

Moses' summary statements bring his previous prophecies to a fitting conclusion—especially for those of us living today. Every single one of us can experience either life and prosperity, or death and adversity. We can love the Lord and walk in His ways, or we can choose not to follow Him and suffer the consequences of disobedience. *God gives each of us a free will to make these choices.*

If you choose obedience to God, He promises His blessings. If you choose anything else, He promises penalties. As God puts it, Heaven and Earth are witnesses against all who originally listened to Moses in the wilderness prior to crossing the Jordan—and all who are reading and having to consider these passages today. Heaven and Earth have not gone away, and neither have these Divine principles. Now that these prophecies are becoming real to many, perhaps it is time to be serious about whether you are going to choose an existence dominated by the power of life or death!

The Prophet Isaiah affirms how eventually the prophecies of Moses will be fulfilled. In this week's Haftarah selection, the reality of these end-time events coming to pass is amplified, as Isaiah looked forward to the times which Moses' prophecies direct us to:

“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. **For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations**” (Isaiah 61:10-12).

The future time which Moses talks about is seen through a different set of eyes, as Isaiah sees righteousness and praise springing up before all nations—an emphasis on the worldwide effects of Israel's restoration. While we might still be some distance from this taking place, each one of us can experience the essential reality of the New Covenant in our lives today, and we can individually play a role in seeing God's goodness demonstrated to all in the world. As more and more of us commit ourselves to returning to the Lord *and* to His Instruction, the restoration of His Kingdom will accelerate.

I pray that whether we are the final generation—or even if these things occur ten generations from now—we will all experience the fullness of God's Kingdom, **and know the eternal life available through faith in the Messiah Yeshua!**

V'yeilekh וַיֵּלֶךְ

And he went

“The Importance of Obedience”

Deuteronomy 31:1-30

Hosea 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20; Joel 2:15-27

As the Book of Deuteronomy begins to come to a close, our annual cycle of Torah study begins to wind down. It is during these final words of Moses to Ancient Israel that we find some of his most compelling pleas. For the preceding discussions in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses has been summarizing the events of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

Now, as Moses' life is about to end,⁵² his final exhortations to Israel are riddled with emotional appeals for the people to choose life (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19-20)!

For those of us studying these words today, who believe that by faith in Yeshua we are a part of Israel—we consider Moses' admonitions to apply to us and be just as relevant, as they are to the physical descendants of those who stood beside Joshua preparing to enter the Promised Land. *God's people are required to obey Him in order to be blessed.* Yet, over the centuries, many theologians and philosophers of religion have done their best to get around the Biblical requirement that God's people obey His commandments. Liberal branches of Judaism relegate following the Torah to only be a part of Jewish culture. Varied branches of Christianity like to say that Jesus "fulfilled and thus abolished the Law,"⁵³ or that the Torah was "nailed to the cross."⁵⁴ Others simply do not take the time and effort to examine what the Torah says, and then falsely conclude that God's Law has no relevance for modern people.

I have found that all of these—and other arguments—are generally superficial. They are excellent tactics of our enemy to cause people to disobey the Lord, and at the very least, experience a very stifled and ineffective faith. It is my hope and prayer as a Messianic Believer that we would not find ourselves trying to make up excuses for ignoring the Scriptures. While there are certainly questions on applicability of various commandments in the Twenty-First Century, a widescale dismissal of Moses' Teaching is unjustified.

Simply Obey

Messianic Believers today have some distinct advantages over the Ancient Israelites. We can read the words of Deuteronomy and recognize that many of Moses' prophetic statements have already been fulfilled to some degree.⁵⁵ From a Twenty-First Century perspective looking back in history, we can review tangible evidence from the record of Scripture in how obedience to God brings blessings, while disobedience results in curses:

"So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. Then the LORD your God will

⁵² Deuteronomy 31:1-13.

⁵³ Consult the exegetical paper "Has the Law Been Fulfilled?" by J.K. McKee, examining Matthew 5:17-19.

⁵⁴ Colossians 2:14 specifically says "the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us" was nailed to the cross. This comprises the capital penalties pronounced upon sinners who break the Torah, which Yeshua by His sacrifice absorbed in His death; it does not take away the standard of sin contained in God's Law.

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 31:14-22.

prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul” (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

Certainly if you follow the history of Israel since the time of Moses for the past 3,300 years, you can see how God has been faithful to enact punishment on those who have disobeyed Him. Sadly, in spite of the warnings of either Moses or the Prophets, God has sent Israel into numerous exiles into the nations of the Earth.

We can be thankful that there is an anticipated time when scattered and dispersed Israel will return to the Holy One with all of its heart and soul. In our era, especially since the creation of the modern State of Israel, the restoration and gathering back to the Promised Land has become a reality. More is to be anticipated to be sure, but it is to all likely be preceded by a more concentrated return of individuals to God and to His ways *first*. The Lord is clear to say that obedience to His commandments is not at all something to be difficult or overbearing:

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-16).

Many Christians today investigating the Messianic movement, and seeing its emphasis on the Torah, often do not know what to do. Many have been inappropriately told or taught that following God’s Law is a complete impossibility. *But the Lord Himself says that it is absolutely doable.* The problem is often with our human volition, and our widespread tendency to make a choice leading to death and adversity. We often do not want to commit the *little* time and effort it takes to obey our Heavenly Father the way He asks.

Post-Resurrection Choices

The Apostle Paul understood how bad choices can lead to negative consequences, especially among many of his fellow Jews who had denied Yeshua as the Messiah in the First Century. If you will recall his comments throughout Romans chs. 9-11, Paul addresses many of his heartfelt concerns regarding his fellow Jewish people, who would be most familiar with the words of Moses:

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Messiah for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises” (Romans 9:3-4).

“Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Romans 10:1-2).

Paul knew that his own Jewish people, who had inherited the promises of God, and who exhibited a sincere zeal for His ways, did not largely comprehend the very essence of what the Torah was intending to communicate. Many deliberately blinded themselves to the message of the gospel, and were unable to see how the Torah's focus had always been the Messiah Yeshua:

“Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination [*telos*] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: ‘Whoever does these things will live by them’” (Romans 10:3-5, TNIV).

Here as Paul addresses the zeal of his people, he references a concept that is found in Leviticus 18:5: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.” If you can keep the commandments as they have been given *perfectly*, then you will have a blessed life and will never have to suffer the Law's capital punishment. The problem is that if you disobey just one commandment, you have broken the entire Law and are subject to its penalties—**which is what all of us have done** (Romans 3:10). As James the Just reminds us, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). What this human reality forces us to do is to entreat the mercy of the Lord, and it intensifies one understanding how the goal, acme, or aim of the Torah **is to point people to the Messiah Yeshua and the salvation He provides**. If in our quest to be obedient to the Lord, we find that we have erred—born again Believers can now have the comfort in knowing that they have been redeemed from any of the curses of the Torah.

Such a righteousness is based on faith—the same faith that Abraham exhibited when he believed God's promises to him (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Paul's writing continues, as he specifies,

“But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: ‘DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN [Deuteronomy 30:20]?’ (that is, to bring Messiah down), or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Messiah up from the dead).’ But what does it say? ‘THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART [Deuteronomy 30:14]’—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Yeshua *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Romans 10:6-10).

Here, the Apostle Paul describes a word of faith which confesses with the mouth that Yeshua is Messiah, and believes in the heart that He has been raised from the dead. The righteousness of faith is focused around His completed work at Golgotha, **recognizing that He came and paid the price for our sins**. Yeshua the Messiah fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, and paid the debt that we had incurred before the Father as Law-breakers. *Nowhere* does the Torah itself claim that by following its commandments a person will merit eternal life; at most the Torah promises a blessed life for those who follow its commandments on Earth. Eternal communion with God can only be a reality via the accomplished work of His Son.

Still, even though the Torah does not provide eternal life, obedience to its statutes and decrees is required if we intend to be the holy and separated people that God desires. The Apostle John reminds us that believing that Yeshua is the sacrifice for human sin is one

thing; in order to signify that such a belief within us is real, we must demonstrate it via acts of obedience:

“[A]nd He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:2-6).

An indication that one truly knows Messiah Yeshua, is if one chooses to keep His commandments. **If one does not keep His commandments, then John indicates that one is a liar who does not have the truth.** This is very serious. If a person claims with his or her mouth and “believes” in the heart that Yeshua is the Messiah, and yet does not expel any effort to keep (any of) His commandments—notably those of loving God and neighbor—there is an obvious disconnect. Perhaps such a confession of faith was just some kind of lip service and not a true heart confession? *Thankfully, only our Eternal God can truly judge the heart intention of any person.*

How debilitating has it been for today’s Christianity to often leave obedience out of the gospel message? While none of us can “earn” salvation, our being cleansed from sins and spiritually regenerated is to follow with our being obedient to the Lord. How can today’s Messianics become a force of positive change, helping to not only see many Jewish people come to faith in Messiah Yeshua—but many Christians turn toward a path of diligent obedience to God?

These, and many other questions, should be reflected upon during this season of reflection and repentance, as we consider the themes of the Fall high holidays. As we each meditate upon the issues before us, and consider a future time when we will be standing before our Creator, **may we each be encouraged to choose the eternal life provided in Messiah Yeshua with all our hearts, minds, and souls!**

Ha'azinu הָאָזִינוּ

Hear

“The Rock of Salvation”

Deuteronomy 32:1–52

2 Samuel 22:1–22:51

Moses’ approaching death has inspired him to make some very emotional appeals to the people of Israel, seen in the words of Deuteronomy 32. He knew how his days of leading Israel were soon coming to an end. As any good shepherd would be, he was very cognizant of his sheep’s proclivities. For forty years he had observed the Israelites’ behavior in a variety of circumstances, and he knew their inclinations. As is true of most sheep, they were prone to wander. Moses attests to this in some of his final statements:

“For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my