



Parasha Ki Tisa

March 11, 2023

Torah: Exodus 30:11-34:35

Haftarah: 1Kings 18:1-39

Ketuwim Shlichim: Acts 7:35-8:1

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha. This week's *parasha* is *Ki Tisa*. It means "when you take," and refers to the taking of a census. ADONAI usually commanded that censuses be taken, but occasionally Israel's leaders took it upon themselves to take one. This brought about severe punishment for doing what was right in their eyes and for not asking ADONAI if and how He wanted the census taken.

There are a number of important subjects in this *parasha*, things that we could talk about and have done so before. *Shabbat* was given as a perpetual sign between ADONAI and Israel and told how it was to be observed. Then, when Moses did not quickly return from Mount Sinai, the people made a golden calf and worshipped it. ADONAI told Moses what the people were doing down below and indicated that He wanted to destroy the whole group. Moses interceded on their behalf and ADONAI relented. Moses descended from the mountain carrying the two tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments. When he saw the people dancing around their idol, he threw the tablets down, breaking them. Moses destroyed the golden calf and had the main instigators put to death. ADONAI told Moses to prepare a new set of tablets and to go back up the mountain and He would again write the Ten Words on them. On the mountain, from a cleft in a rock, Moses was shown ADONAI's glory. When Moses returned to the camp, his face was so radiant that he had to cover his head with a veil.

The census is one of our subjects for today. As this *parasha* began, ADONAI described for Israel how censuses were to be taken. We read about that in our *Torah* service. ADONAI described certain procedures that were to be followed. If they were not followed, in ADONAI's theocracy the punishment for violation of His commands was sometimes swift. David, a man after G-d's own heart, a man we think of as continually being right with ADONAI, was punished regarding a census which he took. But, *Torah* tells us that ADONAI actually instructed him to take it: *1 Now the anger of Adonai again flared up against Israel, so He incited David against them saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."* (2 Samuel 24:1 TLV). This is a little confusing. Why did ADONAI incite David against Israel? It seems to have been that ADONAI's anger against Israel was also His anger against David because of his pride, pride in his accomplishments. David took the census as ADONAI commanded, but afterward, he knew that he had done wrong. There is a different slant on this in 1Chronicles: *1 Then satan (the adversary) stood up against Israel and incited David to count Israel.* (1Chronicles 21:1 TLV). I added the words "the adversary," the meaning of the Hebrew, *satan*. This verse seems to indicate that ADONAI used *HaSatan* to cause David to take the census in order to punish both David and Israel for their sins of pride. The punishment which ADONAI brought on Israel for David's sin, a punishment chosen by David, was three days of plague: *14 So Adonai sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell.* (1Chronicles 21:14 TLV).

Why did ADONAI punish David when He was the one who commanded him to take the census? He punished him for the pride, but also possibly for failing to carry out all of ADONAI's commands. We are not specifically told, but it seems that David didn't do everything ADONAI required for a census. *Torah* says: 12 "When you tally the sum of Bnei-Yisrael by numbering them, then every man must pay a ransom for his soul to Adonai when you count them, so that no plague will fall on them." (Exodus 30:12 TLV). The word translated "ransom" is *chofer*, כּוֹפֵר, meaning "the price of a life." Each "man" twenty years of age and above was to pay the tax of one half *shekel* so that no plague would fall on them. This census was actually taken to determine how many men Israel had in its army. It was only a census of men. Since, ADONAI's punishment for Israel was "plague," it appears that David did not collect the half *shekel* per man as required by ADONAI. The half *shekel* was ransom money so that no plague would fall on Israel's fighting men. But, ADONAI's punishment was actually plague, plague which killed "70,000 men," not women. It was a plague against the army of Israel. That was because the purpose of a census commanded by ADONAI was a census of fighting men, those 20 years old and older and able to bear arms. The *chofer* money, the ransom money, was money to be paid by a man who might become guilty of taking human life in a situation which did not constitute murder. The men counted in the census were required to pay a ransom of one half *shekel* because they were potential takers of human life in battle. The man that David sent to take the census, Joab, thought that David was wrong in taking the census, but followed orders. (1Chronicles 21:3-6). It was David's pride in the size of his army which caused him to count them and the sin which brought about the punishment.

In later years, the half *shekel* census tax became an annual tax which supported the daily worship in the Temple. When Yeshua was in Capernaum, the collectors of the Temple tax came to *Shimon Kefa* and asked: 24 "... , "Your teacher pays the Temple tax, doesn't He?" (Matthew 17:24b). And Peter told them yes, of course he did. Yeshua, the Teacher of righteousness was righteous in every regard and He fulfilled every legitimate requirement for a Jewish man living in the 1st century. He paid His tax. But, the question of how Yeshua paid His tax, as reported in the Book of Matthew, has been used by atheists and other detractors to infer that Scripture is nothing but a fairy tale. Yeshua said to *Kefa*: 27 "... go to the sea and throw out a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you'll find a coin. Take that, and give it to them, for Me and you." (Matthew 17:27b TLV). How can a fish have a coin in its mouth? It does sound like a fairy tale. But, we also know that Yeshua could cause any fish that He wanted to be caught to get on *Kefa's* hook and for that particular fish to have a coin in its mouth. It happened! Peter caught the fish and took out the coin. This was just one of the many miracles which Yeshua performed.

Is there a natural application of this event, something which Yeshua knew and used? Do fish do these kinds of things? Yes, some of them do. In the *Kinneret*, the Lake of Galilee, there are many different kinds of fish, but there is one particular fish which fits this requirement. That kind of fish actually keeps something in its mouth and because it does, it has become associated with *Shimon Kefa*. Today in Israel, it is called St. Peter's fish and there are many restaurants around the lake serving them. Tourists especially like them. It's delicious fried. Why is it called St. Peter's fish? It's called that because it is the kind of fish which *Kefa* caught with a coin in its mouth. I'm pretty sure that you have eaten this kind of fish, but not necessarily one from the Sea of Galilee. We're talking about Tilapia, a very common fish for sale today. That's the St. Peter's fish. These fish are from a group of fish called cichlids and are described as "mouth brooders." It is the female who does this. She holds and protects the young fish in her mouth, brooding, protecting them there until they're

large enough to swim away and fend for themselves. Being accustomed to having them in her mouth, when she has no young, she will sometimes hold a small stone. It's not inconceivable that the fish which Peter caught picked up a coin from the lake bottom and kept it in her mouth. Sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction and once again the Bible proves itself to be true. There were actually three miracles in this situation. Yeshua who created heaven and earth and everything in it, created the Tilapia to be like this, to have this kind of behavior. Second, Yeshua directed that particular fish to pick up a coin someone had dropped in the lake. And third, Yeshua directed that fish, the one with the coin in her mouth, to bite the bait on *Kefa's* hook. He pulled in the fish and took the coin from her mouth. Actually, there could be a fourth miracle. Someone had to be caused to lose the coin in the lake. Since, we know that the Temple tax was one half *shekel* and Yeshua said it was for Him and *Kefa*, we know that the coin found was a one *shekel* coin, money from ADONAI's Bank of Tilapia.

The subject of "taking a census" is about obedience. It had to be done correctly and in the right spirit. A closely related subject is holiness. In our *parasha* last week, we read that Aaron, as *Kohen Gadol*, wore a plate of pure gold on his forehead which was engraved with the words "Holy unto ADONAI." (Exodus 28:38-40). Holiness was required for Aaron, the mediator between Israel and ADONAI and was also required for his sons, the ordinary priests. Aaron is no longer the High Priest. Yeshua is now our *Kohen Gadol* after the order of *Malkitzedek*, a High Priest with an eternal and more excellent priesthood. *Shimon Kefa* tells us that we, Yeshua's followers, are His ordinary *kohanim*, His priests. (1Peter 2:9). As His priests, we are called to be "Holy unto ADONAI." It is not automatic. Holiness before our G-d is something which has to grow, grow from our hearts and take root in our lives.

Sha'ul taught about holiness. To the Ephesians, he said: *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah. 4 He chose us in the Messiah before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love.* (Ephesians 1:3-4 TLV). What does it mean to "be holy and blameless before Him?" First, understand holy. What does it mean to be holy? You can find seven or more definitions for holy in a dictionary, but the one which most pertains to us is: "Dedicated or consecrated to God for a religious purpose." That's our purpose, to be dedicated to ADONAI. My understanding of this verse is that before the foundation of the earth, ADONAI chose all of His creation to be holy and blameless. Not all have done that, but some have and some more than others. This means that His will is for us to be "holy and blameless before Him." *Shimon Kefa* also wrote about holiness: *13 So brace your minds for action. Keep your balance. And set your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah. 14 Like obedient children, do not be shaped by the cravings you had formerly in your ignorance. 15 Instead, just like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in everything you do. 16 For it is written, "Kedoshim you shall be, for I am kadosh."* (1Peter 1:13-16 TLV). As followers of Yeshua, we are called to be *kedoshim*, holy ones, holy in everything that we do, holy because He is holy. We are to be set apart and dedicated to Him only. Here are some examples: In Leviticus 11, after ADONAI commanded what we could eat and not eat, He said: *44 "For I am Adonai your God. Therefore, sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy. You are not to defile yourselves with any kind of creeping thing that moves on the earth."* (Leviticus 11:45 TLV). In Leviticus 19, ADONAI said: *2 "Speak to all the congregation of Bnei-Yisrael and tell them: You shall be kedoshim, for I, Adonai your God, am holy."* (Leviticus 19:2 TLV). He said that immediately before He told us to honor our mother and father, to keep His *Shabbats* and not to turn to idols. We are to be *kedoshim*, holy ones, in obeying these commands. In Leviticus 20,

ADONAI told Israel that they were not to offer their children to *Molech* or to turn to mediums or soothsayers and then said: 2 *“Speak to all the congregation of Bnei-Yisrael and tell them: You shall be kedoshim, for I, Adonai your God, am holy.”* (Leviticus 20:2 TLV). Many people in our nation today, even some in the Church, are advocating for *Molech*, although they don’t know that he is the demonic power behind abortion today.

The Scriptures are clear. ADONAI said that we must be holy. *Kefa* wrote: 15 *Instead, just like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in everything you do.* (1Peter 1:15 TLV). But, it is easier to say it than to do it. No matter how many times we resolve to do better, our flesh enters into the equation and in just a few seconds, can break down our resolve to do what is right. Speaking through the Prophet Malachi, ADONAI said: 8 *“Will a man rob God? For you are robbing Me!”* (Malachi 3:8 TLV). But we say: “How have we robbed You?” ADONAI answered: “In the tithe and the offering.” Withholding what we owe to G-d is a departure from the holiness to which we are called. The same is true with regard to our time. We rob ADONAI when we make our personal need of time more important than His. If we love Him with all our heart, mind, and strength, as He has commanded us to do, we will give Him more of our time and our priorities will be more in line with His.

Does the body of Messiah today really understand “personal holiness?” Personal holiness means that our goal should be to set ourselves apart for Him only. In our *erev Shabbat* service in our homes, at one point we wash our hands symbolically declaring that our hands are clean. David asked in Psalm 24: 3 *Who may go up on the mountain of Adonai? Who may stand in His holy place? 4 One with clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted his soul in vain, nor sworn deceitfully.* (Psalm 24:3-4 TLV). We then have the opportunity to make this personal statement: “I dedicate my hands to Yeshua my Messiah, to serve Him only.” What we do with our hands should honor ADONAI. The same is true for our hearts. We are to have circumcised hearts, pure hearts which separate us to ADONAI, make us holy before Him.

When we enter the synagogue each *Shabbat* we begin our service with *Mah Tov*. The English says: “How goodly are Your tents, O Jacob, Your tabernacles Israel. And, in Your great compassion, I will come into Your house. There I will bow, there I will fear Your holiness, O L-rd. We make that declaration each *Shabbat*, saying that we fear ADONAI's holiness, actually, a holy fear of our Creator. What is “holy fear?” It is high reverence for Him. We are not to take our relationship with ADONAI lightly. The psalmist wrote: 10 *The fear of Adonai is the beginning of wisdom.* (Psalm 111:10a TLV). Solomon wrote: 7 *The fear of Adonai is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.* (Proverbs 1:7 TLV). Solomon also wrote: 10 *The fear of Adonai is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (Proverbs 9:10 TLV). If our goal is to have more understanding, our entrance to that understanding and a greater closeness to ADONAI as our Father is to have a holy fear of Him. Mary Louise’s former church in Savannah has a Scripture verse across the front very similar to the way the *Shema* is placed here in our sanctuary. It’s an important verse, one which should be in our hearts just as “You shall love the L-rd your G-d” is. When I think about this verse, it causes me to stop and think and to realize what I am doing and how I am to act. It would make a great addition to our sanctuary, a wonderful visual reminder for us as we enter for worship. (According to the Septuagint) David wrote: 5 *... Holiness befits Your House, Adonai, for endless days.* (Psalm 93:5b TLV). This place is ADONAI’s house and in it we should exhibit holiness. We call this house a synagogue. Synagogue is a Greek word. Translated into Hebrew, it would be *Beit Kneset*, House of Meeting. Judeo-Christian places of worship are not the Tabernacle or the Temple,

but are Houses of Meeting. They are modeled after the small synagogues which were formed during Israel's captivity in Babylon and were brought back to Israel with the returning Jews. In Yeshua's day, they were places of daily and weekly worship, places to worship ADONAI in between visits to the Temple in Jerusalem.

In this place, our small sanctuary, holiness is our goal. It's because ADONAI said so. He has commanded us to set ourselves apart for worshipping Him and for no other purpose when we enter into our service. That's the main reason that we're here. That part of *Mah Tovu* comes from Psalm 5. According to the TLV, David said: *8 But because of your great lovingkindness, I will enter Your House. I will bow toward Your holy Temple, in awe of You.* (Psalm 5:8 TLV). The Hebrew actually says *b'yirateka*, בְּיִרְאָתְךָ, "in fear of You." When we enter for worship, we are to have a holy fear of ADONAI. But, worship is not all that we do here. We can have movies here and eat popcorn here. We can laugh at Rabbi Herb's jokes here. But when we come in to worship, worship should be our goal, worship with a holy fear of ADONAI.

When Israel came out of Egypt, ADONAI told Moses to say: *8 "Have them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them."* (Exodus 25:8 TLV). During those years, ADONAI came down and met with them through the High Priest in the Holy of Holies. But, Israel turned away from ADONAI's *Torah*. They sinned year after year and eventually ADONAI punished them and caused them to go into captivity. But their sinfulness did not stop His love for Israel. Through Ezekiel ADONAI said: *16 Therefore say, thus says Adonai Elohim, "Though I removed them far away, among the nations, though I scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I was a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone."* (Ezekiel 11:16 TLV). ADONAI's presence was with Israel in Babylon and His presence is everywhere that His people are and He is here today. ADONAI's presence, wherever we are, is a sanctuary, a place of refuge and safety. Our synagogue is a sanctuary and His presence is here.

In recent months, our times of worship have become more Spirit led than before and we pray it will continue to become more so. Each of us should want to place greater significance on our time of worship and to have a desire to go more deeply into ADONAI's presence. As we worship, we open our hearts to Him. *Sha'ul's* words which we read a few moments ago tell us what ADONAI wishes of us: *4 He chose us in the Messiah before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love.* (Ephesians 1:4 TLV). ADONAI created us to have fellowship with Him, but holy and blameless fellowship. When we don't give ourselves fully to Him we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.

In *Parasha, Ki Tisa*, Israel committed the ultimate sin of creating a golden idol and calling it YHVH, the name of their Creator. Even though ADONAI had delivered them from Egypt, parted the Red Sea and drowning the Egyptian army, and done other miracles, in just this short time, they reverted to Egypt in their worship. The Golden Calf which they made was a return to the gods of Egypt, creating a likeness of the Apis Bull which the Egyptians worshipped. It had been just a matter of days since all Israel said to ADONAI, "Everything you have said, we will do." Now, in just the short time that Moses had been away, they had forgotten ADONAI and looked for other gods. Even though they called their golden idol YHVH, it could not save them from the wrath of ADONAI. Israel paid for their sin with 3000 deaths.

But, ADONAI's nature is characterized by His love and mercy. If we depart from Him and then return to Him, He will receive us. His nature was physically revealed on earth

through His Son. Speaking of Yeshua, John said: *18 No one has ever seen God; but the one and only God, in the Father's embrace, has made Him known.* (John 1:18 TLV). What the TLV translates as “in the Father’s embrace,” in the Greek reads *On eis ton kolpon tou Patros*, “being in the bosom of the Father.” This is a reference to Yeshua, the “One and only G-d” who is in the “bosom of the Father.” He, Yeshua our Messiah, makes the Father known through His own love, mercy and grace. By Yeshua’s words and action, we are shown how we are to speak and act.

Some days before the time of today’s *parasha*, when giving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, ADONAI said: *5 ... For I, Adonai your God, am a jealous God, bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to the thousands of generations of those who love Me and keep My mitzvot.* (Exodus 20:5b-6 TLV). His hate is powerful, but His love even stronger. If we draw near to Him, He will draw near to Us. Yeshua’s brother *Ya’acov* said: *8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded!* (James 4:8 TLV). In the very uncertain world that we live in today, we want to be even closer to ADONAI. He is merciful if we draw near to Him with sincere and repentant hearts.

ADONAI has said to us: *Kedoshim you shall be, for I am kadosh.* He speaks to us individually in His *Torah* saying: “You must be holy because I am holy.” In Leviticus 11, He said: “You are not to defile yourself by eating things I have declared unclean. You must be holy because I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44). In Leviticus 19, He said: “Honor your mother and your father, keep my *Shabbats* and don’t turn to idols. You must be holy because I am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2). In Leviticus 20, He said: You are not to offer your children to *Molech* or turn to mediums. You must be holy because I am holy.” (Leviticus 20:2). ADONAI has made it clear through His *Torah* what He desires our conduct to be with many of His principles amplified by Yeshua, our ultimate *Torah* teacher.

Speaking about personal holiness, Yeshua said: *38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evildoer. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him also the other. 40 And the one wanting to sue you and to take your shirt, let him also have your coat. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”* (Matthew 5:38-42 TLV). In saying these things, Yeshua told us that we must be merciful to others even as our Father is merciful. Then He said: *43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors do the same, don’t they? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than anyone else? Even the pagans do that, don’t they?”* (Matthew 5:43-47 TLV). In saying this, Yeshua told us that we must love others even as our Father loved us. Then He said: *48 “Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48 TLV). Yeshua used these words to say to us: “Be holy because ADONAI is holy.”

The subject of holiness is really “personal holiness.” Each one of us must eventually stand before Yeshua and give an account. We are not to be like the world or even the Church in the liberal form that portions of it take today. We must individually take stock of the

things that we do to see if they qualify as being holy – according to Yeshua’s standard. He said: “Be perfect.” There are so many things that can tempt us today. I had a realization this week as I was writing this message. I have always had a problem with overeating, specifically, compulsive overeating. I know that overeating affects my body, His temple of the Holy Spirit. I knew that it did because it has caused me some serious health problems. But this week, I recognized that compulsive overeating is a holiness problem, at least for me. Many years ago, I did the same thing with alcohol and tobacco and even looked at pornography. ADONAI helped me to conquer those three, but overeating has continued to be a problem. I realized while writing this message that my eating is a part of my personal holiness and have prayed believing that this realization will help me to overcome it. Each of us should ask ADONAI if we have any areas which need examining. Unless we identify them, we can’t be set free and our holiness will not be what ADONAI wishes for us the, the closeness of our relationship with Him.

Sha’ul said: 18 For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (Romans 8:18 TLV). We are the holy and righteous sons and daughters of G-d wait for Yeshua to reveal us. ADONAI said: 44 “For I am Adonai your God. Therefore, sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44a TLV). And, Yeshua said: 48 “Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48 TLV). We have been told what Yeshua desires of us. It is up to us to make decision. Shabbat shalom!