

פרשת דברים / Parashat Devarim

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Being close, being tight with HaShem that is what is most important!

השבועות הזה קוראים / This Week's Reading

תורה: Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22
הפטרה: Isaiah 1:1-1:27
הברית: Acts 9:1-21; 1 Timothy 3:1-7
החדשה

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In the beginning of Sefer Devarim (book of Deuteronomy) it appears Moshe is simply retelling how Beni Yisrael (The children of Israel) left the mountain of Sinai by giving us a little review of what happened during the journey in the desert. However, while including some details, Moshe has left out other important components which should draw our attention to the text. To see this we need to understand the context, the setting for the beginning of Sefer Devarim. Prior to Sefer Devarim what is happening? Beni Yisrael was supposed to go directly from the mountain of Sinai to the Promised Land; however it is now 40 years later. While Moshe explains the journey he also explains his burden of leadership and how HaShem commanded him to share his leadership with the seventy elders (*Bamidbar / Numbers 11:16-29*) and in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:12-18* Moshe explains how his burden of leadership was alleviated by the appointment of judges in a hierarchal system. (i.e. Moshe had chosen the heads of the tribes, men who were wise and experienced to be heads over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens) Furthermore, Moshe explained the importance of leadership by listing a few problems/temptations that might arise after this system of judges is established. Moshe points out specifically problems with partiality in judgment. Another interesting bit of information Moshe gives occurs when he mentions the judgments or rulings these men make are synonymous to that of G-d's judgment in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17*.

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This leads me to ask the following questions:

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1. What is the real message Moshe is trying to give to Beni Yisrael and to us?
2. Why does Moshe mention the leadership role including some example potential problems/temptations that might occur relating to partiality?
3. Is there a connection between judging in impartiality, leadership, and our relationship with Hashem?
4. How could ones judgment be synonymous to that of HaShem's?

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The reason why I chose the title for this week's portion "Being close, being tight with HaShem that is what is most important" is because I believe Moshe is trying to tell us something here that has an application for all of our lives. Let's look at the scriptures in question:

דברים 1:12-18

12 אַתֶּם כְּאִשֶּׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם: אֵיכָה אֲשֶׁא לְבָדִי טַרְחָכֶם וּמִשְׁאָכֶם
 13 וְרִיבֵכֶם: הֲבֵנוּ לָכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְנִבְנִים וְיֹדְעִים לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם
 14 וְאֲשִׁימָם בְּרָאשֵׁיכֶם: וְתַעֲנוּ אֵתִי וְתֹאמְרוּ טוֹב הַדְּבַר אֲשֶׁר־
 15 דִּבַּרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: וְאָקַח אֶת־רָאשֵׁי שִׁבְטֵיכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים
 וְיֹדְעִים וְאֵתֵן אוֹתָם רֹאשִׁים עֲלֵיכֶם שְׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשְׂרֵי מֵאוֹת
 16 וְשְׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשְׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת וְשֹׁטְרִים לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם: וְאַצְוָה אֶת־
 שְׂפִטֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר שִׁמְעוּ בֵּין־אֲחֵיכֶם וּשְׁפִטְתֶם צֶדֶק
 17 בֵּין־אִישׁ וּבֵין־אָחִיו וּבֵין גֵּרוֹ: לֹא־תִכְבִּירוּ פָּנִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט כַּקָּמָן
 כַּגְּדֹל תִּשְׁמְעוּן לֹא תִגְוְרוּ מִפְּנֵי־אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לֵאלֹהִים
 18 הוּא וְדַבַּר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי וּשְׁמַעְתִּנוּ: וְאַצְוָה
 19 אַתֶּם בְּעֵת הַהוּא אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂוּן: וְנִסַּע מִחֵרֶב

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As you know leadership roles are not easy, Moshe chose men of wisdom and intelligence, people who were capable of judging between two men. The example of impartiality illustrates the importance of having the right heart, specifically because the judgment the leader was supposed to be giving is G-d's judgment. Forty years ago the leaders did not have a heart for HaShem, one that trusts, and relies upon the Lord for their deliverance. As a result G-d caused the people to wander in the desert forty years until all of the ungodly men/leaders died.

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Whether you believe it or not, we are all in leadership positions. It doesn't matter who you are, you have a ministry to your friends, your family, or to an entire congregation of people. Moshe is making a point on the importance of a leader to have wisdom and knowledge which I believe is related to studying the word of G-d. How do I know this? Look at the lives of the great men and leaders throughout the Holy Scriptures.

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All of the great men in the Tanach (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) and the Ketuvei Shelachim (Apostolic writings) we find a common theme to all. The great leaders in the Tanach (i.e. Avraham, Moshe, David, etc) each had a life that was characterized by one that is centered on faith and HaShem's Torah.

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A life centered on Torah

Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:12-18

1:12 'How can I alone bear the load and burden of you and your strife? 1:13 'Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.' 1:14 'You answered me and said, 'The thing which you have said to do is good.' 1:15 'So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes. 1:16 'Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. 1:17 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' 1:18 'I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do. NASB

75 To illustrate this I would like to look at the life of one of the great men found in the scriptures. One such great leader that is found in the Tanach who is not mentioned so often is the priest Ezra. In 495 BCE Ezra the sofer (סופר, scribe) led the second body of exiles that returned from Babylon to Yisrael. What little information we do know about Ezra is found in the last four chapters of sefer Ezra (עזרא). The priest Ezra was a man whose life provides for us a model of godly leadership to a people who were desperately in need of G-d's word. When Ezra the priest returned and the people gathered themselves together both Ezra and Nehemiah the prophet called for a renewed covenant one in which involves understanding G-d's will lived out in practical ways. This becomes obvious when we look closely at the Hebrew verb tense, specifically, the infinitive construct.

80 In Hebrew, there are two infinitive forms, the infinitive construct and the infinitive absolute. Infinitives are verbal nouns and as such have features that are in common with both verbs and nouns. The infinitive construct can function like the English infinitive, which is commonly translated with the preposition "to" plus a verb as in "to study" or "to learn." Thus, the infinitive construct with a preposition is generally used to express purpose or result. The infinitive construct which the preposition ל (lamed) often compliments the main verb by expressing the purpose, goal, or result to which the main verb points.

95 In *Ezra 7:10*, there are three Infinitive construct forms that are used in this way in a verse that highlights Ezra's personal commitments and gives us a picture of leadership.

עזרא 7:6-11

6 הָרֹאשׁ: הוּא עֲזָרָא עֲלֵהּ מִבָּבֶל וְהוּא סוֹפֵר מְהִיר בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה
 אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן־לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּיַד־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו
 7 עָלָיו כָּל בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ: וַיַּעַל מִבְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִן־
 הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְהַמְשַׁרְרִים וְהַשְׁעָרִים וְהַנְּתִינִים אֶל־יְרוּשָׁלַם
 8 בְּשַׁנַּת־שִׁבְעַ לְאַרְתַּחְשַׁסְתָּא הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיָּבֹא יְרוּשָׁלַם בַּחֹדֶשׁ
 9 הַחֲמִישִׁי הִיא שְׁנַת הַשְּׁבִיעִית לַמֶּלֶךְ: כִּי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הָרֹאשִׁין
 הוּא יוֹסֵד הַמַּעֲלָה מִבָּבֶל וּבְאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי בָּא אֶל־
 10 יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּיַד־אֱלֹהָיו הַטּוֹבָה עָלָיו: כִּי עֲזָרָא הָכִין לִכְבוֹ לְדַרְוֹשׁ
 אֶת־תּוֹרַת יְהוָה וּלְעֲשׂוֹת לְלַמֵּד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חֶק וּמוֹשֶׁפֶט:
 11 וְהוּא פָּרְשָׁן הַנְּשִׁתּוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶרְתַּחְשַׁסְתָּא
 לְעֲזָרָא הָכִין הַסֵּפֶר סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי מַעֲוֵת יְהוָה וְחֻקָּיו עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Ezra 7:6-11

7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. 7:7 Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 7:8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 7:9 For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. 7:11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the Lord and His statutes to Israel: NASB

100 Up until this point in the book of Ezra the narrator has already introduced Ezra as a minister with the right degree or qualifications (See 7:1-5) and the right professional abilities being a סופר (sofer, scribe) skilled in the Torah of Moshe

Infinitive constructs

(see 7:6 and 7:11). Notice also Ezra's every request was granted him by the Persian king and his ministry flourished "because of the hand of Adonai his G-d was on him" (see 7:6,9). *Ezra 7:10* provides the reason for this divine favor.

English: "*For Ezra set his heart to study the Torah of Adonai, and to practice (it), and to teach (its) statutes and ordinances in Yisrael.*"

Here we find the main verb הכין (to set, establish) note this is in the Hiphil perfect 3ms of כון. This is followed by three infinitive constructs with the preposition ל (lamed) (i.e. לדרוש, לעשת, ללמד) each of which clarifies the purpose to which Ezra committed himself:

Study → Practice → Teach

ללמד → לעשת → לדרוש

This progression of action, grounded in G-d's word, characterized Ezra's life and ministry. Do you think it would be perhaps wise to follow his example? Note that sound study of the Scriptures must give rise to personal practice. Only then can we have a basis for effective teaching. How are you personally practicing the scriptures?

Have you ever noticed how preachers and teachers begin to lose the centrality of the Word in their ministry or confuse the order of Ezra's resolve? Some focus on teaching techniques at the expense of quality time in the word, thus substituting the shape of the message for its essence. Others are quick to proclaim G-d's truth but are slow to apply it to their own lives resulting in hypocritical leaders who have forgotten that only the pure in heart will see G-d (See *Matthew 5:8; Psalms 24:3-5*). Still others apply before having studied, allowing their own definitions of right and wrong to guide conduct rather than the revealed divine will in the scriptures.

Psalms 24:3-5

24:3 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? 24:4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. 24:5 He shall receive a blessing from the Lord And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Matthew 5:8

5:8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Ezra was serious about understanding G-d's word, applying it and proclaiming it. It is this exact order we must take in our own personal testimony and ministry before G-d.

Conclusion

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This personal commitment generated a ministry blessed by G-d. We would do well to follow the pattern of Ezra today. Yeshua knew this and taught us the same... lets part with a final thought in what Ezra says about all of this ...

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Ezra 8:22

The hand of our G-d works for good on all who seek him, but his powerful wrath is against all who forsake him.

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So where do you stand in that equation?

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The reason Moshe listed the creation of leadership was to demonstrate the importance of our roles as leaders. In addition to leading, guiding, and expounding upon the scriptures we absolutely have to protect our hearts, and the only way to do that is to be close to HaShem, to be tight with HaShem as leaders. This comes by Ezra’s example to study, practice, and then teach the scriptures.

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To all of you out there in leadership, I encourage you to stand firm in the midst of the troubles haSatan tries to throw your way ... for greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

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1 John 4:4

4:4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

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Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,

“Yeshua” King Messiah forever and ever

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