

serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). If you do not know how to apply the Sermon on the Mount in the Twenty-First Century, understand the work of Yeshua, or even where to begin with all this—as He says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). *Seek the Father’s will in urgent and diligent prayer.* Always desire to be one who can make an impact by good works:

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Expose the false ways of others not by repaying evil with evil (Romans 12:17)...but by responding with good!

Reflection for *B’har-B’chuqotai* “Obedience and Love for One Another”

Luke 4:16-21

1 Corinthians 7:21-24

Galatians 6:7-10

John 14:15-21; 15:10-12

1 John

This week with our Torah reading (Leviticus 25:1-26:2; 26:3-27:34), we complete the Book of Leviticus. For most of this text, Moses has been instructing the Israelites in various regulations, commands, statutes, and laws for them to be holy and live reverently before God. Without any significant fanfare, the foundational concept communicated to Israel is simply: **If they obey the Lord, then He will bless them.** Here is just a small summary of the blessings He promises:

“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making *you* tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land” (Leviticus 26:3-6).

In the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, when the Southern Kingdom was about to be chastised for its disobedience, the contrast is made between trusting or obeying mortals, versus trusting and obeying the Lord. Jeremiah directly communicates how evil and deceitful the human heart can be:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:5-10).

At the end of Jeremiah 17, we see how there is an emphasis placed on proper remembrance of the Sabbath. If the Sabbath is honored and kept, then God’s blessings will manifest themselves—but severe penalties and consequences will manifest themselves if the Sabbath is improperly observed and or just flat disregarded:

“Thus the LORD said to me, ‘Go and stand in the public gate, through which the kings of Judah come in and go out, as well as in all the gates of Jerusalem; and say to them, “Listen to the word of the LORD, kings of Judah, and all Judah and all inhabitants of Jerusalem who come in through these gates: Thus says the LORD, ‘Take heed for yourselves, and do not carry any load on the sabbath day or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem. You shall not bring a load out of your houses on the sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. Yet they did not listen or incline their ears, but stiffened their necks in order not to listen or take correction. But it will come about, if you listen attentively to Me,” declares the LORD, “to bring no load in through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but to keep the sabbath day holy by doing no work on it, then there will come in through the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. They will come in from the cities of Judah and from the environs of Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the lowland, from the hill country and from the Negev, bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of the LORD. **But if you do not listen to Me to keep the sabbath day holy by not carrying a load and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be quenched”**” (Jeremiah 17:19-27).

It was probably passages just like this one which led to the Jewish Sages concluding that final redemption would come to Israel if it could keep two consecutive Sabbaths properly: “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).¹⁷ How much is involved in understanding the significance of *Shabbat*—its message of rest from labors, communion with the Holy One, and a sanctified time—that is *still yet to be understood* by His people? How long could it be for Israel to keep two Sabbaths in a row properly?

Yeshua the Messiah taught how love for Him would manifest itself by proper obedience to the commandments. Such obedience would not only naturally result in blessings, but also in His followers truly experiencing spiritual intimacy with the Father:

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. **He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him...**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. **These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.** This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 14:15-21; 15:10-12).

If love for God manifests itself in obedience—and Messiah followers get to experience a great communion with Him as a result—what would disobedience bring? We are not talking about human ignorance of various commandments, but a strong willed desire to not obey at all or have any instructions regulate our behavior. *Would this not merit some kind of (severe) penalty from the Creator?*

There is a direct link between loving the Lord and following His commandments. This does not only evidence itself in a reverent fear for Him, but also in a recognizable love for our fellow Believers. As the Messiah puts it, how we demonstrate love for one another will be natural evidence that we are truly His:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

¹⁷ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

Remembering *Shabbat* as a holy time every week is very important, and there is probably much about the Sabbath that Believers today do not yet understand. Unfortunately, many of today's Messianics have a tendency to become overly-worried about the regulations of the Sabbath—becoming embroiled in nitpicking and arguments about *why others* are not as good as they are in keeping it—and very little energy is actually expelled on loving and treating others with kindness and respect. Is not *Shabbat* to be a time where we focus on the Lord, and from our relationship with Him we do what is right?¹⁸

If Believers can exemplify the tangible ability to love one another, then perhaps the lost world observing such love just might be attracted to the message of the gospel. We can then welcome them into our Sabbath fellowships, and all enter into His presence together! *Let us make this happen **this week!***

¹⁸ For some useful reflection and commentary, consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics (forthcoming).
