

Why does Scripture always Draw us back to the Land, the Place, and the People of God?

In this weeks reading from Parsahat Re'eh (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17*), Moshe says *ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה*: meaning “*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.*” Moshe says the blessing comes if we “*listen and obey.*” The curse comes to those who turn aside from the way God has commanded. The blessing is for those who remain “*within*” the covenant with God and the curse are for those who remain “*outside*” of the covenant suggesting that those who turn away from the way the Lord wants one to live is synonymous to turning away from the covenant. Those inside the covenant live inside of the Promised Land, walk according to the commands, and enjoy the blessing and protection of God. Those outside have no part in God’s promises and do not regard God’s word as a guide for life. In this week’s reading, remaining within the covenant is emphasized as Moshe continues to speak to the people stating over and over again, “*But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.*” According to these scriptures, God is establishing His name in the Land, the Place, and the People of His choosing. Today, in Yeshua the Messiah, the Lord has established a place for His name in us. With this in mind, does the Land and the Place remain as important to us as it did to Israel in the days of the giving of the Torah?

ספר דברים פרק יא *Devarim / Deuteronomy 11:26-30*

כּו רֵאָה אֲנֹכִי נָתַן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה: כִּזְ אֶת-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ עוֹ אֶל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם: כח וְהַקְלָלָה אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְסָרְתֶם מִן-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתֶּם: ס כֹּט וְהָיָה כִּי יָבִיֵאֵךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בָא-שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנִתְּתָה אֶת-הַבְּרָכָה עַל-הַר גְּרִזִים וְאֶת-הַקְלָלָה עַל-הַר עֵיבָל: ל הֲלֹא-הִמָּה בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן אַחֲרֵי דָרֶךְ מְבוֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּעַרְבֵי רֶבֶה מוֹל הַגִּלְגָּל אֲצֵל אֵלוֹנֵי מֹרָה:

11:26 ‘See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 11:27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; 11:28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. 11:29 ‘It shall come about, when the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 11:30 ‘Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh? (NASB)

Reading through Moshe’s statement of the blessing and the curses, the question I have is “*have we lost a tangible aspect of the covenant today that is found within the the*

list of blessings and curses?” In Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Part 4, Part 1 (מדרש רבה) (דברים פרשה ד סימן א) the rabbis speak of the issue of dividing up the public readings with regard to the list of curses. The reference is made specifically to the section of Scripture that contain the curses that are pronounced when one chooses to disobey God’s word. The midrash states the following:

Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 4, Part 1

1. Halachah: Is it permissible to divide up the public reading of the Curses amongst several persons? Our Rabbis have learnt thus, The curses must be read without interruption, one person only reading them all. Our Rabbis have taught us, Why is it not permitted to interrupt the reading of the curses? Rabbi Hiyya son of Gamda said, Because it is written, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither spurn (takotz) you His correction (Mishley / Proverbs 3:2). This means, Do not make the Rebukes appear as if cut in pieces (kotz-in), but one person must read them all. Another explanation, Why is it not permitted to break up the reading of the curses? Rabbi Joshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbi Levi, The Holy One Blessed Be He, says, I have written concerning Myself, I will be with him in trouble (Tehillim / Psalms 41:15), it would not be fair that my children should be cursed and I be blessed. How could this come about? Should the reading of the curses be frequently interrupted then every one called to the reading would have to recite two benedictions, one before it and one after it; therefore, one only should read them all. The Rabbis say, God said, I do not give them (Israel) the Blessings and the curses for their hurt but only to show them the good way which they should choose in order to receive reward. Whence this? From what we have read in the context under comment, BEHOLD, I SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY, etc (11:26).

The main objective of this midrash is to ask the question on whether it is right to divide up the Torah reading across multiple persons with the possibility that multiple persons would read through the curses. The problem is that if this happened one would recite a blessing before and after a curses. The rabbis ask whether this would be OK to do? Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 4, Part 1 ends with God saying that He did not give the blessings and cruses for Israel’s hurt, but so that they would choose to receive reward and blessing over against the curse and destruction. The point is doing what is right is not something that just come naturally. We are to consciously choose to do what is right because we love God and the Lord gives us the strength to do just that in our daily lives. The Torah principle of doing what is right, walking in truth, and in faith, is connected to walking in the covenant as we read in this week’s portion. Righteousness, truth, and faith, according to the Scriptures, is always connected to the Lord God Almighty, the Land, the Place, and the People of God. The reason being God dwells in the midst of His people. According to the Apostolic Writings, in Yeshua the Messiah, the Lord dwells in

our midst, in our hearts, and we have that connection to the Lord being graft into Israel (*Romans 11*). But today, have we lost that tangible connection to the Land, the Place (Zion), and the People that is based upon a modern interpretation of the Bible? To help understand this question, let's look at Midrash Tehillim 48, Part 1.

Midrash Tehillim 48, Part 1 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying “*A song; a Psalm of the sons of Korach. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain (Tehillim / Psalms 48:1-2).*” The homiletic introduction (פתיחה, Petihta) to the Midrash states “*The ministering angels said, From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name will be great among the nations (Malachi 1:11)...*” Here, the Psalm speaks of the name of God being great whereas Malachi chapter 1 speaks of the disobedience of Israel. The people would take the sick and diseased, the blind and the lame animal for the sacrifice before the Lord which is in itself an act of unfaithfulness and disobedience to the command that the animals chosen for sacrifice are to be perfect and without blemish (*Shemot / Exodus 12:5, Vayikra / Leviticus 22:24, Devarim / Deuteronomy 17:1, etc*). Here Israel is described as walking in their unfaithfulness in the sacrifices, by bringing blemished animals as an offering to the Lord. Throughout the Scriptures the relationship that is described between Israel and the Lord is that of the marriage relationship. (Note that this relationship is carried forward into the NT by the apostles.) When Israel goes off to worship false gods, the relationship is spoken of as one of infidelity (e.g. *Ezekiel 16*). In most instances, the act of idolatry was considered the adulterous affair before God, e.g. the infidelity of Israel. However, when thinking on infidelity, does infidelity always necessarily refer specifically to sexual relations? The idea of infidelity is typified by the phrase: “*When the relationship has to be kept secret from your partner it is wrong. Otherwise you could bring the person in and sit them down in the living room and visit like a friend!*” A November 14, 2012 article posted on “*cnn.com*” discussed a survey regarding infidelity and what people today believe constitutes infidelity in a marriage relationship. Drawing the line at sex was actually the second most popular choice, but it only got 20% overall. The other forms of unfaithfulness involved touch like kissing (13%) and hugging (less than 1%). There were some who drew the line at flirtatious behavior (11%). A few readers stated that fantasizing was an important aspect of infidelity (8%). The overall conclusion was that the readers seemed to place a lot of power in the mental aspect of love. The point that can be taken from the survey is that infidelity comes first as a mental aspect of love and the Lord God desires that all of our mental faculties be devoted to Him. The people in the days of Malachi felt the command could be fulfilled by bringing a sacrifice but it was not done out of a love for God, and for the commandments; the sacrifices were chosen from the worst of the flock to give to God. Today do we choose from the worst of what we have to give to the Lord?

The Midrash goes on to say the following:

the sons of Korach said, Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Does this mean that our God is great only in His city? No, the sons of Korach really meant, in His sanctuary. So too, Scripture says, The Lord is great in Zion; and

He is high above all the peoples (Tehillim / Psalms 99:2) (Midrash Tehillim 48, Part 1)

The sons of Korach praise the name of the Lord and the rabbis ask whether God's name is great only in His city? Here we are drawn back to the Land, the Place, and the People in the minds of the rabbis based upon the Scriptures (the Psalm of David). The conclusion is that Korach really meant God's Sanctuary, that His name is praised in His Sanctuary. The Lord being great in Zion places Him high above all the peoples. Based upon this line of reasoning, the midrash states:

If He has done such a thing to His city, how much more will He do to the peoples of the earth, for it is said, Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city, upon which My name is called, and should you be utterly unpunished? You will not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord of hosts (Jeremiah 25:29). (Midrash Tehillim 48, Part 1)

The point is that the Lord has brought judgment down upon Jerusalem because of her infidelity, her unfaithfulness to God. The rabbis discuss the idea that if God has done such a thing to His city, how much more will He do to the peoples of the earth? The point is that those who do not believe in the God of Israel will one day be held accountable to the God of Israel by reason of His being the creator of all things. Faith can get you into right standing with the Lord, but can it keep you from His wrath if you live in open disobedience to His commands? What do the apostles have to say about this topic? The writer of Hebrews and the apostle John have the following to say:

Hebrews 10:26-31

10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 10:30 For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (NASB)

1 John 1:5-10

1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 1:7 but if we walk in the Light as He

Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (NASB)

The author of Hebrews speaks of willful sin after having received the truth. Willful sin leads to one not having atonement but only a terrifying expectation of judgment and fury with fire that consumes the adversaries as described in the Torah (e.g. Parashat Korach). He speaks of those who “*set aside the Law (Torah) of Moshe,*” and dying without mercy. The midrash states that the wicked will not go unpunished; all of the inhabitants of the earth will be accountable before the Lord. Scripture says that even we who are in Yeshua the Messiah will be accountable for what we have done. John says that if we walk in darkness, we do not practice the truth, we speak a lie. The person John is speaking of is he who says he has no sin, he do not confess his sins, and he says he walks in the light but in truth he walks in darkness. Does this fit the concept of infidelity as described in the rabbinic midrash? The concept of “*infidelity*” as described earlier, we know today that it is very easy to be unfaithful, not only to our spouses (i.e. internet, television, etc), but also to the Lord God of Heaven. Unfaithfulness can come in the form of what we do, the way we talk to people (flirtatious) what we look at (internet or TV), what we listen to, and where we consider our treasure to be (sports, house, cars, etc) in heaven or hear on earth? By these things do we trample the blood of Christ under foot by the uncleanness of our lives which have been sanctified in His blood like the author of Hebrews is saying? The Scriptures state (*Hebrews 10:30*) that the Lord says “*Vengeance is Mine,*” and this is what we are seeing in the midrash which says “*You will not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord of hosts (Jeremiah 25:29)*” The Midrash concludes saying “*And so, the sons of Korach really mean, Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, because of the city of our God, because of His holy mountain.*” Throughout the Scriptures, as well as the Psalms, we are consistently drawn back to the Land, the Place, and the People, because of the actions of the Lord to make a place for His name to reside. We see even today He is saving the Land and His People, and these things are greatly to be praised. The midrash states “*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, because of the city of our God, because of His holy mountain.*” Not just because of what He has done in the past as we read in the Torah, but also because we know that “*He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” in Yeshua the Messiah. Halleluia!

In Parashat Re’eh, the curse come by those who turn aside from the way God has commanded and the blessing comes for those who turn towards the way God commanded. As we have read, all of Scripture draws its authority from God’s Torah and ultimately we are being directed to His Messiah Yeshua. The reason God draws us back to the Land, the Place, and the People in the Scriptures is for the purpose of having good reason (the knowledge of) to give God the praises for what He has done and continues to do in our lives. It is in this way we are able to see how the Lord has worked in the past and

how he is working in our lives even today. His faithfulness is forever and now we too are to remain faithful to Him because of what He has done for us and what He continues to do daily in our lives. The importance of the Land, the Place, and the People is Historical, Prophetic, and Eschatological. We see what God has done in the past, we know what He is doing in the present, and we live with the expectation of what He is going to do in the future. Isn't that just the greatest blessing of all? Praise the Lord!