



Mordekhi's Drash for Shabbat May 24, 2008 / Iyar 19, 5768

Parashah #33

Torah: *B'chukkotai* (By My Regulations), *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 26.3-27.34

Haftorah: *Yirmeyahu* (Jeremiah) 16.19-17.14

Suggested Messianic Writings: *Mattityahu* (Matthew) 22.1-14

Shalom,

Vayikra 26 is one of two chapters in Torah that contain from a HaShem a תּוֹכַחָה *toh-kha-khah*, admonition; the other being *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) 28. Both chapters are full of the promises of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience – “If you... then I.” Anytime anyone wants to complain and be jealous about Israel being the chosen, these chapters give a look at just what being chosen involves. It's not an easy road.

אם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם

Eem b'khook-ko-ti teh-leh-khoo v'et meetz-vo-ti teesh-m'roo va-ah-see-tem oh-tahm (If you live by my regulations, observe my *mitzvot* (commandments) and obey them...). There is a lot to this short phrase that begins the parashah, so let's look at it a bit. The English is the CJB translation, Stern using the term, “live by,” which can also be understood as meaning “walk by, follow, go by, grow by, lead by,” etc. This infers going from level to level, going higher all the time; from glory to glory. “Regulations” is חֻקָּה, *khoo-kah*, which can also be translated as, “statutes, commandments, decrees.” The root of this word is חֻק, *kha-kahk*, which means, “to engrave.” This is intended to be a permanent regulation, so it would seem that the commandments are therefore “engraved” in our “walk;” we could read it as “If you live by my engravings that I have carved on your ‘walk’....” I think we can see a picture of this in Sha'ul's words in Romans 2.15, “For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts.” Deep within a person's heart, unless it has become so totally hardened, the conscience so totally seared, is known the truth that there is a Creator; I believe that a man has to work (or transgress) hard to deny that. We read in 2 Corinthians 3.3, “You make it clear that you are a letter from the Messiah placed in our care, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on human hearts.”

So we see that the basic Torah of HaShem is written on our hearts. Humanity, so easily influenced by sin and evil, does indeed have a basic knowledge of good and evil – which makes sense, for that is the tree from which *Havah* (Eve) and Adam ate from. There is something deeply significant to the reality of HaShem's word being engraved, carved out as it were, on our hearts. The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote of this passage, “What is special about engraving as a means of writing? Firstly, the words are not added, as something extraneous, to the material on which they are written. Rather, they become an integral part of the material itself. Secondly, and more importantly, the letters have no substance of their own. Their whole existence is in virtue of the material out of which they are carved.” This gives credence as to why Adonai commanded that there were to be no graven images, for He was intending to be the engraver, engraving His word in us.

“Observe my *mitzvot*...” The Hebrew root word for “observe” is שָׁמַר *shah-mahr*, which means, “to hedge about (as with thorns), that is, guard; generally to protect, attend to, take heed (to self), mark, observe, preserve, regard, reserve.” Although the Jewish people on the whole have thus far missed their Messiah, they did guard, protect, and preserve the Torah of HaShem through the centuries, and the Gentile church owes them a great debt of gratitude. A *mitzvah* is a commandment (*mitzvot* is plural, commandments). The root word is צוּה *tzah-vah*, “give a charge, give a commandment, set in order, to appoint, to ordain.” “Protect what I have ordained.”

“...and obey them...” “Obey” is עָשָׂה *ah-sah*, meaning, “to do, fashion, accomplish, make, to act with effect, to bring about,” etc. As the prophet *Shmuel* (Samuel) said to King Sha'ul, “Does ADONAI take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what ADONAI says? Surely obeying is better than sacrifice, and heeding orders than the fat of rams” (*Shmuel Alef* / 1 Samuel 15.22). *Tehillim* (Psalms) 119.2 says, “How happy are those who observe His instruction, who seek Him wholeheartedly!”

The תּוֹכַחָה *toh-kha-khah*, admonition, of this chapter as well as that of *D'varim* 28, is oftentimes difficult to understand. Rabbi Hertz noted in his commentary, “Why, it is asked, ‘does Scripture enter into such dreadful details concerning the consequences of disobedience?’ Two observations must be made... the first is, that it is a language which the people to whom this discourse was originally addressed could clearly

understand... to cause the primitive mind to realize the awful consequences of sin and transgression, the words of denunciation must come swift and powerful as hammer blows, and must picture to their last terrible results the dreadful devastation wrought by human perversity. The second is that the *Tochacha*, though it may sound harsh, is true; and truth in its nakedness is not always pleasant. The promises and, alas, also the warnings in these chapters have abundantly been borne out by Jewish history.” And it must be noted that the punishments each time become more severe – beginning with sickness and defeat, then famine, wild beasts, siege and exile. The Sages believe that this chapter dealt with the sins leading up to the destruction of the First Temple and the aftermath, while D’varim 28 seems to speak more of the sins leading up to the destruction of the Second Temple, extending to our current diaspora and a yet-to-come fully blessed nation of Israel.

“If you live by, if you observe, if you obey... then I will provide the rain you need in its season....” The prophet *Hoshea* (Hosea) wrote, “If you sow righteousness for yourselves, you will reap according to grace. Break up unused ground for yourselves, because it is time to seek ADONAI, till he comes and rains down righteousness upon you.” Let it rain....

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – *Sha’alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B’rakhot v’todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)