

Bechukotai **In My Statutes**
Torah: Leviticus 26:3-27:34
Haftarah: Jeremiah 16:9-17:14
Brit Chadashah: Matthew 22:1-14

Today I will use the Torah Meditation as my sermon in order to give Melissa lots of time to bless us. This is the last portion in the Book of Leviticus. From the beginning, Moses had a tremendously difficult task to perform. He only had one year to turn a semi-assimilated gang of slaves into the Hosts of YHVH. He also had to inoculate them against any future forms of paganism which they might encounter.

Leviticus was written as a guide book full of priestly instructions so the people could become and remain holy in order that the presence of YHVH could live in their midst. For this to happen, they had to learn positive holiness with the Word of YHVH as the centre around which their lives revolved and that from conception to the grave.

Holiness is not a separate feature of our daily life, it is our life. And unless we fully integrate biblical spirituality (holiness) into every area of our lives, we are vulnerable to intrusive spiritual infection and to spiritual attacks against which we cannot stand. A Messianic Jew is either fully integrating the Word into every area of their lives or they are backsliding. You see, there is no shallow end in our blessed Messiah. Part-time or partial believers are really part-time or partial pagans.

In Messiah, it is either all one and none of the other, or we are heading our lives towards a tragic shipwreck. There is no room for half measures. When we encounter new situations, we may make accommodations based on the changeless principles of the Scriptures. But adding non-biblical material and non-biblical morality is part of what syncretism is and those who fall for it are really steering their compromised faith in the direction of destruction. When we board an airplane, we are either all in or we will be lying sprawled on the pavement.

Related to this, I may give a summer series which reviews what the Bible says about the End Times and the Return of our Blessed Messiah. This is so that none of us become radicalized and get panicked into a frenzy, or when things do not happen as fast as some say they are, we do not get discouraged and slip into complacency. Understanding what the Bible says about the End Times is part of the full measure we are called to embrace, as we avoid the half measures which come from the tradition and teachings of men.

Speaking of half measures, one of the most reliable indicators of fully integrated and healthy biblical spirituality is the tithe. I know some believers who feel that they can get away with not tithing because they have found a loop hole which they came up with themselves. Listen very carefully. Tithing and the Torah have not been abolished. Some of it is fulfilled, some of it has still got to be fulfilled. Grace does not free us from the obligation of faithful obedience. Instead, it empowers us to seek, to see and to do YHVH's will according to the Scriptures, and that in every part of our lives. Tithing is the will of G-d for all believers.

But there is still another subtle cop out I want to warn you against. It falls into the category of excuses that ask: "has G-d really said?"

Here I am talking about those who say that they do not understand tithing the same way as we do. They put their own needs and the needs of their family before their obligation to tithe. They would only tithe, once all their family's needs are met and they have enough money left over. They want the full blessing and protection of G-d and have become self deceived spiritual freeloaders. They have fallen into a noble sounding form of materialism. We are concerned with meeting our family's needs, but our biggest need is to walk with G-d according to His Word. Ten percent of a little is the same as ten percent of a lot and when you run into difficulties, we will hopefully have the financial resources to help out. But it should never be the tithers who are bailing out those who do not tithe.

Also the tithe is not there to pay my salary, or the rent or the insurance, or to meet any of the other financial needs of the shul. It is bringing our harvest (a salary or a wage is a kind of harvest) so that the blessings of the heavens above and the earth below can flood our lives with all the blessings of YHVH – both in the good times and in the lean times. In Judaism, no one starved unless the whole community starved as well. It is not a hard principle to understand and, sadly, there are those disobedience hoarders who will suffer great loss when Judgment day is finally here.

I do not want to harp on tithing or beat you up about it. I felt compelled to share what I have shared and it relates to the end of the portion too. You see, His way is the Highway. You are either walking on it or you are stumbling around in the dark getting nowhere fast spiritually.

Our portion is broken down into two main sections: blessings and cursing and then vows and tithes. The section on Blessings is short and to the point. Faithful Obedience is the key and a whole life approach is required. Israel is a country which relies upon rain for her harvests and when we walk with the King, we shall receive these at the right time and in the right amount. The portion deals with the people multiplying and enjoying agricultural abundance to the point they have to take out out the old harvest which they have not yet eaten, to make room for the new harvest. They shall dominate, scatter and slaughter their enemies.

Walking with the Messiah is both a community blessing and an individual one. YHVH wants to live among a ritually clean and a spiritually moral people. We may have to accommodate when we apply the unchanging principles of G-d's Word to new situations, but we will never syncretize and allow pagan beliefs and practices into our midst. This is why so much sacrificial ritual is given, so the people would know how to live and what to do to get back on track when they fail.

The chapter goes on to describe the devastating consequences of disobedience. The people's condition will worsen until only a few are left and the land will be devastated as the people are struck will famine and plagues. Even when they are taken into captivity by their enemies, YHVH will not completely abandon them. When the remnant repents they shall be brought back to the land and restored because of the covenant YHVH made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and because of the Exodus which was a witness to the nations.

The first part of the next chapter deals with how to redeem (buy back) that which was offered in a vow to YHVH, whether it be livestock, lands or people. Since the land was to revert to the original owners at the Jubilee, when someone redeemed the land, he was really just paying for the number of harvests until the Jubilee.

The first born could not be redeemed as they already belonged to YHVH. If an unclean animal was not redeemed, it was killed, but not as an offering.

A special vow was given where an animal, a person or land was devoted to destruction. They could not be redeemed and had to be killed. It is not clear whether the crops on a piece of land which was devoted to destruction were burned or if the crops and the land became to property of YHVH. All which was thus devoted, belonged to YHVH and destruction was inescapable.

Four examples of this severe vow are given in the Scriptures. First, Aachen is stoned because he stole some of the spoils, which were already devoted to YHVH. The city of Jericho was destroyed and was not to be built again. Anyone who did so would do so at the price of their first born son.

Next, the generational war to destroy the Amalekites is mentioned because the whole nation was dedicated to destruction. Saul's downfall began when he allowed the people to take some of the spoils.

Next we encounter Jephthah who foolishly devoted to destruction the first thing that came out of his home to greet him. He was probably expecting an animal or one of his servants, but he had to put his own daughter to death because of the vow. I think it was a sign of weakness that no one tried to stop him.

Next is the case of Saul devoting to destruction anyone who took food until the Philistines were defeated. When Jonathon, who had not heard the vow, ate honey, Saul was going to put him to death, but the people rightly stopped him. Jonathon was unaware of the oath, so was not really disobeying his father.

The portion ends with a discussion of tithes. Anyone who wished to redeem his tithe, had to add one fifth to its value. When it came to unclean animals, they had to be redeemed or be killed. No one would ever think about not paying their tithes because of the terrible consequences of such disobedience.

While G-d may not strike us down like He did Ananias and Saphira, when they lied about how much they had contributed to help feed new converts who had no revenue until they got home. But if we want the blessing and protection of the L-RD, we need to walk according to His Word. And then if something as horrible as the Holocaust happens to us, we will walk through the ovens and into our Father's Kingdom.

Disobedience robs us of spiritual power and in such a weakened state, we become sitting duck targets for the enemy.

Moses shared all of this which he received from YHVH on the mountain so that the people would stay clean and come under the full protection and provision of YHVH. I would not want anything less for any of us, but the final choice is up to us. When it comes to major details in your life, like the tithe what final choices should we be making? May the joy of the L-RD be our strength and may our path be blessed with great joy and much peace. Shabbat Shalom.