

B'chukkotai ydqHb (Walk In My Regulations) May 28, 2005

Shabbat Morning

Torah: Leviticus 26: - 27:34

Haftarah: Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14

K'tuvim Notzrim: 1John 2:1-17

Our parashah today is B'chukkotai. The Complete Jewish Bible entitles this parashah "By My Regulations." Another way to say it would be "Follow My Laws." HaShem is very specific regarding what we are to do. In 26:3-4 we read: **3** *"If you live by my regulations, observe my mitzvot and obey them; 4 then I will:"* and He goes on to tell every thing that He will do. The New American Standard Bible puts it this way: "If you walk in My statutes." This is a very good rendering. Walk reminds us of the Hebrew, "halak," from which we get halachah. Halachah is of course, the term used to describe what we are to do according to our understanding of Scripture. It is the way we are to walk. It is our understanding and interpretation of how HaShem wishes us to do what He has told us to do. According to one rabbi, Judaism without halachah is like playing tennis without a net. He takes that analogy from the poet Robert Frost. When he was asked why he did not write in free verse and disregard the rules of metrical rhymes, he answered "because that would be like playing tennis without a net. And without a net every ball hit is in." Halachah is the net necessary to play the game. How high or how wide the net is to be adjusted is determined by the group involved. But the net is not the game. The game, in our analogy, is the following of HaShem's Torah. How we follow it, as we best understand it, is halachah. But Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Messianic halachah is not the same. Ours is possibly similar to that of Conservatives with regard to Torah, but then deviates with regard to Messiah. Our halachah must include the understanding that we can only be righteous before HaShem through the shed blood of Yeshua and that he is the Son of God. This is not negotiable.

We will soon be celebrating Shavuot, the time at which HaShem gave the Torah to Israel. The very first Shavuot occurred in the wilderness at Har Sinei, Mount Sinai. All of Israel was assembled at the base of the mountain when Moshe came down and told them everything which HaShem had said, including all of the rulings. Exodus 24:3 tells us that: The people answered with one voice: *"We will obey every word Adonai has spoken."* This is what we have said in our hearts, just as if we were standing there with all of Israel. Our desire is to obey HaShem.

But the people did not obey as they said they would and HaShem goes on to tell them what will happen if they do not obey. He describes many things with increasing severity that He would do if they did not obey. Finally, in Leviticus 26:27-34 He says: **27** "And if, for all this, you still will not listen to me, but go against me; **28** then I will go against you furiously, and I also will chastise you yet seven times more for your sins. **29** You will eat the flesh of your own sons, you will eat the flesh of your own daughters. **30** I will destroy your high places, cut down your pillars for sun-worship, and throw your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols; and I will detest you. **31** I will lay waste to your cities and make your sanctuaries desolate, so as not to smell your fragrant aromas. **32** I will desolate the land, so that your enemies living in it will be astounded by it. **33** You I will disperse among the nations, and I will draw out the sword in pursuit after you; your land will be a desolation and your cities a wasteland. **34** Then, at last, the land will be paid its Shabbats.""

You remember that our parashah last week described the sabbatical system in which HaShem commanded that the land was to lie fallow one year out of seven? What he said to Israel was that they must follow his regulations, they must walk in his statutes, including allowing the land to have its proper rest. And if they don't follow His halachah He will give the land its due rest by disbursing Israel among the nations. And then the land will have its rest.

HaShem made good on His promise. He counted each year of sabbatical rest throughout Israel's history. And when they broke His laws beyond what He had determined, the straw that broke the camel's back, He made good on His promise and dispersed them among the nations. Initially the northern kingdom, Israel, was sent into Assyria. The southern kingdom of Judah had not violated quite so greatly and continued for a number of years, but eventually, Judah, too, was sent into captivity. Babylon was where they were sent. How long they were to be there was predetermined by HaShem. He spoke through Jeremiah in 29:10-14 to say: **10** "For here is what ADONAI says: 'After Bavel's seventy years are over, I will remember you and fulfill my good promise to you by bringing you back to this place. **11** For I know what plans I have in mind for you,' says ADONAI, 'plans for well-being, not for bad things; so that you can have hope and a future. **12** When you call to me and pray to me, I will listen to you. **13** When you seek me, you will find me, provided you seek for me wholeheartedly; **14** and I will let you find me,' says ADONAI. 'Then I will reverse your exile. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have driven you,' says ADONAI, 'and bring you back to the place from which I exiled you.' So we see that HaShem had decided Judah would be in captivity for seventy years. Why seventy years? How did HaShem arrive at this length of time for Judah to be in captivity? It seems likely that the seventy years was determined by the number of shmittah years violated by Israel. It seems probable that the captivity was one year for

each schmittah year not observed. Each time that the land was not given its rest HaShem was counting. And if Israel itself did not observe Torah and give the land rest, HaShem himself made sure that the land rested by sending the people into captivity. And according to Leviticus 26:34: *Then, at last, the land will be paid its Shabbats.*

During this time in Babylon our people had no way to repent of their sins; no way to bring offerings to Him. The Temple had served as their connection to HaShem and it had been destroyed because of their unfaithfulness. Today we have no physical Temple either, but because Yeshua paid the price for our sins, we have access to HaShem through the torn veil in the Holy of Holies. In the days of the Temple, HaShem's Shekinah rested on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Today a believer and follower of Yeshua has been given the Ruach HaKodesh to live within his own body. According to 1Corinthians 6:19-20: **19** *Or don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; 20 for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God.* Since our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit, is there a need for another Temple? This is not a question that we can answer. But we do know that Ezekiel prophesied that there will be another Temple. In discussing the millennial reign of Messiah this Temple is termed the "Third Temple," and we will speak more about it in a moment.

Since Shavuot is approaching and since some of us will be celebrating Shavuot in Israel, the Temple is greatly on my mind. We know of course that HaShem permitted the Jews to return to Israel from Babylon and rebuild the Temple. That Temple was known as the "Second Temple." In the years before Yeshua was born King Herod began to expand and embellish the small Temple which had been built 400 odd years before. It took him many years, but the Temple he built was a magnificent structure. And it too was referred to as the "Second Temple." Actually it was a reconstruction of the Second Temple. As you know it was destroyed in the year 70CE and Jews have yearned for it to be rebuilt for almost 2000 years now. According to the prophetic visions the future Temple will proclaim an era when nations will not fight each other, when war will not be taught, and when swords will be beaten into plowshares. According to Jewish hope this Third Temple is the hope of mankind, symbolic of that Messianic shalom, peace, and it will be HaShem's palace on earth. HaShem's Mashiach will reign as king and all of his subjects will be at peace with one another.

The Western Wall in Jerusalem is today Judaism's holiest place. Since the Temple has been destroyed and for all practical purposes Jews are forbidden access to the Temple mount area, it is the center of worship for Judaism. There is one other very holy place, but it has been accessible to the general public for less than ten years. It is small section of the Rabbi's Tunnel along the western wall, to the north of the traditional

Western Wall. In Yeshua's day there was an entrance in the western wall leading to the Temple area called the Kiphonut Gate. Today it is called Warren's Gate, after its modern discoverer. A small synagogue has been constructed before the walled up gate. Actually it is just a portion of the tunnel, 8-10 feet wide and about that long. All visitors to the tunnel walk through the center of the synagogue. But it is a very special place in Orthodox Judaism because it is the closest one can get to the Holy of Holies.

We will be in Jerusalem in just over two weeks to join thousands of others for prayer. This small exterior section of wall, about 200 feet long, is but a small part of a very large and majestic enclosure that surrounds a mountain. The mountain is of course, Mount Moriah and it is on this same place that the First and Second Temples stood. The Western Wall, which we see today, is just a small part of the enclosure which King Herod built to support the Temple that he was to build. Half of the Western Wall today is buried 70 feet beneath the ground.

The Temple was a place of worship during Yeshua's day. Even though the High Priesthood was corrupt, the ordinary cohanim were dedicated to their calling and the people were as well. You know that all Israel was divided into three classes. Aaron's descendents were the priestly class and performed the sacrificial Temple service. The Levites, the remaining descendants of the Tribe of Levi were the Temple singers, workers, guards, and musicians. All cohanim and Levi'im belonged to one of twenty-four groups called mishmorot, or watches. Each watch was called on a rotating basis to perform the Temple service for one week twice a year. The other eleven tribes were called Isra'elites. What you may not know is that they, too, were divided into twenty-four groups. Their groups were called ma'madot, or posts. Within these groups religious leaders were assigned and during their assigned weeks, they ceased from their regular work in order to assemble in the Temple to recite special prayers four times daily and to fast during the day from Monday through Thursday. They prayed for the welfare and health of the nation. The Temple service was not some unimportant holy ritual. All Jews were invited and expected to participate.

Three times each year, each adult male was commanded by Torah to make a pilgrimage to the Temple and in actual practice were joined by many women as well. During the festivals of Unleavened Bread, Shavuot, and Sukkot, the heads of households offered holiday sacrifices at the Temple. To the Jews of ancient Israel the Temple was the seat of religious rites and judicial authority. You might think that the Temple only played a role in the life of religious Jews, but that was not the case. Every Jew felt that life without the Temple would be incomplete.

Yeshua's talmidim were no exception. They visited the Temple with him many times and continued to do so after he was no longer with them. And it should be no surprise that on the day of Shavuot that that is where they were. In Acts 2:1 we read: *The*

festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. That place was the Temple Mount, probably in the area called Solomon's Porch, to the south of the Temple itself. In verse 2 we read: Suddenly there came a sound where from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. According to Young's Literal Translation, "it filled all the house where they were sitting." The Temple Mount during Yeshua's day was called "Har Habayit," "the mountain of the House." Often it was shortened to just "Habayit," the House. Many of you know that the traditional Haftarah reading for Shavuot is Ezekiel 1:1-28 and 3:12. Ezekiel 1:4 says: I looked and saw a windy storm approaching from the north and a huge cloud with flashing fire, glowing brightly all around with the color of gleaming amber from within the fire. Young's Literal Translation gives: And I look, and lo, a tempestuous wind is coming from the north, a great cloud, and fire catching itself, and brightness to it round about, and out of its midst as the colour of copper, out of the midst of the fire. If you or I had been at the Temple on that Shavuot and heard Ezekiel read and then an actual violent wind occurred and we then saw what looked like tongues of fire resting on each of those men and women standing nearby as verse 3 tells us, what would we think? I believe that many, many were curious and stood to listen to Shimon Kefa's message, probably multiple thousands. Acts 2:41 gives us this clue. It says: So those who accepted what he said were immersed, and there were added to the group that day about three thousand people. Those who accepted were about three thousand, but there was a larger group which did not accept Kefa's message.

For hundreds of years scholars and doubters questioned this verse. They could not see how three thousand could be immersed in "dry" Jerusalem. And that remained a mystery until the 1960's when the Jews recaptured Jerusalem. Archeological excavation began almost immediately to remove the centuries of trash from before the Western Wall, but also to uncover the area at the southern end of the Temple Mount where the main entrance into the Temple was located. At the foot of the Monumental Staircase were found a number of mikvaot, ritual immersion pools, where all entering the Temple would first immerse themselves. This was unknown until the early 1970's and suddenly it was shown that 3000 could be immersed fairly rapidly by use of the mikvaot just outside the Temple Mount.

I have a great expectation for our presence at the Temple Mount on this coming Shavuot. What spiritual blessing will HaShem give us? We don't know. Will it be as dramatic as Yeshua's talmidim experienced? Whatever it is, you will be there with us in prayer, and we will also be here with you in prayer. We will share what it is that HaShem has for us as a congregation with each of you. We are your representatives and you have sent us to Jerusalem as one of the ma'madot, one of the divisions of Israel commanded to go up to worship.

I said that I would speak a bit more about the Third Temple. Would you not think that Israel would build it if they could? Did they ever have the opportunity to do this after the Temple was destroyed in the year 70? Yes, they did. In the year 130 Shimon bar Kosiba led a rebellion against Rome and recaptured Jerusalem. The Jews were in control of Jerusalem for two and one half years. Do we have any evidence that Kosiba, the false messiah who became known as Bar Kochba, built a Temple? Yes, we have good circumstantial evidence. Yes, we do. First, Bar Kochba issued coins and began counting anew. On the coins were "year one, year two, and year three." Freedom For Israel was inscribed on them and many had the facade of a temple. Why would he depict the front of a temple no longer standing? Second, he appointed a High Priest and his name was on some of the coins, Eleazar the Priest. The High Priest presided over the Temple service. If there was no Temple, there was no service. So, why did Bar Kochba appoint a high priest?

There is another great mystery from this time period. Rabbi Judah, the Prince, who codified the Mishna many years after Bar Kochba wrote of his grandfather, Rabban Gamaliel, who lived during the time period 130-133. Regarding Rabban Gamaliel, it is recorded in Pesachim 74a that there was a dispute over the way that the Passover sacrifice was to be roasted. How could this be if there was no Temple? But this passage tells us that Rabban Gamaliel ordered his servant to "roast the Passover sacrifice on a metal grill." This could only happen if the Temple had been reestablished so that sacrifices could be offered.

In fact, it is a primary function of the Jewish Messiah to rebuild the Temple as described in the Book of Ezekiel. Read chapters 40-47. If Bar Kochba believed himself to be the Messiah, why did he not at least begin building the Temple during his two and a half year reign? The circumstantial evidence is almost overwhelming. And there is a very strong belief that Bar Kochba did in fact build the Third Temple. But where was it? Is there any physical evidence remaining which would point to this structure?

First, let's take a look at the Third Temple as described in Ezekiel. It is radically different from the Second Temple. It is almost square, described in Ezekiel in cubits. What is the length of a cubit? Actually there are several different lengths known to represent a cubit, and the measurement could vary from project to project. The standard cubit was approximately 18 inches, the distance from a man's fingertips to his elbow. You can see that this would vary greatly. If the cubit used for the Third Temple was 19.07 inches, then the dimensions of the Third Temple would be exactly 550 by 540 feet. Do you know what is exactly this size? Yes, it is! It is the Dome of the Rock platform. It is believed by most authorities that the Second Temple was partially over this area and with the Holy of Holies over protruding bedrock which would be just outside of the Dome of the Rock to the west, toward the Western Wall.

In the Third Temple however, the almost square design had the altar in the center and this would coincide with the location of the "foundation stone" inside the Dome of the Rock. That is possibly where the sacrifices were offered during Bar Kochba's time in the Messianic Temple.

But of course, all of this came to an end. When the Roman emperor Hadrian recaptured the city he built a pagan temple dedicated to Jupiter on the Temple Mount. Most likely he built it on the site of the Third Temple which he first destroyed. He also rebuilt the city and renamed it Aelia Capitolina. The Cardo, the central street of the present Jewish Quarter was the main street of Hadrian's Aelia Capitolina. Bar Kochba fled to the fortress of Betar southwest of Jerusalem and he and his followers managed to hold out there for 3 1/2 years. In the end he suspected everyone of treason and was himself killed by his own men. Hadrian's seat of paganism remained on the Temple Mount for 200 years.

When Constantine was Emperor in 324 the pagan temple was torn down. In 363 the Emperor Julian gave full rights to the Jews and gave them permission to restore the Temple. Their hopes were dashed when an earthquake destroyed their storehouses of material to build the Temple and Julian was killed in battle. The new emperor, Jovian, restored Christianity as the religion of the realm. The Jews were again given permission to rebuild the Temple at the beginning of the 7th century by the Persians who had captured Jerusalem. The Christian inhabitants protested and the Persian king withdrew his permission. Fifteen years later, in 629, Jerusalem was recaptured by the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius. The Christian Byzantines then began building an octagonal church on the Temple Mount. Although the mount had no special significance to them, defiling the mount with a church was the ultimate insult to the Jews and would dash their hopes of ever regaining control of their holy place. The Byzantine church was never completed. In 637 the Muslims captured the Holy Land and the church was converted into a Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock.

Will the 550 by 540 foot platform of the Dome of the Rock once again become the foundation of the Third Temple? Will the eight sided building which began as a church and ended as the Dome of the Rock be destroyed so that the altar of the Third Temple can be built over the foundation stone? These are questions which presently have no answers for us. But we all have a great Messianic expectation. Jews in Israel certainly do as well. We know in our hearts that the events taking place in Jerusalem bring us ever closer to the return of Yeshua our Messiah. And at this time in our history, being in Jerusalem for Shavuot has tremendous significance. I know you will pray for us as we go throughout the land. But pray especially during the 24 hour period of Shavuot, Jerusalem time, that we will be in HaShem's will and that He will meet us there. We plan to be at the Western Wall for prayer at sunrise, Jerusalem time, and then return for breakfast before joining with Rabbi Judah Hungerman's

group for a Shavuot Morning Service in the hotel. We will be seven hours earlier than you here at home so keep that in mind as you are praying for us. We will be praying that each of you here also receives mightily from HaShem.

Aveinu, Malkeinu, Our Father our King: We praise you for your merciful goodness. We magnify your holy name. You who created the heavens and the earth also created us and determined that we could worship you if we chose. Father, we do choose to worship you and to fulfill our calling as Israel, as cohanim to the Nations. Continue to fill each one of us with your Ruach HaKodesh that we might enter into the fullness of what you have planned for all your children. Father, we pray for your protection for all of Beit Shalom, our families, and that which you have given us. Keep HaSatan, the Evil One from us and help us to join Messiah Yeshua in crushing his head. Blessed be the name of Israel's Holy One. B'shem Yeshua HaMashiach, in the name of Yeshua our Messiah. Amen.