

# PAYING ATTENTION

**Credit:** Shabbat Shalom: Insights on the Weekly Torah Portion from the Heart of Biblical Israel

“But if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments... I will assign upon you panic.” (Lev. 26:14).

The following is a comment by Rabbi Elli Scheller and well worth reading:

“God warns, “If you transgress the Torah, you will be punished with suffering.” The Torah then elaborates on the punishments, beginning with ‘I will visit upon you confusion.’ Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin explains this curse to mean that we will be beset with confusion and nervous tension. He notes that this curse has been fulfilled in our time; people live hectic, pressure-laden lives, rushing from one activity to the next.

In today’s “instant generation” no one has patience for anything. Driving is a good example: if you want to know the smallest unit of time, try measuring the amount of time it takes from when the light turns green until the car behind you starts beeping! Our worst nightmare is getting stuck by a red light, or even worse - behind a school bus letting off children, whether we are actually in a rush or not. Stores have video screens to keep people waiting on the checkout line occupied. Soon we’ll be able to take care of all our errands without stepping out of the car; everything will be Drive-thru!

We may think that this is all a blessing, because we can accomplish so much more in less time. However, not only is it a curse - it is the first curse mentioned in this week’s Torah portion. Rabbi Sorotzkin goes on to explain that this lack of inner tranquility is a punishment for having lost our patience in our service of God. In order to regain our sense of inner peace we must set aside time for prayer. Then God will bless us with a life of physical and mental tranquility.”

## Wonderful Blessings

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land (Lev. 26:3-5).

Wonderful blessings are promised to YHVH’s people. When the rains come at the right time they irrigate the crops and have an affect on the climate and also people’s health. The abundant crops keep the people busy and when they are active and involved their health is often better. This constant activity is part of the blessing. When people are idle, they look for amusement and excitement, which can lead to all kinds of undesirable habits, even addiction.

YHVH also promised peace and safety in the Land and they would be so powerful that a few people would scare off and pursue a large number of invaders. The LORD also assured Israel His special attention. YHVH desired a close relationship with Israel because He had redeemed them from Egyptian slavery and had given them dignity by making them His special people. However, there was a condition attached to all these blessings; they had to live according to His directions, because that is the only way they could be in close relationship with their wonderful God. It still is the only way to live well.

## Frightening Curses

But, if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments; if you consider My decrees loathsome, and if your being rejects My ordinances, so as not to perform all My commandments, so that you annul My covenant – then I will do the same to you; I will assign upon you panic, swelling lesions, and burning fever, which cause eyes to long and souls to suffer... (Lev. 26:14-16a).

The spiritual law of God works much like the physical laws of the universe. Like the invisible law of gravity, the law of God is always in effect, working at all times. When we keep it, God blesses us. If we do not, we bring its penalty upon us. To think that God has abolished His Torah, His spiritual law, is like proclaiming that the law of gravity has been done away, so people may freely jump off tall buildings with no ill-effects!

We need to remember that the Ten Commandments were not Moshe’s invention; he only was the mouthpiece used by YHVH to give the Torah to His people. The commandments; Torah; the Word was present at Creation. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3). In verse 14 we learn that this Word is Yeshua Messiah.

YHVH’s Law has been in full force from the very beginning. Adam received God’s commandment not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even the warning that disobedience would cause death did not hinder Adam from thinking that he knew better than his Creator. Just like Adam, even many Christians do not believe that God’s warnings are to be taken seriously. Most think they only need to adhere to the instructions Yeshua gave to His followers. Are the Jewish people then correct in saying that Christians serve two Deities? Are Yeshua and the Father not One? “Hear O Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is One” (Deut. 6:4). And are Yeshua’s teachings not a confirmation and explanation of what He spoke to Moshe on Mt. Sinai?

Why are YHVH’s commandments not recognized as being holy, just and good? (Rom. 7:12). It is impossible that our loving heavenly Father, Who is Holy, could mislead us in any way. Why would He tell us to observe the Sabbath and His Feasts if He did not mean it, or if it was not of the greatest importance? And who would dare to deny the truthfulness of His Word? Solomon wrote, “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5).

Many sincere believers in Yeshua Messiah have been misled concerning God’s word. They have been told that the first part of the Scriptures is for the Jews only and therefore the warnings about punishment do not pertain to Christians. They would say “we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and the Church is the bride of Christ”. Yet,

they eagerly cling to the blessings promised to the Jewish people and the comforts given in the Psalms; the Jewish prayer book.

Forgotten is the fact that on Mt. Sinai, even before the Torah was given, the betrothal between the God of Israel and His redeemed people took place. There YHVH declared His love for Israel, "I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19:4). In response to His proposal the people of Israel wholeheartedly said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). It was at that holy moment YHVH's congregation of believers was formed, contrary to the belief that the birth of the Church took place at Pentecost. Pentecost was when YHVH's congregation, Jewish believers in Yeshua, was empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel, as promised by Yeshua before His ascension.

Another misconception is the term "New Covenant". This new covenant was promised by YHVH to His people Israel through the prophet Jeremiah; "Behold the days are coming – the word of YHVH – when I will seal a covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah...For this is the covenant that I shall seal with the House of Israel...I will place My Torah within them and I will write it onto their heart; I will be a God for them and they will be a people for Me" (Jer. 31:30a; 32). At His last Passover Seder our Master Yeshua referred to that covenant and would seal it with His blood. Therefore, the "new covenant" is not Christianity, it is YHVH's promise to His people Israel, and all who have become Israelites by faith in Yeshua Messiah. "And if you are Messiah's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). This is the truth of God's word and not human invention.

The tragedy of separation between the Messianic believers and the Gentile Church came through anti-Jewish church leaders. Before that happened, the Apostle Sha'ul, discerning the coming danger, urged the Gentile believers in Yeshua Messiah to "walk according of the calling with which you were called...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one LORD, one faith, one immersion; one God and Father of all Who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:1-6). The Apostles were devout Torah-obedient Messianic believers and would never have misled believers to disregard YHVH's holy, just and good commandments.

"I am the LORD, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6). Why do so many Christians think Almighty God has totally changed His mind and allowed sinful people to make their own rules and laws, to suit themselves? As defense they will use Scripture verses taken out of context. Is that what Yeshua taught? (Matt. 5:17). However, our Torah portion tells us that disobedience to YHVH's good and holy law brings suffering upon those who think to know better than Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe.

His commandments are still binding on us today. Our loving Father has only one family – Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua - and if we purposely refuse to obey His commandments there is no place to turn. Nowhere in the Scriptures does the LORD tell us to ignore them. They are not some good suggestions, but the very code and conduct of our God. Obedience to His perfect will enables us to be a light in this world as Yeshua told us to be. But who is listening?

### **The Haftarah**

So says YHVH; "Accursed is the man who trusts in people and makes mortals his strength, and turns his heart away from the LORD. He will be like a lone tree in the wilderness and will not see when goodness comes; he will dwell in the arid desert, in a sulfurous, uninhabited land.

Blessed is the man who trusts in YHVH, then YHVH will be his security. He will be like a tree that is planted near water, which will spread its roots alongside brooks and will not see when heat comes, whose foliage will be ever fresh, who will not worry in years of drought and will never stop producing fruit (Jer. 17:7-8).

Jeremiah's message was much like that of our Torah portion: if God's people live in obedience to Him, they will enjoy blessings. If they forsake the ways of the God Who loves and cares for them, they will suffer tragedy. Jeremiah had warned them of upcoming destruction by the hand of Emperor Nebuchadnezzar, but the people ignored or got very angry with him. He was even thrown in the dungeon for speaking YHVH's warnings.

Through the prophet Jeremiah YHVH made it clear why we sin. "The heart is most deceitful of all and it is fragile; who can know it? I, YHVH plumb the heart and test the mind; to give to man according to his ways, like the fruit of his deeds" (Jer. 17:9-10). But the good news is that anyone, Jew or Gentile, who comes to the LORD in repentance, will be forgiven, and YHVH will not remember our sins anymore. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). And when we rise from the waters of baptism, we enter into a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, eager to be obedient children to the Most High God.

### **Messianic Writings**

If you love Me, you will keep My commands; and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforting Counselor like Me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever...I will not leave you orphans – I am coming to you...Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me, and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him"

In His great love the LORD promised His disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would enable them to continue Yeshua's work on earth. In saying, "I am coming to you" when speaking of the Holy Spirit, we see again the Oneness of God. Yeshua and the Father are One, and Yeshua and the Holy Spirit are One.

Our loving Father knows our weaknesses, but His Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen us to walk in obedience to Him Who loves us. Only love for Him will motivate us to walk "In His Statutes" and receive His blessings. Will you be blessed?

Blessed are those who reject false teachings and traditions, but search the Scriptures for themselves, asking the LORD's guidance in finding the Truth. "Their delight is in Adonai's Torah; on His Torah they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams – they bear their fruit in season, their leaves never wither, everything they do succeeds" (Ps. 1:1-3).

Shabbat Shalom

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Sources: ArtScroll Chumash; Jess Feinberg's "Walk Leviticus";  
Rabbi Elli Scheller's Torah teaching.