



Parasha Devarim

July 17, 2021

Torah: Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

Haftarah: Isaiah 1:1-27

Ketuwim Shlichim: Acts 9:1-21

Shabbat shalom mishpacha! Our *parasha* today is *Devarim*. This *Shabbat* we begin a new book of the *Torah*, Deuteronomy. With this *parasha* we begin the last of the Five Books of The *Torah*. In this portion *Moshe* told *Benei Yisrael*, the children of Israel, what had occurred since they left Mount Sinai. He reviewed the *mitzvot* which ADONAI gave with emphasis on the change of lifestyle which they were about to undergo. They were to go from the miraculous and supernatural existence of the desert under ADONAI's guidance to the more natural way of life which they would experience under Joshua's leadership in the land of Israel. No more manna, no more easy to catch quail and no more water provided miraculously. They would have to work for and fight for their existence. The central theme of this *parasha* is the sin of the ten spies who gave a bad report and influenced the people to rebel against ADONAI and Moses.

The *parasha* begins with Moses reviewing the sins of the previous generation which had died during the 40 years wandering in the desert. He gave Israel a description of what would have happened if they hadn't sinned by refusing to go up as ADONAI had ordered. He told them that if they had obeyed, they would have been given all of the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River and the power needed to conquer it. Their list of sins grew and grew and climaxed in the sin of the spies. Because of that one sin, the entire generation died in the desert.

As they continued their journey, they were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of *Edom*, *Moav* or *Amon*; these were lands ADONAI had promised to Esau and Lot. *Moshe* also described the defeat of the Amorite kings *Sichon* and *Og*, and he encouraged Joshua by telling him that ADONAI would do to the *inhabitants of Canaan* what he did to *Sichon* and *Og*. He said: 22 "You must not fear them, for it is Adonai your God who fights for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22 TLV).

The book of Deuteronomy is called by several different names by the rabbis. *Elah haDevarim*, the first two words of the book mean "these are the words." Another name used is *Mishnah HaTorah* which means the repetition of the *Torah*, taken from chapter 17, verses 18 and 19 which state that when the king sits on the throne he shall write a copy of this *Torah* for himself. The English name Deuteronomy also comes from the idea of a copy, and means "second law." This name is taken from the Greek of the LXX, the Septuagint.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a restatement and teaching of the first four books to a new generation of Israelis. It was also a preparation for their entering and conquering the Land. One way to look at *Torah* is that it is Israel's national constitution, that is, it is the constitution of biblical Israel, not the secular State of Israel. As a constitution, it is a formal legal document which defines and outlines the relationship between ADONAI, the Great King, and Israel, his beloved. In this constitution, the covenant, ADONAI vowed to do certain things

for Israel and they agreed to be and to do certain things for Him. In a more personal and individual sense we also look upon the covenant as a *ketubah*, a marriage contract between ADONAI and Israel. But, as you all know very well, no legal system, including the *Torah*, can function as a means of atonement. It can only function as a means of condemnation. It shows us our sin. But, we must also have atonement and that atonement has always been provided by ADONAI through grace by means of a sacrifice. Obedience to *Torah* has never been a means of justification. In the wilderness, it was a covenant relationship for those who were already redeemed. And even back then, it was designed to reveal the person and work of Messiah Yeshua.

How is Yeshua pictured in *Torah*? In part we see Him in the sinner's laying on of his hands and his confession of his sins over the Tabernacle sacrifice before it was slain. Even though the sinner didn't personally kill the animal, it was his sins symbolically laid on the sacrifice's head which caused its death. This is a picture of Yeshua's substitutionary death for our sins. After his death and resurrection, Yeshua walked toward Emmaus with two of his disciples and taught them that he was pictured in the *Tanakh*. They didn't recognize him or understand the things which had happened regarding His death. He said to them: 25 .., *"Oh foolish ones, so slow of heart to put your trust in all that the prophets spoke! 26 Was it not necessary for Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them the things written about Himself in all the Scriptures* (Luke 24:25b-27 TLV). One of the most remarkable things written about Him is also found in Deuteronomy: 15 *"Adonai your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst—from your brothers. To him you must listen"* (Deuteronomy 18:15 TLV). And, there are many other direct references to Messiah who would come.

As a restatement of the *Torah* found in the first four books, Deuteronomy uses the word "covenant" 27 times. This is a clue that *Torah* is a covenantal document and not a legal one. What's the difference? Very simply, a covenant is an instrument of grace entered into voluntarily. A law code is forced. You have no choice but to obey. In a law code, you have to, but in a covenant, you get to. But even within covenantal documents there is also a need for guidelines in order to have a happy life in fellowship with ADONAI and each other. In this regard, there are legal sections of the covenant which are designed for that purpose. And this has very important implications for all of us who call ourselves Israel today. If ADONAI made a legally binding covenant with Israel which has never been nullified, then we are just as much under the covenantal obligations today as ancient Israel was. The covenant is still in force, but it has been modified.

Hebrews chapters 8-10 tell us about that modification and that it is the Tabernacle (Temple) and system of sacrifices which has passed away by the initiating of the New Covenant mediated by Yeshua. The writer of the Book of Hebrews shows us this truth in several places. In chapter 8, verse 13 he said: 13 *"In saying "new," He has treated the first as old; but what is being made old and aging is close to vanishing"* (Hebrews 8:13 TLV). It was the sacrificial system administered by the Levitical priesthood which was about to pass away. In Hebrews 10, verse 9 it says: 9 *..then He said, "Behold, I come to do Your will." He takes away the first to establish the second"* (Hebrews 10:9 TLV). The system referred to as the "first" is the system of sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple. The second system is the New Covenant in which Yeshua is both sacrifice and High Priest. At the time Hebrews was written there were still sacrifices being offered in the Temple. That which according to Hebrews 8:13 was in the process of aging, the Levitical sacrificial system, vanished altogether

just a few years later. The remainder of the covenant has not passed away and we are still under it.

Even though the full covenant was in effect at the time that Israel entered into the Land of Canaan, we are told in chapters 28-30 of Deuteronomy that Israel would be dispersed, removed from the land, in the future. And, after many years of rejecting ADONAI's covenant, Israel was dispersed into foreign lands. Their sins which brought about that dispersion are the subject of our *haftarah* reading for today.

The time of Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 1 is around 701 BCE, near the time that Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, invaded Israel, the northern kingdom and took them away into captivity. This *haftarah* and its accompanying *Torah* portion, *Devarim*, is traditionally read on the *Shabbat* which comes before *Tisha B'Av*, the 9th of the month of *Av*. According to rabbinic tradition, the 9th of *Av* is the date on which both the first and second temples were destroyed, as well as a number of other catastrophic happenings to the Jewish people. The First temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Second by the Romans in 70CE. The *haftarot* which are read on the three *Shabbats* before *Tisha B'Av* are called the *Haftarot* of Rebuke. The reason that this *haftarah* and the preceding two were placed here by the rabbis was to rebuke Israel for her sins, the sins which caused the destruction of both temples. This prophecy of Isaiah is referred to in chapter 1, verse 1 as a vision. Isaiah had a vision, Hebrew, *chazon*. In this regard, this *haftarah* which is read on the *Shabbat* before *Tisha B'Av* has given today's *Shabbat* the name *Shabbat Chazon*. The 9th of *Av* this year begins at sundown today, Saturday, July 17th, and ends at sundown on Sunday, July 18th.

As a *haftarah* of rebuke, Isaiah chapter 1 does a very good job of it. In the 27 verses of this chapter, at least six different crimes of covenant unfaithfulness which Judah had committed are listed. Isaiah called this covenant unfaithfulness what it really is, "rebellion." He compared Israel to an ox and a donkey. Even those dumb animals know who their master is and who provides them with food and shelter. Isaiah said that Israel even lacked the intelligence shown by the ox and ass and did not possess even their sense of gratitude. These sins are still condemning natural Israel, the Jews, today and they are also condemning many within the commonwealth of Israel today, those of us both grafted and re-grafted into the olive tree.

The first and foremost of those sins was that (1) Israel forsook ADONAI. In verse 4 Isaiah said: 4 "*Oy , a sinful nation, a people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons dealing corruptly! They have abandoned Adonai. They have despised Israel's Holy One. They have turned backward*" (Isaiah 1:4 TLV). Their sin was so great that they were called *goy choteh*, sinful nation, instead of calling them *goy kadosh*, a holy nation, as they were intended to be called. This great difference between the *goy choteh* and the holiness of ADONAI is magnified when we see Him referred to in this verse as the Holy One of Israel, a title which is found in Isaiah 39 times and only 5 times in all the rest of Scripture.

The second sin that Israel and Judah committed was (2) the practice of an empty religion and ADONAI rebuked them for it: 11 "*For what is it to Me— the multitude of your sacrifices?*" says Adonai. "*I am full of burnt offerings of rams and fat of fed animals. I have no delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or he-goats. 12 When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand— trampling My courts? 13 Bring no more worthless offerings! Incense is an abomination to Me. New Moon and Shabbat, the calling of convocations*

—*I cannot endure it— iniquity with solemn assembly. 14 Your New Moons and your Festivals My soul hates! They are a burden to Me. I am weary to bear them*” (Isaiah 1:11-14 TLV). ADONAI was not instructing them to abolish the sacrificial system, but were being reprimanded because they were abusing the system, if following it at all. You remember that in 2Kings 23, shortly after Isaiah's time, King Josiah discovered that the people had not celebrated Passover in many years, not since the days of the Judges, a period of about 400 years. It is very likely that they had not been celebrating the other festivals either, at least not properly. We get this impression from verse 14 in which ADONAI referred to “*Your New Moons and your Festivals My soul hates!*”! These were not the ones which He ordained. Judah was practicing the *mo'adim* in their own way and altering the very character of ADONAI's appointed times.

The third sin of Israel was (3) the lack of justice, especially to those who were most vulnerable. *17 Learn to do good, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow*” (Isaiah 1:17 TLV).

The fourth sin was (4) the sin of Israel's corrupt rulers. *21 “How the Faithful City became a harlot! She once was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her— but now murderers! 22 Your silver has become dross, your wine diluted by water. 23 Your princes are rebellious and friends with thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does a widow's case come to them”* (Isaiah 1:21-23 TLV).

The fifth sin, one which is not present in these verses, but underlies all of the other sins and is dealt with by Isaiah fully in remaining chapters, is (5) idol worship. It is described in verse 29, a verse which the rabbis decided to leave out of this *haftarah* portion which ends in verse 27: *29 “For they will be ashamed of the sacred oaks that you desired, and embarrassed because of the gardens that you have chosen”* (Isaiah 1:29 TLV). These were places of worshipping false gods.

These sins were judged by ADONAI with two kinds of judgment. The first was a physical judgment on the land of Israel. We see this in verse 7: *7 “Your land is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your fields, strangers devour it in your presence—a desolation, overthrown by strangers”* (Isaiah 1:7 TLV). In this one verse we see that first, there was great desolation in the land, second, the cities are burned, and third, foreigners will occupy the fields. In fact, this had already happened during the lifetime of Isaiah. It was exactly what the *Torah* warned against in Leviticus 26: *31 “I will lay waste your cities and devastate your sanctuaries. I will not smell your soothing aromas. 32 I will make the land desolate and your enemies settling there will be astonished at it. 33 I will scatter you among the nations and I will draw out the sword after you. So your land will become a desolation and your cities will become a waste”* (Isaiah 26:31-33 TLV).

The second type of judgment was the destruction of the people themselves. This is found in verses 30 and 31, which are also not a part of this *haftarah* portion. And along with this physical judgment on the people, there was also spiritual judgment. In verses 10-15 ADONAI refused to hear Israel's prayers. And, He did not accept their sacrifices, so there was no cleansing of the sin which was taking place. Also, according to verses 5 and 6 there would be rampant sickness among the nation. Read these verses for yourself.

What is the cure of Judah's rebellion? There is hope for Judah, the Jews of today. The two steps in curing rebellion are found in verse 16: *16 “Wash and make yourselves clean. Put*

away the evil of your deeds from before My eyes” (Isaiah 1:16a TLV). In other words, “stop sinning!” The second step, repentance, teshuvah, is also found in verse 16: 16 “Cease to do evil” (Isaiah 1:16b TLV). “Stop doing evil.” A third step for the cure for evil is found in verse 17. Isaiah tells them to: 17 “Learn to do good, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 TLV). Finally, in verses 19 and 20 he reminds them of the benefits of covenant faithfulness: 19 “If you are willing and obey, you will eat the good of the land. 20 But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured with the sword.” For the mouth of Adonai has spoken” (Isaiah 1:19-20 TLV).

And then in verse 26 ADONAI said: 26 *“I will restore your judges as at first, your counselors as at the start. Afterward you will be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City” (Isaiah 1:26 TLV). What can this refer to but the days of Messiah? And Jerusalem will be called the City of Righteousness because Messia Yeshua is reigning there. Then in verse 27 ADONAI declares that He will redeem Jerusalem with justice. 27 “Zion will be redeemed with justice, her repentant with righteousness” (Isaiah 1:27 TLV). The word translated redeemed is not *ga'al*, the usual word used. In this verse it is *padah* which stresses the reclamation of property through a payment of ransom. What is the only ransom that ADONAI could give which would reclaim his people from sin? *Sha’ul* said: 7 “In Him (**Yeshua**) we have redemption (**padah**) through His blood—the removal of trespasses—in keeping with the richness of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7 TLV). Yeshua is the *padah*, the ransom for Judah of today.*

This brings us back to Yeshua's statement to his *talmidim* on the road to Emmaus that throughout the *Tanakh* could be found things about Himself. And, the majority of Judah is still in need of His redemption. This is the *p'shat*, the plain language understanding of Isaiah chapter 1. And while most of Judah, the Jews today, don't know it, we know that that ransom has already been paid. It has been paid because we must have an atonement. There is no other way to obtain redemption. And, as we said earlier, atonement has always been provided by ADONAI through grace by means of a sacrifice. It's only through faith in Yeshua that the restoration of the rebellious ones will be complete. Our *shlichim* reading today ties in here: 4, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5 “Who are You, Lord?” Saul said. “I am Yeshua—whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4b-5 TLV). At this time, *Sha’ul* was the personification of the Pharisees who were persecuting Yeshua. Without realizing it, rabbinic Judaism, the Pharisees of today, are persecuting Yeshua by denying Him and more. But, that will end soon. We know how it ends. All Israel shall be saved!

But, does the ransom provided for those of us who have already trusted in Yeshua mean that we don't need to take heed of ADONAI's words through these words of Isaiah? Absolutely not! Isaiah also said: 5 *“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a filthy garment, and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away, like the wind” (Isaiah 64:5 TLV). All is all. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. If we are in Messiah, are we still unclean with righteous-nesses like a filthy garment? Technically, we are not. His righteousness received through faith covers us initially. But, we must not have unconfessed sin. The question remains, are we who have believed in Yeshua and confessed our daily sin, are we where we should be spiritually? All of those sins which were attributed to Israel and to Judah in Isaiah chapter 1 could also be attributed to some in Yeshua’s body today. Are they our own sins?*

Let's look at them again. Sin Number One: (1) Israel forsook ADONAI. Haven't many believers today turned away, forsaken their first love? We are a *goy choteh* today! Israel is a sinful nation!

Sin Number Two: (2) the practice of empty religion. The latest "Pew Research" reveals that the religious landscape of the United States continues to change at breakneck speed. I don't have to quote you statistics for you to know that the body of Yeshua in the United States has changed drastically in recent years. Israel and Judah had the practice of an empty religion. For many followers of Yeshua today, that's all it is; an empty religion. Their names may be on the rolls, and they may attend worship occasionally, but for all practical purposes, they are only interested in doing their own thing. Sin Number Three: (3) the lack of justice, especially to those most vulnerable. And that's also true today. Those most in need seem to have the hardest time receiving justice. Favoritism is shown in many congregations. Sin Number Four: (4) Israel's corrupt rulers. We still have corrupt rulers today. It is not so surprising when it is our secular rulers. We almost expect corruption there today. But when the corruption is among those who are supposed to be servants of ADONAI, his ministers to the people, then we really are no better off than Israel in the time of Isaiah. Many shepherds are leading their congregations astray by endorsing their own interpretation of Scripture. ADONAI said through Jeremiah: 1 *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" It is a declaration of Adonai.* 2 *Therefore thus says Adonai, the God of Israel, about the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and have not taken care of them. I will soon visit on you the evil of your deeds." It is a declaration of Adonai*" (Jeremiah 23:1-2 TLV). Sin Number Five: (5) idol worship. We certainly have plenty of that today. Mammon is a very popular god. Many worship him. Pleasure is another favorite. His other name is Self-indulgence. These are all signs of our times and also bear out *Shlomo's* words: 9 *"What has been is what will be, and what has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9 TLV).

For the greater body of Messiah today here in the United States and around the world, this *Shabbat* is surely a *Shabbat* of rebuke for us. As a body, we are far from the calling which Yeshua has given us. The same is true for us as individuals. If you are not following Yeshua as you should, today can be the day that you change that. Today can really be a *Shabbat Chazon*, a *Shabbat* of Vision for each of us. Take a moment right now and reflect in your heart about your walk with Yeshua. If you recognize that it is not what it should be, make a commitment to change it. Let today be your *Shabbat Chazon*. Yeshua is calling each of us to greater commitment and greater service. Think about it and make that commitment right now. Amen.

As followers of Yeshua, we must guard our hearts against these sins which Isaiah identified; and others as well. We are sinners, but we don't have to be. David said it very well: 7 *"Behold, I was born in iniquity and in sin when my mother conceived me.* 8 *Surely You desire truth in the inner being. Make me know wisdom inwardly.* 9 *Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.* 10 *Let me hear joy and gladness, so the bones You crushed may rejoice.* 11 *Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.* 12 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:7-12 TLV). *Shabbat shalom!*