

# GROWING IN GOD PODCAST



## GIG272 – From Generation to Generation

It is good to be here this morning. This is our final service for the celebration of Sukkot; it ends tonight at sundown, and so we just continue to draw in our hearts everything God has for us out of this time. I wanted to talk about what begins at sundown, because we do not just end the celebration of Tabernacles, but we also begin another celebration. Actually, it is two celebrations, especially in Israel. We have Shemini Atzeret, and we have Simchat Torah. The first one, Shemini Atzeret, is actually the prayer for rain and the celebration of what God is going to do in bringing rain during this time. We also have Simchat Torah, which is called in English *the Joy of Torah*. This is especially important, and I want to focus on it because as we know in Judaism, they read the Torah every year; and the beginning of that reading starts immediately following the celebration of Sukkot on this day of Simchat Torah, the Joy of the Torah. Everyone would go to the synagogue and they would read the final verses of the Torah and finish the reading of the year, and then immediately they would begin going back to Genesis. In fact, the Sabbath coming up is called *Beresheit*, which means *the beginning*, because we finish, and yet at the same time we never finish because we immediately go back and start rejoicing again in the reading of the Torah all the way through.

This is a tradition in Judaism that every year the Torah is read from beginning to end, and that is really what most of the focus of their synagogue services is about – the reading of the Word. And I thought it was interesting, because we were talking about this idea that in Tabernacles, or Sukkot, we are remembering this time in the wilderness, that they lived in the tents, the sukkah. There is kind of a play on words, if you will, going from Hebrew to English. In the Hebrew, the word for tent is *ohel*, and I am sure after forty years of living in tents that is exactly the way they felt about it! But they were coming to the conclusion of this requirement of living in tents in the wilderness because it was a result of their disobedience, wasn't it? And so, they lived for forty years in the wilderness as a punishment, waiting for the whole generation of people to die off and a new generation to be taught. So it was kind of a similar feeling; one thing was ending, the generation of unbelief was ending, and at the same time Joshua and Caleb, during that forty years, were training a new generation of those who would not be unbelieving, but would go in obedience and take the promise of Canaan that God had given, back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So we see this time of dwelling in the wilderness as kind of conflicted, because they had these great blessings from God, but at the same time, the only reason they were there was because they had been disobedient to go in and take the land. If they had been obedient, there never would have been forty years in the wilderness.

We know that as we celebrate Sukkot, or Tabernacles, we are to build the Sukkah and live in it, have our meals in it, and remember this time. But you cannot remember this time without remembering why you are there. You are there because of the disobedience. You are there because it really was a punishment from God for what they had done in refusing to go take the land. They did not enter in because of the unbelief. When we say, "What was the unbelief about?" it was unbelief that He was big enough and strong enough to clear out the giants before them. They were facing seven nations greater than themselves, mightier than themselves, but they were to believe that God could go in and clear the land

before them so that they could possess it. So their unbelief was an unbelief about who God was and how powerful God was, and how able He was to do what He had promised them to do, which was to give them possession of that land.

There is so much dynamic and so much meaning; it really is a fantastic time, and it is something tremendous for us year by year to engage in and rehearse within ourselves of why we are doing this, what it is that we are supposed to be remembering. We should come away from the celebration of Sukkot refreshed in the memory that God is all powerful, that He is able to give us what He has promised. It does not matter how big the giants are that are sitting on our promises, God will clear them away if we believe in Him, and He will allow us by His divine power to possess the things that He has promised. And it is interesting, then, that at the very ending of the celebration of Sukkot the Jewish people have this Simchat Torah celebration; they end the reading of the Law and they begin the reading of the Law. I do not think it is by accident; they do it because the whole issue is rehearsing what God has said, getting back to this place of believing who He is and what He has told them and what He is going to do for them.

I want to kind of position us in this place of these two celebrations. Like I said, in Israel, Simchat Torah starts tonight at sundown, the day following Tabernacles. Now, it does not do that in the Diaspora. The Diaspora is the Jews that are scattered all over the world, and they do it differently. Tonight for the Diaspora would be the beginning of Shemini Atzeret, and then the next day, Monday night, would be the beginning of Simchat Torah. It sounds confusing, but there is actually a reason for the confusion, which there usually is. The reason that outside of Jerusalem you celebrate things for two days rather than one is because of the communication system back in the ancient times. What they would do in the ancient times, and this would include the time of Christ, is they would have signal fires that they set up on the mountains. Once the Pharisees and the Sadducees determined that it was in fact the beginning of a feast – remember, all the feasts are done on a lunar calendar except for, which one? Pentecost, does that ring a bell? You count to that. But all the other feasts begin when you see the moon. So for the feast to actually begin, you had to look up and there had to be two witnesses that saw the moon phase and confirmed it, and that began the feast.

Now it is easier today just to look at your watch, or go to an app, but they could not do that. And that was just in Jerusalem. They would have to stand on the walls of the city and find it out, and get confirmation, and go to the high priests and say, “Yes, we saw the moon. This is actually the beginning of the feast time.” That is great except if you live outside of Jerusalem, because there are no telephones, there is no email, there is no Siri, and so they had to have another way. What they would do is they would start a signal fire on the Mount of Olives, and then you would see that across the land. The next mountaintop would see the signal fire, and then they would light a signal fire; then the next mountain would light a signal fire. They would do that all the way into the Fertile Crescent, into the Tigris-Euphrates area; and so that took a while to start the fires, to identify the fires and know exactly when things were supposed to start. That is the reason by tradition that outside of Jerusalem, outside of the main area where the people were identifying it, they gave two days for the celebration, because they probably could not even start till the second day because they did not really know yet that it was that day. So anyway, that is just trivia, but it explains to you why we are going to celebrate for two days in the Diaspora. If you call the local synagogue, our friend the rabbi over here in Kihei, tomorrow he is going to be celebrating Shemini Atzeret, and then on Monday night start celebrating Simchat Torah.

But what I want to emphasize is the fact that within Jerusalem, within tradition, they would have done it the day following the Feast of Tabernacles. So you go into it right from this time of remembering your disobedience and the fact that you have lived forty years under the consequence of your sin and disobedience; and so they start this idea of, "Hey, let's begin and end the reading of the Word immediately following that time, because we do not ever want to make this mistake again." That really was the concept behind it.

I want to read a few of the Scriptures about this time in the wilderness and see what was going on. Deuteronomy the eighth chapter, we will start with verses 1-2. It says,

"All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers. You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

Now remember, this is just before they are going in to take the land, and He is now talking to this new generation, saying, "Are you going to make the same mistake that the other generation made that cost you forty years in the wilderness? Or have you learned your lesson? And if you have learned your lesson, are you going to be able to keep that lesson alive for yourself and for your children?" So that became a real issue to them. It was not just themselves they were worried about, there was this question: "Can we now never, ever make this mistake again?" And that is what God is challenging me about. He said, "Look, this whole time in the wilderness I have been trying to humble you. I am testing you to know whether it is in your heart, whether you would keep the commandments." Verse 3, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

Every Word from God is what makes man live, if he is obedient to it. So again, you can see this idea that when we come out of a time when we have learned our lesson of disobedience, then we want to somehow give ourselves a way to not err again. They had learned the lesson that we do not live by bread, we live by the Word of God. We live by what He says to us, and God was teaching them that. It says in verses 4-6, "Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your feet swell these forty years. Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him."

So they are looking for a way: "How do we recall this? How do we lock ourselves in to everything that God has given us and not lose it generation to generation?" One of the things we are very familiar with is in Deuteronomy 6, it is what we call the Shema prayer. I will read it, because again it is emphasizing this point. And I think the point is so powerful when we really look at their experience in the wilderness; you really see where the emphasis of these verses is coming from.

Verses 1-2,

"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it [this emphasis on teaching the Word, teaching them what they must know, teaching them how they should walk, teaching them what they should obey], so that you and your son

and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.”

So again, this idea that it is not just the generation that is going in to possess the land; I mean, for sure they will not forget. They are not about to forget forty years in the wilderness; they just lived it. But Moses is saying, “But I am concerned about your sons and your grandsons, and your grandchildren after that. How do we prevent generation after generation from what you have just experienced and what you have gone through?” Verse 3, “O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.”

We always emphasize the Shema prayer but we forget these verses that precede it, because these are giving the reminder why it is so important that we look at this, that we do this. And I feel like what God is saying to us in the lesson is the fact that we have gone through many things in our walk with God. I could liken some of my life to a wilderness experience where God is always teaching me, He is always giving me consequences. And if we are wise we learn by consequences how to go from that point on. So we have gone through things, and God is disciplining us. If you go to Hebrews 12, he talks about the same thing: “God is disciplining you like a son, and what son is there whom the father does not correct and discipline and train and teach? So listen and do not faint when you are reproved by God.” Do not let these things you have been through in your life and in your walk with God be of no effect.

I think much of what we have experienced is our preparation for these days just ahead of us, and that is what they learned from Tabernacles: “Everything I have been through, everything I look back over with my forefathers, is really preparation for tomorrow.” Because up to this point for Israel there never, ever was a possessing of the promise. I mean, everything in their history was never a fulfillment. Think about that. You are talking about hundreds of years, generation after generation, that never saw a fulfillment of what God had promised. They were the ones who were just at that moment getting ready to possess all of these things that God had said. So that means that everything in their history was preparation for the moment of possessing what God had promised.

I wonder how much that is true of us? I wonder how much everything we have been through... we think, “My gosh, we have been walking with God for years and years.” Yes, but what if it was all preparation? What if it was all preparation because now God is ready to open the door of the promise? He is ready to move on our behalf. Remember, we cannot do it ourselves, it only comes by His divine power. It comes because He said, “I will go before you and I will fight for you, and you will remove these people off of your land; but it is because I am fighting for you. I am doing this.” That is where their faith had to come in. When you face the giants, when you walk around Jericho, it is like, “Okay, I am just walking around Jericho. All I can say is these walls are really, really high, and I see a bunch of guys with spears and arrows standing there just waiting for me to get close enough that they can take me out. Okay, God, we are supposed to take Jericho.” From right at the beginning, they realized it had to be God fighting for them. They had to do certain things, they had to be obedient, but He had to provide the miracle. And God has to train our spirits lest we withdraw, lest we back off in unbelief and feel like what we are facing is too great. Not too great for us – we already know it is too great for us – but we feel like it is too great for God.

Has it become too great for God in your walk with God that He can fulfill and give you the promises? Is it too late? Has it been too long? Is there too much? Is it too hard? Not for Him. This was what they were

looking at. And to me, I love the fact that in Judaism they recognize, "We have to read this Word over and over and over. And every time we do, I know we just finished reading it, but we are going to start again and we are going to see things we have never seen before." That is the thought behind Simchat Torah. That is the attitude of Simchat Torah: "We are going to see things we have never seen before this time when we read it. We are going to get more out of it. It is going to open up for us in a new way." And I believe God wants us to do something like this. When I look at the needs today in these churches, I think I would boil it all down to say, "We do not teach the Word enough. We are not focusing on the Word as we should." We have a living Word just like they had a living Word. They knew they had a living Word because God spoke it literally out of heaven to them, right? That is a pretty living Word. He came down, He touched down on Mount Sinai, and He gave them personally that Word. And we have a living Word. But it is not going to help us, it is to no avail, if we end up without the faith. And we will never have the faith because faith comes by what? By hearing. Hearing what? the Word. Our faith comes by it. That was their problem, unbelief. So what were not they doing enough? They were not hearing that Word. Our faith comes by hearing the Word.

Like I said, we have been going through a lot of things, and the more I study it, the more I look into it, the more I pray over it, the thing I feel is that we have to come back to this emphasis within our churches of teaching the Word we have. Really teaching it, not just forgetting it. I remember John Stevens, our founder, coming here and beginning to teach in a conference, and the whole emphasis was, "We have to stop preaching in the churches and we have to emphasize teaching."

When we look at Ephesians 4 it gives that emphasis: "He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some evangelists, some as pastors and teachers." "Pastors and teachers" is something that moves together. And the pastors need to be teachers, teaching what we know. I thought about it in reading over some of the foundational documents we have, even in our corporations. Every once in a while the pastors ought to be teaching the bylaws, just so you know what governance, spiritually, is over us, how do we function? We have wonderful things like *The First Principles*, like *The New Testament Church*. We have whole series of messages on very specific things, including the feasts, like *The Seventh Feast of the Seventh Month*. How do we know what we are doing in celebrating the Feast? We have the teaching that tells us how to do it. But if we do not come back and reteach that, sometimes we feel, and I am guilty of this, you feel like, "I already said that. How many times do I need to say that?" But in the New Testament, the apostle said, "Hey, it is not a problem for me to teach these things again." It is not a problem. And it should not be a problem for us to repeat. That is what we see happening, that is what Simchat Torah is celebrating, the repeating of the teaching of the Law, the reading of it over and over again. You say, "Well, we just read it." I know, but we are going to read it again, because we cannot forget what the Lord is telling us to do.

That is what they learned. They learned in the wilderness, "When we get to the place where we have to have the faith, where we have to know what to do, we are not going to have it because we are not following the pattern. We are not rehearsing to ourselves what God has told us, what He said to us." I could go on and read the Shema, it makes the point. We know why they are saying it now, because they are trying to do something for their grandchildren, their sons, their daughters, but for the many generations. I will go ahead and read the Shema. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, "'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words [these words], which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.'" How do you have faith? Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word. "These words which I am

commanding you....” See, Moses again in Deuteronomy is repeating one more time before they go into the land the words that had been given them.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way.” See, this should be our fellowship. Let this be a plumbline to our hearts – do we do this? There was a word recently about, “Are we living in alignment to what we say? Are we really in alignment?” These words should be on our heart, and we should be teaching them diligently to our sons; and we should be talking about them when we sit in our house and when we walk by the way. When we get together to fellowship, there should be a focus on worship and the Word. And it is fine, we can still barbecue and have fun and have other conversations, but what is the focus of it? What is the purpose of fellowship? The true purpose of fellowship is to get together surrounding the Word and the worship, so that we are creating faith within ourselves. We are regenerating the Word, we are binding it to our hearts.

Verses 8-11,

“You shall bind them... [oh good, it is right there]. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as the frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of good things.”

Then he talks about how they are not going to forget. But everything was about not forgetting. And I just wonder how much of the living Word have we forgotten? How much of it is really written, bound to our hearts, as frontlets to our forehead? Do we remember these things so that we can do them? He said, “You have to do the things I command you,” but there is no way to do what you do not remember.

That is the fun thing about children, isn’t it? They can forget so fast it is literally a miracle. It is a miracle of childhood. I mean, three seconds after you tell them something, you have to tell them again, right? You know, “Don’t do that.”

“Oh, don’t do that.”

“I just said, don’t do that.”

“Don’t do what?”

“Don’t do that!”

It is amazing, and I do not know how much of that we lose in our adulthood. God feels the same way. He is trying to command us and re-command us because we are always forgetting. The battle is against forgetting. And we know the other aspect of it is that if we are reminding ourselves, then faith comes by hearing. If we hear it, we can have faith and we can do it. I am convinced of that.

So that is what they are looking for in this time surrounding the Torah. I will give you another verse. Deuteronomy 11, verses 18-21. I like this. “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.” What is he doing? He is reminding them what he just said. He just said this a few chapters ago, but he is reminding them again. “You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land.”

It is all about remembering. It is all about reminding. When I say teaching, that is really what we are talking about, isn't it? It is the reteaching, it is the reminding of what we are. We have already heard it; yes, I know that we have already done this. But here is good old faithful God, what does He do? He says it in Deuteronomy 6, then He says it in Deuteronomy 11, and He says it back in chapter 4. He keeps repeating this over and over, because it is all about the reminder. And it is interesting, in Deuteronomy 31, and again, you can read most of this later, but this kind of connects to this whole idea of the celebration of Sukkot, and it is the reminding of the Word. Deuteronomy 31:10-13 says,

Then Moses commanded them, saying, “At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God.”

See, they did not want the other generations to miss out on the lesson of Tabernacles. It has to be something generational. And if we want this living Word to be something generational, it has to be that we come to grips with the ways of reminding ourselves, reminding ourselves, and doing that. We as a church do not have a liturgy, and we kind of have an aversion to liturgy. But one aspect of liturgy is it almost does the same thing that the Jews do. It reads over significant verses of faith and belief time and time again at certain times of the year, so that people are reminded what the Word says.

I bless us with this concept. We are at Tabernacles; that was the time when you called everybody together. There was nobody who could not hear it. There was no separation between the men and the women and the children, and even the alien – hey guys, that is us! That means we had a right to come and be engaged with Israel. Even as aliens, we had the right to come and stand at the gate during Sukkot and hear the Word of God so that we could learn and we could understand and we could fear the Lord our God, and we could walk with Him and have long life and prosperity and blessings.

So I bless us as we are leaving this time of the Feast of Tabernacles. Let there be something in us that says, as a body of people, “We are going to find a way.” Just like Israel has found a way in reading the Torah over and over, beginning again from year to year to reread that, we need to find the things that for us are foundational to our faith and to who we are, and to what God has spoken to us that we must walk in. We need the faith right now to be able to walk in it, but that faith only comes by hearing the Word. We are not going to get to it by trying to unravel problems. We are going to get to it by getting into the Word and reminding ourselves of what God has said and how we are to walk and what we are to do and who He has called us to be; and remembering that He is mighty enough and He is powerful enough to provide for us the promises if our hearts are in the right place.

So I bless us. Let's not leave the Feast of Tabernacles, let's enter a year of hearing the Word of God. Amen.