

BECHUKOTAI { בְּחֻקֹּתַי } (In My Statutes)

Leviticus 26:3-27:34; Jeremiah 16:19-17:14, Matthew 21:33-46

A Messianic Jewish Commentary
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The Flight of the Prisoners (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](http://www.voiceforisrael.net))

The parashah (weekly scripture reading) for this Shabbat is called ‘Bechukotai (In My statutes/decrees) from the opening line, **“If you walk in My statutes (בְּחֻקֹּתַי), and keep My commandments, and do them; then...”** (Leviticus 26:3)

In this concluding portion of the book of Leviticus, God gives several promises to the people of Israel: rain, fruitfulness, peace, prosperity and security (safety); as well as victory over their enemies.

These promises, however, are conditional upon the people’s obedience. ‘If’ is a tiny word but its significance in our lives is immense. **“If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them; then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.”** (Leviticus 26:3)

We sometimes take God’s promises as gospel truth and perhaps feel disappointed if we don’t see them coming to pass in our lives, but have we considered the ‘ifs’.....and the ‘thens...’ ?

Blessings and Curses

God promises a blessing upon the people if they obey His commandments in the Torah; but warns of punishment, persecutions and even exile for disobedience to His commands.

“Im bechukotai teileichu-if you will go in My ordinances... I shall grant your rains in their proper season...” (Leviticus 26:3-4)

We must keep in mind that God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men but only when it is absolutely necessary to get our attention, see the error of our ways and put our feet back on the right path.

“For if He causes grief, then He will have compassion. According to His abundant lovingkindness. For he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”
(Lamentations 3:32-33)

The first of God’s promises is of rain in season, which produces fruitfulness. Rain is such a blessing in this dry and thirsty land that received virtually no rain all summer; however rain out of season call spell disaster. In 2001, the Sea of Galilee was at a dangerously low water level and Israel desperately needed water; but because of the lateness of the rains, they actually caused more destruction to the crops than good.



City of Tiberius & Sea of Galilee

Lack of rain which produces drought is also disastrous. In 2008, we read a sad announcement in the news that Israel would not be watering their fruit trees. Due to the lack of rain; many acres of fruit trees were expected to simply die of thirst.

In the previous parashah, B’har, we discussed the laws of sabbatical for the land (Shmittah). That year (2008) happened to be a Shmittah year for Israel so all agricultural activity should have ceased according to God’s commandments; but many farmers continued to plant, plow, and harvest crops through a kind of religious legal loophole.

The Jewish landowners are allowed to “sell” their land to a Gentile and therefore continue to work the land during the shmittah year so as not to lose money. According to Rabbinic man-made rulings, the fruits and vegetables are then considered ‘kosher’ - but God is not fooled by this religious nonsense (shtuyot in Hebrew).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, which the people of Israel entered into willingly, and to which they still profess to adhere, God promised Israel blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Because the people of Israel refused to give the Land its required rest on the seventh year, God brought the land into desolation to make up for the years that it was denied its rest.

“The land will be paid its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it.”(Leviticus 26:34-35)

I am thinking of all the people (and I admit to including myself in this unfortunate category occasionally) who refuse to give their body its sufficient rest period. God has given us the Sabbath every seventh day to simply rest and recuperate from all the busyness of the weekdays. But we keep violating the boundaries: something just seems too irresistible to miss, or one of our children has an activity that seem so delightful that, o.k., we agree to drive them here or there ‘just this once’.

And some people completely disregard God’s commandment to keep a Sabbath rest whatsoever considering this law some kind of outdated ‘Old Testament legalism’. And then we wonder why we burn out - why we have fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome! Perhaps this is God’s way of ‘*making us*’ to lie down in green pastures¹; perhaps our bodies are being paid their Sabbaths that we have denied them for far too long.

Sowing Seed in Vain

“You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it.” (Leviticus 26:16)

One of the consequences of disobedience is that we will sow our seed in vain. I remember so vividly when we lived in the Negev the time that our neighbors’ entire crop of lemons was stolen one night by the marauding bands of thieving Bedouins.

All the farmers hard work - all their sweat, and time, and money, and effort - came to nothing. This is sowing our seed in vain.

We can do the same thing. We can invest time, money, blood sweat and tears into something and in the end have nothing to show for it. Absolutely nothing at all – it was all in vain. What a terrible waste!

In the book of Haggai, the prophet warns the people to carefully consider their ways. **“Give careful thought to your ways.”** (Haggai 1:5-7)



Our lemon tree in Israel

The people had planted much but harvested little; they ate and drank but were never satisfied. It was as if their purses (or wallets) had holes - the money earned seemed to

¹ Psalm 23:2

just slip away; it was never enough. Wow! Sound familiar? Don't some people live like this all their lives? If this is our experience, perhaps we need to heed the ancient prophet's words and consider our ways.

The people of Israel lived in paneled houses while the house of the Lord lay in ruins for years! Are we doing the same? Are we living for the Lord – to build His kingdom? Or are we simply trying to store up treasures and trinkets for ourselves in our nice, paneled homes here on earth? We must now be about our Father's business. The Word of God says to *finish our 'outdoor work' first*; and only then may we build our home'.² We must finish our Kingdom work first and then build our own personal house.

Living in Peace, Safety and Security

“I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid.” (Leviticus 26:6)

What is it that most people want and no amount of money can buy? The answer for many is simply 'peace and security'. We want to know that we can lie down at night and sleep in safety – without fear (bli pachad). Here in Israel we have no such assurance outside of the shelter of God's wings.

God's Word promises that *'if'* we keep His commandments (Torah), *'then'* we will live in the Land in peace. We will chase our enemies and they will fall before us.³

Obviously we do not yet enjoy peace, safety and security in the Land of Israel. We are surrounded by enemies and face the daily threat of terrorism. These are national curses that come upon the nation as a whole and even the Messianic believers in Yeshua who live here are not wholly exempt from the consequences.

We may be surprised by this reality; but consider Corrie ten Boom, and her family who suffered in the Nazi's concentration camps right along with the Jewish people. They were not exempt from suffering simply because they were righteous and took a stand to help the Jews.⁴ We are also not exempt from trouble simply by being in Covenant with the Almighty.



It shocked me when I first came to Israel to find that we, our children, and the families of other believers could be so negatively impacted by some of the 'curses' that still affect

² Proverb 24:27

³ Leviticus 26:7

⁴ See Corrie ten Boom's story in the book, The Hiding Place, or the movie by the same title

this land and people. I foolishly believed that because we are covered with the blood of Yeshua, none of these curses could come upon us - but I was wrong.

Our youngest child at the time, Liat, seemed to come under particularly heavy attack. At one point, we were thinking of putting her in full body armor to try and protect her from all the injuries that seemed to befall her. When we moved back to Canada, this lasted only about a week and then the attacks stopped completely.

I remember a Messianic family from South Africa who were trying to make aliyah (immigrate to Israel) coming to us in the Negev with their children who looked as if they had come from a war zone. They had bandaged hands and black eyes and bumps and bruises and scrapes all over their bodies.

They also had a hard time accepting this reality, since we were praying and doing spiritual warfare, but the attacks seemed to prevail. We were completely green – new and inexperienced with living in Israel - and we had a lot to learn about how to protect ourselves and our children from spiritual attack.

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

If we read only Parashat Bechukotai, we can get the impression that any kind of suffering is punishment from God (a curse) and any blessing is a reward; but we must be careful of such simplistic thinking. We live in a fallen world where *'stuff happens'*. The whole issue of human suffering is a complex subject that greater minds than mine have wrestled with for years.

Sometimes we suffer because of others' sinful choices, and sometimes because of our own sins or mistakes; but many times the trials that befall us have nothing to do with either! The disciples asked Yeshua about a man who was born blind – was it because of his own sin or his parent's sin that he was born blind.

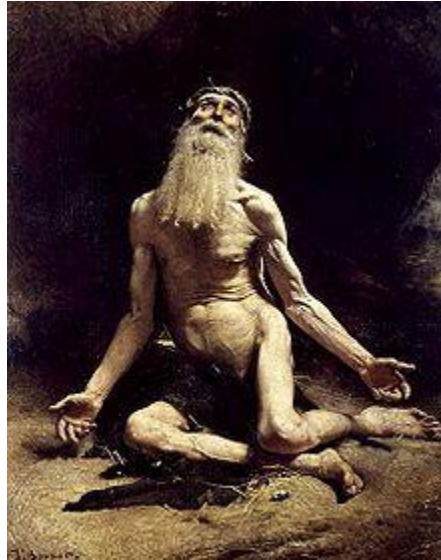
How could it have been the man's sin since he was born blind? Could he have sinned in the womb? No, but they (like most people) were looking for someone to blame; but Yeshua answered, **“Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”** (John 9:2-3)

Sometimes on a *'no good, bad, horrible, terrible, just awful kind of day'*, we automatically think that we must have done something wrong and are being punished for it by God. On one of those *'growing days'*, I cried out to God, *“I'm sorry! I'm truly sorry! I don't know what I'm sorry for! But if You will just show me what I've done wrong, I will repent. Please restore Your grace upon me!”*

I have learned a bit over the years (I hope), and know that my mouth and attitudes have a lot to do with the level of blessing I walk in; but surely it is unjust to blame all the suffering of the world upon our own sins.

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” This has been a question asked by most people at some point in their lives. Job, for one, suffered the loss of everything and everyone – even his health – and yet he was a righteous man. His suffering did not come because he had sinned (as his friends kept trying to imply); but rather because he was so righteous that he became a target for hasatan to attack him.

God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts not our thoughts. Who are we to understand all the ways of God with man? Like Job discovered, it is useless to speculate on what is fair and unfair in this world; but only to do our best in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in and always keeping in mind the eternal perspective.



Job as portrayed by [Bonnat](#)

Rabbi Yannai said: *"It is not in our power to explain the well-being of the wicked or the sufferings of the righteous."* (Avot 4:15)

Joseph also suffered injustice and betrayal; and yet in the end he saw God’s grand purpose woven into the tangled threads of his story. It is in this place of prolonged suffering that our faith is being tested and strengthened. Even Yeshua learned obedience by the things he suffered.⁵

God may use the trials of life to develop the character qualities that will be necessary for us to fulfill our destiny. Not all suffering is bad or a sign that God is ‘mad at us’. The apostle Paul wrote that we can actually rejoice in our sufferings, **“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,”** (Romans 5:3-4)

Our challenge, when we feel that we are experiencing the curses, rather than the blessings of God, is to seek Him for any ways that we may be off track or walking in disobedience; and then to simply say, like Job, **“Though He slay me yet will I trust Him.”** (Job 13:15)

Even the concept of blessings or cursing may not be black and white. What may seem like a negative circumstance can turn into a blessing. When the father of my unborn child deserted us twenty years ago, this seemed like the worst possible thing in the world that could happen; but it turned into the greatest blessing since it led to our salvation!⁶

⁵ Hebrews 5:8

⁶ See book, [Grafted in Again](#), by the author for Hannah’s personal testimony www.voiceforisrael.net

This is why we can be thankful in all things. If we love the Lord, He promises to make all things work out for good – for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.⁷ He can bring forth light out of darkness and turn every curse into a blessing.



Let us be extremely careful about judging negative situations – whether our own or someone else’s – as a curse from God; but instead entrust our whole life, the good and the bad, into the hands of the One who loves us.

Appointed Terrorism

Terrorism is a grave concern for many people in the world today – and justifiably so; but God’s word even has something to say about terror. **“If you will not listen unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if you shall reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances, so that you will not do all My commandments, but break My covenant; I will also do this unto you; I will appoint terror over you ... and the soul to languish...”** (Leviticus 26:14-16)

Most nations (including Israel) have their fair share of sin: abortion (the shedding of innocent blood), homosexuality, idolatry, adultery, violence, cheating and rebellion... the list could go on and on. I don’t think we need to look much further to see why Israel (as well as other nations) has been plagued with terrorism and tragedies.

And yet we are not left without hope; for God is compassionate and merciful. He promises a day when even if we looked for sin in Israel and Judah, it would not be found.

“In those days and in that time, says the Lord, “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none; and the sin of Judah but they shall not be found; for I will pardon those whom I preserve.” (Jeremiah 30:20)

Wedding Hall Collapse

Not all tragedies in Israel are because of terrorism. In 2001 in the city of Jerusalem, a relatively new building, in which over seven hundred guests were celebrating a wedding, collapsed, causing the dance floor and everyone on it to come crashing down three floors into a huge hole in the basement.

⁷ Romans 8:28

We lived relatively close to where this occurred, and so we heard the sirens of the ambulances and rescue vehicles for several hours. The information I received is that over two hundred people were injured and there were twenty-six fatalities. Although because of the degree of rubble, the possibility of finding more bodies existed; the chance of other survivors slim. The Rabbinate made special provision for the Orthodox rescue workers to continue their work of searching on Shabbat in the case a life may be found and saved.



Magen David Adom ambulances and rescue workers

This is a land of such grieving. It was so painful to watch grown men weeping like babies on the news, recalling how the people below stretched their hands up to them, crying and screaming for help. But they had no way to reach them and so they simply stood there in anguish, helpless to save.

It seems to me that this terrible tragedy illustrates the horrible situation when those who have not made Yeshua their Savior will find themselves forever lost in the pit of utter darkness and despair. And just like the poor man in the bosom of Abraham was unable to help the rich man who desperately cried out for help, even for a drop of water to cool his parched throat in the pit of hell⁸, so too will we be unable to help those who have rejected Yeshua. It will be too late. The vast gulf separating heaven from hell will not allow those in heaven to reach those suffering in the pit of Sheol⁹.

⁸ Luke 16:26

⁹ Sheol – place of the dead (hell)

Where do We Stand?

There existed only one minute but crucial difference between those who survived the wedding hall collapse and those who sunk into the pit of destruction: it was their position – where they were standing. So too, will our eternal future depend on where we stand: are we covered with the blood of the Lamb? Are we on the Lord's side or not? And if we stand with the God of Israel, then we also stand with His Land and His people. There is no middle ground – no more time to sit on the fence.

Yeshua said that this is how He will separate the sheep - those blessed of the Father who enter into eternal salvation – from the goats – those cursed of the Father who go down to eternal damnation. It is by what we do or not do for the least of His brethren.¹⁰ I do believe He is speaking here of the poor and the needy, but also we cannot neglect the fact that while He walked on earth, who did Yeshua call His brethren? The lost sheep of the House of Israel.¹¹

Will the Christian Church, with the exception of the righteous Gentiles, join with the enemies of the Jewish people again, as they did with the Nazis? When the anti-Christ takes control and the persecution really hits (the time of Jacob's trouble/tribulation), I believe that the Church may be tested on these words again and given one last chance to prove themselves faithful.¹²

Most of the survivors of the wedding hall collapse gave the glory to Elohim that they were somehow miraculously among those left standing. Many members of the bride and groom's family were killed or injured. What should have been the happiest day of their lives ended up as the worst non-terrorist tragedy ever to befall the modern state of Israel.

We cannot help but ask ourselves why? Is it not bad enough that the terrorists continue to set off bombs, killing and injuring the people of Israel. And now this?

To add insult to injury, another car bomb exploded the next day in Hadera. One night shortly after, my daughter, Courtney, went out with a friend after congregational services in Jerusalem. After being home about an hour, she heard a loud 'boom!'. My husband went down to check on the internet, and sure enough, another bomb had exploded right where she had been walking only an hour before.

Thankfully, no one was injured, even though this area is full of cafes and restaurants. This is not the only time that my children's lives have been miraculously spared through Divine intervention. Recently (2011) a bomb exploded at the Central Bus Station at the exact bus stop where my youngest daughter Liat should have been standing that day at that exact time of the explosion.

¹⁰ . Matthew 15:31-46

¹¹ Matthew 15:24

¹² .See DVD - Where is Your Brother Jacob? or Ruth a Righteous Gentile, available by mail or through our website: www.voiceforisrael.net

However, her school had scheduled a teacher's meeting and had let the kids out of school an hour early that day. As Timothy, my son, drove her home from school, they passed the Central Bus Station and heard the blast, even feeling the impact in the car. But their lives were spared. Praise the Lord!

Another Believer's mother was riding the bus that was hit but one stop before the station, she felt an overwhelming sense that she had to get off the bus so she got off one stop early, only to see it explode at the next stop! Several people, however, were injured and even killed.

We must face the possibility that God may have appointed these tragedies and terrors upon Israel because of their disobedience to His Torah. I am reminded of the day we had to drive through the 'West Bank' on Shabbat to reach a Messianic congregation in a different city. We got stuck in a traffic jam. Why? Because many Israelis 'shop till they drop' at Palestinian markets on Shabbat in order to get the cheaper prices than in Israel.

Another memory – of going to see a 'family movie' one night; but before it started, some commercials and advertisements aired. One for yogurt showed transvestites dancing across the screen. The next commercial showed Romeo and Juliet in bed together when a third party, another man, crawled up the trellis, through their bedroom window, and jumped into bed with them, forming a 'threesome'.

Sexual immorality in the Land includes an annual gay parade defiling the streets of Jerusalem, God's Holy City, and three free abortions offered to each female Israeli soldier during her term in the IDF.



Gay Pride parade in Jerusalem September 2014, photo Olivier Fitoussi

We were also shocked by the level of sorcery, New Age religion and mysticism in the country (even Satanism); while Messianic Jews are persecuted, evicted, and barred from

entering the Land. Besides these sins, our there have been political leaders of Israel who have committed the abomination of giving up this God-given Land to the enemy and (contrary to Scripture) making covenants of death (which they call ‘*peace treaties*’) with the former inhabitants of the Land which God commands us to drive out. Is it any wonder that Israel has such troubles?

And yet, despite a land filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel, God will never forsake Judah nor Israel. **“For Israel has not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.”** (Jeremiah 51:5)

I want to help you understand, through our firsthand personal witness, what is actually happening in this country, so that you can pray intelligently and appropriately. As one sister said, *“Love for Israel and the Jews is not a natural thing. It is supernatural and can only be planted in our hearts by God.”* I agree. A soulish, emotional kind of ‘love’ for Israel based on a romantic, unrealistic assessment of the nation will not withstand the end- times trials that we will all need to endure. The grace to stand with Israel unto the end can only come supernaturally through His Spirit.

Please don’t ever give up praying for the nation of Israel, even when we come under such terror and judgment, for God Himself promises never to give up on us - because of His covenant with our forefathers.

God is a covenant-keeping God. Even when He exiled the people of Israel into the nations where they were persecuted, tortured, and killed, God still did not reject them, nor destroy them completely.

“ And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes, remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 26:44-45)

Choose Life

We can look at the example of Israel and receive wisdom for our own lives. God has offered us blessings or cursing, life or death – so let us choose life – so that we and our children may live!

“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

How do we choose life? By walking in the ways of the Lord and keeping His commandments. Some ‘New Covenant believers’ erroneously believe that we are no longer required to keep God’s commandments; but this is what Yeshua said:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” (John 14:15 & 21).

Yeshua’s desire is that we might have life and life more abundantly¹³; but it is possible we could be living under a curse without even being aware of the root cause: anti-Semitism, ignoring the plight of the poor, and failure to give our full tithe are just a few examples.

Parashat Bechukotai ends with the command to give the ma’aser (tithe) which is holy unto the Lord. **“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.”** (Leviticus 27:30)

When we withhold the first 10% of our income, we are actually stealing from God – and we put ourselves under a curse. God says it, not me - so don’t shoot the messenger!

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob Me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing You?’

“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.” (Malachi 3:8-9)

How many Messianic believers no longer go to a ‘Sunday Church’ and can’t find a suitable congregation so they simply stop tithing? How many Christians just don’t tithe at all? This is a disastrous decision!

One of the first things we should teach our children (by example) regarding finances is to give God the first ten percent of everything they receive. Then God promises to open the windows of Heaven and pour out such a blessing we will barely be able to contain it all. Test Him on this!

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” (Malachi 3:10)

*“Concerning the tithe: we must never forget that all that we “possess” belongs to YHVH and we honor him through the tithe. Those who greedily hoard that which belongs to him, or who stingily say, “I can’t afford to tithe” will quite simply be cursed in their finances. Again, the choice is ours: to tithe and be blessed, to not tithe and not have that blessing on our finances.”*¹⁴

¹³ John 10:10

¹⁴ Natan Lawrence, MIA

Trusting in the Lord

Haftarat Bechukkotai (the prophetic portion) continues along with the theme of blessings and curses. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of a curse that comes upon us when we trust in the arm of flesh rather than in God.

“Cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:5).

What happens when we begin to backslide; when our hearts turn away from the Lord and we put our trust in man instead? We dry up; we live in a wilderness; we stop living by faith and begin to live a dull, dry, boring, empty life.

“That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.” (Jeremiah 17:6)



Sheep on a drought affected paddock near [Uranquinty, New South Wales](#).

The first thing that dries up when we stop living for the Lord is our fruitfulness. But when we trust in the Lord, we shall never cease from bearing fruit. For the Father has chosen and appointed us to bear much fruit.

Jeremiah wrote that our hearts are deceitful above all things.¹⁵ As women, we tend to follow our hearts, and our feelings, which can lead us to put our trust in unworthy people rather than in the only One who is always faithful. One of the worst mistakes we can make is to depend upon man instead of the Lord who is our hope.

Jeremiah wrote, **“LORD, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.”** (Jeremiah 17:13).

Yeshua stood up on the last day of Sukkot, Feast of Tabernacles, at the ceremonial drawing of the waters of Sho'avah, and declared,

“If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink, He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive. (John 7:37-39)

We can live without food for several days but we can only go without water for a very short time without dying of thirst. We may be able to go without reading the word for a

¹⁵ Jeremiah 17:9

short period of time, but we absolutely and desperately need the living waters of the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh) each and every day! Only the spirit of God can quench our terrible thirst.

By way of contrast, Jeremiah describes the person who fully trusts in Adonai as someone with courage and confidence whose life bears fruit no matter what the outward circumstances:

“But blessed (ashrei) is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

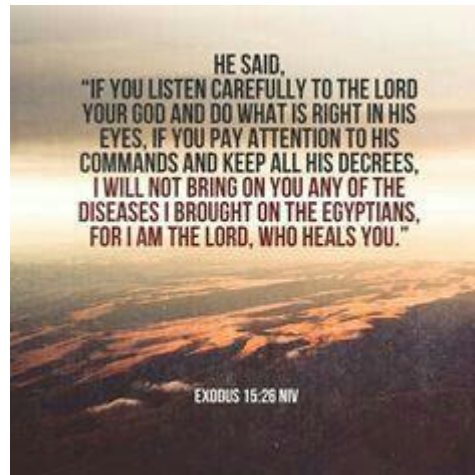


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This week’s reading ends with a beautiful Scripture, the cry of our hearts, **“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.”** (Jeremiah 17:14)

Even our healing is conditional upon our obedience to His commandments. Let us listen to the Lord our God and do what is right in His eyes, walking in His commandments and decrees (b’chukotai) – that we may be healed. In Yeshua’s name.



Bechukotai Part II – a Decade Later...

It has been ten years since I first wrote this first portion of this commentary on B'chukotai. Looking back at what I have written, it seems to me that my perspective has changed somewhat over the past decade. Having walked through a few more fires and floods with the Lord, having failed and fallen several more times, I think I have come to a better understanding of God's lovingkindness and mercy.

Yes, there are blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience; and yes, we must accept that our actions carry consequences, but first and foremost, if we are ever to have hope, we must remember that mercy triumphs over judgment in Yeshua Hamashaich (the Messiah).¹⁶

Yeshua has taken our punishment upon Himself, and though we are all like sheep who have gone astray, the Lord has laid on Him the sins of us all. He, the perfect, blameless, Lamb of God, willingly became the Scapegoat. As it says so beautifully in the song, Amazing Love, "He took the fall... and thought of me above all..."¹⁷

It is not as if God is up in Heaven watching and waiting for us to mess up so that He can fire down some horrible curse on us! No, He is longing to be gracious to us!¹⁸ We may have taken some wrong turns, made some choices that we now regret; but I believe that God's love is higher and more powerful than all our blunders and mistakes.

When we have put our trust in Yeshua Hamashiach, we can rest in faith that He has taken our punishment upon Himself. He wore that crown of thorns, which symbolizes the curse on the earth which we inherited from Adam and Eve. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.¹⁹ No, we are not in Paradise yet, but when we have put our trust in Yeshua, we can still believe for God's blessing on our lives.

Previously we discussed the importance of "If...then..." Here are some New Covenant examples of a few "if...then's...": *If* we will let go of all our heavy loads of guilt, shame, and regret from the past; and choose to trust Him, rather than live in fear and anxiety over our future. ... *then* we can truly enter into the wonderful plan that God has for our lives – to give us a hope and a future! (Jeremiah 29:11)

If we will give him the ashes of our burned out lives, *then* He will exchange them for beauty. *If* we will give Him our mourning, *then* He will anoint us with the oil of Joy.

If we will give Him the shattered pieces of our lives, *then* He will make them into something beautiful – in His time.²⁰

¹⁶ James 2:13

¹⁷ Amazing Love, Lyrics by Chris Tomlin, recorded by Hillsong

¹⁸ Isaiah 30:18

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 3:11

An intimate relationship with the lover and keeper of our soul will never be achieved through self-discipline or grueling efforts to be ‘*good enough*’; but rather gradually, as we open ourselves to His grace and learn to receive His love. The richest and highest blessings of God cannot be purchased for any amount of money or earned through even extraordinary levels of effort.

The love, peace and joy of the Lord come naturally as a result of living a life of faith, trust, hope and surrender. We experience comfort when we simply choose to come home. Truth came through the Law of Moses, but thankfully grace and mercy came for repentant sinners through Yeshua.²¹

Blessings in Disguise

The other point I want to make in contemplating this parashah about blessings and cursings is that the line is not always clear cut – it may not be quite as black and white as it first appears. What is a blessing and what is a curse?

My children and I used to play the ‘bad/good game’. Someone would start out with what sounded like a terrible scenario and the other would say, “*Oh, that’s bad!*” to which the first would reply, “*No, that’s good.*” “*Why is that good?*” the other would ask. And then the first would go on to tell the story of why what seemed to be a bad thing turned out to be good – a blessing in disguise. On and on we would play the bad/good game until someone ran out of reasons for why something bad could be good or good could be bad.

A Chinese folktale illustrates this point: A man in a small village acquired a beautiful horse. When the villagers saw this horse, they exclaimed, “*What a blessing!*” But the man said, “*What seems like a blessing may be a curse.*” The villagers were puzzled. Later, the man woke up to find that his horse had run away. “*We are so sorry*”, the villagers said, trying to comfort the man about his loss. “*What seems like a curse may actually be a blessing*”, the man replied.

Later, the horse returned, along with a whole herd of beautiful stallions, worth a huge fortune! The villagers congratulated him. But the man’s son rode one of the horses and broke his leg. “*How terrible!*” said the villagers. But the man was calm, repeating “*What seems like a curse may be a blessing.*”

Not long afterward, all the young men were conscripted into the army to fight in a war in which they were all killed. But because this man’s son had broken his leg, he was not sent to the war and his life was spared.²²

In life, the lines between blessing and curses may be blurred. What seems like a curse may somehow turn out to be a blessing in disguise. ☺. If we are trusting in the natural, in our humanity, in other people, to make things work out right, then we are doomed from the get go. It is only when we trust in the Eternal God, the supernatural power of God to work everything out for our good in the end, that we experience a life of blessing.

²¹ John 1:17

²² Rabbi Hannah Gracia Yerushalmi, Haftarat Bechukotai, The Women’s Haftarah Commentary, Ed. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein. P. 153

Walking by Faith and not by Sight

The Word of God says that all people will look upon us and see that we are blessed. We may feel that we are far from the place where people would look at us and say, “Whoa – that person is really blessed!”

But we are to be people who walk by faith and not by sight. If we walk by what we see in our lives, perhaps we will feel that we are not blessed; perhaps we will even doubt God’s love for us and wonder why He allows injustice and suffering. But we must be relentless in fighting the good fight of faith – knowing that **we walk by faith, not by sight** (2 Corinthians 5:7).

I want to end with a beautiful poem by Ruth A. Morgan²³:

Sometimes I’m sad, I know not why my heart is sore distressed,
It seems the burdens of this world have settled on my heart.
And yet I know... I know that God who doeth all things right
Will lead me thus to understand.... To Walk by Faith...not sight
And though I may not see the way He’s planned for me to go...
That way seems dark to me just now but oh, I’m sure He knows!
Today He guides my feeble step
Tomorrow’s in His right...
He has asked me to never fear... But walk by Faith ...not sight...
Some day the mists will roll away.
The sun will shine again.
I’ll see the beauty in the flowers.
I’ll hear the bird’s refrain
And then I’ll know my Father’s hand
Has led the way to light
Because I place my hand in His.... And walked by Faith...not sight.
May the Lord bless you and keep you; may He make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace (shalom).

²³ From God’s Little Devotional Book for Women: By Faith not Sight, Ruth A. Morgan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, Paul Lee Tan, ed. (Rockvielle, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979), p. 404

Bechukotai Study Questions

1. What did Yeshua have to say about the rewards for Torah-obedience and the punishment for Torah- disobedience in Matthew 5:19?
2. In Jeremiah 16:19, the Gentiles will come to the Lord from the ends of the earth and say, “Surely our fathers have inherited lies.” What are some of the lies that Christian spiritual fathers have passed down to us that we need to let go of in order to embrace the truth?
3. What does Yeshua say will happen to those who call him Lord, prophecy in His name, cast out demons, and do many wonders in His name but do not keep the Torah (they practice Torah (law) – lessness?) (Matthew 7:21-23)
4. How would you answer the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?”
5. Have you ever experienced something that seemed like a curse in the beginning but in the end proved to be a great blessing? (or vice versa – something that seemed like a blessing turned out to be a curse). Share and discuss.
6. Do you believe that God still blesses obedience and punishes disobedience to His Torah under the New Covenant? Discuss.
7. Do you believe that people can come under a curse by failing to tithe? Why or why not?
8. What picture does Jeremiah paint of the man who trusts in the Lord and the one who trusts in man (the arm of flesh). Have there been instances or areas of your life where you tended to depend upon man or found it hard to trust God? What was the outcome? Discuss.
9. What happens to someone who forsakes the Lord?
10. Has your perspective of law and grace changed over the years as you have grown in spiritual maturity? If so, how?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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