

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:2-4).

If you are a part of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) by faith in Messiah Yeshua, **then you need to obey Him in order to receive His blessings.** Through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is to be permeating your very being, this should be something that is not difficult—especially if our motivations for obeying God are a strong love for Him and wanting to please Him! As Paul put it,

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; **for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.** For this, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET’ [Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17-19, 21], and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’ [Leviticus 19:19]. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; **therefore love is the fulfillment of the law**” (Romans 13:8-10).

By reviewing texts like *Ki-Tavo*, we each have an opportunity to reconsider some of the choices we make when it comes to the commandments of God. *The choice is ours.* We can either have a blessed relationship with our Maker, or one that is constantly riddled with problems.

When you consider the list of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy ch. 28, it is easy to prefer the blessings to the curses. The difficult thing is obedience. Fortunately, the answer to obedience is found in the ministry examples of Messiah Yeshua, and can be attained by receiving Him into our lives and having our hearts and minds transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is my sincere prayer that you choose obedience to the Lord in order to receive His blessings, and thus be counted among those who are part of His people—a **treasured possession!**

Nitzavim נִצְּבִים

Standing
“Choose Life”

Deuteronomy 29:9[10]-30:20

Isaiah 61:10-63:9

V'yeilekh וַיֵּלֶךְ

And he went

Deuteronomy 31:1-30

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

The annual Torah cycle has begun to wind down. On typical years, this *Shabbat* is known as *Shabbat Shuvah* or the Sabbath of Repentance (or Return), and it usually falls between *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. During what is intended to be a season of

repentance, the Ten Days of Awe from 01-10 Tishri, provide followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob an annual opportunity to reflect upon their relationship with Him and their required return to Him and to His ways.

The Holy One of Israel desires to have a meaningful relationship with His people. As followers of the Lord, we have each been called out of the world to be a treasured possession unto Him. This is what Moses declared in Deuteronomy 26:18-19:

“The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession [לְעַם סְגוּלָה, *l'am segullah*], as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people [עַם־קֹדֶשׁ, *am-qadosh*], to the LORD your God, as He has spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:18-19).

Please note that being a “treasured possession” of the Almighty has some incumbent responsibilities—notably that His people obey Him. The results of obedience to God are praise, fame, honor, and ultimately composing a holy nation which can be used to proclaim His goodness to a sinful world:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be **My own possession** among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**” These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:5-6).

If you consider yourself to be a follower of the Most High, and recognize that you are His “treasured possession,” then I would urge you to consider the great responsibility He has truly given to you. As we all compose “a kingdom of priests” (cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9), we have the job of interceding for the lost of Planet Earth. I believe that this season is an excellent time to review your relationship with the Almighty. As you turn to Him in confession and prayer, recognize that He willingly accepts a broken spirit and contrite heart. Turn to Him for forgiveness of sin and iniquity, so that you can be fully restored to Him and be able to serve Him more effectively:

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

The Apostle John tells us as Believers in Yeshua, that we have the additional assurance that through heartfelt confession, our transgressions are forgiven:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

For *Shabbat Shuvah*, I pray that all who read this commentary will take some time to go before our Heavenly Father and confess sins of commission or omission. I also pray that we will all be reconciled one to another, as we allow the Holy Spirit to enact a special work on our hearts and minds.

As we turn to this week’s Torah reading, we find that Moses is now 120 years old, and ready to pass on the mantle of leadership to Joshua, before his death:

“And he said to them, ‘I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to come and go, and the LORD has said to me, “You shall not cross this Jordan.” It is the LORD your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken”’ (Deuteronomy 31:2-3).

Joshua has been the faithful servant of Moses for nearly forty years. His service goes back to his youth:

“Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, ‘Moses, my lord, restrain them’” (Numbers 11:28).

He led the Israelites in the battle against Amalek after departing Egypt:

“So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Exodus 17:13).

Joshua accompanied Moses to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from God:

“Now the LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.’ So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God” (Exodus 24:12-13).

Joshua, along with Caleb, came back from Canaan with a good report:

“But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land” (Numbers 14:38).

God instructed Moses to lay his hands on Joshua in front of the Israelites, to indicate that he will follow in Moses’ position and lead the people into the Promised Land:

“Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses. . . . Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it” (Numbers 27:22-23; Deuteronomy 1:38).

Now as our Torah reading begins, Moses realized that Joshua was ready to inherit the leadership responsibilities for Israel. It is at this point that Moses exhorted the people to “be strong and courageous,” prior to entering the Promised Land:

“**Be strong and courageous** [*chizqu v’imtzu*, אַחֲזִקוּ וְאִמְצוּ]⁴⁸, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. **He will not fail you or forsake you.**’ Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, **‘Be strong and courageous** [*chazaq v’ematz*, חַזַּק וְאִמְצֵן], for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. **The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed**” (Deuteronomy 31:6-8).

In a comforting word, Moses said that God will not fail Israel or forsake Israel. In order to reaffirm Joshua’s position, Moses turned to Joshua and repeated the words of encouragement to “be strong and courageous.” Joshua had been a firsthand witness of God’s guidance and deliverance of Israel for nearly forty years. Observing and serving Moses had prepared him for leadership for some time. But still, Moses was led to encourage him directly. In fact, at the end of this statement Moses added the words, “Do not fear or be dismayed.” Moses had told the same thing to the Israelites earlier, when recounting the mission of the twelve spies to venture into Canaan:

“See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. **Do not fear or be dismayed**” (Deuteronomy 1:21).

⁴⁸ Or, “Be strong and resolute” (NJPS).

We need to remember that God's people, in spite of the written record of Scripture and testimony of Biblical witnesses, do have the tendency to become fearful and dismayed. Moses, more than anyone else, knew this from his personal observations over the previous forty years. Moses was very concerned about the destiny of Israel. At the end of this *parashah*, Moses reiterated these same words to Joshua. This time Moses also added the request to put the scroll of the Torah next to the Ark of the Covenant so that it will remain a witness against Israel:

"Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, **'Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you.'** It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, **'Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.** 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 death? Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 31:23-29).

Remember that Moses has already prophesied what would happen to Israel if and when they acted corruptly. Here, he once again called upon Heaven and Earth to be witnesses against the people. If you will recall, these are the same two witnesses that Moses called upon when he gave Israel the choice of life and death:

"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" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Heaven and Earth still testify against God's people, and the choices of life or death—blessing or curse, favor or penalty—still remain to those of us who live in this generation. God's Word can stand against us as a third witness of what will happen when we choose to obey, or disobey, Him. Much like Ancient Israel would face neighbors who tried to lead them astray from God, so do we face obstacles and temptations that can likewise take us away from Him.

Before Deuteronomy 31 concludes, Moses added a prophetic statement based on his observations of Ancient Israel for the previous forty years:

"For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; **and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD**, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 31:29).

As the shepherd of Israel since the Exodus from Egypt, Moses knows how the people will react after his death, even with the anointed leadership of Joshua. Moses was able to look to the future and make a reference to the evil that will come upon them in the Last Days. Certainly today, we are seeing much of what Moses foresaw coming to pass, when many are doing evil in the sight of the Lord. But let us not forget that God's people have always been given a choice.

Today, we can choose to follow and obey the Lord, or choose disobedience and suffer the consequences. This is one of the huge reasons that a season of returning to the Lord is so vitally important to us. This is a time for individual and corporate confession and repentance. We can be spiritually strengthened and resolve ourselves to another year of service and devotion unto Him.

In spite of the propensity to wander, the promises of God to restore His people are replete throughout the Bible. Interestingly enough, when you consider the Haftarah selection for this week, you find that the Hebrew term *shuvah* (שׁוּבָה), used for the designation *Shabbat Shuvah*, comes from the first word in Hosea 14:

“Return, O Israel [shuvah Yisrael, שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל], to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity and receive *us* graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips.’ Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses; nor will we say again, ‘Our god,’ to the work of our hands; for in You the orphan finds mercy. I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily, and he will take root like *the cedars of Lebanon*. His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree and his fragrance like *the cedars of Lebanon*. Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain, and they will blossom like the vine. His renown *will be* like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress; from Me comes your fruit. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; *whoever* is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them” (Hosea 14:1-9).

In this oracle concerning the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the prophecy of Moses about evil is echoed. The Northern Kingdom departed from the Torah, pursued evil, and suffered the consequences of disobedience toward God. This included the punishment brought upon them by the Assyrians, as they were largely exiled, scattered, and assimilated. Hosea pleaded with these people to return to the Lord! Hosea exhorted them to ask God for forgiveness while confessing their sins. Hosea reminded them not to rely on the work of their hands or their own strength. Hosea invoked the reality that as orphans, they would find their pity only in the Holy One.

God will respond to these pleas by declaring that He will heal the affliction of the people and take them back in love. As His anger will turn away from their disobedience, He will cover them like dew and the boughs of a cypress tree. Returning to God will result in blessings of new grain, new wine, and abundant fruit. Hosea confirms that confession and repentance have great rewards to all who return to Him. Hosea’s final admonition is that the wise will consider his words and the discerning and righteous will walk in His ways, while sinners will stumble.

These are encouraging admonitions to consider in association with *Shabbat Shuvah*. However, just reading or hearing these words will not benefit anyone unless he or she acts upon them. But in order to act, one must have faith in the testimony of Moses. And, one must be strong and courageous to overcome any of the thoughts or doubts that prevent a person from exercising his or her will to confess, repent, and return to God.

It is my prayer that God would give each of us the strength and courage to be honest with Him in this season of repentance. I pray that the confession of our lips will touch His heart, and that He will restore us into His loving arms. The author of Hebrews specifically

tells us that Yeshua is the same yesterday, today, and forever—not only speaking of His timelessness—but also in His ever-present compassion and mercy:

“For He Himself has said, ‘**I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU** [Deuteronomy 31:6],’ so that we confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME? [Psalm 118:6]’ Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. **Messiah Yeshua is the same yesterday and today and forever**” (Hebrews 13:5b-8).

May we entreat and receive the Lord’s mercy always!

Ha'azinu הָאָזִינוּ Hear “The Rock of Salvation”

Deuteronomy 32:1–52
2 Samuel 22:1–22:51

This week we are in the midst of the Fall festivals of the Lord. The Ten Days of Awe are ending, and *Yom Kippur* is about to take place. The annual Torah cycle is nearing completion. Final preparations for the Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot* are being made. The time to contemplate some of the final words of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our Teacher, could not be better, as the message of *Sukkot* is that the Lord desires to take up residence with His people, “tabernacle” with them if you will, during the Millennial reign of Messiah Yeshua—and beyond into the Eternal State.

Before *Ha'azinu* begins, we witness how Moses’ time as the leader of the Ancient Israelites is coming to a quick conclusion. Yet, there is a definite message that God wants to give the people of Israel, in the form of a song that speaks of the destiny that is to befall them.⁴⁹ Before Moses dies, he was specifically asked to record this song that will detail the future history of Israel. What was recited is not very good, as God’s people would prostitute themselves with other gods and break the covenant that they have made with Him. As a result, God will be angry and temporarily turn His face away from Israel, who would then be consumed by many evils and troubles. The scene opens with the following,

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.’ So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. The LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent. The LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face

⁴⁹ Please note that the Song of Moses referred to in Revelation 15:3 is most probably the Song of the Sea of Exodus 15, something employed in the daily liturgy of the Jewish *siddur*.

For a further discussion, consult the article “The Song of Moses and God’s Mission for His People” by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.