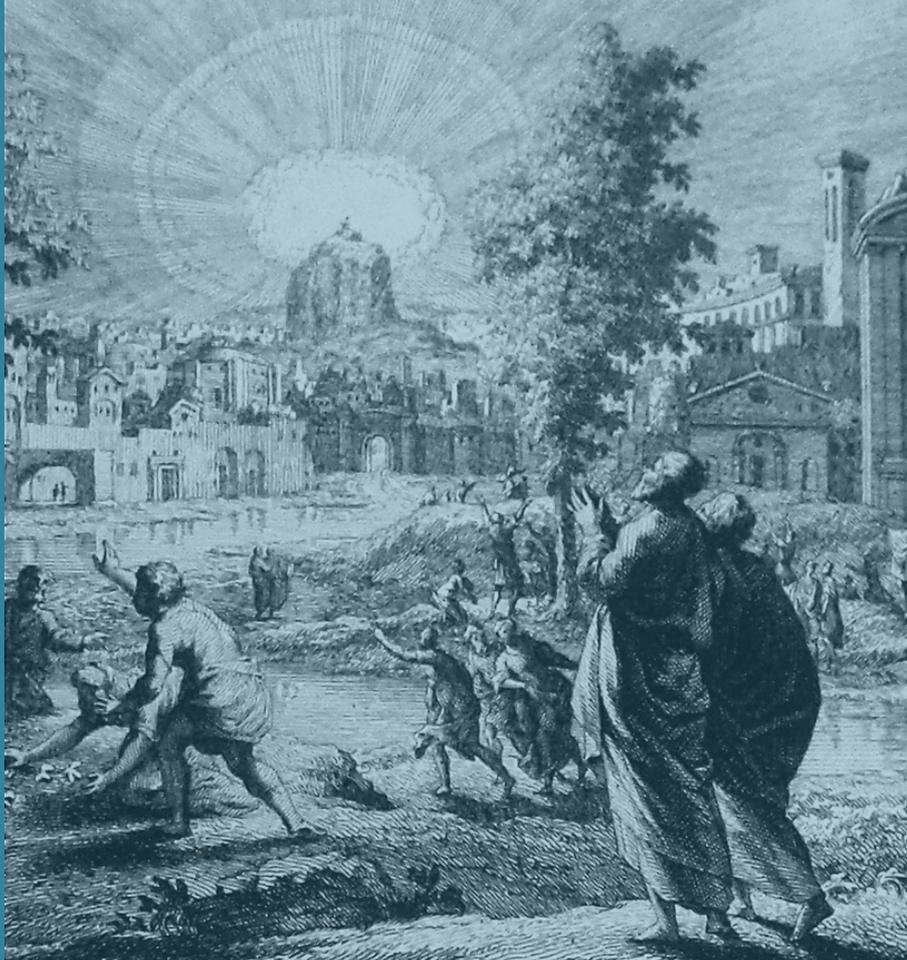


Our Job is to Bear Fruit in the Community

Parashat Bechukotai



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This week we conclude the book of Leviticus. We began it with an explanation of the different types of sacrifices. After that, God taught us about the sacrificial service in the Tabernacle, which later will become the sacrificial service used in the Temple.

We continue on to the dedication of the Tabernacle, which was followed by the national trauma of the death of Aaron's two sons, the chief priests of Israel. From there, the book continues to instruct the people of Israel on the laws of purity and impurity, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and the requirements for holiness for the people (and for us).

Several times in the book we encounter the commandment:

“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’” - Leviticus 19:2

After this requirement, we have a long list of commandments that lead to holiness, such as honoring parents, observing the Sabbath, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

The Choice Between Blessings and Curses

This week we reach the final Torah portion of Leviticus, and in closing, we the people, are given the opportunity to make a choice. We can choose to obey the commandments - which will bring about an abundance of blessing. Or we can choose not to obey the commandments that God gave, which will bring a curse upon us.

“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...”
- *Leviticus 26:3*

If we keep His commandments, we will receive an abundance of blessings, mainly financial success, which will lead to a better life in the country and a military advantage. In turn, this will bring us security, peace, and tranquility.

Of course, if we do so, we will merit God's presence among us. He will be our God and we will be His people.

“But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands...” - *Leviticus 26:4*

Then we will receive the exact opposite, we will get the sword, the famine, the pestilence, and if we still don't get the hint and continue to disobey:

“If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you...” - *Leviticus 26:23, 24*

We will descend into war, which will surely end with destruction and exile.

A National History of Blessings and Curses

We read these verses from the point of view of the people of Israel before entering the Promised Land. Here God warns them to keep His commandments, not to regress morally, or else the earth will vomit them out.

Today we can literally mark all the dates on a historical calendar in which these curses took place.

The interesting part is that there are 10 verses that talk about the blessings compared to 25 verses that deal with curses.

However, chapter 26 concludes with God's promise that He will not forsake us, He will remember the promises He made to our forefathers, and even if we go out to exile, He will one day deliver us, just as He did when He brought us out of Egypt.

The Land of Israel will be waiting for us. Enemies can conquer the land, enemies can exile us, but the Land of Israel will be waiting for us, and the land will flourish only when the Jewish people return and settle in it.

When we were in exile, the land stood desolate and would no longer blossom. It did not grow a tree or bear fruit throughout the period in which we were in various exiles.

Today, thanks to God, after the return of the Jewish people to their land, it has once again started to grow at a tremendous pace. The prophets prophesied that the day will come when Israeli children will play undisturbed in the streets of Jerusalem and old people will walk in the streets.

While in exile, upon reading these prophecies, it was difficult for people to see how they would be fulfilled. They could not imagine that one day the fields of Israel would come to life and produce crops.

Today we do not need to imagine, we just need to look out the window. We have many blessings that are promised to us in the Bible. Some of those blessings are mentioned in this week's parasha.

God's Promise to Us

The first verse begins with "if" as a condition, meaning that, as a nation, we have the choice to follow the Lord and receive the following blessings: rain in season and in the right quantity, crops and harvest, that we will eat bread in abundance, and that we will dwell peacefully in the Land of Promise.

God promises us good things, if we obey His statutes and follow His path.

This weekly parasha addresses the blessings on a national scale, as the people of Israel. In the haftara, the weekly reading from the prophets, the blessing is more personal:

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” – Jeremiah 17:7-10 [NIV]

Our haftara (weekly reading from the Prophets) is very similar to Psalms 1:

“That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” – Psalms 1:3 [NIV]

Almost identical to the words in Jeremiah 17:8.

Our Job is to Bear Fruit in the Community

Our job here on earth is to bear fruit. God gave us many talents and has blessed us all. The New Testament gives us several lists of gifts, talents, and abilities. Every person has a role and a unique gift.

Therefore, every member of the community should have a role, whether it is an official role, or an informal one, such as encouragement, listening, caring for others, prayer, or visiting the sick and the elderly. We are all organs in the body of Messiah, and we must all contribute to the community.

The most important thing is, that everything we do, we must do with gladness. If we do something, it must appear like we enjoy doing it, that it comes from the heart.

Can the congregation function at full potential when most of the audience is inactive, both physically and socially? Do we imagine a congregation where we sit, sing a little, pray a bit, listen to a sermon, go home, and that's it?

Have we truly done our duty? Is God pleased with me because I went to His house? The great question that Yeshua asks is, where is the fruit?

How Will We Account for Our Lives?

I would now like to share with you the story of a man and his rich relative:

A man begged his rich uncle for a job, but no position was fitting for him. The uncle tried putting his nephew in a few different offices, but the work was done very poorly, which was bad for business.

The uncle did not want to fire his relative, but he also could not leave him in charge of an office that would eventually not function.

Finally, he said, “Okay, you've got a job at the factory, all you have to do is to refrain from bothering the employees, don't touch anything, wait for the first of the month, and then go get your paycheck - that's it.”

From then on, the man was happy, all he needed to do was hang around the factory and do nothing, and wait for the first of the month.

One day an inspector came to check the factory. He asked each employee about their job and received a detailed explanation of why each worker is important and contributes to the factory. Of course, every worker tried to show how essential their work is to the factory.

Then came the turn of the nephew. The supervisor asked: “What do you do at the factory? How do you contribute towards its success?”

The man paused for a minute, then replied: “All I have to do is go around the factory and do nothing, not touch anything, not disturb anyone, wait for the first of the month, and then get my salary.”

One day we will stand and give account to Yeshua. What will we say? That all we did was hang around without care?

It's not a big deal to come to congregation, sit down and think, “I've done God's will, I showed up, I sat down, I didn't disturb anyone, and I left.” A day will come and I will receive my “paycheck” from the King of Kings.

We are all God's workers, and we must actively build up the body of Messiah and the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of us has special skills and gifts, and we must utilize them and contribute them to the congregation in order to build the community.

“...A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down!’

Why should it use up the soil?’ “Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” - Luke 13:6a-9 [NIV]

In Conclusion

God cares for us, waters us, and invests in us. What's left for us to do is to cling to Him, to His word, to His path, and God will plant us by streams of living water, as He promised: living water that does not run out or run dry.

The goal is for us to produce fruit, to help each other, support one another, implement steps that build the Kingdom of Heaven, and respect God.

This choice is also a national one, for all of Israel, to live according to God's word. But it is also a personal choice, to personally draw near to God's word, to personally invest and lift up the family and the community.

Both personally and nationally, we must choose to be holy, every day. It is not an easy choice, but it is choosing life!

This is the end of our portion as well as the conclusion of the book of Leviticus. Let us say the traditional blessing after finishing a book in the Torah:

“Chazak chazak v'nitchazek” (“Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened”)

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context*

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