

PARASHAH: Ki Tavo (When you come)
ADDRESS: D'varim (Deuteronomy) 26:1-29:8
READING DATE: Shabbat
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*Updated: July 4, 2006

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-O’lam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Ki Tavo means, “When you come.” The opening p’sukim (verses) speak to Isra’el about taking of the first fruit of the ground (Hebrew: “כָּל-פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה (וְלִקְחָתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית מִלְּקַחַתְּ מִרְאשֵׁית הָאֲדָמָה)”) and offering it to the LORD upon entering into the Land of Promise. To offer the first of the produce of the ground was to affirm and signify that the person was dedicating everything he has to the service of HaShem. What is more, this offering was a declaration of HaShem’s faithfulness that as he swore to our ancestors he has indeed performed: “We have come to the Land of Promise!” (See verse 3)

The offering, like any other offering, was facilitated through the priest. This has always been HaShem’s pattern of worship, and it remains down to this day. All who carefully name the name of the LORD must approach him in the sacrificial intercession of his Only and Unique Son Yeshua. To approach him otherwise is to risk rejection and ultimately spiritual death. Thus, the pattern remains.

Chapter 26

The crux of the parashah is found in chapter 26 verses 16-19 where we see that truly God and Isra’el are an inseparable covenant pair. Moshe informs his listeners that it is HaShem’s desire to have his covenant people intimately identify with him by becoming his “Am S’gulah” (Treasured People), and by carefully upholding (establishing) his commandments. To be sure, Moshe describes in no uncertain terms, the condition in which the mitzvot are to be carried out: with all your heart and with all your soul (verse 16). So what is the

problem with these instructions? Absolutely nothing! The man Moshe continues by stating that they, 'Am Yisra'el (the People of Isra'el), have distinguished HaShem to be their only God, and to walk in his ways, while HaShem for his part has distinguished 'Am Yisra'el to be his Treasured People, and to make them supreme over all the other nations on the earth. Don't confuse this unique position. This special election is a display of God's divine Will, and not a matter of "playing favorites." In other words, Isra'el is singled out for a purpose: to showcase the holiness of HaShem to all the peoples of the earth, and to bring glory to the One and Only Creator of all mankind.

We who live with the tension of believing in Yeshua's faithful sacrifice while becoming submissive to the Torah of HaShem must understand that we have joined ourselves to this divine calling as well. I say "tension" because for the last 2000 years or so there has existed a great confusion over whether or not a believer should even attempt to become Torah submissive. The idea is really rather ludicrous when common sense is exercised. Of course a genuine child of God should be Torah submissive. It is rather cruel to imagine a God who would put a whole nation of people through the unnecessary judgment of wandering for 40 years in a barren wilderness for failing to perform his commandments, only to send his Son into the world to set all men free from these very same commandments! We need to understand the Torah from God's eternal perspective.

This Torah portion vividly details the curses associated with failure to obey the commandment of HaShem. However, in order to grasp the concepts contained within these next few chapters, the reader MUST understand true Torah obedience first! I cannot stress this issue too much here! If we are to live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to our Heavenly Abba, then we must understand and come to grips with the mitzvot and our heart's attitude toward them.

Tochacha

Chapter 28 contains what is known in Judaism as the '**Tochacha**'. We have encountered this before in Leviticus 26:14-46. Allow me to recall my notes from there for you:

According to one online Hebrew-English dictionary, the origin word 'tocheycha' conveys a "reprimand."¹ Browns, Driver, Briggs defines this word as "rebuke, correction, reproof, punishment, chastisement."² By its context, since the source is the Holy One Himself, it conveys the purpose of "divine retribution." Interesting by comparison, the Hebrew of this current perek (chapter) is written in the plural, addressing collective Isra'el. Its counterpart in D'varim 28, however, is written in

¹ <http://milon.morfix.co.il/Default.aspx>, תוכחה

² Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), תוכחה

the singular. The Gaon of Vilna explains that the difference conveyed by the listing in D'varim is that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is addressing collective Isra'el, that is, each and every Jew that was present then and each and every Jew that will be born in the future. Indeed a quote from the JPS version of Parashat Nitzavim (D'varim 29:13, 14 [14, 15 in English Bibles]) gives the Gaon this impression:

29:13 But it is not with you alone that I am making this covenant and this dread oath.

וְלֹא אִתְּכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֲנֹכִי כֹרֵת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת

(V'lo itchem l'vadechem anochi koret et-hab'rit hazot ve'et-ha'alah hazot.)

29:14 I am making it both with those who are standing here with us today before God our Lord, and with those who are not [yet] here with us today.

כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁנוּ פֹה עַמְּנוּעַמֵּד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ
פֹה עַמְּנוּ הַיּוֹם

(Ki et-asher yesh'no poh imanu omed hayom lifney Adonai Eloheynu ve'et asher eynenu poh imanu hayom.)

Rashi explains that the phrase "*v'lo itchem l'vadchem*" וְלֹא אִתְּכֶם לְבַדְכֶם includes even "*dorot ho'asidim l'hiyot*" - generations that are destined to yet come into existence. Indeed, the Gemara (the commentary on the Mishnah) explains that the principal of communal responsibility - *kol Yisroel areivim zeh bozeh* - is rooted in Parashat Nitzavim.³ Thus, the collective nature of the Tochacha in particular, and K'nesset Yisra'el (Assembly of Isra'el) in general, includes any future member of B'nei Yisra'el (Sons of Isra'el) as well. Accordingly, the Gemara derives the concept of arvus (say "ar-voos"), "joint responsibility [of one Jew for another's performance of mitzvot]," from the tochacha, which emphasizes the collective unit of B'nei Yisra'el. In this sense, Rav Yeruchum Perlow explains the view of the Bahag who counts the Tochacha and its blessings and curses among the 613 mitzvot. He suggests that the Bahag was not referring to the ceremony and ritual of the Tochacha, but rather to the mitzvah of arvus, which is rooted in the Tochacha itself.⁴

Again, as in Leviticus, our teacher of blessed memory Nechama Leibowitz adds further insights to this parashah:

³ *Sanhedrin* 43b and *Sotah* 36b.

⁴ *Sefer HaMitzvot L'Rasag*, Chapter 57.

The chapter of Retribution (*Tokheha*), as it is termed, outlining the evils in store for a backsliding Israel which takes up the greater part of our sidra proceeds in ascending order from more usual upheavals and catastrophes to sickness and plague, drought and famine, war and persecution until the Climax of exile and expulsion from the homeland is reached:

And the Lord shall scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth unto the other end of the earth; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou have no repose, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and languishing of soul.
(28: 64, 65)

The second half of verse 64 stating that they would serve other gods of wood and stone seems to run counter to the sequence of the passage and not to fit in with the crescendo of catastrophes awaiting a disobedient Israel. Is this statement regarding their ultimate acceptance of idolatry a reference to the sin on account of which they would forfeit their homeland? This explanation does not suit the context where it is distinctly stated that they would serve idols "there"- whilst in exile. Moreover all the verses 'beginning from 59 onwards dwell on their exile and the attendant sufferings, the subject of the sin which would cause it having already been alluded to. As Rashi observes sufferings do not evoke iniquities but blot them out. The reference here therefore to their serving idols must allude, in keeping with the context, to a part of their retribution. In accordance with this explanation Rashi, following the Targum Onkelos, states:

"And there thou shalt serve other gods" -- In accordance with the Targum (Aramaic version) not the literal serving of idols but rather the paying of dues to heathen priests.

However, Rashi's explanation does not take account of the explicit use of the phrase "and there thou shalt *serve* other *gods*." Abravanel's suggestion which is colored by the religious persecutions of his times is more suited to the wording of the text: As a result of their desperate situation in the lands of their dispersion, hounded by unspeakable persecution, many of them would succumb, against their will, to the demands of their persecutors and embrace alien faiths and idolatrous worship, in which they did not really believe. Knowing them to be of wood and stone that could neither see nor hear, they would worship them only in order to escape death. The idolatry referred to here is thus not in the sense of sin, but rather as part of the punishment inflicted on them, that they would be brought to such a state or being forced, against their will to serve idols, although inwardly believing in God. Jews would thus be forced to serve idols not out of conviction but against their will knowing it to be false and foolish. This is indeed a terrible fate and punishment for having worshipped idols of their own free will in their ancestral homeland...

We are thus left no alternative but to accept the yoke of heaven and be servants of G-d. Our Sages however found a message of consolation in this very same verse: “But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto the ark” (Genesis 8: 9). R. Judah ben R. Nahman in the name of R. Shimon stated: If it had found a resting place it would not have returned. Parallel to this we find (Lamentations 1) “She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest”—if she would have found rest she would not have returned. Parallel to this we find: And among these nations shalt thou have no repose and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot”—thus if they would have found rest they would not have returned. (B’resheet Rabba 33: 8.)⁵

In the Hebraic mind, to accept the yoke of heaven (also spoken of as the yoke of the Kingdom) means to place one’s trust in HaShem. Additionally, to accept the yoke of the Torah means to be submissive to God’s Written Word. We know from spiritual hindsight that trust in HaShem and submissiveness to his Torah should result in trust in his Son Yeshua. Such trust is meant to be a safeguard against idolatry. Sadly, far too few believers actually avail themselves of the full measure of protection that the Ruach HaKodesh offers. If the historic Church would have kept the Written Word guarded (Heb: shamar) we might not have the penchant lust for Sun worship that is rife in Christianity. Conversely, if the historic Synagogue had not aligned herself against the newly formed Church, we might not have the lack of faith in Yeshua (Jesus) that we find in Rabbinic Judaism today. So what should a proper balance of trust and obedience look like?

“Trust and Obey for There’s No Other Way...” (Recalling the old, familiar Baptist tune...)

Part One: Trust...

Paul and James on Justification

Some see a contradiction between Paul and James on the teaching of justification. Paul emphatically taught that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law while James argued that a man is justified by faith and works (James 2:14-26). Luther is such an individual who saw the two prophets' teachings to be in opposition. Insisting that Paul's view was correct, Luther belittled James's epistle, calling it an 'epistle of straw.' Such an approach to the two authors is not necessary. When the literary context of each other is examined it can be demonstrated that there is no contradiction. The key to understanding these two seemingly contradictory authors is to understand how

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<http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Jewish+Time/Jewish+Sources/Iyunum/35.+Parashat+Ki+tavo.htm>

each uses the terms justified, faith, and works. These words must be defined by their respective contexts. Observe the following table:

Paul	James
Faith =genuine faith and reliance upon God for salvation.	Faith =mental assent that could fail to affect one's actions.
Works =works apart from faith that one believes are able to, or help make him a genuine covenant member.	Works =works that can be done through faith, which attest to genuine faith.
Justified =declared righteous by God because of your trust in his means of salvation.	Justified =show to be righteous as evidenced by your actions. ⁶

Paul emphasized that we are saved by faith in Yeshua, and not by our natural or achieved ethnic status. James emphasized that the kind of faith that results in salvation will necessarily produce works that show evidence of that faith. Paul was concerned about people adding anything to faith that they believe is meritorious for their salvation. James was concerned about people professing to have faith that is not really faith at all, but rather a lifeless mental-assent to Messiah. It seems that James was attacking the 1st century Jewish distortion of the Torah's teaching on justification, wherein faith is some dead orthodoxy with no corresponding behavioral changes. Even Paul found it necessary to fight against this distortion of his teaching on justification (Romans 3:8; 6:1, 15). James pointed out that if a person has genuine salvific faith, works will follow after him showing evidence of that faith. Avraham really did believe God, and his works evidenced that fact. If Avraham had refused to offer Yitz'chak upon the altar, it would have demonstrated a lack of faith in God's promises to him (James 2:21-24).

Using a series of bullets to summarize his letters, we shall see that Rav Sha'ul had his hands quite full while attempting to expound HaShem's way—the Torah-true way—of making someone righteous to his 1st century Jewish detractors:

- Yeshua has made forensic righteousness available to everyone by paying on everyone's behalf the penalty for sins which HaShem's justice demands, viz, death.
- Forensic righteousness is appropriated by an individual for himself the moment he unreservedly puts his trust in God, which at this point in history, entails also trusting in Yeshua the Messiah upon learning of him and understanding what he has done.
- In order to interpret Sha'ul correctly one needs to understand that the phrase "ergon nomos" (works of law) does not mean deeds done in virtue of following the Torah the way HaShem intended, but deeds done in

⁶ David Bernard, *The New Birth* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1984), p. 48-49.

- consequence of perverting the Torah into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, legalistically, without having faith, without having trust in HaShem, without having love for HaShem or man, and without being empowered by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit).
- To be sure, in the case of the Galatian congregation, the specific perversion that was taking place sought to transform Gentiles into Jews via a man-made ceremony of conversion, performed under the guise of “covenant inclusion.”
 - To appreciate the consternation that this halakhah caused Rav Sha'ul, one has to understand that within the 1st century Judaisms, the prevailing view was that all Isra'el shared a place in the World to Come. What is more, since Isra'el and Isra'el alone were granted this gift from HaShem it was necessary in the minds of the proto-rabbis to convert Gentiles into Jews before they could enjoy the status of “full-fledged covenant member.”
 - Because of this feature, the entire sociological situation was subsumed under the label “circumcision.” Thus, “works of law” becomes a sort of “short-hand” way for Sha'ul to describe this phenomenon.

In Sha'ul's letter to Ephesus he also seems to be in opposition to Ya'akov (a position which we will examine shortly). A cursory reading of 2:8-9, a familiar passage, gives us the impression that only by faith alone are we considered righteous, and that external actions (assumed to be obedience to Law) are of no apparent consequence to HaShem. The passage needs to be understood in its entirety-to include verse 10! The entire context affirms the biblical fact that our gracious gift of righteousness was indeed granted unto us so that in union with Messiah Yeshua, we might live the life of good actions already prepared for us to do!

Part Two: ... and Obey

Let us now examine what Ya'akov has to say about faith and works. Sanctification and holiness are near equivalents theologically. Both words in their various forms are translated from the same Hebrew root meaning to "cut" or "separate," and the Greek word *hagiasmos* ἁγιασμός, meaning "consecration."⁷ The core concept of holiness, then, is separation and consecration to God (Leviticus 11:44). In our culture sanctification has come to mean the pursuit of moral perfection. Although the latter is included in the Biblical concept of sanctification, it is a corollary to the idea of separation. Sanctification results in morality, but sanctification is not tantamount to morality. God is said to be holy because He is separate from creation and is morally pure in contradistinction to sin.

⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), ἁγιασμός.

A reading from James chapter 2 verses 14-26 appears as an overemphasis of actions as opposed to faith. In reality, a common understanding of these verses might give the reader the impression that works are more important than faith itself. Yet, Ya'akov's audience, unlike Sha'ul's, seemingly did not have a problem with an enforced conversion policy. Instead they had a problem with a dead faith that led them nowhere! So Ya'akov masterfully constructed a correct biblical theology that showed that genuine biblical trust ALWAYS leads an individual into genuine biblical actions! This is in complete harmony with what Sha'ul was teaching! Faith must not be substituted for good works, and good works should not be substituted for faith! Moreover, good works do not replace faith, nor does faith cancel out the performance of good works. To be straightforward:

“Faith and good works go hand in hand! One without the other is incomplete and lacking of true biblical righteousness!”

We therefore come to understand that for Paul, there was no bifurcation between “faith” and “faithfulness.” They are two sides of the same coin. One may therefore speak of either with the full assurance that the other exists.⁸

Conclusions

Moshe goes to great lengths to demonstrate that a heart that is devoid of true biblical faith (there really is only ONE kind of biblical faith folks!) is a heart that will lead the individual down a degenerative path straight into the curses pronounced here in our Torah portion! The heart of doubt is ultimately headed for destruction, as the curses vividly demonstrate! Moshe's heart, which is the heart of the Father, is that they would truly circumcise their hearts to follow after HaShem and his ways, and to become the people that God truly desires them to be!

Blessings and curses are quite simply the effects (God supplying the cause) of our heart condition. If we follow trust and obedience, blessings will follow us! But if we harden our hearts and pursue doubt and disobedience, then the Torah instructs us that not only will the blessings be withheld, but that the curses will actually pursue us instead the blessing (see 28:45). To be sure, we don't deserve any blessings at all! Yet God in his mercy sees fit to grant blessings, provided we continue in his covenant with a heart that is governed by genuine trust!

One Law for One Corporate People

At this point in my commentary, it becomes painfully clear that I need to define whom the recipients of the blessing and the curses are, based on responsibility

⁸ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 98.

to the Torah. For it is indeed true that historic Gentile responsibility differs slightly from Jewish responsibility. The operative word is “historic.” Volumes could be said, but I will be brief.

Historically, those identified as Corporate Isra'el were first given the task of showcasing God's holiness and righteous standard in the earth (“...to the Jew first...”). To this end HaShem supplied them with his Written Word of holiness. The very same God expected them to accept and uphold this Torah in faith. So the Jews have been given Torah, and their responsibility and response to it should be a heart that is circumcised towards God. The corporate Gentiles are in a position to receive the very same Torah and grace demonstrated by believing Isra'el, by becoming partakers and fellow covenant-keepers, through their demonstration of the exact same biblical faith! Yeshua the Messiah came to inaugurate the covenant originally made with the offspring of Avraham (read Jeremiah 31:31-34). This covenant now includes Gentiles *en masse*, provided they continue in the very same trust that Isra'el was expected to demonstrate. Don't get me wrong. God has always ‘included’ the ger (a technical term referring to a non-Jew”). But Yeshua demonstrated the Father's plan by reaching out to the disenfranchised Y'hudi (Jew) first, while sending his sh'li'chim (apostles) to the Gentiles afterwards. Are you following me?

Failure to continue in genuine trusting faithfulness for either Jew or Gentile participants invited God to place them in a position that Sha'ul called “broken off.” In other words, natural branches (Jews) could be broken off because of lack of trust, and grafted-in branches (Gentiles) could also be broken off due to lack of trust (read Romans chapter 11)! Far from purporting that some “ethnic-driven” halakhah secured one's place in the 'olam haba (Age to Come), the native born Jew, the convert Jew, and the good old fashioned Gentiles all faced the same penalty for remorseless lack of faith: spiritual death.

So we see that the Torah is the universal document for both peoples and it outlines God's plan for all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles.

The “mystery of the Gospel” is that Isra'el is actually comprised of both Jews and Gentiles! To be grafted into the family of God is to join oneself to a Jewish Olive Tree without having to succumb to any kind of man-made conversion policy whatsoever! To this end, one becomes submissive to the instructions and righteousness of God, and inherits the blessings of God, whether he is of Gentile or Jewish stock!

To walk in disobedience and lack of trust is to invite God's punishment and withholding of blessing. To belong to the family is to mentally, spiritually, and physically accept the family rules. To this end, both Jews and Gentiles are expected to practice Torah submissiveness within their hearts and within their communities. To submit to God is to desire and allow his Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) to continually mold a person's life into the example of the Son of God,

who vividly displayed a Torah-obedient and submissive life! This is the responsibility of a believer.

To suppose that faith outside of resulting action alone is pleasing to God is to misunderstand the valuable lesson explained by Ya'akov. Such faith is barren and of no value to God. Conversely, to mistakenly replace the genuine faith that the Torah teaches with halakhic rules designed to regulate one's identity with God, is to misunderstand Rav Sha'ul's valuable lesson. Such actions also prove to be displeasing to God and unacceptable as righteous.

To sum up my commentary this week:

Blessings and curses are dependent upon the orientation of the individual's heart, and his responsibility to the Torah of HaShem. To the Jew, the Torah spells out the consequences of failing to heed the instructions of HaShem, while attempting to be included in the covenant family. An uncircumcised heart is simply not acceptable in terms of Torah-based righteousness. For the Gentile, to be grafted into the family of HaShem one needs to place his unreserved trust in the Son of HaShem—just like any Jew—and then let God work in him the good work which was designed for him since creation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Everyone else who falls into the category of simply not being found in covenant relationship with HaShem, through his Son Yeshua, fails to receive covenant blessings, and is ultimately a candidate for destruction. God only deals within covenants. His Son freely offers a covenant with salvific benefits and all men are freely enjoined to participate!

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-O'lam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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