



Parasha Nitzavim

September 24, 2022

Torah: Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20

Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9

Ketuvim Shlichim: Romans 10:1-13

Shalom Mishpacha! Our *Torah* portion today is *Nitzavim*. It is the last *Torah* portion of Hebrew Year 5782. 5783 begins at sundown tomorrow. “Sunrise, sunset, swiftly go the days” as it says in the song sung by Tevye in *Fiddler On The Roof*. He lamented the growing up, the marriage and leaving the home of his daughters, something that many of us can relate to. Sunrise, sunset has also brought us many changes in the world, changes similar to those Tevye and his family faced, growing persecution brought on by godless tyrants throughout the world. While our persecution here has not reached the level which Tevye faced, it is growing and millions around the world are facing much more, even tribulation. They are our example, standing firm even in the face of death.

Nitzavim means “Standing,” and refers to those gathered before Moses on that day. 9 “You are standing today, all of you, before Adonai your God—the heads of your tribes, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, 10 your children, your wives, and the outsider within your camp (from your woodchopper to your water carrier)” (Deuteronomy 29:9-10 TLV). Moses went on to say that they were to cross over into ADONAI’s covenant, that is, to affirm their covenant with Him as they were about to enter Canaan, the Land of Promise. He will be their G-d as He had promised them and their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

We have to understand that the covenant which ADONAI made with Israel at that time is different than the covenant through which we now relate to Him. Last week’s *parasha* declared the “curse of *Torah*,” the “curse of the Law,” which was in effect under the Covenant made at Sinai. In that covenant, an individual Israelite and the whole nation of Israel had to be obedient to the *Torah* or suffer the curse of *Torah*. The curse was to be cut off from ADONAI’s protection, something which G-d executed with finality hundreds of years later by having the northern Kingdom of Israel carried away by the Assyrians and the Kingdom of Judah taken captive to Babylon.

Many Christians today don’t realize that there was no atonement in keeping the *Torah*. Obedience was required to be in covenant with ADONAI, but an individual Israelite’s atonement came through the ministry of the Levitical system of Priests. Aaron and his descendants, the *kohanim*, were the channel of atonement for the people. Through repentance, daily sacrifices for sin and the yearly *Yom Kippur*, Day of Atonement, sacrifices, Israel had a limited form of atonement.

We are now covenant members, both Jew and Gentile alike, of the New Covenant. When Yeshua died on the cross, the New Covenant was cut, a blood covenant which ADONAI made with Israel, the Jews. Those of us who are Yeshua’s Gentile followers have entered into G-d’s covenant with Israel through the blessing of Abraham, which is that all the people of the earth will be blessed through him through his seed, his descendant, Yeshua. This is

what *Sha'ul* calls the mystery of the Gospel. 4 “When you read this, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Messiah— 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed by the *Ruach* to His holy emissaries and prophets. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are joint heirs and fellow members of the same body and co-sharers of the promise in Messiah *Yeshua* through the Good News.” (Ephesians 3:4-6 TLV). The Good News of the Kingdom, the *Besorah HaMalchut*, is “the Blessing of Abraham.”

The covenants are something which you already know about, but it doesn't hurt to review. The primary difference between the Covenant made at Sinai and the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31 is a change of priesthood. As the writer of Hebrews says: 11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for based on it the people had been given the Torah), what further need was there for a different kohen to arise—designated according to the order of *Melechizedek*, not according to the order of Aaron? 12 For whenever the priesthood is altered, out of necessity an alteration of law also takes place.” (Hebrews 7:11-12 TLV). There was a change of priesthood from Aaron's sons to *Yeshua*, a priesthood after the order of *Malkitzedek*, an eternal priesthood with better promises. *Yeshua*'s sacrificial death took the priesthood away from the Tribe of Levi and made *Yeshua* from the Tribe of Judah to be *Kohen HaGadol*, the High Priest. So, now we are under a covenant with better promises. Just as there was no atonement in keeping the Law under the Covenant at Sinai, there is no atonement in keeping the Law under the New Covenant. In both covenants, the atonement came through the priesthood, Aaron then and *Yeshua* now!

And, *Yeshua* took the curse of Torah for us. *Sha'ul* wrote: 13 “Messiah liberated us from Torah's curse, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”)”— (Galatians 3:13 TLV). Regarding anyone hanged on a tree, Deuteronomy stated: 23...for anyone hanged (**on a tree**) is a curse of God (Deuteronomy 21:23b TLV). Those who have trusted in *Yeshua* no longer face the curse of being outside of ADONAI's will because of disobedience because *Yeshua* took the curse for us.

Yeshua took the curse for us. But, that doesn't mean that we are no longer to obey. We are given a choice today even as ancient Israel had a choice: 15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil. 16 What I am commanding you today is to love Adonai your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His mitzvot, statutes and ordinances. Then you will live and multiply, and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are going in to possess.” (Deuteronomy 30:15-16 TLV). ADONAI has given us free will and we are free to choose *Yeshua* or reject Him, something which grieves Him if we do. A person can reject Him and if they do, they receive the curse which He took for us; the complete separation from ADONAI for eternity.

But, obedience goes even beyond that. We should not think that because we have made *Yeshua* our Savior, because we have trusted in Him, that obedience is not required. Within the body of Messiah today, some say: “yes, there are some commandments we must obey” while others say that we are to keep all. Can you pick and choose which ones “you” want to obey? I don't think so. But, ADONAI in His mercy toward us has eliminated those commands which He does not desire to be active for us today. He did it by having the Temple destroyed and by replacing the Levitical priesthood with *Yeshua*'s priesthood. There has been no Temple and Levitical priesthood for the last 1,970 years, but ADONAI's commands which were not made inactive are our duty as disciples of *Yeshua* today.

The rabbis of the 1st century who did not trust in *Yeshua* addressed the loss of the Temple and Levitical priesthood by totally changing ADONAI's system and devising a new

system without the blood sacrifice required in *Torah* (Leviticus 17:11). On the other hand, after the Temple was destroyed, the believing Jews, Yeshua's followers, continued to follow ADONAI's system with the changes He had made under the New Covenant. They recognized Yeshua as the only sacrifice, a once for all time blood sacrifice, and recognized Him as the new *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, the Mediator between man and G-d. They continued to follow His commands, *Torah*, all of them that could now be obeyed without the Temple and the Levitical priesthood.

After Yeshua's death, His brother *Ya'acov*, Jacob, became the *nasi*, the Prince, the leader of the mother congregation in Jerusalem. The Jews were the leaders of the movement which began to grow under the New Covenant. Including Jacob, the first fifteen leaders of the Jerusalem congregation were Jews. This line of Jewish leadership ended after the second Jewish revolt was put down by Rome and the Emperor Hadrian took his revenge on the Jews by excluding them from his new city built near the total ruins of Jerusalem. After 135 CE, the time of Hadrian's victory over the Jewish rebels, the leaders of the mother congregation were all Gentile, but not of Jerusalem. They were now bishops of the congregation in Aelia Capitolina, the name of Hadrian's new city. Almost two hundred years later, the year 325, the city again became known as Jerusalem, but the leaders continued to be Gentiles.

It is important that everyone know not only Biblical history, but also the history of the early followers of Yeshua. How we understand that history has very much with what is done in Yeshua's body today. I don't believe that many within the Church today know the history of the Church. We can't erase what has already happened, but we can learn from it. I, as a Gentile, now understand why the Jews have had such a negative opinion of Christians through the ages. From outright hate to suppression and murder, the Church has persecuted Jews through the centuries. It is understandable that there is distrust today.

The antisemitism that we have today began with the early Gentile Christians. I have no doubt that it was placed in their hearts by *HaSatan*, the Adversary of Israel. He knew that Yeshua would eventually defeat him, but he used this tactic as one way to bruise Yeshua's heel (Genesis 3:15). Though instigated by *HaSatan*, it came from the hearts of men who claimed to love G-d.

This statement by Ignatius, the Gentile Bishop of Antioch was made around 115 CE, twenty years before the Second Jewish Revolt. At that time, there were still Jewish leaders heading the Jerusalem mother congregation. He said: "Whoever celebrates the Passover along with the Jews, or receives emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those who killed the L-rd and His apostles. For if we are still practicing Judaism, we admit that we have not received God's favor...it is wrong to talk about Jesus Christ and live like Jews. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity." This man apparently did not know that Yeshua said "Salvation is of the Jews." (John 4:10).

Around 130 CE, a man named Marcion imprinted his teachings and theology upon Church doctrine, and it continues, even to this day. He taught that the Hebrew Scriptures "have no value or authority for the Church." He believed and taught that the grace of G-d as taught by *Sha'ul* had replaced the *Torah*. According to him, *Sha'ul* taught a more excellent way of grace. Even though Marcion was later declared to be a heretic, his teachings of the dualistic concept of grace vs. law was accepted as truth by the Church.

Ten years later, around 140 CE, the Church at Rome appeared to be the first Christian community to observe Sunday as a day of worship. By now, non-Jewish believers far

outnumbered Jewish believers. Non-Jewish Christianity had begun to express its own identity and by 200 CE, the Church was completely non-Jewish led, officially worshipping on Sunday instead of ADONAI's Sabbath.

There is so much more to know and we can only scratch the surface today. In 312 CE, the Roman Emperor Constantine became a follower of Messiah after having a vision of himself being victorious in battle under the sign of the cross. When he informed his troops of this vision, the Christians thought he was speaking of the "Christian" cross, while the pagans perceived it to be the symbol of Tammuz of Nimrod, the letter "T".

In 321 CE, Constantine made a law for the whole Roman Empire to rest on Sunday in all cities and towns. This act officially sanctioned Sunday (known by the pagans as the venerable day of the Sun) as the Sabbath for Christians. As a result of this edict, Sylvester, the bishop of Rome, changed the name of the day from the "venerable day of the Sun" to the "L-rd's Day".

Constantine was not yet done. In 325 CE, he called together a council to be held in the city of Nicea. No Jewish bishops or pastors were invited. This council was brought together for two purposes. The primary purpose was to deal with a heresy which began to flourish called "Arianism", a heresy which denied the deity of Yeshua and the virgin birth. In response to this heresy, the doctrine of the Trinity was formalized. A secondary and lesser-known purpose at this council was to settle the matter of setting the date for Passover. In his letter to the Gentile churches after the council concluded, Constantine wrote: "At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day..." In other words, the leaders at the Nicean Council, under Constantine's leadership, decided that ADONAI's Passover on Nisan 14 should be changed to Easter which would meet on a different day. Constantine continued: "First of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Savior a different way." Marcion's teaching about "Old Testament" that it had no value or authority for the Church was now reaping its benefits among the early Church leaders. They completely ignored ADONAI's command in Leviticus 23 and other Scriptures regarding the *moedim*, the festivals.

You may have noticed that it wasn't ADONAI who changed the Sabbath and Passover. It was done by men. And, there was so much hate in those men toward the Jews. The early Church fathers spewed their venom in their sermons and it was received and imitated by the people. My prayer is that today churches will make it a priority to study early Church history, not so that it can be erased, as some try to do with our American history today, but so that we all can learn from it. Winston Churchill said: "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." A very large portion of the antisemitism directed toward the Nation of Israel and the Jews worldwide today comes from the Church, a repetition of the early history of the Church.

Every follower of Yeshua, whether Church or Messianic Jews and Gentiles, must decide how he is to walk out his faith. Yeshua has given us that choice. We've covered this recently,

but it is so important, that it will be repeated. While He and His disciples were at Caesarea Philippi, He asked a question. He said: 13... *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* (Matthew 16:13b TLV). The disciples said this and that and then *Shimon Kefa*, Simon Peter, said: 16... *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* 17 *Yeshua* said to him, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven!”* (Matthew 16:16b-17 TLV). *Yeshua* then said that He would build His Ecclesia, His congregation of believers, His followers, on the solid rock of this truth, that He, *Yeshua*, is *Mashiach BenElohim*, the Anointed Son of the Living G-d. And then He said: 19 *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will have been forbidden in heaven and what you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:19 TLV).

We are not prescribing our way of understanding *Torah*, what we believe, teach and follow, for the whole body of Messiah, nor are we judging anyone else’s way of following Jesus. *Yeshua* has given each leader the authority to make *halacha* for their group, that is, how they will interpret and walk out the Scriptures. He did that through His words in Matthew 16, giving the authority to forbid and permit, which we also know as binding and loosing. For whatever else it may mean, at the time that *Yeshua* spoke these words, binding and loosing was not something new. He didn’t invent binding and loosing. What He referred to by binding and loosing was authority, authority to make decisions for His body.

At that time, this was a Pharisaical thing. The rabbis of *Yeshua*’s day bound and loosed. The two great houses of Jewish thought from a generation before *Yeshua* were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*, the schools of the rabbis *Hillel* and *Shammai*. These two rabbis most always disagreed, with one loosing, permitting, and the other binding, that is, forbidding, or vice versa. Usually, this had to do with how *Torah* was understood. *Yeshua* said to Peter: *“I give you the authority to bind and loose, the authority to make decisions how those under your leadership will follow Scripture.”* That is what I believe it meant when *Yeshua* spoke it, the *p’shat*, the plain meaning of His statement. And, this authority was passed down to leaders through the centuries.

And this, I believe is true for us today. Each leader must decide how to interpret and to follow Scripture, all of Scripture. What we believe and teach here in *Beit Shalom* is only being taught to those who choose to receive it. And G-d has given that same authority to others in *Yeshua*’s body. Each of us who teaches must stand before *Yeshua* for our choices. *Yeshua*’s brother *Ya’acov* said: *1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, since you know that we will receive a stricter judgment.* (James 3:1 TLV). *Sha’ul* said: *10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may receive what is due for the things he did while in the body—whether good or bad.* (2Corinthians 5:10 TLV).

That is how we understand binding and loosing in its initial form. Those of us in Messianic Judaism are not any more special than any other follower of *Yeshua*. He has called each of us in His body to be “one in Messiah” in His love and in our callings. And, it is through His binding together of all of us who have so many different beliefs today that we will become a body without spot or wrinkle and ready for His return.

This statement is in our *parasha* today: 18 *“Now when someone hears the words of this oath and in his heart considers himself blessed, thinking, ‘Shalom will be mine, even though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart’—thus sweeping away the moist with the dry—.”* (Deuteronomy 29:18 TLV). Who are the moist and the dry? *Yeshua* said something similar

as He was walking ahead of Simon of Cyrene who was carrying His cross to Golgotha: 31 *“For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”* (Luke 23:31 TLV). This is also understood as: “If they do these things to the green tree, what will they do to the dry tree?” Yeshua was the green tree, righteous. Preceding these words, he had said to the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves. His words meant: “If they do these things to me, the righteous One, what will they do to you who are unrighteous?” In Deuteronomy 29, the moist are righteous and the dry are unrighteous. Moses was saying that when Israel is judged for their sins, ADONAI will sweep the righteous into captivity with the unrighteous. Here are the next two verses from the Complete Jewish Bible: **19** *“If there is such a person, when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself secretly, saying to himself, ‘I will be all right, even though I will stubbornly keep doing whatever I feel like doing; so that I, although “dry,” [sinful,] will be added to the “watered” [righteous].’* **20** *But ADONAI will not forgive him.”* (Deuteronomy 29:19-20a CJB). In other words, the dry, the sinful, the unrighteous, seeks to be given the treatment of the watered, the righteous, even though they remain sinful. That’s called riding on the coattails of others.

What Moses spoke about in Deuteronomy 29 and what Yeshua said in Luke 23 are about the same subject. Moses said: “Don’t think if you are not faithful to the covenant that you can ride on the coattails of the righteous for G-d will not forgive you. Here we have to distinguish between righteousness and judgment. Because Israel broke the covenant for so many years, ADONAI brought His righteous judgment on both the righteous and the guilty. They were all swept away by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. ADONAI judged Israel and destroyed the 1st Temple. Hundreds of years later, He judged the 2nd Temple. Yeshua, the most righteous, was killed and just forty years later, the Curse of the *Torah* was carried out on that generation when the Romans surrounded Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, a fulfillment of Yeshua’s words that “not one stone would be left standing” (Matthew 24:1-2). At the destruction of the 2nd Temple, the “curse of the *Torah*,” G-d’s judgment, came upon “both the moist and the dry,” “the green tree and the dry tree, the righteous and the unrighteous. Both righteous and unrighteous died, those who followed Yeshua and those who didn’t. But Yeshua said: 22 *“And unless those days were cut short, no one would be delivered. But for the sake of the chosen, those days will be cut short.”* (Matthew 24:22 TLV). The “chosen” were Yeshua’s followers who did not die in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. They were “chosen” to go from there and be witnesses of Yeshua to all the world. But, many of the moist, His righteous, were destroyed along with the dry.

As this *parasha* closes, Moses said: 19 *“I call the heavens and the earth to witness about you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 by loving Adonai your God, listening to His voice, and clinging to Him. For He is your life and the length of your days, that you may dwell on the land that Adonai swore to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob—to give them.”* (Deuteronomy 30:19-20 TLV). Before entering Canaan, Israel renewed their covenant with ADONAI. The New Covenant, the covenant which we are under today is different. We don’t have the same requirements. But nevertheless, we still have set before us, life and death, blessing and curse. ADONAI wants us to choose life and life only comes through Yeshua.

There is a remnant today within Yeshua’s body. Not all are righteous. There are the green trees and the dry trees. Some are there in name only. We have the ability to choose which we will be. Not everyone who is called a Messianic follower of Yeshua is righteous and not everyone who is called a Christian follower of Jesus is righteous. Only Yeshua knows

who are His faithful ones. He said: 13 *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. 14 How narrow is the gate and difficult the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* (Matthew 7:13-14 TLV). Today, there is a righteous remnant within the Church and also in Messianic Judaism. The time is now that we become one, the full body of Messiah, working together in the love which He told us to have: 34 *“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you must love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:34-35 TLV). This is not just for His followers in the individual bodies. It is most especially meant to be across the bodies, between those who may exercise Matthew 16 differently. It’s important for that to happen now. That is what is required of each of us to enable the words of prayer that Yeshua gave us, “thy kingdom come,” to be fulfilled in its proper time. Continued division will mean continued delay of our redemption and His glorious return. *Shabbat shalom!*