

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-

inclusive God, who wants all of humanity to be blessed by the covenant which has been established with His chosen nation. Perhaps most important for us to consider is that the agreement made between Himself and Ancient Israel is not only made with them, but is considered to have been made with future generations:

“You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, *even* all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today**” (Deuteronomy 29:10-15).

Remember that the group of Israelites which Moses addresses here are the second and third generations who have experienced the desert sojourn. The Exodus generation which first departed from Egypt—except Joshua and Caleb—have largely all died in the wilderness due to believing the bad report of the ten spies (Numbers 14:26-30). Their children and grandchildren are being admonished to obey the Lord and to keep His covenant. It is not just enough for the people to acknowledge His faithfulness in delivering Israel, but each successive generation of Israel has the responsibility of obeying His commandments.

Thinking about this, what might we really need to be considering today? What is most significant for us in the Twenty-First Century is the closing comment with how God’s covenant is made “with the future generations who are not standing here today” (Deuteronomy 29:15, NLT). The message of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy has relevance *for us living now*, as much as it did to its first recipients as Israel was preparing to enter into the Promised Land.

Moses was a prophet who had a unique relationship with the Creator, and so as he nears the end of his life, many of the words he delivers in Deuteronomy have tremendous prophetic significance for our times. He was very concerned for Ancient Israel, because already several times in Deuteronomy, he has said that they will not obey the Lord in the future—and will be punished and scattered accordingly:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. **The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you.** There you will serve gods, the work of man’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you search for *Him* with all your heart and all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:26-29).

“Moreover, **the LORD will scatter you among all peoples**, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known” (Deuteronomy 28:64).

This week in *Nitzavim*, Moses once again communicates that Israel is going to be severely chastised for not obeying God and maintaining its covenant with Him. Moses again tells Israel that the people will be cast into other lands to live:

“Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as *it is this day*” (Deuteronomy 29:27-28).

We see how Moses has reiterated a tragic future for the Ancient Israelites as a by-product of their collective, future disobedience. Plagues and diseases upon Israel, and a curse upon the Promised Land, are just some of the penalties that will be incurred (cf. Deuteronomy 29). At the same time, not all hope is lost, because as Deuteronomy 29 comes to a close, we see Moses communicating a profound truth *which all generations* can take great encouragement from:

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

There are many secret things that only God knows, but Israel as God’s chosen people have been revealed things by Him—in order that they might follow His Instruction and be blessed. With such knowledge given to Israel by the Creator, they have a serious responsibility to be a blessing to others and be able representatives of Him in the world. The classic problem—as witnessed throughout the Tanakh, sadly—was that Ancient Israel was largely unable to follow God’s Law. Even in spite of Moses’ and the Prophets’ warnings that if Israel disobeyed the Lord, punishment would come—disobedience still too frequently prevailed.

Following this, Deuteronomy 30 begins with one of the most important end-time prophecies regarding the future of Israel. This word not only considers how Israel will be scattered into the nations, but also how a future obedience of Israel will result in its return and restoration to the Promised Land:

“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” (Deuteronomy 30:1-6).

This prophecy is to take place at a distant future time, when a scattered Israel remembers the words Moses delivered in Deuteronomy chs. 28 & 29, and as is declared, “you [will] come to your senses *while you are* in all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you” (HCSB).

If you are familiar with the broad history of Israel, then perhaps you can think about how the various blessings and curses Moses details have impacted the Jewish people—no matter where they have been scattered down through the centuries. Furthermore, the blessings listed in ch. 28 are noticeable in certain societies which have either directly or indirectly adhered to the morality and ethics of the Torah. On the other hand, the predominance of any disobedience to God, in and among the nations, is likewise readily

discernible. Even if you do not know that much about the history of Ancient Israel or Judaism, the axiom of how obedience to God merits blessings and disobedience to God merits some kind of penalties—is quite easy to witness, if not just on a personal level.

In many respects, the prophecy of Deuteronomy 30:1-6 may have a direct correlation to much of what we are now witnessing with the emerging Messianic movement. Since the late 1960s, more Jewish people have come to faith in Messiah Yeshua than since the First Century. Also important is how since the 1990s, many evangelical Christians have been exposed to their Hebraic Roots and have started diligently studying the Torah of Moses. For the first time since the early decades of the Apostles' ministry, Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are coming together as one in the Messiah, and are submitting themselves to a regimen of considering Moses' Teaching every week (cf. Acts 15:21). Many Messianics think that Moses' prophecy of "...calling them to mind in the nations where the LORD your God has banished you..." (Deuteronomy 30:1b) is occurring in our day.

It is very true that our generation has witnessed a community of Messiah followers come forth who recognize Yeshua as the Savior of the world, *and* are considering a very high role for the Torah to play in their lives. While recognizing that Torah-keeping does not merit one eternal salvation, the emergence of a Torah observant sector of Believers does make one realize that God's Instruction is to mold men and women in ways of holiness and good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). Any born again Believer naturally wants God's blessings, and God's blessings can only come by a diligent and faithful obedience to Him. Yeshua may have been sacrificed to take away the capital penalties of the Torah (Colossians 2:14), but He still bids His followers to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17-19).

People around the globe today are desiring to fully return to the Lord, and are letting His Torah teach them about His holiness and what it means to be a part of a treasured people. Our own family—where two generations recognize the Torah as relevant instruction for Messiah followers—I believe is very much influenced by how "the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29, NIV). While we do not know all of the future details of Moses' prophecy coming to pass, today's Messianic movement is doubtlessly going to be involved in the future return of scattered Israel to the Holy Land (Deuteronomy 30:4-5).

Many have rightly concluded that the formation of the State of Israel is a definite fulfillment of this prophecy. Many "outcasts" have been gathered from the ends of the Earth and brought back to reside in *Eretz Yisrael*. The remarkable achievements of the State of Israel are easily seen in how a primitive desert land can be turned into a productive and vibrant economy, and Israel today is one of the leading technological innovators in our world. We have already witnessed some prophetic fulfillment of Moses' words—although it is notable that most of Israeli society today is secular, and many do not acknowledge the existence of God. But as we move closer and closer to the Messiah's return, not only will more begin to acknowledge who God is, but they will also recognize Yeshua as their Savior. It should be our persistent prayer that the main essence of Moses' prophecy comes to fruition in the lives of all modern Israelis:

"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" (Deuteronomy 30:6; cf. 10:12-16).

Apparently, one of the challenges that Moses knows will plague Israel throughout history is the inability for them to willfully circumcise their hearts. At some future time, God will circumcise the hearts of Israel so that they will love Him, obey Him, and be

empowered to perform some mighty deeds. Paralleling this, to be sure, are the words spoken by the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in detailing the forgiveness provided in the New Covenant—and the supernatural ability to keep God’s Law:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

These two passages specifically describe how God will transform the hearts of His people, writing His Law onto them via the power of His Spirit. As those who have placed our trust in Yeshua the Messiah, we believe that His sacrificial work has already inaugurated this within the hearts of His followers (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8-12). At the same time, the expectation of the New Covenant involves not only a cleansing from sins, but God’s corporate people being brought back into the Promised Land. *When all this is going to take place is unknown.* It is safe to say that as the Messianic movement grows and matures, that the full realization of the New Covenant is going to come to fruition.

As our Torah reading for this week closes, Moses summarizes all of his teachings to one simple choice: life or death. Now that Israel has been given the Torah, will they choose an existence of being in God’s plan and favor—or one dominated by separation and exile from Him?

“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. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them”** (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

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.