

Love or Profit? The Torah Honors Both

Parashat Eikev



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Shabbat Shalom. This Shabbat we read the weekly Torah portion, Parashat Eikev. The theme that repeats itself over and over throughout Deuteronomy is the request to keep the commandments of God.

Again and again Moses asks us not to turn away from the way of the Torah, not to the right or left, but to keep the Word of God with zeal.

The Book of Deuteronomy as a whole contains many reasons for which we should keep the Word of God and teach our children to keep and walk according to the Word of God forever.

An Overview of This Week's Parasha

This week's parasha quotes from Yeshua's response to being tempted:

"...Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." – Matthew 4:4b [NIV] (see also Deuteronomy 8:3b)

The verse that Yeshua quotes was spoken by Moses, to the people, after 40 years in the desert, after 40 years in which the people saw the power of God in action.

Our parasha makes a comparison between Egypt, or the nations of the world, and the Land of Israel:

“The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.” – Deuteronomy 11:11-12 [NIV]

In contrast to the countries of the world, water in the Land of Israel is not guaranteed. We depend on the providence of God to provide us with rain every year and to sustain us. We, as the people of Israel, depend daily on God.

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We Depend on God for Food and Water

There is an important element here in understanding that God is involved in our daily lives. In the Jewish prayer service, in the winter, when there is supposed to be rain, we, the entire nation of Israel, pray daily for rain, and in the Talmud there is a complete tractate called Ta’anit, which mainly deals with fasts and prayers for rain.

When you understand the context, you can understand the fullness of the intention of Yeshua, in saying that we live on the Word of God and not on bread.

We are assured that if we keep the Word of God, there will be bread, there will be rain, and there will be blessing!

Love or Profit?

The main question that arises repeatedly throughout the Book of Deuteronomy is: The reason for the observance of the commandments (mitzvot), do we observe the commandments in order to get a reward? Or out of fear of punishment? Or out of love to God?

I would like to use the Shema prayer as a model for understanding the reason for the observance of the commandments. The Shema prayer is composed of two parts: “Shema Yisrael” and “V’haya Im Shamo’a”. Last week we learned the Shema Yisrael that appeared in Deuteronomy 6, and this week we learn the second part, “So if you faithfully obey...”, which appears in Deuteronomy 11:13.

These two important passages appear in every mezuzah, and in all tefillin. This is actually the center of Torah and the center of Jewish prayer. And it tells us that there is reward and there is punishment!

“So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today... then I will send rain on your land in its season... so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied... so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors...” – Deuteronomy 11:13a,14,15,21a [NIV]

The words “so that” here say that the reward is not only the result of the observance of commandments, but also the reason for the observance of the commandments. It’s as if the Torah is saying to fulfill the commandments “so that” you will have a good and long life.

Our Reward in the World to Come

Yeshua teaches us, over and over, when we give charity, we must not take credit, why?

That our reward would not come as honor in this world, but as a reward in the World to Come.

Notice that Yeshua does not say there is no reward, but that there is reward. It's just that it's worth receiving in heaven.

Yeshua teaches us that when we fast, God forbid we will have the appearance of a person who is fasting. Again the matter of reward. And so even when we pray and actually do everything we do, we must be careful of our appearance, in order for our valuable reward to be kept in heaven.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” – Matthew 6:19a,20a [NIV]

This means there is a treasure, and there is a safe, there is reward and there is a prize, and there is a bank and there is a banker, and it is God.

It is worthwhile for a person to observe the commandments, and the great reward that a person will receive following the observance of the commandments is emphasized.

The Torah – a Means to an End?

But the Torah also warns us sternly that it is very dangerous to commit transgressions, and that whoever does so exposes himself to severe punishment.

One must ask – is this is a proper approach? That the decision to fulfill the Word of God would be based on profitability?

On the other hand, in the Shema prayer (Deuteronomy 6) there is no mention or question of profitability, but love for God:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.” – Deuteronomy 6:5,6 [NIV]

The tension between keeping God's Word “so that” or not “so that” has always been around. Many see the observance of the commandments “so that” as a grave flaw, and claim that a person who fulfills commandments in anticipation of reward actually serves himself rather than God.

The Importance of Doing

If we stop for a moment and think about the subject, I think we will agree that there is a fundamental flaw in the fulfillment of a commandment in order to receive a reward.

Where is the intermediate line connecting these two opposites?

The Torah and the New Testament emphasize that the main thing is to do the Word of God. Yeshua teaches us the parable of the house on the rock and the sand (Matthew 7:24).

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” – Matthew 7:21 [NIV]

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” – Matthew 7:24 [NIV]

The emphasis of Yeshua is not on the believer who says, “Lord, Lord”, but on the believer who “does the will of my Father who is in heaven”.

From all this I learn that what is important is to do. And that the Scriptures give legitimacy to a person who upholds the Word of God, and avoids violating prohibitions solely because of the reward and punishment before him. Perhaps it is neither desired nor ideal, but it is acceptable.

Of course, there is a desire for an ideal, in which one disconnects oneself from the interests of profit, and acts from pure love to God and serves Him truly. As we pray every Shabbat in the congregation, the same prayer that the entire Jewish world prays in the Amidah prayer:

“...purify our hearts to serve You in truth.” – Koren Siddur, Amidah prayer

In closing

As in the laws of the state, it is important to uphold the law, such as the prohibition to steal, if the thief is afraid of punishment and therefore he

does not steal, it is okay and acceptable, but there is the ideal of the citizen who does not steal because it is a question of morality, and not necessarily an avoidance of punishment.

It is the same with the Word of God. The main thing is that we do it, if we're looking for a blessing, that's fine too.

But the ideal is to act out of love.

“Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” – Matthew 22:37-40 [NIV]

Shabbat Shalom.

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