

B'har בְּהָרַךְ On the mount

Leviticus 25:1–26:2

Jeremiah 32:6–27

B'chuqotai בְּחֻקָּי By My Regulations “Double-Edged Sevens”

Leviticus 26:3–27:34

Jeremiah 16:19–17:24

This week’s Torah study combines the last two portions of Leviticus, *B’har* (Leviticus 25:1–26:2) and *B’chuqotai* (Leviticus 26:3–27:34). Leviticus 26:18 summarizes the basic principle of retribution, or reaping what one sows, which the Lord is often attempting to communicate to each man and woman—especially those committed to faithfully following Him:

“If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.”

The simple if/then proposition that we see, is something that must be readily grasped by each of us, *without* necessarily having to understand all of the profound mysteries of God’s universe. **If** you obey God’s instructions, **then** you will be blessed—but **if** you disobey, **then** you will be cursed (*or*, at least penalized to some degree). One does not need a great amount of formal training in the Scriptures to comprehend the basic formula of choosing life over death, or pleasantness over adversity!

In reading through our dual Torah portion, I believe that a slightly deeper level of understanding is introduced and amplified for students, when a pattern of sevens is repeated several times in the text. Such a “seven pattern” can be applied in a series of curses upon those who disobey Him:

- “If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you **seven times** more for your sins” (Leviticus 26:18).
- “If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you **seven times** according to your sins” (Leviticus 26:21).
- “Then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you **seven times** for your sins” (Leviticus 26:24).
- “Then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you **seven times** for your sins” (Leviticus 26:28).

The fourfold repetition of the statement “seven times for your sins,” as the penalties for disobedience intensify, has profound significance for those of us who eagerly want to obey the Lord and be recipients of His blessings. If you have been paying careful attention to the Torah portions from Genesis to here in Leviticus, the call upon God’s people is to be a holy

nation and kingdom of priests, who have been commissioned to bring His light to the world. In Leviticus ch. 26 we discover that the pattern of seven is like a sword with a double-edge, seeking to pierce the heart in order to separate the holy from the profane, or the clean from the unclean. As Hebrews 4:12 tells us,

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

If you take a look at the wider context of what the author of Hebrews writes, you find that he is describing the profound privilege that children of God have to enter into His rest. Interestingly, it is from Psalm 95 that he largely draws his inspiration from, to exhort his audience to obey the Lord and not give up on Messiah Yeshua:

“Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘**AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST**’ [Psalm 95:11], although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: ‘AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS’ [Genesis 2:2]; and again in this *passage*, ‘**THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST**’ [Psalm 95:11]. Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS**’ [Psalm 95:7-8]. For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, **so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:1-16).

The righteousness of God requires Him to follow His own Instruction for the created order with fidelity. Unfortunately, we find that many of the warnings issued by Moses, to Ancient Israel in Leviticus 26, were administered down through the ages. Within the Tanakh, we see many scenes of how Ancient Israel rebelled against the Lord, committed idolatry, aligned themselves with foreign nations opposed to Him, suffered military defeats, and even experienced exile to strange lands.

Even though the Father patiently loves each and every one of His people, showering them with His lovingkindness and mercy, He is often compelled to execute His judgment in order to drive us back into His loving arms. He intensifies the punishment phases in an

attempt to turn His people back to Him. As you read the accelerating chastisements seen in this Torah portion, you will see that once the disobedient Israelites are scattered to the nations, that the Holy Land will finally enjoy its Sabbath rest:

“You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. **Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths.** All the days of *its* desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it” (Leviticus 26:33-35).

As you can read, God is very concerned about the Promised Land. Because He created Planet Earth, He knows that the very elements He designed require a level of rest in order to function efficiently. Here, we see how the Creator must fulfill His promises, but also His intimate concern for the Land promised to the Patriarchs. Now if you can imagine how much the Holy One cherishes His commitment to that “dirt” located in the Middle East, can you fathom how much He loves us, who are formed from “dirt” (cf. Genesis 2:7)? The challenge individuals face, is that unlike dirt which forms dry land, when God took those same elements and fashioned human beings, He made them in His image and likeness:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Ironically, this is where the problem emanates, because human beings have been given a free will to choose what they want to do. Unlike the dust of the ground—or even the animals at large—we have been endowed with a mind, emotions, and reasoning abilities. We do not just act “on instinct.” The Creator has gifted men and women with the capacity to do and accomplish much. Just consider the mandate that came forth as the Lord uttered His first command to Adam:

“God blessed them; and God said to them, **‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’** Then God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food’; and it was so” (Genesis 1:28-30).

From the very beginning of Creation, humanity was given the command to bear seed through reproduction, in order to fill the Earth and take dominion over it. Rule was given to the human race over all the other creatures. Humanity’s challenge was dealing with these awesome responsibilities first in the Garden of Eden, but then through the sin of Adam, outside of such a paradise in a rather hostile and unprotected environment. As a result of disobedience to later instructions, the presence of obstacles outside the Garden now were able to enact various afflictions upon the man and woman, and their offspring, turning people back toward Him:

“Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it”; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat

of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

We all know the story too well, and can attest to the introduction of challenges and problems that ensue from the various “thorns and thistles” of life. However, the principles are absolute. By the time Moses receives further instructions, the Holy One attempts to give His people an advantage over those who are simply trying to understand the Creation and their relationship to it through empirical observation.

As witnessed in Holy Scripture, God’s people have a great advantage, but it comes with an equally great responsibility—because once you read and comprehend what is being stated—you then become accountable to God’s Word. Whether it was Moses declaring it in the desert, or Jeremiah reiterating it many generations later regarding the seventy years of exile that would allow the Land to have its rest (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21), or even Yeshua amplifying these principles in His teachings—the fact of the matter is that the pattern of sevens, quite often, can either be a blessing or a curse.

Consider, for example, the simple teaching that Yeshua gave to His Disciples regarding the spiritual warfare that has enveloped the fallen world:

“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find *it*. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds *it* unoccupied, swept, and put in order. **Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself**, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation” (Matthew 12:43-45).

When you read the wider context of where these statements are made, you will discover that Yeshua is explaining the finer points regarding the Sabbath to some of His critics (Matthew 12:1-13). In fact, Yeshua makes the provoking statement that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), while describing why it is permissible to do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:12). In Matthew 12, Yeshua makes some poignant quotations from the Prophet Isaiah (Matthew 12:17-21), which point to His redemptive work:

“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.’ Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, **‘I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.** I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you” (Isaiah 42:1-9).

As you can read, Israel has been chosen to be a light to the nations (Heb. *l’or goyim*, לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם). All of those who compose the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) have the responsibility of pointing people to the One True God, by demonstrating an earnest

obedience to Him and thus being blessed by Him. But this can only happen by us being one with Him who is the epitome of Israel—the Messiah Yeshua—the quintessential Israelite.

In Matthew 12, a demon-possessed man confronts Yeshua, and some condemning Pharisees (possibly of the stricter School of Shammai) say that He is operating via the power of Beelzebul or Satan (Matthew 12:22-37). After Yeshua explains the difference between casting out demons by Beelzebul versus the Spirit of the God, He then explains what is often referred to as the *unpardonable sin*. This is when a person denies or blasphemes the Ruach HaKodesh or Holy Spirit, which must be indwelling His followers if they are to truly have salvation. Those who claimed that the Messiah operated via the power of Satan were blaspheming the work of God, and so Yeshua makes a profound statement about our accountability for the very words we utter:

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

It is not just a matter of doing something against the Torah that will merit condemnation; Yeshua the Messiah raises the threshold for disobedience. One will be held accountable for making careless statements without understanding the foolishness of speaking from fleshly inclinations. This is why James, the half-brother of Yeshua, admonishes us to listen before we speak:

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19-21).

More important for us to not overlook from the scene of Matthew ch. 12, though, is how Yeshua directs us to how those delivered from demons—can have seven more demons come back—if sinful behavior is not rectified and corrected:

“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation” (Matthew 12:43-45).

What is it that the Lord is specifically trying to say to us? If we are set free from a demonic influence or stronghold, we must ask our Heavenly Father **to fill up the void left empty with His presence!** Our nature in Adam is fallen, and as humans our propensity is to think and speak things that will *probably* judge us. *Perhaps if we decrease, He might increase.* Yeshua the Messiah is looking to spend eternity with us, and He wants us to receive all of the rewards that we can in His Kingdom! Notice how in Matthew ch. 12 He is asked about His mother and brothers, and He says that those who obey His Father may be considered part of His family:

“Someone said to Him, ‘Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You. But Yeshua answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother”’” (Matthew 12:47-50).

Do you want to spend eternity with Yeshua? Perform and accomplish the will of our Father in Heaven. Follow the instruction manual He has given us. Do the best that you can do, to follow the directions that He has given us in order to receive His blessings. Pray for the Lord to send you His Holy Spirit, and be empowered to accomplish good works. ***Make sure that you are born again!***

We are each created in the image and likeness of God. Think about how you are as a parent and how you interact with your children. Have you ever asked a son to do the weekly task of taking out the garbage, or a daughter to empty out the dishwasher for her mother? Can you relate to the joy you receive when your son or daughter has actually performed these tasks on their own initiative? *Our Heavenly Father is the same way.* When He looks down from Heaven and sees us obeying Him, He smiles down upon us and is able to bless us.

I believe that as we search the Scriptures and understand more about His Word, we will find that everything we know for a joyful and fulfilled life is embodied in it. We should be renewed every day to do the good works that He requires of us, which in turn will testify of who He is to the sinful world in which we live. If we do not obey the Lord, then the double-edged sword of His Word will have its way—whether we like it or not!