

Deuteronomy 6:25

I heard a Messianic teacher say that if I keep the Torah perfectly not only will I be able to be saved, I will also be able to never get sick or die of diseases like cancer. Can you help clarify this for me?

In Deuteronomy 6:24-25, one finds a statement of commitment made on the part of the Ancient Israelites. They declare before God,

“So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us” (NASU).

V. 24 makes the obvious observation that God’s commandments are obeyed “for our lasting good and for our survival” (NJPS), or “so that we might always prosper and be kept alive” (NIV). This is because the Torah provides safeguards that are intended to keep God’s people secure and industrious, thus allowing them to live lives where they can prosper. And truly, any society that has taken the Torah’s code of ethics and morality to serious heart has benefited immensely from what it is intended to provide.

V. 25 is a bit more complicated, as the Ancient Israelites do say to the Lord *u’tzedaqah tih’yeh lanu* (תְּהִיָּה לָנוּ צְדָקָה וַיִּצְדַּקְהוּ), “and righteousness it is for us” (YLT) if they were to observe all of God’s commandments. To some people, this might present the opportunity that if one were to observe all of God’s commandments, then it is possible to be righteous on the basis of such Torah-keeping or Law-keeping. Yet, if this is a possibility, then it is also notable that *nowhere in Biblical history* was Ancient Israel ever able to do this. The testimony of the Tanach (and even much of the Torah itself) **is clear evidence that a fallen human person is incapable of living up to the requirement of v. 25** (cf. Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Romans 3:10). This is why a Divine Redeemer, Yeshua the Messiah, is understood in Romans 10:4 to be the *telos...nomou...eis dikaiosunēn* (τέλος ...νόμου...εἰς δικαιοσύνην) or “the goal of the Torah for righteousness” (author’s translation). Those desiring the righteousness the Torah requires of God’s people must look to Yeshua as the source (Philippians 3:9).

There is another view of Deuteronomy 6:25 which need not be overlooked. The Hebrew *tzedaqah* (צְדָקָה) or “righteousness” has *corporate* dimensions that concern all of God’s people. Having *tzedaqah* in this case would not regard being individually “righteous” or “justified,” but simply being in covenant membership with the Lord and with other members of His community. *TWOT* explains some often overlooked aspects of this term,

“The covenant or theocratic aspect involves the nation of Israel, the covenant requires obedience to God by the nation and is the way of his people (Psa 1:1-6; Deut 6:25), a way of righteousness. God is righteous, under the covenant, when he delivers his people from trouble (Psa 31:1), their enemies (Psa 5:8), the wicked (Psa 37:6) and when he is vindicating Israel before her foes or executing vengeance on them (Jer 11:20). It is appropriate that Israel be assured of ultimate victory over her foes (Isa 54:14-17). In this last event the Lord is both righteous and the savior (Isa 45:21).”¹

From this point of view, the affirmation on Israel’s part in Deuteronomy 6:25, to keep the Torah’s commandments, could be a reflection on the fact that they will be identified as God’s people by their obedience to Him. By obeying God’s commandments, the Torah was to provide Israel with a society that was safe and prosperous and thus have “righteousness” or “justification”—a corporate identification of being His people and being preserved by Him. Yet, it is also true that in Biblical history, Ancient Israel often failed at this.

Any Messianic teacher today who says that individuals can be righteous just by keeping the Torah is ignoring the whole of Scripture. While the standard of obeying God perfectly is placed before us, it is not something

¹ Harold G. Stigers, “צְדָקָה,” in *TWOT*, 2:754.

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that fallen man is capable of doing. This does not mean that such a standard should be ignored, **but it undoubtedly forces us to Yeshua because of our human incapacity to keep it perfectly.**

Perhaps what has been avoided more than anything else, is how the righteousness of Deuteronomy 6:25 is to be manifested on a corporate scale. Is today's Messianic movement desiring to be a faith community where the *shalom* of the Lord prevails, and we can live out all of those imperatives that the Torah calls us to? This is a question that often goes unasked in today's Messianic world. If we were to have this status, then we would be far more united as His people, and far more cognizant of the significant issues in the Torah that we often avoid but the world certainly needs to be made aware of.