

Fear This!

A drash on Parashah 37, Sh'lach

By Kevin Phipps (aka Oriyan)

*The hens they all cackle, the roosters all beg,
But I will not hatch, I will not hatch.
For I hear all the talk of pollution and war
As the people all shout and the airplane roar,
So I'm staying in here where it's safe and it's warm,
And I WILL NOT HATCH! [Shel Silverstein]*

This cute little poem gives us a picture of Israel in this week's parashah. They are like a little chick that has been growing in the knowledge of their God in the egg of the wilderness. Now it is time for them to start planning to enter the Promised Land. Spies go out and return with reports of a land of fruitfulness and prosperity, but inhabited by giants. Fear grips them and the people of Israel, despite the reports of Kalev and Y'hoshua that God was with them and they could defeat the giants and take the land God had given to them. They desire to return to Egypt and die. If a chick fails to hatch from the comfort of its egg, it will soon die in the egg. Despite the fears of the world outside, either real or imaginary, the chick must hatch from the egg and face whatever lies on the outside.

Fear is a natural part of being human. We are finite beings living in a world much bigger than ourselves. We are constantly faced with problems which are bigger than we can deal with on our own. Fear is not necessarily a bad thing. The Bible talks a lot about fear. There are times when fear is appropriate, and times when it is not.

He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt. It is there that I will make you into a great nation. [B'eresheet/Genesis 46:3]

Moshe answered the people, "Stop being so fearful! Remain steady, and you will see how Adonai is going to save you. He will do it today – today you have seen the Egyptians, but you will never see them again! [Sh'mot/Exodus 14:13]

These are examples of inappropriate fear. It is fear of people and circumstances. Often, it is in the midst of fearful circumstances that God does His greatest work on behalf of His people. He wants us to know, as well as others, that the work is of divine power and not human power. For this to happen, circumstances have to be beyond our power, so God's power has to be utilized and He gets the glory.

*"So now, Isra'el, all that Adonai your God asks from you is to fear Adonai your God, follow all his ways, love him and serve Adonai your God with all your heart and all your being; to obey, for your own good, the mitzvot and regulations of Adonai which I am giving you today.
[D'varim/Deuteronomy 10:12-13]*

We see in these verses the appropriate expression of fear. Fear in these and many other verses equates to respect and loyalty to God as our King. However, when we read of people who rebel against God and He either causes fire to fall from the sky or the earth to swallow people alive, the fear is a little more than simple respect. We must never forget that God is a loving God, but He is also a just God. Our lack of fear in Him and our fear of our circumstances can cause grave consequences.

"My friends, I tell you: don't fear those who kill the body but then have nothing more they can do. I will show you whom to fear: fear him who after killing you has authority to throw you into Gei-Hinnom! Yes, I tell you, this is the one to fear! Aren't sparrows sold for next to nothing, five for two assarions? And not one of them has been forgotten by God. Why, every hair on your head has been counted! Don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows. [Luke 12:4-7]

As God's people, we have to learn to have kingdom thinking. This means that we not only see the physical consequences of things, but the spiritual as well, and the spiritual is much more important than the physical.

*It is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear Adonai his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them;
[D'varim 10:12-13]*

This verse concerns the king, and his mandate to have a copy of the Torah with him to study, in order to lead his nation according to the will and ways of God. We see two things here about fearing God. One is that it is learned. We learn to fear God through obeying Torah. Likewise, following Torah shows one's fear of God. The two go hand in hand. When we read the Word of God and make excuses for not following what it says, could it be that we lack the fear of God to do what He tells us to do, simply because He is our King? Under what authority do we use, as finite human beings, to disregard large portions of God's Word, simply because we no longer think it pertains

to us? When you are going against the Creator of the Universe, who can end your life in an instant or cause any number of calamities to befall you, how much are you willing to bet on being right? Personally, when I see a law in Scripture telling me, for example, to work for six days and rest on the seventh, I would rather do that exactly as it says, rather than rely on human logic and teaching which changes that day to the first day of the week. I'd rather live the rest of my life not eating pork, and get to heaven to find out it was ok, than to eat pork despite a command in God's Word not to, and find out later that I displeased my God because I assumed it was ok to eat.

"Also the foreigner who does not belong to your people Isra'el – when he comes from a distant country because of your reputation (for they will hear of your great reputation, your mighty hand and your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house; then hear in heaven where you live, and act in accordance with everything about which the foreigner is calling to you; so that all the peoples of the earth will know your name and fear you, as does your people Isra'el, and so that they will know that this house which I have built bears your name. [1M'lechim/1Kings 8:41-43]

This is to show that fearing God is not just for the descendants of Isra'el. They were to be the light that showed the rest of the nations what fearing God was all about. They in turn would learn to fear God, with the result of them following Torah as well. If you doubt this to be true, there is a story from 2 M'lechim 17 which shows otherwise. In this story, Isra'el is divided. Hoshea is the king over Isra'el and through rebellion against God and failure to follow Torah, God removes His people from the land to dwell in a pagan country. In turn pagan peoples from multiple countries were brought into the land to learn what Isra'el had failed to do themselves, fear God. Lions were sent into the land to kill the people living there until they had a cohen from Isra'el come to teach them about God and His Torah. He had success, but only to a point. These gentiles feared God, while attempting to maintain their pagan traditions and idolatry. Doesn't this sound familiar?

Both Isra'el and the gentiles brought into the land learned that fearing God and failing to live according to His ways to do not go together, especially when mixed with pagan idolatry and customs.

*Adonai takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who wait for his grace.
[Tehellim/Psalms 147:11]*

God wants us to know that we are His children who He loves more than anything He has ever created. This is why He requires us to trust in Him. He can do much more for us and through us than we can ever do ourselves. One of our biggest

problems is patience. God wants to extend his grace to us, but instead of waiting for Him, we go forward in our own strength or shrink from our fears.

Then they will call me, but I won't answer; they will seek me earnestly, but they won't find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of Adonai, they refused my counsel and despised my reproof. So they will bear the consequences of their own way and be overfilled with their own schemes. For the aimless wandering of the thoughtless will kill them, and the smug overconfidence of fools will destroy them; but those who pay attention to me will live securely, untroubled by fear of misfortune." [Mishlei/Proverbs 1:28-33]

All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to bring you back again into fear; on the contrary, you received the Spirit, who makes us sons and by whose power we cry out, "Abba!" (that is, "Dear Father!"). [Romans 8:14-15]

When we don't fear God, we forget who we are. We begin to rely on our own strength and knowledge, instead of relying on God's power and provision. God is doing a work in our world, and His will is going to be accomplished with or without us. If we live in fear of the giants standing in the way of us doing what God has called us to do, then our fears may come true as they did for Isra'el. Let's say Isra'el did face the giants in the land and were killed as grasshoppers. Would that not be better than dying anyway in the wilderness because of their lack of faith?

The value of fearing God did not change in the New Covenant. In fact the early messianic community was born in adversity, with plenty of reason to fear.

So, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey now when I am away from you: keep working out your deliverance with fear and trembling, for God is the one working among you both the willing and the working for what pleases him. [Philippians 2:12-13]

We are saved by grace, but grace is not a free ride. It comes as a result of a relationship with God built on love. An integral part of loving God, is fearing God, and if we fear God we will do all we can to live by His commands. If He tells us to go, we go, giants or no giants.

As we feel God leading us into increased ministry in our community, we have to keep in mind it is His work and not ours. We plant the seeds, but He makes them grow.

Then the Messianic community throughout Y'hudah, the Galil and Shomron enjoyed peace and was built up. They lived in the fear of the Lord, with the counsel of the Ruach HaKodesh; and their numbers kept multiplying. [Acts 9:31]

As we move forward in our faith, fearing nothing but God Himself, God is able to work through us in ways that will not only amaze us, but give a testimony to others of God's power and goodness. Our life is our greatest testimony to the world of the truth and love of God. As we follow our Messiah, He may lead us through the valley of the shadow of death for a time, but if He's the one who does it, so what? Eventually He will lead us to green pastures. That is the hope we have if we live in fear of Him.

For "Whoever wants to love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, turn from evil and do good, seek peace and chase after it. For Adonai keeps his eyes on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of Adonai is against those who do evil things." For who will hurt you if you become zealots for what is good? But even if you do suffer for being righteous, you are blessed! Moreover, don't fear what they fear or be disturbed, but treat the Messiah as holy, as Lord in your hearts; while remaining always ready to give a reasoned answer to anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you – yet with humility and fear, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are spoken against, those who abuse the good behavior flowing from your union with the Messiah may be put to shame. [1Kefa/1Peter 3:10-16]

I left the military not knowing what the future held for my family, and I still don't. I don't know how long we will have the house we live in or live the way we do, but I do know that God is a faithful God and whatever happens I am called to fear Him and not my circumstances. It is better to be penniless and faithful than live like a king and end up in the fires of hell because I failed to fear my Creator. This life is but a vapor, and will be gone before I know it. Regardless of what happens in this life, God has prepared a place for me and I will go there if I continue to trust in Him.

What are your fears? How big are they? Who is your God? How big is He? If your god is not bigger than your fears, perhaps you need a different God, or perhaps you need to re-evaluate who God is to you. God needs people serving Him who are able to focus on the blessings He promises us rather than on the challenges it will take to get there. For those with enough faith, they can rejoice in the simplest of blessings in the midst of the bleakest of situations.

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. [Anne Frank]