

# COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY

## *Devarim*

### Words

### “Rehearsing the Truths”

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

Isaiah 1:1-27

The Book of Deuteronomy is a repetition and an amplification by Moses, of many of the commands of the Lord given in the Torah, so that the Ancient Israelites would not disobey Him, as they prepared themselves to enter into the Promised Land. In the opening chapters of *Devarim*, the reinforcement of an historical perspective is recorded, as Moses recalled many of the places where he probably had to admonish the people to obey the Lord:

“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazereth and Dizahab” (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Moses then defined the boundaries of what has been described as “the Greater Israel” that was promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

“The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. **Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.** See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them” (Deuteronomy 1:8-11).

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When one plots out these boundaries, it is abundantly clear that in modern times, the State of Israel has never come close to securing for itself all of what was originally promised. It has not been since the days of Kings David and Solomon that this promise was actually fulfilled. But that was over 2,500 years ago, and in the interim, Israel has not been able to secure all of these territories and have control over these promised regions in the Middle East. We know that according to prophecy, when Israel is restored in the Last Days, that somehow Israel will occupy these borders. However, when or how this will specifically take place is anyone's guess at this point in time.

The key with seeing Israel restored, more than anything else, is that all must corporately acknowledge Yeshua the Messiah as its king. Most of the Jewish people on Earth today have rejected Yeshua as the Messiah, and most in Christianity fail to recognize who He was as a First Century Jewish Rabbi. This has begun to significantly change in the past thirty to fifty years through the growth of Messianic Judaism and the Hebraic Roots movement. Many Jews have turned to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers have recognized the importance of their Hebraic Roots. Without one's personal recognition that apart from Yeshua dwelling inside of us, unredeemed human beings can do nothing of eternal significance:

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. **I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.** If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned” (John 15:4-6).

Many of our Jewish brethren who are not Believers have sought redemption through a refined system of following the Torah, that—without the Holy Spirit—could be at best good human works. How many of these works are offered by rote without the right intentions? (The same could be said of any Christian “good works” offered by rote as well.) We know that the Lord is not impressed with our sacrifices and attempts to please Him with works of the flesh. Just consider some of the statements made in this week's Haftarah selection from Isaiah:

“What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. **So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make**

**yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.** Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool'" (Isaiah 1:11-18).

These statements were obviously given against an historical backdrop of ancient people presenting empty offerings before God, and going through religious motions. While on one level they were loyal to the Father, on another they were disloyal by failing to obey key statutes and commandments that would enact His justice.

Can you imagine what religious Jews contemplate when they review these, and other similar verses? What do they think is being said by Isaiah while they fight terror and Muslim extremists? Do you think that some see how God greatly desires His people to have a broken spirit and broken and contrite heart—which completely loves Him and is devoted to Him?

**“For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise”** (Psalm 51:16-17).

*This is the sacrifice that pleases Him alone.*

On the other hand, many of those, who have been truly born again down through the centuries, have concluded that following the Torah is not really necessary in order to demonstrate good works. What many did not take into account is the fact that the curse of the Law and its capital penalties, have indeed been atoned for via the sacrifice of the Messiah, being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Yet, while our salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), we have each been created to walk in good works (Ephesians 2:10). The promise of the New Covenant, quite contrary to somehow abolishing the Torah—actually includes the stipulation that the Holy Spirit will write the Torah onto the hearts and minds of the redeemed (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17). Disobedience to God’s Instruction, surely impedes the oneness that the Lord desires to have with us!

This age-old dilemma persists to this very day. But, things have indeed started to change with the arrival of today’s emerging Messianic movement. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are coming together in unity like never before—and they are learning to truly appreciate the value of Moses’ Teaching. The Book of Revelation says that two common denominators will define the end-time saints: there will be a group of people who have a testimony of Yeshua, knowing that He is the Savior, and they will obey the commandments of the Torah of God (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). *This group is beginning to steadily emerge throughout the world.* With this understanding comes a great responsibility to become a true disciple of the Messiah Yeshua and walk as He walked. It most especially involves a responsibility of

understanding the imperative value of being able to love God and neighbor, the foremost of the Torah's commandments.<sup>1</sup>

As our ministry has observed over the years, a wide number of non-Jewish Believers are embracing a life of Torah observance, which previous generations have surely missed out on. Yet, for many this is being done with increasing urgency—as they are convinced that the days of Jacob's Trouble are *rapidly approaching*. While we should be able to appreciate that many have tried to stay in tune with what is happening in our world, and in Israel in particular—understanding the importance of the Messianic lifestyle, with a skewed sense of timing for the Last Days, has been most debilitating for our faith community. If one believes that the trauma of the Great Tribulation is getting ready to begin this year or next year, there is a tendency to be unbalanced in relation to the wider breadth of Scripture. *One's presumed growth in the Lord can be extremely unbalanced and unstable.*

Since 1996, I have personally witnessed many voices across the Messianic spectrum who have proclaimed that the Great Tribulation was about to begin. By looking at world circumstances, these people have forced Scripture texts to fit with current events, or vice versa, and have created a great amount of angst and fear among those sincerely seeking the Lord. While some of their theories have indeed “jumpstarted” many into taking the Scriptures more seriously, far too many have fallen away when prognostications do not materialize. This has done some considerable damage to the Body of the Messiah and has not helped the growth and stability of the Messianic movement. Credibility is challenged in all regards when the so-called “urgency of the hour” is the compelling word, and predictions fail to come true.

Even today, as the conflict with Hezbollah and Hamas rage throughout Israel, we are hearing a chorus of statements by some who are anxiously communicating that the world is on the verge of Armageddon. *Time and experience are the best teachers.* Since I have worked my way through multiple scenarios over the past decade and longer, I can sincerely relate one major breakthrough that has tempered our ministry's balanced approach to teaching the Word of God.

Several years ago, our family came to the conclusion that the return of the Messiah was not at all incumbent on running numbers and calculating years for the Second Coming.<sup>2</sup> Too many presuppositions that have gone into the different numbering and chronological schemes can be easily challenged. Recalculating recalculations of recalculations has been a less-than-constructive activity for today's Messianics. The Apostle Peter says instead how we “**ought...to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God**” (2 Peter 3:11-12). He employs the present active participle *spoudontas*—“hastening”—to describe this action. The righteous behavior of

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

<sup>2</sup> Consult the blog editorial “The Hastening of Righteousness” by J.K. McKee.

Believers affects “the coming of the day of God,” not any human being’s mistaken calculation of it. *What we do as the Lord’s people will affect when the Messiah returns.* What we do regarding our godly behavior, in obedience to the Lord, will “work to hasten its coming” (CJB), “speed its coming” (NIV), or be “hurrying it along” (NLT). This is a very Hebraic principle that is paralleled by what the Jewish Sages tell us:

“Said R. Yohanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, ‘If the Israelites keep two successive Sabbaths in a proper manner, they will be saved immediately’” (b.*Shabbat* 118b).<sup>3</sup>

(Obviously, if the Rabbinic principle of keeping two Sabbaths is correct, then it would be keen for us to understand that remembering *Shabbat* is far more than just abstaining from our labors. *Shabbat* is to teach us important things about eternity [cf. Hebrews 4:1], undoubtedly to be known by those who observe it properly.)

While some might argue with our conclusions, this one determination has been directly responsible for us to maintain a long-term, steady approach to the work and responsibilities of Messianic ministry. Rather than be like the sprinter who tires after a short distance, we instead approach the work of discipling others like a marathon runner. While we recognize that the race has an ultimate end—namely the restoration of God’s Kingdom—it is through patience, perseverance, and steadfast endurance that we will complete the race of faith. While this method may not be as exciting or stimulating as others, it has allowed us to maintain a balance and fair-mindedness, that we believe will help us complete our call to reach out and leave a sound legacy to those who will follow after us.<sup>4</sup>

One of the basic elements of this long-distance approach should be seen in a consistent, weekly study of the Torah. We all must face the fact that human nature has a tendency to become lackadaisical with repetition. But is it not repetition and practice which ultimately allow the greatest musicians or athletes—or any professional—to excel at their chosen profession? Is it not through repetition and practice that we inculcate our minds with almost automatic responses in given situations?

What about the study of God’s Word? How is one going to be able to respond in a godly manner, unless he or she has devoted the time to study the Bible? The battle in the mind is where most of the conflict of fallen human nature and the indwelling Spirit occurs. It is *only* through a diligent and consistent study and application of the Word of God that we can overcome the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Moses understood that God’s people needed repetition of His Instruction, and thankfully down through the ages, the Jewish Sages and Rabbis also realized this aspect of our humanity. Consequently, the Torah cycle as we now know it was

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<sup>3</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

<sup>4</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Messianic Marathon: A History Lesson,” appearing in the September 2008 issue of Outreach Israel News.

developed to have the Jewish people rehearse the truths that it communicates. Sadly, many contemporary Christians, who have had a real life encounter with the Messiah of Israel, are under the illusion that the New Testament has replaced the Torah—not recognizing that the Torah, Prophets, Writings, and Apostolic Scriptures are all integral parts of God’s written Word.

The introduction of a consistent and practical Torah study for many people has greatly enhanced their faith and understanding of the life of Yeshua and the Apostles. If one does not read and reflect on the teachings of Moses, it is difficult to know when you are committing a sin of commission or omission. I have discovered that each year, as I have faithfully reviewed the Torah portions every week, that the Holy Spirit will bring certain areas in your life to your attention that need to be changed. *This does not occur in a single year.* On the contrary, if we are maturing in our faith—applying Scripture properly takes a lifetime!

With all of this being said, we can each turn to the patterns established by Moses and joyfully study his words and admonitions. We can each ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate areas of our walk that need positive change as we are being conformed to the image of the Messiah Yeshua. May we each relish the opportunity to rehearse the truths and be changed from glory to glory as His sanctifying work continues in our lives!

We do not know all that God is doing today with His people, because we simply cannot see time and space and the universe from His perspective, but we do know that when one part of the Body of Messiah suffers, the whole body suffers along with it. This not only concerns our Jewish brothers and sisters suffering from terrorism today—but all members of the community of faith all over the world, who today might not even know that a Messianic movement exists. As the Apostle Paul reminds us,

**“But now there are many members, but one body.** And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. **And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”** (1 Corinthians 12:20-26).

If this is a time of great affliction for the Jews living in the Land of Israel, then perhaps the Holy One will use our prayers of intercession to reveal Himself. Likewise, we must pray for any Believer suffering from personal or corporate traumas. We must also pray for the enemies of Israel, as Yeshua the Messiah alone is the only answer for the members of Hezbollah or Hamas. We must pray that in

this time, the Lord reveals Himself in a unique way to all members of the human family. Our prayers are described in Revelation like incense unto God, being gathered in His throne room in golden bowls:

“When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp **and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**” (Revelation 5:8).

Perhaps, as we each rehearse whatever truths He brings to mind as we intercede this weekend, our Heavenly Father will be pleased with our petitions and return those prayers to those who in a like manner are crying out for His salvation and hand to move. Remember that God’s Kingdom can only be restored first by the restoration of individuals unto Him. May we fervently pray to this end!

## *V'et'channan* I pleaded “Call Upon Him!”

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

Isaiah 40:1-26

*V'et'channan* is one of the most compelling Torah portions in the entire annual cycle. With a reiteration of the Decalogue<sup>5</sup> and the *Shema*<sup>6</sup> being just two of the many words that are declared, the commentaries written about this critical juncture in the sojourn of Ancient Israel are voluminous. One could spend days dissecting the grand significance of the Decalogue and the *Shema*, as these two critical pieces from the Bible have doubtlessly molded the thoughts and views of countless followers of the Creator God since. While these studies are definitely beneficial and recommended for the ardent student of the Torah, the aspect of this week’s reading, that seemed to settle in my spirit, is the comment that Moses made regarding the opportunity that God’s people have to call upon Him:

**“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?”** (Deuteronomy 4:7).

There should be no doubt that this week I am being influenced by the distressing affairs that are currently going on in our world. These are troubling times for many who follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From my limited perspective, if there were ever a time to call upon Him, *this is such a time*. The fact that these particular Scriptures just happen to be studied this week is not by

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 6:1-12.