

I will remove the northern *army* far from you, and I will drive it into a parched and desolate land, and its vanguard into the eastern sea, and its rear guard into the western sea. And its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up, for it has done great things.' Do not fear, O land, rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done great things. Do not fear, beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, for the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full. So rejoice, O sons of Zion, and be glad in the LORD your God; for He has given you the early rain for *your* vindication. And He has poured down for you the rain, the early and latter rain as before. The threshing floors will be full of grain, and the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil. Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; **then My people will never be put to shame. Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame**" (Joel 2:15-28).

Today, whether we are Jewish Believers who have finally come to know the Messiah Yeshua, or non-Jewish Believers who have been enriched by our Hebraic Roots—we should take encouragement from knowing that Israel will be restored by the supernatural hand of our Creator! Like Moses and the Prophets attested: *it is just a matter of time*. Even if we might get frustrated when various individual voices deter or complicate the process of restoration, Israel's restoration is a work of God and not of limited mortals! While each of us should make sure that we have appropriated the salvation available in the Messiah *as individuals*, it is only the King of Kings who can restore us *corporately* to Himself.

## *Haftarah Ha'azinu*

### "The Rock at the End"

2 Samuel 22:1–22:51

*Occasionally, life's challenges tend to intersect with our weekly study of the Torah and Haftarah. This week is one of those times, so please allow me to share with you some intimate thoughts which have been on my heart and mind.*

By the time one reaches this point in the annual cycle of Torah teachings, the Fall appointed times have commenced, and we anticipate the severity of *Yom Kippur*. The thirty days, of personal reflections during the month of Elul, are amplified as the Ten Days of Awe complete the total time period of forty days, preparing the seeking heart for the Day of Atonement. It is appropriate that Torah students can

contemplate and meditate upon some of the final words of Moses and David, two of the most significant people of their respective eras.

In the *Ha'azinu* Torah portion (Deuteronomy 32:1-52), Moses anticipated his departure with a mellifluous poem of praise toward the Rock of salvation. In the selected Haftarah teaching, David lifted his voice in a praiseworthy psalm of deliverance and salvation toward that very same Rock. Quite gratefully, for those living in this current generation, that same Rock of our salvation is available for us as a shield, refuge, or for that matter, a comfort in times of trouble. Yet despite how mortals often cry out to the Almighty for help, consider how the Creation itself testifies to all people about the obvious existence of a Creator:

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

Without appropriating the Lord’s mercy by falling upon the stone or rock of His forgiveness—all are subject to the crushing ruin of the chief corner stone:

“But Yeshua looked at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written: “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*?” [Psalm 118:22] **Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust**”” (Luke 20:17-18).

This is a particularly difficult reality for me to personally consider this week, after spending the month of Elul in Boulder, Colorado ministering to my non-believing sister as she struggles with a reoccurrence of breast cancer. For almost thirty days, the looming presence of the aptly named Flatirons—which shoot skyward as the Front Range of the Rockies transcends into miles of towering craggy peaks and erosion formed valleys—overshadow this community of seeking souls. Yet despite the undeniable truth that the Maker’s hand has fashioned the beauty of the mountain ranges, the sustaining flora, the indigenous fauna, and the cascading rivulets—many in this spiritual environment desperately continue to choose gods other than the Holy One of Israel. Lamentably as of this writing (23 September, 2009), the “cosmos” of the New Age still intrigues my beloved sister, as the ravages of disease continue to wreak havoc on her weakening body. Your prayers for her and for her physical recovery are greatly desired—as I will have returned to Boulder this week to minister to her, my parents, my brother, and the extended family.

The Torah and Haftarah readings we encounter this week are very relevant to me and these upsetting circumstances, as the Torah cycle winds down to its annual conclusion. The connecting themes we read revolve around two attributes of our Creator which are evident to both Moses and David.

First, recognizing that he would not be permitted to enter into the Promised Land, Moses generated a valedictory poem to which all Israel is told to “Give ear” (*ha'azinu*) or listen. Evident throughout this discourse are the themes of God’s unparalleled strength as a rock (*tzur*) and everlasting perfection (*tamim*). Note the number of times Moses referred to the Lord as “rock” (Deuteronomy 32:4, 13, 15,

18, 30, 31, 37). Among His many high character traits, the Lord is considered to be perfect:

“The Rock [*tzur*]! His work is perfect [*tamim*], for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Correspondingly in our Haftarah passage from 2 Samuel 22 (also seen in Psalm 18), King David lauded many similar themes about not only the power, protection, and stability of the Almighty by the multiple references to the Rock or *tzur* (2 Samuel 22:3, 32, 47). David also reiterated God’s integrity, blamelessness, and perfection by the use of the word *tamim* or “blameless”:

“I was also blameless [*tamim*] toward Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness before His eyes. With the kind You show Yourself kind, with the blameless [*tamim*] You show Yourself blameless [*tamim*]; with the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the perverted You show Yourself astute. And You save an afflicted people; but Your eyes are on the haughty *whom* You abase. For You are my lamp, O LORD; and the LORD illumines my darkness. For by You I can run upon a troop; by my God I can leap over a wall. As for God, His way is blameless [*tamim*]; the word of the LORD is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him. For who is God, besides the LORD? And who is a rock, besides our God? God is my strong fortress; and He sets the blameless in His way” (2 Samuel 22:24-33).

As I read this passage from the heart of David—in light of the current circumstances with my sister—I am very concerned about her ultimate destiny, because of the clear testimony of the Scriptures that mean everything to me. My sister thinks it is just fine for *her brother* to believe in the God of the Holy Bible. In her very words, two quotes come to mind. In 1992 while conversing with one of her Jewish friends, it was simply a disdainful, **“Whatever my brother believes, I believe in just the opposite!”** In the last few weeks, however, while attempting to pray with and for her, her derisive tone was more of a watered down, **“Your beliefs work for you, but they are just not for me.”** Sadly, there has not been much movement in her beliefs in the past seventeen years. Still, with the prospect of death on the horizon, we are detecting a little softening, so we continue to pray!

When I consider the words of David, I am reminded of the testimony of those who preceded him as recorded in the Torah. The first time that the Hebrew word *tamim* is used is when it describes the attributes of Noah. We are told that Noah was not only blameless, but that he was also a righteous man. Genesis 6:9 says, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless [*tamim*] in his time; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). Apparently, this combination of righteousness and blamelessness contributed to Noah being known as someone who walked with God. Additionally, based on the many years of building the Ark, Noah obviously had faith and belief in the instruction of God as it was revealed to him.

Later in Genesis 17:1-2, we find that the Holy One required a blameless walk by Abraham, in order to establish His covenant. The Lord spoke to him, “Walk before Me, and be blameless [*tamim*]. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly” (Genesis 17:1-2). However, let us remember that many years before this covenant was established with Abraham, before Abram was renamed Abraham, it is asserted that Abram’s righteousness resulted from His belief or faith in God. It was Abram’s wholehearted belief in God’s promises which prompted the Creator Himself to reckon him righteous: “Then [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

The Prophet Habakkuk said one of the most important remarks in the entire Scriptures, reflecting on this reality:

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

The Apostolic Scriptures all confirm how this same principle is now extended to placing our trust in the accomplished work of the Messiah at Golgotha (Calvary). **Heartfelt faith** in the atoning blood of the Savior will result in the righteousness that God desires for all humanity. Yeshua’s sacrifice as our blameless Lamb, receiving upon Himself the just payment for the sin of all people, atones for our sins. The graceful gift of salvation is received by faith and not individual works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Turning back to our Haftarah selection generated some significant concern on my part, concern for those who lack faith in the Word of God. King David clearly understood God’s requirements for people to faithfully seek a blameless and righteous life—in order for the Rock to become a fortress, a deliverer, a shield, a horn of salvation, a stronghold, and a refuge. I become very concerned for those who do not look to the Rock, **but rather rely upon their own personal estimation for their deliverance**. These verses remind us of the need for humility, and how the Lord deals with the proud—who falsely believe that their own good works will merit themselves as proper before a Holy and Righteous God:

“With the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the perverted You show Yourself astute. And You save an afflicted people; **but Your eyes are on the haughty whom You abase**” (2 Samuel 22:27-28).

Contrary to this, David considered his pursuit of God to be blameless and righteous:

“The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not acted wickedly against my God. For all His ordinances *were* before me, and *as for* His statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also blameless toward Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness before His eyes” (2 Samuel 22:21-25).

David clearly understood how it is the Lord who was his Savior and Protector. It is the Lord who makes the way for those who pursue Him:

“For You are my lamp, O LORD; and the LORD illumines my darkness. For by You I can run upon a troop; by my God I can leap over a wall. As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him. For who is God, besides the LORD? And who is a rock, besides our God? God is my strong fortress; and He sets the blameless in His way. He makes my feet like hinds' *feet*, and sets me on my high places” (2 Samuel 22:29-34).

The rhetorical questions asked by David—“Who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a Rock, besides our God?”—generate a multitude of queries. **This is because only the Almighty One is the Rock of our salvation!** It is to Him who all must turn.

Yeshua the Messiah teaches us important things about how people are required to seek the righteousness of the Heavenly Father, which we must receive in order to be blameless before Him. In describing the great contrast between pursuing the things of this world versus the things of the Kingdom of God, we find Yeshua describing the two contradictory paths available to all who live. One person pursues the things of this world, while another person seeks the Kingdom of God:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; **for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! **No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.** For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** So do not worry about tomorrow;

for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:19-34).

If we are able to seek God, and the righteousness available by the work of His Son, then we will have salvation. We will have our priorities straight where the things of His Kingdom are primary to the things of this world. The gospel is such a simple thing, but one that prideful people often willingly reject.

I have had to consider how people can look at the awesomeness of Creation—including the beauty of the jutting peaks and mountains overlooking Boulder, proclaiming God’s glory and magnificence almost every time they see them on a clear day—but deny His power to save them from their sins. Noah knew it, as did Abraham, Moses, and David. We often ask: How can people not see what is patently obvious to the Believer? Do they not recognize their own sinfulness and their need for a Savior? Do they not understand that believing in the Rock is necessary if they hope to be redeemed?

I would be remiss if I did not interject into this discussion the testimony of the late Kimball McKee, Margaret’s first husband and father to John, Jane, and Maggie. Similar to my sister Marsha, Kim was diagnosed with terminal cancer (malignant melanoma). However, unlike Marsha, Kim was a very strong Believer, and was quite serious about his faith in Jesus Christ.

In Kim’s final days, his cancer had spread to his brain stem, and he was entering in and out of a comatose state. Before he went into his final coma, Margaret was sitting in his hospital room, praying for relief and for direction on how to proceed. One of the things she did was pick up a legal pad, and start to write his obituary. For a very brief moment, Kim came out of his coma and sat straight up in bed with a few choice words to proclaim to Margaret.

After hours of medicated sleep, Kim opened his eyes, looked right through Margaret pointing through the wall and exclaimed, “I can see the Rock and hear the music!” Margaret was startled and confused. “What do you mean rock music?” she retorted. It was not until Kim slumped back in his bed, going into his final coma, that it dawned on Margaret how Kim had seen beyond this dimension and into Heaven. He then went into a coma, and after being kept alive by a ventilator for two days, was welcomed into the presence of his Lord.<sup>20</sup>

While considering some of the final words of Moses and David, as they both looked to the Rock of their salvation, you might want to ask yourself just which rock (or Rock) is going to be most prominent in your mind as your life comes to a close. Will you be thinking of the beautiful vistas perhaps of the Rocky Mountains, or the Grand Canyon, or even a full moon in all its glory? Or will you be looking beyond the temporal to the eternal Rock of your salvation? Will you hear the music, or will the loneliness of separation from the Lord be your destiny?

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<sup>20</sup> For a further discussion, consult the publication *To Be Absent From the Body* by J.K. McKee. Also useful is Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

Will you follow in the footsteps of the saints who have pointed to the Rock? Or will your pride of good works and self-righteousness be enough to stand before a holy and righteous God?

For ages, Yeshua the Messiah—the Rock—has been a great stone of offense. Quoting the Prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Paul taught the mixed assembly of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome one of the main reasons why his fellow Jewish brethren had largely rejected Messiah Yeshua. *Too many of them had forgotten the necessity of faith.* The nations at large, contrary to this, had the necessary faith:

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.* They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED’ [Isaiah 28:16; 8:14]” (Romans 9:30-33).

Paul was by no means enthusiastic about having to express how his own people largely did not have the faith to be redeemed. **The faith to be redeemed, and then be empowered to walk blameless before God, is available to every man and woman.** Yet people have got to want it.

*Please pray that my sister will see the Rock and hear the music, by simply believing in the work of the Lord Yeshua who loves her!*<sup>21</sup>

## *Haftarah*

# *V'zot Ha'berakhah*

### “Passing the Torch”

Joshua 1:1–18 (A); 1:1-9 (S)

Upon arriving at the final reading of the annual Torah cycle (Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12), it seems like one should be ready to take off and discover everything that was going to happen to the new generation of Israelites who had been prepared for the invasion of Canaan. Lamentably I think, many readers annually close out their Torah study and turn from Deuteronomy 34:12 to Genesis 1:1 with a gusty *Chazak! Chazak! V'nit'chazeik!*—“Be strong! Be strong! And let us be strengthened!”—with no serious thought given to what lay in store for the company of people who had been taught

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<sup>21</sup> Marsha Huey Moritz died on September 23, 2010. For a summary of her final testimony, consult the author’s article “Marsha’s Love Story: Snookering the Devil,” appearing in the October 2010 issue of Outreach Israel News.