

TORAHSCOPE: Tzav (Command)

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Leviticus 6:1[8]-8:36
Jeremiah 7:21-8:3; 9:22-23(23-24)

“Kindness, Justice, Righteousness”

“This is that which is consecrated to Aaron and that which is consecrated to his sons from the offerings by fire to the LORD, in that day when he presented them to serve as priests to the LORD. These the LORD had commanded to be given them from the sons of Israel in the day that He anointed them. It is *their due forever throughout their generations*” (Leviticus 7:35-36).

This week, the Torah portion *Tzav* is typically contemplated before the observance of Passover. In Judaism, the Rabbis have historically designated this *Shabbat* as *Shabbat HaGadol* or the “Great Sabbath.” The timing of these words in the portion, or even the word *Tzav* or “Command” for reflection, is not by chance. After all, the Holy One, through the agency of men over the centuries, has consistently accomplished His will via the Rabbi’s means of preparing the hearts of His people for obedience to His commands, and has proven successful.

If you will recall over the past six Sabbaths, some other special designations have been observed to prepare the hearts of God’s people to seriously consider honoring the appointed time known as *Pesach* or Passover. These include: *Shabbat Shekalim*, *Shabbat Zachor*, *Shabbat Parah*, and *Shabbat HaKodesh*. Consequently, for those who have been faithfully studying the Torah on the Rabbinical calendar, the preparation for the fulfillment of the command to observe or remember the Passover has been building to the crescendo of this final *Shabbat* before Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commences on the 14th of Nisan.

One final exhortation is made on the *Shabbat* preceding Passover to encourage Israel to willfully choose to participate in the coming festival. Providentially, our text just happens to begin and close with a reminder that the God of Israel is a Creator who has made certain commandments that He expects His people to obey:

“Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses” (Leviticus 8:36).

The bookends of this Torah portion allow the student to reflect on the Hebrew terminology that is used to name this *parashah*. The final verse of this Torah portion employs *tzivah* (צִוָּה) for “had commanded.” Without hesitation, those who take the commands of the Lord seriously are preparing their hearts for the Feast of Unleavened Bread that commences this coming week.

This is an intriguing backdrop to consider when we turn to *Tzav* for consideration and reflection this week, especially when the opening directive from the Lord to Moses is “Give Aaron and his sons this command” (NIV):

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘**Command Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the law for the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it”**’” (Leviticus 6:9).

While reading about the different offerings “commanded,” and the variety of procedures in this Torah portion, you might conclude that God was very specific about the burnt offering, the grain offering, the purification offering, the reparation offering, the sacrifice of well-being, the thanksgiving offering, and the freewill offering. Then after detailing all of the offerings, ch. 8 describes the command to anoint Aaron and his sons. The specifics are recorded, and for the first time in the history of Israel, the physical representation of the high priest and the attendant priests are consecrated for service unto God and the Israelites. The portion closes with the final command that seems to punctuate this selection of teaching in Leviticus chs. 6-8:

“Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses” (Leviticus 8:36).

For centuries, the Israelites attempted to follow these commands with varying degrees of zeal and accuracy. As the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, and altars finally migrated through the wilderness, the period of the Judges onto Shiloh, to ultimately rest on Mount Moriah (Deuteronomy 12:11; 1 Kings 8:29; Ezra 6:12; Nehemiah 1:9), a magnificent Temple under the direction of King Solomon was constructed. Thereafter, the Israelites had a more permanent place to bring their respective offerings. But apparently by the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, the intentions of the offerings had digressed to various perversions that were rampant among the people. If you take the time to read the context of the coupled Haftarah reading (Jeremiah 7:21-8:3; 9:22-24), you should be appalled by the declension to idolatry, theft, murder, adultery, and even child sacrifice. Jeremiah even prophecies that the Temple will end up like Shiloh and that Judah will be scattered just like the Northern Kingdom exiles had been two centuries earlier:

“And now, because you have done all these things,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer, therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim” (Jeremiah 7:13-15).

Jeremiah makes the following opening remarks from this week’s Haftarah selection:

“For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you” (Jeremiah 7:22-23).

Here, Jeremiah refutes the commands as recorded in Leviticus 6-8. Is this a contradiction of the Torah, or does Jeremiah have a deeper understanding? What Jeremiah says is that God is most concerned that the people “obey His voice”! In so doing, then they will have the Lord as their God, be His people, and walk in all the ways which have been commanded. He says that God is more concerned with a personal obedience from an individual than a potentially meaningless corporate offering.

By the time you read through this passage, and realize that the sins are so abominable to the point of child sacrifice, you might become thoroughly confused and alarmed by the contradictions and the prophecies that followed the incongruity. These prophetic utterances indicate a violent destruction of great parts of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and even the beloved city of Jerusalem. The final verse of this passage sums up the results of disobedience:

“And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family, that remains in all the places to which I have driven them,’ declares the LORD of hosts” (Jeremiah 8:3).

Those of the Southern Kingdom will largely chose death rather than life, even in the places where they are scattered. The concluding remarks are so disturbing that the Jewish Sages decided to add a few verses from Jeremiah 9 in order to allow the tradition of giving hope to the reader so that the study may end positively:

“Speak, “Thus says the LORD, ‘The corpses of men will fall like dung on the open field, and like the sheaf after the reaper, but no one will gather *them*.” Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD’ (Jeremiah 9:22-24).

While reading these final verses of the Haftarah portion, the redundant nature of the various offerings described in *Tzav* can appear hollow, despite their meaningful and specific instructions, especially in light of the ultimate sacrifice performed by the Messiah Yeshua at Golgotha (Calvary). Quite frankly, in lieu of our modern era, I personally found that it was much easier to identify with Jeremiah’s statements than the intricacies of the various sacrifices. Jeremiah was speaking to a religious and secular audience that is very similar to the one we cohabit with in our current generation.

Today, we have individuals who pontificate about the wisdom they have received from God. They oftentimes use their God-given intellect, knowledge, and understanding to dominate less-gifted individuals with their self-proclaimed “wisdom from God.” In this passage, it is very obvious from the statement from Jeremiah that any wisdom will be evident without any boasting. Anyone who does have wisdom from God should take some instruction from James the Just as he deals extensively with wisdom in his epistle, even encouraging his brethren to ask for more wisdom at the beginning of his exhortation:

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

Further on in his letter, James writes more about the benefits of wisdom:

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.** And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, ‘**GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**’ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you**” (James 3:13-4:10).

Clearly from the comments of James, Divine wisdom should naturally develop a sincere humility toward God. After all, who cannot appreciate the statement that “the more one learns about God, the more a person realizes that he or she does not know!” If nothing else, knowing that you are just scratching the surface in your knowledge of the Creator should humble everyone.

Jeremiah mentions that the “mighty man should not boast in his might” (Jeremiah 9:23). This should be self-explanatory to all who realize that their very breath is under the control of the Sovereign Creator. Even the revered Moses in his psalm points out that our days are numbered, so that we should count them in order to present a “heart of wisdom” to our Heavenly Father:

“Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? **So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom**” (Psalm 90:11-12).

Isaiah prophesies that our strength must be in God. Yeshua realized this during His Earthly life as He called out to His Father for strength and guidance. In turn, it is through our knowledge of where our strength is that will make us “a light unto the nations” pointing all to the One True God:

“‘He said to Me, You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I will show My glory.’ But I said, ‘I have toiled in vain, **I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity**; yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the LORD, and My reward with My God.’ And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (**For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength**), He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the

preserved ones of Israel; **I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth**” (Isaiah 49:3-6).

Finally, Jeremiah states that the rich man should not boast in his riches. Again, this is evident with many references that describe the fleeting nature of wealth. Even Yeshua had some terse words for the person who was anxious to build some more barns to store his grain:

“Then He said to them, **‘Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.’** And He told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.” But God said to him, **‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’** So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:15-21).

James warns businessmen about the frailty of life and the thought of gaining riches:

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in **business and make a profit.**’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. **You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.** Instead, *you ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil (James 3:13-16).

While contemplating these and other examples, perhaps the most outstanding verse to meditate upon in this selection from Jeremiah, is the last verse of Jeremiah’s conclusion that summarizes what delights the Holy One of Israel:

“But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:24).

If one is to boast, then he or she should boast in a personal knowledge and understanding of the Lord. Consequently in knowing Him, a person should understand that the Lord is the One who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness. It is these three attributes that summarize the infinite love that our Creator has for His creatures. **When you take the time to review these awesome attributes, you will discover that when we mirror these attributes, we are a delight to Him.**

While meditating upon these character traits, it was difficult to not consider a statement made by the Messiah Yeshua to some of the religious leaders of His day who challenged His perspective on representing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By the time He reiterates some of the thoughts of Jeremiah, He was thoroughly admonishing these people for their hypocrisy:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23-24).

Here in a rewording of what Jeremiah says is a delight to the Almighty, Yeshua makes it understood that obeying the Torah will reflect the attributes of our Heavenly Father. These “weightier matters” are what we should all be seeking to walk out in our own personal maturation process. We should be asking ourselves whether we are extending justice to those who need it. Are we showing mercy and lovingkindness to those who need it just like we all do? How about faith and how it relates to righteousness? Is it not by faith that we are considered righteous?

“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

What is our faith focused upon? Is it upon the variety of offerings that we read about in *Tzav* this week? Or is it faith in the work of the Messiah Yeshua at Golgotha—that is typified by those offerings? The Apostle Paul clarifies the difference in his often-misunderstood letter to the Galatians:

“Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.’ Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’—in order that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:11-14).

The Apostles teach us that Yeshua the Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the Torah, which is eternal separation from God when we disobey Him. This is why we must exhibit an “active faith” in His atoning work that is required in order to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

James the Just addresses the connection between true faith and its fruit that is evidenced in works. But keep in mind that these works are primarily works of grace and mercy that come from a person who has been perfected by the Holy Spirit:

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. But someone may *well* say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? **You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;** and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,’ and he was called the friend of God. **You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.** In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead**” (James 2:17-26).

If you have become a willing vessel for the Spirit of God to use for His good pleasure, then by faith you should be submitting to His will for your life and allowing Him to operate through you. As a result, the good works that He has prepared for you to walk in will be evident:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Additionally, it is critical that we diligently hearken to His voice when His indwelling Spirit takes up residence in our hearts. Jeremiah implores his listeners to listen to the voice of God in order to understand and know Him. Thankfully, we can recall that our Messiah Yeshua affirms the reality that redeemed, Spirit-filled Believers will hear the voice of God because “**He knows them.**” In fact, Yeshua was almost stoned for His description of how His sheep or His faithful followers “hear His voice,” which is, in no uncertain terms, the voice of God:

“The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’ Yeshua answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; **the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me.** But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;** and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’ **The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him**” (John 10:24-31).

Our challenge, as we deal with the controversial issues of the day, is to cry out for wisdom and for a heart that listens more intently to His voice. In so doing, I believe He will conform us to His image over time, and in that process, allow each of us to extend lovingkindness, justice, equity, and true righteousness as we yield to His work. Offering ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2) for His righteousness is better than all the sacrifices listed in *Tzav* that we could make!

However, there are some “offerings” that the faithful can bring to the altar and the Holy of Holies. These are the intercessory prayers of the saints for Israelis living in the Land of Israel and abroad, as well as the Messianic community as it struggles to be salt and light in this perverse generation, and most especially as it struggles toward perfection. These prayers can be offered as the Spirit leads us individually and collectively. As we listen intently to His voice, He will instruct us in all things, but do not be surprised if your pleadings turn to groans or even cries as the Apostle Paul writes:

“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, **having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves**, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. **In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words**; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose*” (Romans 8:22-28).

Do you now understand why Jeremiah is often known as “the Weeping Prophet”? From the revelation he received, and the Voice that he heard, he knew that the judgment of God was coming in just a matter of time to the rebellious Southern Kingdom. In a like manner, as we study the Scriptures understanding the ways of the Lord, while coming to know Him more fully, I pray that as we learn to listen to His voice, **we also know that judgment is coming to our modern world—because His righteousness requires it.**

Our problem is that, by His grace, we do not know when the judgment or the Day of the LORD will erupt in its fullness (Jeremiah 25:31; Acts 17:31; Revelation 14:7). **But we do know that He delights in our “God-emulating” acts of lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness.** May these commanded attributes be evident in our actions that every one of us can exercise by faith, as we hearken to His voice!

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

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