

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

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

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## DEUTERONOMY 26-28

### CHAPTER 26 – First fruits of the Ground

*1 “And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you **possess it and dwell in it**, 2 “that you shall take some of the **first of all the produce of the ground**, which you shall bring from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.<sup>3</sup> “And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD my God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’*

They are to go on to remember their lowly beginning, how they cried out and the LORD heard their voice, and with ‘a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders, brought them out and gave them this land, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” This is to be a constant remembrance for them. The Jew’s gift of his first fruits symbolizes that he dedicates everything he has to the service of God; it is a remembrance that the Land could never have been theirs without God’s loving intervention —now it is theirs as an inheritance to *possess and dwell in*.

This Land has been the destination of promise since Abraham first obeyed the voice of God—when He said: “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation...” (Gen 12:1-2), and in Gen 7:8, *The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.*”

But they have also been consistently reminded that it will have to be deserved by the unceasing efforts of Abraham’s offspring. Each generation must renew the conquest of the Land for itself—both corporately and individually. As they present their basket of the first of their produce from the ground to the priest, they are to recall where they have come from, and the hand of God’s grace that has brought them to this place. In doing so, they will become accustomed to maintaining humility before their God, and generosity to those in need.

*11 “So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the LORD your God has given to you and your house—**you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you.***

**Discuss both the natural and spiritual realities of this law.**

Consider what it means to “possess and dwell in” the inheritance we have in Christ – Eph. 1:11 “*In him we have obtained an inheritance...*”; the fruit that comes from abiding in Him, and how that is expressed and offered as first fruit to the LORD.

## Tithing

12 *"When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to **the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow**, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled..."* (refer back to Deut. 14:22-29)

Again, we continually see the need to remember the poor among them, and also provision for the Levites, who had no inheritance of their own, but served God on the people's behalf.

The principle of tithing was known by the patriarchs well before the giving of the Law. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything, and was blessed by him (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:2), and after Jacob escaped from Laban, he set up a pillar, saying: "of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." (Gen 28:22).

The actual law of tithing was first mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:22-29: *"You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide..."*

Religious authorities did not enforce the tithe, rather a formal vow was made every three years stating that the proper tithes were separated and given. They were also to vow: *"I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead."* Tithing also existed in the pagan world – they too saw in it a tribute to God for giving food to the world. But this vow seeks to distance the Jew from the cults of antiquity which were centred around care of the dead. Tombs were typically filled with objects and food to accompany the deceased on their long journey, whereas the primary emphasis of Judaism is upon *life* and holiness associated with living. Their burial custom is very simple. The deceased is dressed in a white shroud and placed in a plain, unadorned wooden coffin.

## A Special People of God

Chapter 26 concludes the long discourse and list of commandments Moses began in chapter 5 and concludes with words of Covenant between the LORD and His people. [Turn to chapter 5:1-3 to put this covenant into perspective. Many who were now present had been too young to enter into the covenant at Mount Sinai, so here, on the brink of entering into the land, all must hear, understand and agree to the terms, as if they had been present at Sinai.

**26:16-19** *"**This day** the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; with all your heart and with all your soul. **Today** you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, ... **Today** the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, ... "and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and **that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.**"*

Moses exhorted his people to observe the commands of God "with all your heart and with all your soul." We might recall that loving God "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" form the opening words of the Shema (Deut. 6:4). We would also recognise this phrase from Jesus' answer to the scribe's question: 'which is the greatest commandment?—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"; He then added, "And the second is like it, you shalt love your neighbour as yourself." This, the scribe responded, "is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

These two commandments ought to form the core of Christian lifestyle, and we need to note that it is perfectly in line with Judaic thought and teaching—obedience and loving God and neighbour go hand in hand.

It is indeed a high calling, privilege and responsibility that the LORD God placed upon His chosen people, Israel—ultimately that they might fulfil a purpose far beyond themselves. He called Israel to be a *holy people*, and through the New Covenant, He also invites people from all nations, to be a *holy people*.

*“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* (1 Peter 1:14–16)

Christian holiness is realized from our new identity in Christ. The Hebrew word, *kadosh*, means to be set apart, to be free from defilement. If we claim to be a ‘holy people,’ it is demanded that we also live a practical holiness—we are to *be holy*, which, according to Paul, isn’t just knowing you are children of God, it is being obedient children, living it out in the world – as an epistle to be read<sup>1</sup>. We are more than happy to call God “holy,” but how much do we consider ourselves as holy? It is a designation we need to own, not in pride, but humbly, as a reminder to live up to this high privilege.

**Q. What are some ways we can carry this title with integrity?**

## CHAPTER 27 – The Law Inscribed on Stones

Chapter 27, verse 9 marks the beginning of the third address of Moses in Deuteronomy. Again, note the covenantal language used:

*9 Be attentive and hear, O Israel: **This day you have become a people** to the LORD your God. 10 “Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.”*

From this point on each person was obligated to recognise their communal responsibility and to safeguard the integrity of Israel against openly committed sins. Moses then instructs the people to conduct an elaborate ritual once they cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Great stones are to be whitewashed with lime and inscribed with ‘all the words of this Torah,’ and an altar is to be set up to offer sacrifices. He then designated six tribes to stand on Mt Gerizim to bless the people, and the other six tribes to stand on Mt Ebal, to curse.

*14 “And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel: 15 “Cursed is the one who...” —just eleven specific sins are mentioned, each followed by: *And all the people shall say, “Amen!”*—but the final one reads: ‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them.’ Thus the curses apply to anyone who does not accept the binding nature of the entire Torah and its commandments. Perhaps this helps us understand why the Jewish leaders put a ‘fence’ around the laws, so as to be extra careful not to break any.*

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

## CHAPTER 28 – Blessings on Obedience

*“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. “And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God”*

**Read through verses 3-13 and take in the abundance and scope of the blessings promised to those who walk in holiness.** These blessings can also be confessed over our own lives.

This ceremony between the mountains is meant to impress on the Israelites that the land is given as the place in which to fulfil the Torah. Obedience would bring about a utopia, in every aspect of life, but if they spurn God and His Torah they will surely reap disaster.

### Curses on Disobedience

15 *“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:*

The curses are the direct antithesis of the blessings—spelled out very dramatically and numerous—and will affect every aspect of their lives. Central to the list of curses stands these verses:

*“And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever, because you did not serve the LORD your God **with joy and gladness of heart**, for the abundance of everything - therefore you shall serve your enemies...,”* (Deut 28:26-28)

Failure to serve the LORD ‘with joy and gladness of heart’ – fully appreciating the blessings that flow from His goodness – will result in them serving their enemies ‘in hunger, thirst, and in nakedness,’ and they will be scattered among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, where they will find no rest.

‘Rejoicing before the Lord’ has been a recurring theme of Deuteronomy. If the person felt no “joy” in the fulfilment of God’s promises, then it was an indication that he had moved away from the LORD, despite all the blessings he had received. It was at this point, that the “joyless person” positioned himself to inherit the curses.

If joy is so important that its lack becomes the catalyst for these terrible curses, then let’s take a look at a few verses in the New Covenant Scriptures to give us more insight.

Jesus speaks of joy, and He also connects it with the keeping of the commandments:

*John 15:10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, **that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.***

**Q. What did Jesus mean, “keep my commandments,” when we are no longer under the laws of Torah, but under the New Covenant law of love?**

The expectation is that God's law is now written on our heart - *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people* (Jer. 31:33).

Ezekiel 11:19 *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. (see also Ezek. 36:26).*

It is the Holy Spirit, gifted to God's people, that enables us to be, in Paul's words, an 'epistle,' "written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

The Holy Spirit brings *joy* to a disciple's life; the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace... If we are not walking in these fruits, we might need to consider if we still do have 'oil in our lamps'.

*1 Peter 1:9 Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you **rejoice with joy inexpressible** and full of glory, receiving **the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.***

**Q. Is JOY and GLADNESS OF HEART part of your faith experience?**

Just as Israel was called to be a distinctly blessed people—'a sign and a wonder' to the honour and praise of their God, so are we—the people of the New Covenant— to carry our faith with joy, in every circumstance: *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials... James 1:2-4*

The restoration plan of the Almighty includes an everlasting "joy".

*So the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 51:11).*

**Q. How can we maintain joy and gladness of heart?**