

Messianic Rabbi Offers Biblical Encouragement for Your New Year

Certain verses of the Bible are associated with different times of the year. For instance, Messianic Jews like me read the verses that depict Yeshua's last Seder meal with His disciples during the season of Passover. We read the narrative about the binding of Isaac and the ram caught in the thicket during the season of Yom Teruah or Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets, when shofars (or ram's horns) are sounded. We read the book of Ruth during Shavuot or Pentecost because the events of Ruth and Boaz take place during that harvest season. And we read the book of Esther during the Feast of Esther, known as Purim (Lots).

Beyond the times when all of Judaism is reading certain books or verses from the Bible, there are certain texts that have become meaningfully associated with certain times or seasons throughout my faith walk. A few examples would be: I read Genesis 2:23 (TLV) each year around my wedding anniversary:

"Then the man said, 'This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh from my flesh. This one is called woman, for from man was taken this one.' This is why a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife; and they become one flesh."

I read Proverbs 31 each year on my wife's birthday. I read Deuteronomy 34:7 on my birthday. And three times a year I read Hebrews 12:1: on Nissan 1, on Rosh Hashanah and on Dec. 31/Jan. 1.

"Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also get rid of every weight and entangling sin. Let us run with endurance the race set before

us.”

There are three reasons that I choose to read these words at the end and beginning markers of a yearly cycle. The first reason is found in the closing sentence of the verse. I understand that I am running a race and, with each year's cycle, I have run further from where I began, and I am closer to the end of my race. These words encourage me to continue the race holding on to every promise of G-D for my present and for my future. It reminds me that G-D knows the race isn't always easy, or else He would not have told me to “run with endurance.” The words also let me know that it is my race set before me and that, while every faithful runner will end up at the finish line, we will not all run the same course.

The second reason I read this verse is because of the second part of the verse, which mentions getting rid of sin. I know it is popular today to say we cannot get rid of and rise above sin, but if we were not able to do so, G-D wouldn't have told us to. At the end and beginning of a yearly cycle, I ask myself if I am still carrying entangling sin that I need to get rid of. This helps me focus my prayers on my sins instead of spending time complaining about other people's sins.

The third reason I read this verse at these times each year is because of the beginning of the verse, which speaks about a “great cloud of witnesses surrounding us.” If you notice, this verse begins with the connecting word “therefore.” This means that Hebrews 12:1 is a continuation of Chapter 11, which is a list of people considered the heroes of our faith. But, when I read Chapter 11, I find myself reading beyond the surface truth that these heroes did great things through the power of G-D's Spirit. I see that every one of these individual heroes stepped out in faith to overcome sin and failure.

As I read Hebrews 12, I am reminded of Hebrews 11, and when I think about Hebrews 11, I am reminded that the entire Bible is provided for the same reason that Hebrews 11 and 12 were

written. The Bible is a history book written of failures that were overcome, provided by our loving Father, so that we could read about the past and learn from previous failures, enabling us to walk in victory.

So, at the beginning of a year, I read these words again and say to myself, "I can run my race with endurance. I can run my race more easily if I choose to get rid of the weight of my sins, which make running more difficult. I can run my race because I have an entire book that provides evidence of those before me who were able to run their race while also living in a sinful world." {eoa}

Eric Tokajer is author of *With Me in Paradise*, *Transient Singularity*, *OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry*, *#ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians* and *Galatians in Context*.