



Parasha Va'etchanan

August 17, 2019

Torah: Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-26

Shlichim: Romans 3:27-31

Shabbat shalom mishpocha! Our *parasha* today is *Va'etchanan*. Last *Shabbat*, Danny got us started in the Book of *Devarim*, Deuteronomy, with a focus on remembering. Israel was to remember where they had come from in order to be able to see what was ahead of them. It's the same for us. What has gone before us with regard to Israel has prepared us and informed us of what is ahead of us and will happen. The Book of Deuteronomy was a time of final preparation for Israel during which Moses reiterated many of the things which were taught and which occurred during the time of the first generation. Many in the second generation may have never heard some of the things about which he spoke. And, the way in which Moses presented the information to them was very orderly and followed a very specific format, the format of a covenant.

Our message today begins with the idea of covenant as suggested by the meaning of the word Deuteronomy. It means "second Law" because it appears to be a re-stating of the *Torah*. One trail which we could follow would be to examine the parts of a covenant as found in Deuteronomy. That is an interesting study, but we're not going there today. Today, we're going to follow a path which begins with the Covenant at Sinai and then examines other covenants.

Most of you have heard of Hammurabi's Code. It was written by the Babylonian king, Hammurabi four hundred or more years before Israel came out of Egypt. But, the covenant which ADONAI established between Himself and Israel was not based on this code. I mention it because some think that the two are similar. But, it is generally agreed by theologians that the Covenant at Sinai and its restatement in Deuteronomy are most similar to the Hittite Suzerainty Treaties. But, Hammurabi's Code was a law code, a document which stated what the law was and then prescribed the penalty, usually a very harsh one, for violating it. The Hittite Suzerainty Treaties were much different and the Covenant at Sinai most resembled them. In the Hittite world, the Suzerain was a sovereign, a king, and the treaty was an agreement between him and some lesser entity, a prince or a lesser king. The lesser king did have a degree of autonomy over his kingdom, but he was still subject to the overall rule of the suzerain, the great king. That's the pattern which we see in the Covenant at Sinai. ADONAI is the Suzerain, the Great King, and Israel is the lesser, autonomous nation under His overall rule. In this metaphor, we might see Moses as the prince. There are very significant differences between the benevolent suzerainty treaties and a law code such as Hammurabi's. We could characterize the suzerain, the great king, as a benevolent dictator, whereas the king of the law code was a tyrant, a cruel ruler. The suzerain treaty was administered with love and grace whereas the law code was administered with force and threat of punishment. The ancient rabbis looked at the difference between these two kinds of system as the difference between sonship and slavery. If you agree to ADONAI's covenant, you're a son; or a daughter. But, if you are under a law code, you are a slave. A son agrees to, but a slave has to. And, the pattern of the Hittite treaties is the general pattern of the Covenant at Sinai.

We also like to look at the overall covenant in a symbolic Jewish way as being a form of a *ketubah*, a marriage document, a form of contract, between Israel, the bride, and the Great King, ADONAI. Now that the Messiah has come, we can also see the continuity and the continuation of the covenant through Him, who He, Himself, describes as the bridegroom. We

continue to walk today as His disciples under the conditions of the *ketubah*, the *Torah*, as we await Yeshua's return and the consummation of the marriage to Him in eternity. The major point which we are making here with regard to the Covenant at Sinai, is that our covenant is a love relationship rather than being a fear document of you have to or else. The ancient treaty patterns help us to see this and to see that our relationship with ADONAI is based on love and grace. Covenant is our focus today and we find other covenants in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible. Let's consider them.

Edenic Covenant. Some consider what ADONAI did through creation as a covenant. In Genesis 1:26-28, Elohim said, "Let us make man in Our image and after our likeness." They will be created male and female and will have dominion over the earth. G-d blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply, and to rule over all the creatures of the earth. One group of theologians considers this part of Genesis to be the Edenic Covenant. Another group considers the covenant to be found in the promise of death if the tree of knowledge of good and evil was eaten, along with G-d's curse upon the serpent and the promise that the Seed of the Woman would crush his head and the serpent would crush his heel. These events are promissory and prophetic, but, they don't seem to have the usual characteristics of a covenant. We would all agree that the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent is a prophetic reference to Yeshua. While it may have been covenantal in nature, it was not identified by ADONAI as such.

Noachic Covenant. Next, we have the Covenant with Noah, the *Noachic* Covenant. Because Adam and Eve sinned, sin was unleashed on their descendants. By Noah's time, it was so widespread that there were only eight individuals living whom ADONAI considered righteous, Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives. The entire world, possibly a million people, except for Noah and his family were wiped out in the flood. ADONAI made a covenant with Noah and promised that "...*never again will all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again will there be a flood to ruin the land.*" Don't confuse this covenant with the Noachide Covenant, an invention of rabbinic Judaism. They propose that there are seven laws given in Genesis 9 which if obeyed by Gentiles, would cause them to be righteous before G-d. This, according to them, was one option for Gentiles to obtain right relationship with ADONAI along with a second option, conversion to Judaism. The Noachide Covenant is totally bogus whereas the Noachic Covenant is from ADONAI.

Abrahamic Covenant. Even with their new beginning after the flood, men began again to sin and sin abounded. Their desire to be like G-d resulted in their attempt at construction of the Tower of Babel. Not long after this time, ADONAI called another man from among the multitude, Abram. When Abram responded with faith, ADONAI counted it to him as righteousness. Some years later ADONAI made a covenant with him and promised the Land of Canaan as a future possession to his descendants. He commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and his household. The sign of the eternal covenant made with Abraham was circumcision, something which was to be done on all Jewish males at eight days of age forever.

The Priestly Covenant. In Exodus 29:44, ADONAI stated that He would sanctify Aaron and his sons to serve before him as priests. In Numbers 18, ADONAI promised that what was set aside of the offerings in the Tabernacle was to be a permanent share for Aaron's children and it was guaranteed with a "covenant of salt," an everlasting covenant. In Numbers 25:13, because of Phineas' righteous act of killing the Israelite man and the Moabite woman, ADONAI promised him and his descendants a covenant of everlasting priesthood.

The Covenant at Sinai; the Mosaic Covenant. ADONAI told Abraham that his descendants would live in a land that was not theirs for 400 years. But, He promised that He would free Abraham's descendants from that land and that they would go out with many possessions. Through an act of His grace toward the Children of Israel, G-d judged Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and rescued the twelve tribes. Promising that Israel would be "priests to the nations,"

ADONAI cut a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. The covenant was summarized in the Ten Words with the subsequent *Torah*, teaching and instruction, being given during the following years.

The Davidic Covenant. ADONAI made a covenant with King David that his descendants would always be on the throne of Israel. Through the Prophet Nathan in 2Samuel 7, He said: that He would raise up David's descendant and establish His kingdom forever. Referring to the coming One, the Messiah, 1Chronicles 17 says: ¹⁴ *"I will appoint him over My House and My kingdom forever, and his throne will be established forever"* (1Chronicles 17:14 TLV).

The New Covenant. During the Prophet Jeremiah's lifetime, the Kingdom of Judah was being judged by ADONAI for their sins and subsequently, the Temple was destroyed. The northern Kingdom of Israel had been judged one hundred years before and most of their people had been deported to Assyria. Through Jeremiah, ADONAI promised to redeem all that and to give a New Covenant to Judah and Israel, a covenant in which He would write His *Torah* on their hearts. The covenant was cut, was put into effect, some 600 years later through the sacrificial death of ADONAI's Son, Yeshua as a permanent sacrifice for sin.

We've seen some features of the covenant as re-expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy in these seven which some consider to be the covenants given by ADONAI. The Edenic was given to Adam and Eve's descendants, the Noachic to Noah's descendants, the Abrahamic to Abraham's descendants, the Priestly to Aaron and his descendants, the Davidic to the male descendants of David, the Mosaic to the twelve tribes of Israel and the New Covenant to Israel and Judah. Our question is, what bearing, if any, do these have on us today? If the Edenic was actually a covenant, we as descendants of Adam and Eve have been told to rule over the whole earth and to expect that the Seed of the woman, whom we understand to be Yeshua, will defeat the serpent, *HaSatan*, the Adversary. As descendants of Noah, we are confident in ADONAI's promise to not destroy the inhabitants of the earth again by flood. The Abrahamic Covenant applies only to the Jews, the descendants of Abraham. They have been promised the Land of Israel as a permanent homeland, something which has only been partially fulfilled today. The atonement earlier available through the Mosaic Covenant and the Levitical Priesthood has been superseded by the better atonement of the New Covenant and the eternal Priesthood of Yeshua. But, the Laws of the Mosaic Covenant are still on the books. Some are inactive due to the lack of a Temple in which to carry them out. But, the laws, *Torah*, teaching and instruction, given in the five Books of Moses which are not affected by the lack of the Temple and a Levitical priesthood, are available today to all who can receive them. Today, the New Covenant is the active covenant under which Yeshua's followers live. In it, ADONAI's *Torah* has been written on our hearts and we are obedient to it as a matter of conscience along with the additional *Torah* commands (1,050, according to some) which are found in the Writings of Yeshua's Emissaries, the *B'rit Chadasha*. After we have trusted in Yeshua by faith through ADONAI's grace and received the promise of salvation and eternal life, we begin to walk in these commands. The following of the commands found in the *Tanakh* and those in the *B'rit Chadasha*, have nothing, whatsoever, to do with a person's salvation. They are obeyed after salvation as a sign of love and commitment to Yeshua, our Messiah.

With covenants being our general theme today, we go to *Sha'ul* for further understanding. Because of his encounter with and the detailed instruction which he received from Yeshua, he seems to have a greater insight regarding covenants as they relate to our relationship with ADONAI through Yeshua. We begin in Ephesians 1. The Congregation at Ephesus included both Jews and Gentiles and *Sha'ul* spoke to both with regard to their relationship with Yeshua. We first establish the basic understanding of our relationship with Him: ⁷ *In Him we have redemption through His blood—the removal of trespasses—in keeping with the richness of His grace*....(Ephesians 1:7 TLV) and then move to: ¹³ *After you heard the message of truth—the Good News of your salvation—and when you put your trust in Him, you were sealed with the promised Ruach ha-Kodesh.* ¹⁴ *He is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of His*

possession—to His glorious praise” (Ephesians 1:13-14 TLV)! *Sha’ul* was saying that we who have trusted Yeshua have received the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit, as the guarantee of our redemption until He comes back to earth to physically redeem us.

We continue in chapter 2 with a paraphrase of *Sha’ul’s* words from verses 1-10. Gentiles were told that they were spiritually dead because of their unforgiven sins, because of their walking in the way of the world and their actions according to *HaSatan*, the ruler of the realm of the air. Speaking of Jews, he said that they also did not do right and lived for the hunger of what their bodies and minds craved. Then, speaking to both Jews and Gentiles, he said that ADONAI was merciful to both groups because of His great love and even while we were still spiritually dead because of our sins, He gave us life in Messiah through grace. And, he said, that ADONAI raised us, Jew and Gentile, up with Yeshua and gave us a place with Him in the heavens, and will, in the world to come, show us the great richness of His grace through our Messiah Yeshua. *Sha’ul* also told us that we have been saved by faith through ADONAI’s grace, and that it was a complete gift of G-d and that we cannot boast about it because our salvation is not based on our deeds. We are the creations of Messiah Yeshua who are created in order to do good deeds, deeds which ADONAI prepared for us earlier so that we could walk in them. This is all pretty much what everyone understands until we get to the part about the deeds. Verse 10 says: ¹⁰ “For we are His workmanship—created in Messiah Yeshua for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so we might walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 TLV). We are created in Messiah Yeshua, that is, we are saved by faith through grace in order to walk in good deeds. The Greek word translated deeds in the TLV is *ergois*. The meaning according to Strong’s is “works.” The word translated as walk is *peripatēsōmen* and means “to walk.” We are to “walk in works.” In rabbinic Judaism, the Hebrew word *halakh*, meaning walk, is the word from which the word *halakha*, meaning “how we walk,” is derived. *Halakha* is the established understanding of how one is to walk in the *Torah*. Rabbinic Judaism establishes *halakha*, how their followers are to walk in, that is, to obey, commands of *Torah*. As Messianic followers of Yeshua, we do the same, but our *halakha* is different because of our Messianic understanding of *Torah*. But, it certainly seems that *halakha* was that which *Sha’ul* was referring to in Ephesians 2:10 when he said “walk.” That which ADONAI prepared in advance is the *Torah* and after salvation, as Yeshua’s *talmidim*, His disciples, we are to *halakh*, to walk, in His *Torah*.

In Ephesians 2:11, *Sha’ul* spoke to Gentiles. He told the Ephesians (and those of us who are Gentile today) that as the people of the nations, they were called the uncircumcised by the Jews, the ones who were called the circumcised because they had had an operation in their flesh. He said: ¹² “At that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12 TLV). We can understand the part in this verse about being separate from Messiah, about not being citizens of Israel, and that we had no hope and were without G-d in the world. But, what about the rest of this verse, the part which I have underlined? What does it mean? Seeking to determine its meaning, it will be the primary focus of the remainder of our message. As I began to study for this message earlier in the week, I discovered that my understanding of that phrase, *strangers to the covenants of promise*, might be incorrect.

Most English translations of this phrase and even the TLV seem have missed something very important. For comparison purposes, here is the phrase in several different Bible versions. The TLV says: *strangers to the covenants of promise*, the NKJV says: *strangers from the covenants of promise*, the NASB says: *strangers to the covenants of promise* and the CJB says: *estranged from the national life of Isra’el*. I am not a theologian and I don’t know why the translators translated those versions in that way. But, they don’t seem to line up with what the Greek text says. In the Strong’s Concordance, the direct English translation of the Greek text is “strangers to the covenants of the promise.” And, surprisingly, the NIV is translated

that way. It says: *foreigners to the covenants of the promise*. This is because the Greek includes the word *tēn*, which means “the.” For me, this is a whole new way of looking at this phrase. What we see in the Greek is that the word “covenants” is plural, but the word promise is singular and has the definite article “the.” So, we’re not talking about a number of covenants which promise something, but a number of covenants which refer to something called “the promise.” That’s what we need to find out about, the promise. What is it?

If we think for a moment, we can find a passage with similar wording by *Sha’ul* somewhere else in his writings. With just a minor bit of mental gymnastics, we can see what seems to be a very significant connection between *Sha’ul’s* statement to the Ephesians and a statement he made to the Galatians. We spoke about this very verse in Galatians just a few weeks ago when we studying Galatians 4. **23 And the son of the bondmaiden was born through flesh; but the son of the free woman was born through promise (Galatians 4:23).** This is my Hebraized version of the King James Version which I created for my original Galatians study in 2001. The son of the bondmaiden, Hagar, was Ishmael and the son of the free woman, Sarah, was Isaac. But, it was incorrect and I have now corrected it to read: ...**the son of the free woman was born through the promise.** The Greek of Galatians 4:23 includes the word *tēn*, the very same word found in Ephesians 2:12. In both these verses, *Sha’ul* referred to “the promise.” And, we must conclude from this that he was referring to a very specific promise from ADONAI relating to certain covenants. What is the actual promise to which he referred? It was originally spoken to Abraham by ADONAI in Genesis 12 and was restated by *Sha’ul* in Galatians 3:8: *8 The Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the Good News to Abraham in advance, saying, “All the nations shall be blessed through you” (Galatians 3:8 TLV).* That is “the promise.” The promise of Isaac’s birth was made to Abraham by ADONAI in Genesis 18:10. Isaac’s birth is a part, the next part, of the promise which would lead to Yeshua as the “seed of Abraham” and the eventual blessing of all the nations. Certainly, ADONAI gave Abraham other promises, but this is the one to which *Sha’ul* referred as “the promise.”

In seeking to further understand what *Sha’ul* was telling us, I have examined several references to a promise theme proposed by a several different of Bible scholars. I am going to focus on information from just one. It is what Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, a respected theologian, detailed in his book, *The Promise Plan of God, A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. His theory is that the promise theme began in Genesis 3:15 with G-d’s promise to Eve that her seed, her descendant, would crush the head of the serpent, *HaSatan*, the Adversary. From that point, the promise continued to be revealed by future covenants. The Noachic Covenant was a promise of the continuation of the human race. The Abrahamic Covenant included a veiled promise of the “Good News,” the Gospel, which you can read about in Genesis 12:2-3 and which *Sha’ul* spoke about in Galatians 3:8. The promise continues in the Mosaic covenant, in that the giving of ADONAI’s *Torah* leads to Messiah. *Sha’ul* referred to this in Romans 10: *4 “For Messiah is the goal of the Torah as a means to righteousness for everyone who keeps trusting” (Romans 10:4 TLV).* Messiah is not the end of the Law as so many Bibles state, but is the goal found within the Law, the *Torah*, the teaching and instruction, which those who diligently look will find. Yeshua’s disciples were some who found Him that way. The promise theme is also found in the Davidic covenant, which gave the promise of Messiah and made it specific to the line of David. Finally, the promise is found in the New Covenant, which when taken in its entirety, promises the final ingathering of Israel and all who are joined to Israel through faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

If what Dr. Kaiser has proposed is correct, which, then, are the “covenants of the promise.” It’s the six which we just listed; the Edenic, the Noachic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic and the New. They are all “covenants of promise,” or at least “promises in covenant form.” The only one not a covenant of promise is the Priestly Covenant, the one made with Aaron and his descendants. The other six reveal a promise from ADONAI to His Creation, the

people of the earth. It's a promise to everyone, all nations, but He chose Abraham's descendants to tell everybody about it. Galatians 3:8 and Ephesians 2:12 as we examined them more closely, have tipped us off to something wonderful. "The Promise" found in the covenants is ultimately the *Besurat Ha'gulah*, the Good News, the Gospel of *Yeshua HaMashiach* which Abraham saw from afar and rejoiced. Speaking to a group of Pharisees, Yeshua said: ⁵⁶ *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was thrilled*" (John 8:56 TLV).

After speaking about the promise, *Sha'ul* continued: ¹³ *"But now in Messiah Yeshua, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah"* (Ephesians 2:13 TLV). It is the blood of the Messiah, "the promise," which brings both Jew and Gentile near. We all must trust in Him. And, through that trust, Gentiles are now citizens of the Commonwealth of Israel along with Jews. The next verses about the dividing wall and the "one new man" are important, but we will have to leave them for a later message.

As recipients of ADONAI's great love and the salvation which we have received through Yeshua our Messiah, we must remember why we are what we are: ¹⁰ *"For we are His workmanship—created in Messiah Yeshua for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so we might walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10 TLV). *Shabbat shalom!*