

“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” [Leviticus 19:18]. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).

Yeshua concludes that the entire Torah rests on the requirements for people to love God and their neighbors. If people can observe these simple commandments, then they will understand why God gave us His Law to follow. *The command to love one's neighbor is perhaps the most basic when it comes to human interaction. Consider in tangible terms what loving one's neighbor actually involves:*

“You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:13-18).

The requirement to love one's neighbor goes back to the foundational instructions delivered by God about separating out a unique people for His own possession (cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). The Ancient Israelites were commanded to judge their neighbors fairly, and to not oppress, rob, slander, hate, bear grudges against, or take vengeance against them. Such is all summarized and made complete in the actions witnessed in the ministry of the Messiah Yeshua.

To what degree do you need to be reminded that we need to be treating a brooding hen the same way we might treat our neighbors? *If you show disrespect to animals, then it should not be surprising why you might show disrespect to human beings.* Each of us needs to heed the admonitions of Scripture, striving to have hearts and minds indwelt with the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). We need to be people who can treat all of God's creatures with dignity and honor. Perhaps if we learn to extend loving kindness to the animal kingdom, then we will treat *people* properly. **If we can exhibit love to all those we encounter, then we can truly live long and blessed lives.**

***Ki-Tavo* כִּי־תָבוֹא** **When you enter in** **“A Faithful Treasured Possession”**

Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8
 Isaiah 60:1-22

Ki-Tavo is frequently remembered for the lengthy lists of blessings and curses that are promised to Israel as a result of their obedience or disobedience to the Lord. In this season of repentance, which traditionally comes during the month of Elul as we approach the Fall high holidays, reflecting on such blessings and curses can be a sobering exercise. After all, God has declared many times throughout the Scriptures that Israel is a chosen people who

have been designated as His own possession among all the peoples of the Earth—who are to in turn be a blessing to all they encounter. Here in our *parashah* this week, after we see instructions on how Israel should honor the Lord with offerings of first fruits and tithes,⁴⁷ Moses summarizes that the people are declaring their willingness to follow and obey Him fully:

“You have today declared the LORD to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice” (Deuteronomy 26:17).

This commitment receives a positive response from the Lord, who reiterates and amplifies just how treasured a possession Israel will be:

“The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God, as He has spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:18-19).

Being “the chosen nation” above all the nations of the world has some rather incumbent, serious responsibilities. Israel is required to be an example of a consecrated people, which fully submits itself to the will of God. He requires specific actions from His people to affirm that they are indeed His, and that they can truly be as prominent as He desires them to be.

Moses gives explicit instructions on what must be done once the Israelites have crossed the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land. In a very dramatic way, the Israelites are ordered to travel to the area around Shechem to perform a solemn ceremony on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. There, the Levites will position themselves between the two mountains with six tribes on each side, and make loud declarations about curses that will come upon them as a result of deviant behavior.⁴⁸ Declarations about blessings as a result of obedience to God will be made,⁴⁹ but so will the consequences of disobedience be specified.⁵⁰ As all of these statements are ushered forth, the people will be expected to proclaim *Amein* (אָמֵן), issuing their agreement with what is said. Just imagine a scene of hundreds of thousands of people declaring forth *Amein* to words that will determine their future (cf. Joshua 8:30-35)!

As we review the different statements that Ancient Israel was to make when they entered into the Promised Land, there are some things that should really strike us. Moses said that if Israel was to diligently obey the Lord, that His blessings will just “overtake” them:

“Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

The lengthy list of blessings offered by the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:3-12) culminates in the ultimate elevation for Israel to always be the head and never the tail among those in the world:

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 26:1-19.

⁴⁸ Deuteronomy 27:1-26.

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

“The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe *them* carefully” (Deuteronomy 28:13).

All that is required to attain this status is simply obedience to God. But as the testimony of Scripture is clear, this is much easier said than done. The narrative and the tone shifts, because there is a much longer list of curses that will come upon Israel if the people choose to disobey God. Moses summarizes,

“But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (Deuteronomy 28:15).

As you read curse after curse (Deuteronomy 28:16-65), you realize that these negative words touch almost every aspect of human life. After reading through these curses a number of times, you can understand why frequently—when this part of the Torah portion is often read in Jewish synagogues—it is traditionally read quickly and in an almost inaudible tone. So severe are the curses upon Israel that the Rabbis have sought to minimize even the contemplation of the possible curses. **And yet, in this time of personal and corporate repentance, is it not an ideal time to consider some of the consequences of disobedience?** Just consider some of the concluding remarks about just how the people of Israel will act once the effects of disobedience have taken their hold:

“So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you will be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Would that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Would that it were morning!’ because of the dread of your heart which you dread, and for the sight of your eyes which you will see” (Deuteronomy 28:66-67).

Once all of the curses have taken their toll, life will be so miserable that one will not be comfortable with either the day or the night. *There will be no assurance of life at all.* One’s existence will be in a sphere dominated by the power of death—a routine marked with incessant fear and loathing—especially since the people will have been scattered into the nations as a result of their disobedience.

With all of this being witnessed in our *parashah* this week, is there not a great incentive to be obedient to the Lord? Surely, as a part of His people today—even though we have experienced redemption in Messiah Yeshua—should we not recognize that we can only be blessed if we expel the effort to follow *and* obey? Sadly, much of religious history is marked by people who have made more of an effort to disobey God, or bend the rules with trying to do as little as possible, then people who have strived to love Him and His ways. Lamentably, the Lord has been quite true to His Word to enact curses and penalties upon disobedient people throughout the ages.

The Faithful Remnant

Pondering this sad reality, I was also reminded that, thankfully, there has always been a faithful remnant of people throughout history who have chosen to diligently obey God to the best of their ability and understanding.⁵¹ As a result, these people of faithful obedience have received the promised blessings, and have prepared the way for each successive generation. In His sovereignty the Lord has always had a group of people who are faithful to

⁵¹ Editor’s note: Of useful consultation would be the many people described in Robert G. Tuttle, *The Story of Evangelism: A History of the Witness to the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

perform His Word, making a concentrated, positive difference in society—whether they be Jews or Christians. As the writer of Hebrews states it, faith is foundational to acts of obedience:

“Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible...And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:1-3, 6).

Apparently, over the ages, it has been the faith of many men and women—who beyond a shadow of a doubt can be counted among the “treasured possession” of God’s people—that has caused them to be obedient to the Lord. They have been responsible for demonstrating acts of kindness and mercy to others, fulfilling what James the Just calls, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

Considering the requirement of faith as a critical ingredient for generating obedience, my thoughts turned to some of the words of the Apostle Paul which address the requirement of God’s people to function as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). Paul specifies how each person has been given a particular allocation of faith, requiring all Believers to work and serve together in the Kingdom of God:

“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

Reading this, I also had to recognize how Paul further says that faith is the means by which we receive salvation—not our human works:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

But, too many people stop reading at Ephesians 2:9, because nowhere in his letters does Paul ever negate the need for the children of God to have good works. Instead, he asserts how Messiah followers have been created *for good works*, which come as a natural result of our faith demonstrated in action:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

James the Just is also noted for his description about how faith and works are to compliment one another. A true follower of the Messiah of Israel is to have a dynamic, active faith, that manifests itself in the appropriate deeds:

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. But someone may *well* say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS’ [Genesis 15:6], and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:17-26).

More Faith

In these days of contemplation and repentance, as I have considered the different blessings and curses contingent upon obedience or disobedience to God—all I can do is **entreat Him to give me more faith**. *I ask the Father to increase my faith, so that I can have a heart desirous of serving Him.* In a day and age when temptation is rampant and is at clear odds with the will of the indwelling Holy Spirit—I beseech the Lord to reveal more and more of Himself, so that I can endure the trials and tribulations that have been thrust upon me in life. I want to live in accordance with His ways.

It is a great blessing to be given a significant measure of trusting faith. This gift results in one not only desiring to be obedient to the Lord, but it places one's total confidence in His will for the future. It lets me know that I, personally, am a treasured possession of His—who He loves and who He truly cares about!

What about you? Have you been turning your heart and attention toward God in this time of contemplation, in anticipation of the Fall high holidays? What about your actions toward your neighbors? Have they been consistent with what is expected of able Messiah followers? If not, I would recommend that you go before the Lord and truly seek Him with all of your being—remembering that He is faithful to reveal Himself to those who truly seek Him:

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

May you be found to be one of His faithful treasured possessions!

Nitzavim נִצְּבִים Standing “Prophecies Here and Now”

Deuteronomy 29:9[10]-30:20
Isaiah 61:10-63:9

The events of *Nitzavim* occur near the end of Moses' declarations to the Ancient Israelites, and contain some extremely profound prophecies. I believe that we are witnessing the fulfillment of some of these prophecies today. From the creation of the State of Israel in the Middle East to the emergence of the Messianic community of faith, elements of these profound realities are forecast in this Torah portion. In this season of repentance in the month of Elul, as we are preparing our hearts for *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, I find it very encouraging to consider some of these passages.

As this section of the Torah commences, Moses specifies how the broad-sweeping influence that the covenant God has made with Israel affects every level of society. As you should notice from the opening verses of our *parashah*, the different groups of people range from the leaders of Israel, to wives and children, to those who perform menial labor, to those who are aliens or sojourners in the camp. We see how the God of Israel is an all-