

celebration. Only singing and dancing, feasting and laughter. Only a multitude of the Heavenly hosts praising the Holy One, and saying *Glory to God in the highest*. Only good tidings of great joy unto all people. Only *peace on earth and good will toward men*. Only songs of thanksgiving to, and shouts in exaltation of, the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, of Ya'akov, and of Yosef.

*Blessed are you, O Holy One our God, King of the Universe,
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.*

Moshe would have wanted it no other way. His work is complete. His day is done. But look to yon horizon, Beloved – another, even greater, day – and an even more glorious prophet - is coming!

One Door Closes, Another One Opens

As we dance with our Bridegroom-King and invite the nations to share in the ecstasy of *Chag ha-Sukkot*, we will not only be saying goodbye to Moshe; we will also be watching another precious cycle of intimate interaction with the Creator's Instruction Manual for humankind slide seamlessly into the vast ocean of history. We will conclude our journey through Torah. But this is no reason to wax nostalgic; for - if Messiah tarries in His return - in just a few short days it will be our privilege to *roll back the scroll, take a deep breath of the Ruach Ha-Qodesh, and plunge off into the Great Journey of destiny afresh*.

What began 11 ½ months ago with an awe-inspiring piece of time traveling back to 'the beginning' of the heavens and the earth through the eyes of Moshe is about to come to a similarly mind-boggling conclusion. At the conclusion of studies each year we find ourselves with many more *questions* than *answers*. We walk away *scratching our heads*, as it were, about many things. Our thirst for understanding has been well-sprinkled - but nowhere near quenched. Our spiritual appetites have been well-fed - but are nowhere near satisfied. And that is, I submit, the way it should be. The purpose of the Divine Author, you see, is always to leave us *restless in our spirits, searching and seeking, hungering and thirsting for more*.

We have come a long, long way since the festivities of *Simchat Torah* last year. But our quest is far, far from complete. The journey we are on together is not a quick jaunt along the information highway of religion – it is *a lifelong pursuit of a Divine Mystery*. So without further delay let us continue on that journey, shall we?

A Closing Parsha Travelogue

How will Moshe spend his last hours upon the earth? And what will the nation do when the great prophet of the Exodus is no more? These are the questions the narrative of *Vezot HaBeracha* will answer for us.

1. Moshe's Parting Blessing

The last few hours of Moshe's life will be consumed primarily with his impartation of a final patriarchal blessing upon the nation he has served as prophet, shepherd, and friend of the Bridegroom for a whopping four decades. From tribal encampment to tribal encampment Moshe will make his journey. Everywhere he goes, as he goes, Moshe will speak powerful words of blessing and release virtual waves of prophetic insight and exhortation.

Fittingly the prophet's final journey through the camp will begin at the encampments of the two tribes from which have come his greatest opposition over the years. It was from the tribes Reuben and Levi that Korach's infamous rebellion arose and spread. What Moshe is going to do is to live out the mandate of Heaven to 'bless your enemies'. How are you doing on that one, Beloved?

2. Moshe's Final Charge to the Covenant Nation of the Holy One

After blessing each tribe Moshe will conclude his 40 plus years as the chief 'servant of the Holy One' with a final passionate encouragement to the redeemed nation to **recognize the superiority of the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven over any other 'god' or 'cause'**. This will be followed by **a final exhortation to walk worthy of the Bridal calling**. Then, with the last words he will ever speak to human ears the 120-year old prophet will declare:

*There is none like the Holy one, Y'shurun!
Your Helper is He who controls the heaven and has His majesty in the skies.
The eternal God is a shelter with everlasting arms underneath.*

*Happy are you Israel! Who is like you?
[You are] a nation delivered by the Holy One.
He is the Shield who helps you and makes your sword triumphant.
Your enemies shall come cringing to you,
and you shall crush their high altars underfoot.*

3. Moshe Climbs Nevo For His Final Earthly God-Encounter

Moshe will then climb the mountain called Nevo for his last moments on earth. The last thing he will see this side of the Mount of Transfiguration will be the land the Holy One promised to the great nation he has led for 40 years. Atop Nevo's summit Moshe's natural ears will once again hear the Voice that spoke to him from Sinai's thorn bush. This time the Voice that spoke the Universe into existence will say:

*"This is the land of which I swore to give Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov,
saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.'
I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over there."
[Deuteronomy 34:4]*

This greatest of all earthly vistas – the outline of *Eretz Yisrael* - will be the last sight Moshe’s eyes behold in this life. The sweet whispers of the Divine Voice will be the last sound Moshe hears.

4. Moshe’s Immaculate Departure

At the Word of the Holy One Moshe will then breathe his last breath – and will become the only person Scripture records was ever buried by the Holy One Himself. The specific place of the burial of Moshe’s remains will be kept a secret known only by the Holy One Himself; all we will be told is that the Holy One placed the grave of His beloved friend Moshe ‘*in a low place in the land of Moav*’.

I wonder if Naomi and Ruth passed by the site on their way back to Eretz Yisrael, don’t you Dear Reader?

5. A Fitting Epilogue

When Moshe does not return from his trip up Mount Nevo, his death will be assumed, and the nation he served so well will mourn for him for thirty days. At that point Y’hoshua [Joshua] will take over the leadership of the camp in preparation for the Great Crossing.

6. The Epitaph of Torah

The revelation of Torah of the Holy One will then conclude with an *epitaph* of sorts. Of Moshe, the servant of God, Torah declares:

*No prophet like Moshe has arisen in Israel, who knew God face to face.
[No one else could reproduce] the signs and miracles
which the Holy One let him display in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his land
or any of the mighty acts or great teachings
which Moshe did before the eyes of all Israel.*

A Quick Look at the Haftarah for Torah’s Final Parsha

Joshua 1:1-18

In this week’s Haftarah reading we will examine the Biblical account of the defining moment of the life of Moshe’s successor, Y’hoshua. In the course of one of the most inspiring divine encounters in the entire Bible, Y’hoshua will be commissioned by the Divine Voice to make what I call ***the Great Crossing*** – i.e. to ***arise, go over this Yarden, you and all this people, to the land which I give to them***. The Holy One will then make some truly awesome promises to Y’hoshua, culminating in the declaration that:

***There shall not any man be able to stand before you all the days of your life.
As I was with Moshe, so I will be with you; I will not fail you, nor forsake you.***

The secret to Y’hoshua’s success is then going to be stated specifically to be threefold. First he is to “***be strong and very courageous***.” Secondly he is to ***be very***

careful to personally observe and do everything the Torah with which Moshe enjoined the redeemed community to do. And thirdly he is to make sure the book of Torah will *never depart from [his] mouth*, but that he continues to *meditate upon it day and night*.

Y'hoshua will then go out and prepare the people to take possession of the land.

A Glance at the Corresponding Apostolic Writings

Matthew 24:1 – 25:13

This week's B'rit Chadasha reading comes from Yeshua's prophetic ***Olivet Discourse***. Just prior to this discourse Yeshua leaves the grounds of Herod's Temple for what is most likely the next-to-the-last time prior to His crucifixion. What He said on that occasion was stunning news to His talmidim.

Please realize that at the time of the events our reading describes Temple Mount was a massive *construction zone*.

Which Temple Was Yeshua Talking About?

The Temple that stood while Yeshua walked the earth with His Talmidim was not the original Temple. The first Temple – the one Sh'lomo [Solomon] had built in accordance with the plans of his father David - had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon over 500 years prior to Yeshua's birth.

The Temple Yeshua visited was not even the so-called Second Temple. The second Temple, originally built by Zerubbabel and Ezra, was almost totally replaced by Idumean kings and tetrarchs named Herod in the years between 18 BC through 64 AD. The Temple that Yeshua and His Talmidim visited and knew was thus not the 'Holy Temple' built in honor of the Holy One, but a gaudy Romanesque structure built by an occupying Idumean in his own honor.

By the time of Yeshua's Olivet Discourse the Herod's massive renovations of the Temple compound were still only partially completed. All that was visible to people who visited the Temple in those days were items of 'new construction'. To the ordinary human eye, of course, these items of new construction were very impressive. Herod intended for them to be. He wanted the beauty of the Temple complex built [actually, just *begun*] on his watch to be his greatest legacy.

In the Talmud it is recorded concerning the Roman-era Temple that "*He who has not seen Herod's building has never in his life seen a truly grand building.*" **Talmud-Bava Basra 4a.** Historian Flavius Josephus describes the massive and gaudy Herodian structure as follows:

*Viewed from without, the Sanctuary had everything
that could amaze either mind or eyes.
Overlaid all round with stout plates of gold,
the first rays of the sun it reflected so fierce a blaze of fire
that those who endeavored to look at it
were forced to turn away as if they had looked straight at the sun.
To strangers as they approached
it seemed in the distance like a mountain covered with snow;
for any part not covered with gold was dazzling white...*
[The Jewish War, p. 304]

Herod's rebuilt Temple compound was gaudy indeed. Expanded to occupy an area approximately 500 meters square, it consisted of a large number of buildings, courts, gates, porticos, colonnades and plazas at multiple elevations. But it was, alas, all for show. This Temple had no ark of the Covenant - hence no mercy seat. Its High Priest *de jure* was whoever, in a given season, offered the biggest – and most recent – bribe to the reigning Emperor.

While beautiful, the Temple that stood in Yeshua's time thus had very little to do with the Holy One or with Torah. It was all about making the Roman occupation feel less odious, with improving the public image and political influence of the Idumeans, with the power struggles between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and with the *crass politics and the lucrative business of man-focused religion.*

The outer court of the Herodian Temple, with its various porticos and plazas, was located at the lowest level. Up a flight of 14 steps Herod built a *grand plaza* consisting of three courts representing divisions not called for by the Torah: the *Court of the Women*, the *Court of the Israelites* [for Israelite men] and the *Court of the Priests*. Up another flight of 15 steps was located the Inner Court. Rising 150 feet in height, this Inner Court was the elaborately rebuilt Temple Structure itself.

To the structure Herod had added massive doors of the same impressive height as the inner sanctum itself. Elaborate pillars overlaid with gold flanked these doors. Running from pillar to pillar was a beautiful crown-work sculpture made to resemble a great golden vine with full branches of grapes hanging down.

As aforesaid, each court of the Temple compound was deliberately designed and constructed by the Herods to sit at a level higher than its predecessor to create a terracing effect. The Temple structure itself was located at a higher elevation still, insuring that its elaborate decorations could be easily seen from any part of the city.

The Herods made sure that the best artisans and artists from all over the world

contributed to the mighty structure of Idumean glory - hence the structure bears the Herodian name [*i.e.* it was called 'Herod's Temple'], *not* the name of the Holy One.

Nowhere does Holy Writ suggest that Herod followed the instructions of the Holy One regarding the kind of earthly abode the Creator of the Universe would inhabit. Unlike the *Mish'kan* of the Wilderness, and unlike the Temple of Sh'lomo, this structure was for man's glory, and man's use – not for the Holy One. The Holy One never consented to abide there as He did in Sh'lomo's Temple. See **I Kings 9:1-9** and **I Chronicles 7:1-2**.

The appearance of the Temple the Herods built was designed to impress *men*, not to honor the Holy One. The walls were made of a white limestone that made the structure appear from a distance as if it was glowing. Many of the buildings had vast amounts of shimmering gold ornamentation. The Herods wanted the Temple to *take a man's breath away*. Our reading from the B'rit Chadasha tells us that when the Nazarene's talmidim expressed wonder at the magnificence of the structure Herod was building, Yeshua's response was merely:

***Most assuredly I tell you,
there will not be left here one stone on another that will not be thrown down."***

Yeshua then took His talmidim up to the Mount of Olives, where they asked him:

*Tell us, when will these things be?
What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?*

What the Master told His disciples on the Mount of Olives in answer to those specific questions has become known in theological circles as the '***Olivet Discourse***'. In that two-chapter long series of stunning prophetic declarations Yeshua explained to His talmidim not only *the level of devastation they should expect in the days when Herod's Temple would come crashing down*, but also *what future generations of talmidim should expect to see and deal with at the end of days*. It makes perfect reading for afternoons in the *Sukkah*.

*May you find true meaning and purpose for your life this week
in the shelter of the Holy One's Tabernacle of Shalom.*

The Rabbi's son

Prayer Focus for the Week

-The Aleinu-

*It is our purpose in life to bring glory to the Master of the World
and honor to the Creator of Heaven and Earth.*

*For He has called us out of the nations,
And has set us apart from all the peoples of the Earth.*

*He has not made our lot in life
nor the portion of our inheritance, like theirs.
For while they bow down to nonsense and emptiness,
and pray to gods who cannot save,
we prostrate ourselves before and give glory and honor to,
the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He!
He stretches out the heavens,
and establishes the foundations of the Earth.*

*His majesty extends beyond the canopy of the sky;
From the heights of the highest mountain
one still cannot see the limits of His dominion.*

*Our God is truly One, Unique, Wholly Other.
But for our King, nothing we know would exist.*

*As it says in the Torah: **“Today you shall know, and take to heart,
that the Holy One alone is God,
in the heavens above and on the earth below, and that there is no other.”***