



MORDEKAI'S DRASH — *TOL'DOT*

Torah: *Tol'dot* (History), *B'resheet* (Genesis) 25.19-28.9

Haftorah: *Mal'akhi* (Malachi) 1.1-2.7

Suggested **Messianic Writings** reading: Romans 9.1-13

Shalom,

I want to take a look at the Haftorah reading for this week, from the prophet Mal'akhi, rather than the Torah portion. [The Torah reading cycle may have been first established by Ezra; a few centuries later, it is said that during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes over Israel, prior to the time of the Maccabees, the evil tyrant Antiochus had forbidden the reading of Torah, so the rabbis came up with passages from the prophets that echoed thought from the Torah. When Torah reading was later re-instituted, the Haftorah portions were kept.] Mal'akhi was the last book of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Scriptures; Old Testament) to be written; there is no internal dating, but the message infers that the book was written approximately 100 years after Babylon had fallen to King Cyrus of Persia, which was in 538 BCE; that was when Cyrus declared that Judah could return to their land and rebuild the Temple. In the early years of this return, Ezra and Nehemiah had rebuilt the Temple, restored Temple worship and reformed the Jewish faith, but sometime after that the *Kohen* (Priests) and the people had drifted into apathy and indifference and had become morally corrupt. By dating through various Biblical and historical references, scholars place the date of the writing of the prophet Mal'akhi to be somewhere between 433 and 400 BCE.

The message begins by stating it is, “An oracle, a burden, of the word of ADONAI to Israel”. This word of ADONAI being delivered through Mal'akhi had divine authority behind it. This was not a word from Elohim, or Shaddai, or any other name of G-d, for the four letter Sacred Name is used here. (Jewish scholars have chosen to protect the Sacred Name with written circumlocutions, such as ADONAI, HASHEM, G-d, or L-rd, to prevent the risk of the Name becoming defaced or destroyed on a written surface. Most observant Jews – Messianic or non – have also chosen not to pronounce the Name. This thought comes not only from the commandment to *not* take His Name in vain, but also from the inference that Jews are not to destroy or efface any holy thing. Hebrew scholars have come up with *at least three possible pronunciations* of the Sacred Name (Y-H-V-H), all uniquely different from each other, so no one can really be positive of the actual pronunciation.) Mal'akhi is about to unfold ADONAI's love for Israel, but he begins by introducing the word as a *burden*, מַשָּׂא, *ma-sah*, “a load to be lifted up; something heavy”. It could be called “a weighty word full of meaning”. The prophet is delivering a burden of ADONAI, because that was the name used to express the Creator's covenant relationship to Israel, a covenant to which she had become unfaithful. According to Jewish Sage Rashi, the Sacred Name represents G-d as the One Who carries out His promises. The Patriarchs had been familiar with the Name, but not until the time of Moshe did the Creator *fully* manifest Himself in this way, as The Promise Keeper. Israel had turned away, and Mal'akhi was about to deliver a hard word from the One Who never changes.

Mal'akhi's message is addressed to “Israel,” which was the common term for the Northern Kingdom, the ten tribes that had broken away from Judah and Benjamin, the Southern Kingdom, after the death of King *Shlomo* (Solomon). But as we saw above, Mal'akhi was written sometime around 400 BCE, yet the Northern Kingdom had been defeated by Assyria in 722 BCE, some 300 years earlier. So who was this “Israel” the prophet was addressing? A good part of Mal'akhi's *burden* was to the Priests, who were serving in Jerusalem (which was in Judah), but the message on the whole was delivered to all of the tribes. Here we must note that both books of Chronicles, as well as archaeological records, reveal that only a small portion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was deported to Assyria, primarily the leadership and the military. The annals of Assyria itself have been uncovered, in which is revealed that they carried away only around 27,290 people out of an estimated population of 400-500,000. Scripture has record of when the Southern Kingdom of Judah returned from Babylonian captivity, but the remnant of the Northern Kingdom returned with little fanfare. This is because not that many returned, since not that many had actually been taken away. So we learn that the bulk of the Northern Kingdom remained where they were, or, leaderless, attached themselves to or drifted down into Judah. Some left the area, and descendants are being discovered in our day in India, China, Africa, and other far-off regions. Assyria did import people from conquered lands elsewhere into the northern regions of Israel; these people intermarried with the locals, and from there eventually developed the group known as the Samaritans. But because there was no formal recognized return of Israel from Assyria, as Judah had from Babylon, legends have developed regarding the “ten lost tribes”.

The *Messianic Writings* (New Testament) authors, just as the prophets, intermingled the terms “Israel” and “Jew” quite often, again because all tribes were represented in the Land of Israel at that time. Because the tribe of Judah remained strong and large, and much of the 10 tribes had assimilated into the region of Judah, they all came to be called “Jews” by the Romans. The majority of all of these people were later dispersed by the Romans, thus the term “Jew” cannot and does not refer to only descendants from the tribe of Judah in this current Diaspora.

Mal’akhi began his oracle by declaring ADONAI’s love for Israel. Through all the rebellion, and even though there had to be punishment, His love for His chosen people remained strong. The word for love in Mal’akhi 1.2 is in the Hebrew perfect tense, referring not only to His past love for His people, but His present love for them. And ADONAI’s love for Israel is deep; it is unconditional, it was sovereignly bestowed first through His covenant with Avraham, the father of all of the Jewish people. ADONAI’s love for Israel is everlasting; He did not make this commitment to any other nation or people group. His love for Israel is like a mother to her child, like a husband to his wife, like a father to his son. Israel is the apple, or the pupil, of G-d’s eye; the eye is perhaps not a more important part of the body, but a part requiring more protection and care.

Yet Israel questioned His love. Without going into great detail, this seemed to be largely because, although He had taken care of them constantly, it was not always to their liking. Echoes of modern day believers. It has been said that where love is most manifested, it is often least appreciated. Just as Israel questioned ADONAI’s unconditional love, we see the same thing oftentimes in otherwise strong families and congregations. Things don’t go to our liking, and we get upset and turn against one other; ultimately it boils down to a lack of faith in the unconditional love of G-d and the rise of human pride. So soon we forget.

ADONAI responded to Israel, as we continue in Mal’akhi, by declaring that He loved *Ya’akov* (Jacob), but hated Esau. Our human tendency is to understand these words only on an emotional level, but the word “hate” is used often in Scripture in another manner – Yeshua said that we must “hate” our loved ones in order to be His disciple (Luke 14.26). ADONAI does not necessarily use this term on an emotional level, a level that indicates that He is fonder of one than the other. Rather, He is speaking of His sovereign choice of Ya’akov and his descendants to carry out His spiritual purposes upon the earth. Israel may have become angry and/or discouraged as a result of her exiles, and a large percentage does not yet recognize this one fact today, that through it all, their Messiah has walked with them.

Mal’akhi continued on, and still Israel argued; Mal’akhi then declared to the *Kohanim* (Priests) that they had better straighten up and do their duties correctly, responsibly and righteously. Mal’akhi 2.7 states, “A Cohen’s [priest’s] lips should safeguard knowledge, and people should seek Torah from his mouth, because he is the messenger of ADONAI-Tzva’ot.” This is a word for all of us who are believers this day, for *Kefa* (Peter) tells us that we are *all* “a royal priesthood” (1 Kefa 2.9), so that “you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”. This is not inferring that all believers are from the tribe of Levi, but rather that as followers of Yeshua we all have a higher calling upon our lives. We are to be proclaiming Torah with our lives – not just the five books of Moshe, for all of Scripture comes under the broader heading of Torah; beyond that, Yeshua is the living Torah, the embodiment of the written word. Thus, our lives are to be proclaiming Yeshua, who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Can you and you and I say that we stand as a Royal Priest to Yeshua in all that we say and do, wherever we are? Certainly we can only do such a thing in the power of the *Ruakh HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit).

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – *Sha’alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! Imagine the day when millions of believers – Jew and Gentile – in Jerusalem and Israel will be proclaiming the excellencies of the Messiah Yeshua, who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light!

B'rakhot v'todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)