

TORAHSCOPE: Ki Tisa (When you take)

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Exodus 30:11-34:35
1 Kings 18:1-39

"Compassion Personified"

"Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations'" (Exodus 34:6-7).

This week's Torah portion is entitled *Ki Tisa*, and we see that the Israelites continue to receive instruction from God via Moses, who continues to remain on Mount Sinai. For the past two weeks in *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, we have seen much instruction regarding the Tabernacle service and how offerings were to be collected for its construction. Now, additional instructions are given, including taking a census, a laver for proper cleansing at the Tent of Meeting, prescriptions for the anointing oil, and the ingredients for the holy incense. After this, Moses is given directives about those who have been specifically anointed with the Spirit of God in wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and the required workmanship to construct the Ark of the Covenant and all of the related implements. The also Lord reminds Moses of the requirements established regarding the Sabbath. This special weekly day of rest was to be set aside as a unique "sign" between Israel and God, designating them as His chosen people for His own possession.

As Moses is handed the two tablets of stone that have been inscribed by the very finger of God, he begins to make his descent toward the people of Israel, who are impatiently waiting below. Apparently, the forty-day period he was on the mountain was too long for them to wait. In the interim, they had lost faith in God and in Moses' ability to return from Mount Sinai:

"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'" (Exodus 32:1).

Amazingly, within less than forty days, the Israelites depart worship of the Lord and pressure Aaron to make a god for them to worship. With the offerings of gold rings and earrings by the people, Aaron himself fashions a golden calf and proclaims a feast unto this golden idol:

"He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the LORD'" (Exodus 32:4-5).

As this rebellion erupts, God is incensed with the actions of His chosen people, and He responds by stating that He is ready to destroy all of them and start over with the offspring of Moses:

"The LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation'" (Exodus 32:9-10).

At this point, we get a glimpse into the heart of Moses, who beseeches God to remember His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through interrogative questions. In an interesting statement by the Lord, it is recorded that He "repented" or changed his mind about what He wanted to do to the Israelites:

"Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?' Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your

descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.” So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Exodus 32:12-14).

The Hebrew verb *nacham* (נָחַם), appearing in the Nifal stem (simple action, passive voice), means “*be sorry, rue, suffer grief, repent*” or “*comfort oneself, be comforted*” (BDB).¹ The LXX renders this with the Greek verb *hilaskomai* (ἱλάσκομαι), meaning, “*to make him propitious to one, conciliate him, win his favour*” (LS).² This one statement by the Lord establishes the major theme for the remainder of this Torah portion. The Lord God of Creation is compassionate when we entreat Him. Some commentators have observed that one of the primary reasons that God even created the universe, Earth, and humanity was to display His attributes that center on compassion.

The Golden Calf Incident

As the text continues, Moses receives the concession and continues down the mountain. With Joshua, he finds Aaron and the remaining Israelites in idolatrous revelry. The scene is too much to bear, and in his anger Moses breaks the two tablets of the Ten Commandments that God gave him as he approaches the golden calf. Moses shoves the idol in the fire and reduces it to ashes. He takes those ashes and mixes them with water, forcing the revelers to drink its bitter mixture. At this point, after Aaron’s poor justification that the golden calf just “made itself” in the fire, the indignant Moses declares that all those true to the God of Israel must join to him:

“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.”’ So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day” (Exodus 32:26-28).

The drama of the moment subsides as the Levites go through the crowd, and as stated, slay three thousand people who were participating in the riotous festival. Then, Moses intercedes for the people with one of the most self-sacrificial offers that is ever recorded in the Scriptures. He unabashedly offers his own life for the lives of the Israelites. He is even willing to have his name erased from the book of life:

“But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (Exodus 32:32).

Moses completely understands his role as intercessor and mediator between God and Israel.

Face to Face

Now as the days proceed, Moses enters the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord “face to face.” The Israelites begin to respect Moses, because as he departs for the Tent of Meeting, the people stand at their tents and watch him enter in. As they watch the pillar of cloud descend upon the gathering place, the people arise and begin to worship the Lord at the opening to their own tents. We are then told that Moses spoke with the Lord “face to face,” as a man speaks with his friend (Exodus 33:7-11).

A very interesting request from Moses is recorded. While interceding for the people, Moses expresses a great desire to get to know the Almighty on a much deeper level:

“Then Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, You say to me, “Bring up this people!” But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, “I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.” Now therefore, I pray You, if I

¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 637.

² H.G. Lidell, and R. Scott. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 379.

have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people” (Exodus 33:12-13).

Moses now pleads that God will reveal His ways to him in order for Moses to really know Him and find favor in His sight. This plea of Moses is reminiscent of what the Apostle Paul declares to the Philippians regarding a Believer getting to know Yeshua intimately as Lord:

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:7-11).

Of course, this heartfelt request of Paul comes after he has listed all of his worldly accomplishments and personal passion for the Lord. He realized, just like Moses centuries earlier, that getting to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is really what life is all about. Whether you are concentrating on the Father or the Son, the bottom line is that one must pursue an understanding of Him with all of the heart, mind, soul, and strength.

At this point, the Holy One makes a promise to Moses about revealing Himself and shows Moses His glory:

“Then Moses said, ‘I pray You, show me Your glory!’ And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.’ But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’ Then the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:18-23).

As you read these words, the Lord clearly states, “You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live” (ATS). This categorical statement is very definite. Unholy man cannot look upon the holiness of God and survive. Sinful flesh cannot bear to view the awesomeness of pure holiness. Moses, however, was allowed to see the back of God and His glory as He passed by. Throughout the Scriptures we are encouraged to “seek the face” of God. But since this statement is so definite, in our mind’s eye when we consider who we are seeking, it is probably better to visualize seeking His presence or His favor or His compassion. This is because God, and God alone, will be gracious to whom He desires, and He alone will show compassion on whom He desires.

A Second Chance

As we come to the focal point of this section, we find that the Holy One has chosen Moses and the Israelites to extend His compassion to. After He has changed His mind about destroying them and has revealed His glory to Moses, He commands Moses to hew out two more tablets of stone to replace the two that were broken in anger over the discovery of idolatry in the camp. In an answer to Moses’ petition, the Lord comes down to meet Moses and utters some profound words that describe His Divine characteristics:

“Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 34:6-7).

These attributes describe a Creator who is full of great compassion, longsuffering, and faithfulness toward His chosen people. In His self-description, we find a God whose character is

beyond our sinful imagination to comprehend. These are characteristics, because God is infinitely perfect, that He will always exemplify toward men and women of any generation. They are not just “New Testament” concepts, as many people may falsely think—but are demonstrated time and time again in the “Old Testament.”

The Revealed Plan

While meditating upon the powerful description of the compassionate Creator, the necessity He required of Himself to become a sacrifice for the sin of humanity came into focus for me. After all, by His nature, God is required to provide a solution to the problem that is inherent in the fallen Creation. Because God is compassionate, He had to devise a plan which would exemplify this attribute for eternity.

Over the years, God has sent prophet after prophet to help point His people back to Himself and to His ways. But many were stiffnecked and rejected His warnings, so the Lord was forced to judge them. God was forced to judge Israel in ancient times by sending them into exile, because they failed to repent of their idolatry and obey Him:

“Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets *and* every seer, saying, ‘Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.’ However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and *went* after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, *even* two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced. The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight” (2 Kings 17:13-20).

As you can read, warnings have come and judgments have been executed as a result of disobedience. God is not hiding His will for His people. He has been very open to discuss all of the existing problems, the solutions, ramifications of disobedience, and blessings of obedience. These truths are not buried in some remote writings of the Minor Prophets. Ever since the days of Adam, as the judgments and prophecies have come forth, faithful followers of the Lord have recorded them for their descendants to hear and obey. But the problem is this: even Israel, the people chosen to be a special possession of the Father, is reluctant to obey the Word and follow His guidelines.

Today, even when we as children of God have the indwelling presence of the Ruach HaKodesh, the ability to obey is still imperfect. We are still humans, flawed with the propensity of the flesh, and we struggle to relinquish our wills so that the will of the Father might be accomplished in our lives. How tragic and yet how true that we are still plagued with the issues of sin!

But of course, the Holy One has told us that there is a solution. Through the Prophet Hosea, the Lord summarizes the ultimate solution that is coming. Hosea tells Israel that they need to seek the face of the Lord. As you read what he declared for ancient times, you should understand that seeking God’s presence and His blessings are indeed requirements for the restoration being accomplished in our day:

“Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment applies to you, for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread out on Tabor. The revolvers have gone deep in depravity, but I will chastise all of them. I know Ephraim, and Israel is

not hidden from Me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel has defiled itself. Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the LORD. Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him, and Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also has stumbled with them. They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find *Him*; He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt treacherously against the LORD, for they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon will devour them with their land. Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: 'Behind you, Benjamin!' Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure. The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary; on them I will pour out My wrath like water. Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to follow *man's* command. Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim and like rotteness to the house of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, or to cure you of your wound. For I *will be* like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. I will go away *and* return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud and like the dew which goes away early" (Hosea 5:1-6:4).

Here, the Prophet Hosea declares how all Israel was judged for its idolatry and failure to obey Him. And yet, because God is compassionate and is a keeper of the covenants He made to His people, eventually there will be a time when complete corporate restoration and reconciliation is accomplished. Here, we read that the Lord will go away and essentially turn his back on the people of Israel. But in time they will corporately acknowledge their guilt and seek His face. It is through the affliction of not having the right relationship with God that people will confess their guilt and seek His face and return to Him.

Interestingly, these passages from Hosea point to some prophecies that are very applicable today. Here, Hosea puts a "time stamp" on the inevitable restoration:

"Come, let us turn back to the LORD: He attacked, and He can heal us; He wounded, and He can bind us up. In two days He will make us whole again; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall be whole by His favor. Let us pursue obedience to the LORD, and we shall become obedient. His appearance is as sure as daybreak, and He will come to us like rain, like latter rain that refreshes the earth" (Hosea 6:1-3, NJPS).

The return to the Lord will occur after a season of mourning followed by healing, and a season of wounding followed by bandaging.

The Compassion of the Cross

God's compassion toward us is absolutely epitomized by the sacrificial death of the Messiah Yeshua, paying the required penalty for the sin of humanity. Of course, Isaiah and many of the other Prophets throughout the centuries predicted that death. The problem is that most hearing did not believe the report. But the facts were already a part of the declarations made about the need for a sacrifice:

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him

stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Isaiah 53:1-5).

The Psalmist also reminds us that it is impossible for a man to redeem another man. Only God Himself can provide the ransom required for redemption:

“No man can by any means redeem *his* brother or give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease *trying* forever—that he should live on eternally, that he should not undergo decay” (Psalm 49:7-9).

God Himself had to offer Himself to redeem mankind. Because of His compassionate nature, He did just that in the person of Messiah Yeshua. This is an awesome thing to consider. As we get to know Him more, we realize just what a sacrificial heart He has for His Creation.

The Prophet Micah summarizes in similar terms the revelation that Moses gives in this week’s Torah portion. Micah was also a prophet who understood the compassion of God. At the very end of his prophecies he makes the following declaration:

“Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sin from to the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob *and* unchanging love to Abraham, which You swore to our forefathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

Micah states that God will not retain His anger forever because of His attribute of “unchanging love.” The Lord will have compassion on us and forgive us for our iniquities and sins, casting them in the depths of the sea. In other words, the covenants that were established with the forefathers, including the one with Moses, will be maintained.

What a gracious God we honor, worship, and glorify! May His love for us become a part of who we are as we continue to get to know Him. Ultimately, we can understand that His compassion was personified in the glorious work accomplished by Yeshua on the cross at Golgotha (Calvary). The ability of God to continue to demonstrate love and compassion toward us is unfathomable by the human mind, as observed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans:

“For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:30-36).

We cannot fully understand what true godly compassion is. It is beyond our human ability to fathom. We need to simply be thankful that through God’s compassion personified in His Son Yeshua, through faith we can get a glimpse of who the Father truly is and by His grace continue to seek Him. We need to demonstrate that love and compassion to others, and by loving them, hopefully the Lord will allow us to be used to draw others unto Him.

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