

Kehilat Sar Shalom and Beth Yeshua Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Lesson 36 Read Matthew 17:1-18:22

Read Matthew 17:1-23

Remember how Yeshua had told His disciples in Matthew 16:28 that, “*some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*”? Well, here, in chapter 17, He fulfills that promise on the top of a high mountain. In Matthew chapter 17, the disciples see Yeshua covered in Glory. They see Yeshua covered in the Glory – the *Kivod* – of God.

Now, the Glory *Kivod* of God is often described as light, or even the radiance of God, and tradition states that Adam, the first king of the earth, was arrayed in such finery:

“Adam’s heel outshone the globe of the sun; how much more the brightness of his face!”
Leviticus Rabbah 20:2

“Adam’s garments blazed like a torch.” *Genesis Rabbah 20:12*

How appropriate that in this vision of Messiah coming into His Kingdom, He too, is covered in Glory! And, these same shining garments of glory will be given to the righteous at the resurrection – we can find this in Revelation chapter 19. Yes, indeed, garments of glory will be the fashion of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Matthew, Yeshua appears to the disciples with Moses and Elijah for they are the two that witness of Him. The book of Revelation also speaks of two witnesses who will come in the end of days to testify to the world about Yeshua – they are one in the same. And, if we look in the Midrash Rabbah, we will find this to be a Jewish expectation as well:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: ‘Moses, by your life, just as you have given your soul for Israel in This World, so in the Future to Come, when I bring them the prophet Elijah, the two of you will come as one.... In that hour he will come and comfort Israel....’”
Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:17

Moses and Elijah can be understood as the Torah and the Prophetic writings of the Bible, which also witness of Yeshua. One question you may want to discuss in class is how did the disciples know that it was Moses and Elijah since they had never met?

The cloud that covered them helps us to understand that this vision is about the end of days as we read in Isaiah that:

“Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a sukkah and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.”
Isaiah 4:5-6

The fact that Peter offers to build sukkot – or booths – for the mysterious guests also places the emphasis on the end of days since Sukkot is a festival that teaches of the Messianic Kingdom. And, this event would have also brought to the minds of the disciples Mount Sinai and when God’s glory had shown from that mountain.

Then, any doubt that the three disciples might have had regarding Yeshua’s unique Messianic call would have been erased by a *bat kol* (heavenly voice) from the cloud. The message of this *bat kol* is the same message spoken at Yeshua’s immersion with one important additional clause. He says, “*Listen to him.*” These words are confirmation to us that Yeshua is, in fact, the Prophet that Deuteronomy 18 tells us must come. **(Read Deuteronomy 18:15-19)**

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But, even with the *bat kol*, the cloud, and the witnesses...questions remain. The disciples know that, according to tradition, Elijah must come before Messiah. If Yeshua definitely is the Messiah, then where is Elijah? Although not plainly stated in the Bible, it was a common belief that Elijah must come before the Messiah and here, Yeshua confirms that belief. The expectation that Elijah will come to begin the great redemption is still expressed in Judaism today by setting a place at the Passover Seder table for Elijah. Yeshua lays to rest their doubt by explaining that John (Yochanan the Immerser) had come to fulfill the role of Elijah.

Finally, they leave the region of Caesarea Philippi and return south to the Galilee. For the disciples this must have been a bewildering experience as everything they thought they knew about the Messiah had been shaken. The disciples had expected wars and glory and trumpets and swords when Messiah came but they never expected Messiah to suffer and die. As they come to edge of the Galilee, Yeshua tells them again that, *“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.”*

Read Matthew 17:24-27

The tax of the half-shekel spoken of here was instituted in Exodus 30:13 and 38:26 as a means of funding the community sacrifices such as the continual burnt offerings which were made in the Temple everyday.

In regard to this tax, Peter is asked, *“Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?”* Without hesitation Peter replied, *“Yes, he does.”* And, of course, he does. It's a commandment in the Torah. But, Peter doesn't realize that Yeshua has an exemption. So, Yeshua says to him: *“What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?”*

You see, Peter should have remembered the voice on the mountain. *“This is my son, whom I love...”* was what the voice had said. If the tax is for the Temple offerings and the offerings are for God the King, then the son of the King is exempt from paying the tax. But Yeshua, realizing His Kingdom is not yet, pays His half-shekel and Peter's as well.

Read Matthew 18:1-6

If Yeshua had not yet erased the idea of a Messianic conquest and a Kingdom brought about by military might, certainly what He says next does, *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* This statement is, again, a long way removed from the disciples' ideas of a kingdom raised by revolution and apocalyptic battles. Instead of soldiers and mighty men, the Kingdom would be made up of little children.

Yeshua will say something very similar in the next chapter as well for, *“the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these (children).”* What is it about a child's character that makes him or her an heir of the Kingdom? And, in what way are we to follow the example of children? Well, children are ready to learn and children are ready to believe. It is the humility of children that allows them to be teachable. They do not assume to have everything figured out yet. They still possess a sense of wonder and a longing to learn. These are qualities that Yeshua requires of His disciples.

In the first century, children began to memorize the Torah at the age of five. And, by the time they were adults, they had memorized it all. The following quote from Pirkei Avot speaks of these same qualities in a child that Yeshua requires of His disciples:

“Elisha ben Abuyah said: ‘He who learns as a child, to what can he be compared? He can be compared to ink written upon a clean sheet of paper. But he who learns as an adult, to what can he be compared? He can be compared to ink written on a used ink-smudged sheet of paper.’” Avot 4:20

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By saying, “*If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea,*” Yeshua not only shows His love for children but for all who would learn of Him *as* children. He then strengthens His point by telling the parable of the lost sheep. From this parable, we can be certain of the love and the protection of Messiah (the man in the parable). He will not leave nor forsake His childlike student (the lost lamb), but He will search and restore him to the flock.

Read Matthew 18:15-22

The procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 is specifically for the case of when a fellow believer sins against, injures, seriously maligns, damages or otherwise harms another person. Yeshua instructs the wounded party to go privately to the offender and to attempt to make peace. Should that fail, and should the offended want to continue to press the matter, then he should take one or two other brothers with him as witnesses. The issue has now become a legal procedure. The presence of the additional witnesses is added so that the matter can be brought to trial.

By saying “*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...*,” Yeshua instructs the wounded party to press formal charges in the local assembly’s court of law. We have to keep in mind that “church” here should be translated assembly. And, that assembly would be the Beit Din which is an assembly of three elders. In the Second Temple period, every synagogue and assembly was presided over by a minimum of three elders who formed a *beit din*. The *beit din* (literally meaning house of judgment) was a small court that had jurisdiction to try and settle legal disputes. By saying, “*tell it to the church*” Yeshua means “*bring the case to the beit din which presides over the synagogue.*”

Still speaking about the judges who officiate over the *beit din*, He then says “*where two or three come together.*” Two is all that is necessary for a Beit Din to render a verdict. Three is a unanimous decision. Where it says “*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*” means that Yeshua, Himself, will aid the judges. The Talmud in referring to a Beit Din says something very similar:

“A judge who gives an honest judgment causes the Shekinah (the Divine Presence) to dwell in Israel, as it is written: ‘God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the judges....’ How do you know that if three are sitting as a beit din the Shekinah (the Divine Presence) is with them? For it is said: ‘He gives judgment among the judges.’” Berakot 6a

God’s presence on the *beit din* lends Divine Authority to the decisions reached by the judges. Yeshua is speaking in the same sense. When the disciples (elders) make legal decisions by a majority vote (where two come together) or by a unanimous vote (where three come together), He is with them endorsing their verdict.

The Matthew 18 procedure is for the unrepentant brother who sins against another brother. But then, Peter wants to know how many times a man is obligated to forgive a repeat offender, who is repentant. He suggests seven times might be appropriate. Yeshua, however, responds that one should forgive seven times seventy. His answer is not literal. It is not as if one should keep count and after 490 offenses cease to forgive. The answer means that there should be no end to our forgiveness. He means that we should extend forgiveness as often as it is asked of us. Yeshua then tells the parable of the Unmerciful Servant to illustrate His point.

And, we will look at the structure of parables next week.

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Questions from this week's Reading and Lesson #36

1. The Glory of God is called the _____ of God and it is often described as what?
2. What two witnesses appeared on the mountain with Yeshua and the disciples and what did each represent?
3. Who does Deuteronomy 18 tells us Messiah will be and how did the *bat kol* point out that Yeshua was He?
4. As the son of the King, if Yeshua was exempt from paying the half-shekel tax, why did He pay the tax for Peter and for Himself?
5. Explain why "little children" will be heirs of the Kingdom and why it is a requirement to have such qualities to be a disciple of Yeshua.
6. What lessons can we learn from the parable of the lost sheep?
7. If a believer sins against another believer, according to Matthew 18, what three steps of reconciliation are we to follow?
8. What does *beit din* mean? And, what is its purpose?
9. According to Yeshua, how many times are we to forgive our repentant brother?