

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

DEUTERONOMY 8-11

We are continuing to work our way through the main speech of Moses which runs from chapter 5 to 26. Most of these second generation Israelites have never known anything other than life in the desert, so it is critical that they be taught the crucial importance of keeping the commandments of the LORD that pertain to living in the land. He is fully capable of defeating the enemies in the land and caring for their needs, but *only* IF they walk according to HIS ways.

CHAPTER 8

1 *"Every commandment which I command you today **you must be careful to observe**, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers."*

Again we see the emphasis on keeping the Word of God, and also His faithfulness to His covenant promises to the patriarchs.

v.3 *"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."*

We would no doubt recognise this as yet another verse quoted by Jesus during his temptation in the wilderness: After forty days of fasting, he was tempted to command that stones become bread. He answered: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Consuming the Word of God feeds our souls—without it we would perish spiritually.

Q. Do you use the Word of God to counter the temptations of the enemy, or do you let flesh dictate your feelings and choices?

We find the imperative of listening and heeding the Words of God, that life will go well for them, in many and various places in Scripture. For example, Proverbs 5:20-23:

My son, pay attention to what I say, listen closely to my words,
Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;
For they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.
Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Moses goes on to emphasise how the LORD afflicted them, and chastised them: 8:5 *You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.* No doubt the writer of the letter to the Hebrews also had this in mind when he quoted from Proverbs 3:

"My son, do not despise the chastening (discipline) of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

Hebrews 12:7-8 “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”

7 “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs that flow out of valleys and hills; 8 “a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 “a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.”

A man of faith lives his life knowing that it's not the external circumstances that will determine his course in life, but his relationship with God. The prophet Jeremiah portrays those without faith “. . . like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives” (Jer. 17:5–6). Without faith, there is no true prosperity; a person cannot thrive or develop to his greatest potential. However, a man of faith— “... 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.” (v.7-8) Even in the most challenging situation, a man of faith will bear fruit — something good can come from any situation, because he is connected directly to the source of life.

The abundance promised by Moses, is quickly followed by warnings:

Warning of pitfalls

Pride in abundant living

⁸*“When you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; ... ¹¹Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, ... lest when... all that you have is multiplied...⁴“When your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;... ¹⁷and you **say in your heart**, my power and the might of my hand has gained me this wealth. ¹⁸**Then you shall remember the LORD your God, that it was He who gave you strength to make wealth In order to establish His covenant that He swore to your forefathers.***

God well knows the weaknesses of human flesh and the danger of living in abundance. Jesus famously warned how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. (Mt. 19:23). Yes, he does want to bless His people, but never at the expense of their souls. The real challenge is not poverty but affluence; not slavery but freedom; not homelessness but comfort. When times are hard, people grow—they come together. The real test of a nation is not: Can it survive a crisis, but can it survive the lack of a crisis? Can it stay strong during times of ease and plenty, power, and prestige? That is the challenge, that has defeated every civilization known to history. Let it not, says Moses, defeat you. Remember, it is God who has blessed you—forgetting that will have consequences!

CHAPTER 9

Spiritual Pride

Another potential pitfall stems from spiritual pride. The nations they are going in to dispossess are greater and mightier than they, cities ‘fortified up to heaven,’ and the people ‘great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim.’ 9:3 *“Therefore understand today that the LORD your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the LORD has said to you.”*

Here we see God's wrath against those who oppose Him depicted as fire that utterly consumes and destroys anything in its path. There are numerous incidents in which God's wrath, judgment, holiness or power, are displayed by fire from heaven. God's *holiness* is the reason for His being a consuming fire, and it burns up anything unholy.

Read 9:4-8 - Note the emphasis here? "It is not because of your righteousness." Don't think you have been brought into the Land because of your own righteousness — *but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

Again the remedy is: 7"**REMEMBER!** do not forget ... how rebellious you have been against the LORD. In other words, 'you have nothing to be proud about.' Moses goes on to remind them of the sin of the Golden Calf, and the tablets that were broken before their eyes. When we recall that the broken 'Word of God' pointed prophetically to the broken 'Word made flesh,' when the Son of God came down from the 'mountain of God', it is worth noting verse 21:

9:21 ***"Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain."***

Psalms 103:12: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us."

All that God does is part of the LORD's unfolding redemption plan for the whole earth, and here, Israel will be used as His instrument on earth to destroy the wicked nations who are inhabiting the Land He has chosen as His own. Read verse 3 carefully: "...**He will destroy them** and bring them down before you; so **you shall drive them out** and destroy them quickly..."

There is a vitally important principle here: The Lord goes before to destroy and bring down, but He needs His people to complete the work on the Earth in order to gain the victory and finally capture the Land.

Likewise, we don't have to defeat the enemy, Jesus has already done that. He has "disarmed principalities and powers," He has defeated Satan; what we need to do is use our God given authority and complete the victory in the earthly realm. It is vital we approach this battle with right attitude—from a position of confidence knowing that the enemy is defeated and the victory is ours. We must see ourselves as victors not victims.

Luke 10:18-19 And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

This is not just about the enemy *out there!* Do you have 'giants' in your life that Jesus defeated on the Cross, but have not yet been driven out?¹ They may still have legal ground in you unless you recognise them, repent and ask forgiveness. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16) Confessing

¹ Capturing the land is also a picture of a spiritual reality: capturing our souls: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9

one's sins to another is not easy, it takes true humility, but is a powerful tool to lose the enemy's grip on us and bring us into freedom.

CHAPTER 10 - The Essence of the Law

Deut. 10:12 *"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,"*¹³ *"and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today **for your good?**"*¹⁴ *"Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it."*¹⁵ *"The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day."*¹⁶ *"Therefore **circumcise the foreskin of your heart**, and be stiff-necked no longer. "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.*

Circumcision of the heart is not a NT concept. It is first mentioned here in Deuteronomy, and is concerned with the transformation of one's heart to enable willing obedience to God's way of life, in contrast to a hostile attitude or mere external compliance.

Chapter 10 goes on to restate the compassionate nature of God, who administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

Micah 6:8 *8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

What an awesome God we serve—ever holding justice and mercy in balance! Indeed Yeshua came to bring to the fore the true heart of God. His teaching was not new but eternally true and embedded in His Word from the beginning. God is indeed—the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

CHAPTER 11 – Love and Obedience Rewarded

Chapter 11 is a beautiful chapter, continuing along the same theme: Hearing the word of God transforms the heart; diligently walking according to the word of God brings abundant blessings; the blessings overflow in testimony to God's faithfulness, and the testimonies will further shore up Israel's love for Him.

1 *"Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always."*

Have you realized that loving God and being loved by God is a new concept for Israel here in Deuteronomy, that is completely absent from previous books of the Torah. We first saw the directive to love God in chapter 6, in the words of the Shema, (which are brought out in a different format here, in verses 18-20). It is worth noting that the Shema in chapter 6, "you shall love..." is in the singular form, but here in chapter 11 the plural form is used, thus applying to Israel as a whole.

The focus of these chapters is unmistakable: **There is a vital link between loving God and keeping his commandments.** Is this link also important to NT believers? John the beloved disciple certainly thought so:

John 14:21 "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

This may present a challenge for grace-oriented Christians. Which commandments is John speaking of? Are the Torah commandments totally irrelevant for us because Yeshua has 'fulfilled' them? —He famously said:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill ² them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Mt. 5:17-18)

Q. What is the right approach for us to take? And what other scriptures come to mind in this regard?

A blessing and a Curse

11:26 Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God... 29 Now it shall be, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30 Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh?

This is intriguing, because a great tree of Moreh is mentioned first in Genesis 12. Every word in the Torah is relevant and has a significant meaning, therefore links such as this can be very revealing. Let's go back to Genesis 12 and revisit Abram:

Gen. 12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. 7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

It was at this tree that God actually appeared to Abraham for the first time and promised that his descendants would be given this land, and this becomes a significant place in Abraham's life (See Gen. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1). Although it is translated as "terebinth, or oak tree", the Hebrew is, *alon moreh*.

Alon means 'great tree', from a root word, 'ayil, meaning 'ram' (because of its strength). Interestingly the word, 'ayil, is used for the ram's skins dyed red which cover the tabernacle, and also the ram of the whole burnt offering.

Moreh means 'teacher' from a root word meaning 'former rain'.

It seems that Moses' words to Israel are linking this stage of their journey back to the covenant promise that the Lord made with Abram when he first entered the land. Now—when the Israelites have finished roaming in the desert for 40 years (the number symbolizing testing)—it appears that this is the very same place where they crossed over the river and renewed their covenant with God by building the altar with the 12 stones. It was also at the site of this great tree that the first altar of the patriarchs was built, indicating that this is a very significant and special place to God.

² Fulfill: to fill up, accomplish, bring to completion, to convert into reality.

The great trees of Moreh seem to be a significant symbol—marking a new beginning in God’s relationship to man—first, his covenant with Abraham, and soon, with his promised descendants. Given the meaning of *alon moreh*, there are also strong Messianic pointers here.

[This subject warrants further study, but unfortunately we must leave it here for now.]