

09-05-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene

Torah Portion; Deuteronomy 29:9 – 31:1-30, *Nitzavim* (standing) and *VaYelech* (and he went)

Haftarah: Isa 61:10 – 63:9

Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: John 10:7-11

Choose Life!

Central question of this message: How can we have an abundant life?

Today we have a double portion. The first is *Nitzavim*, which means “standing.” Its name comes from the first two words in the English, and the second word in the original Hebrew.

Deut 29:10-12

10 "You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God:
your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even
all the men of Israel, 11 your little ones, your wives, and the
alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops
your wood to the one who draws your water, 12 that you may
enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His
oath which the Lord your God is making with you today,

רֵאשִׁיכֶם	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	יְהוָה	לִפְנֵי	כָּלְכֶם	הַיּוֹם	נִצְבִים	אַתֶּם	9
your captains of	your God;	the Lord	before	all of you	this day	stand	Ye	
<u>7218</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>6440</u>	<u>3605</u>	<u>3117</u>	<u>5324</u>	<u>859</u>	
יִשְׂרָאֵל:	אִישׁ	כָּל	וְשָׂרֵיכֶם	זִקְנֵיכֶם	שְׁבִטֵיכֶם			
Israel,	the men of	all	with	and your officers,	your elders,	your tribes,		
<u>3478</u>	<u>376</u>	<u>3605</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>7860</u>	<u>2205</u>	<u>7626</u>		
מַחֲנֶיךָ	בְּקֶרֶב	אֲשֶׁר	וְגֵרְךָ	נְשִׁיכֶם	טַפְּכֶם			10
thy camp,	in	is	and thy stranger	your wives,	Your little ones,			
<u>4264</u>	<u>7130</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>834</u>	<u>1616</u>	<u>802</u>	<u>2945</u>		
	מִיַּמֶּיךָ:	שֹׁאֵב	עַד	עֵצֶיךָ	מִחֹטֵב			
	of thy water:	the drawer	unto	thy wood	from the hewer of			
	<u>4325</u>	<u>7579</u>	<u>5704</u>	<u>6086</u>	<u>2404</u>			
אֲשֶׁר	וּבְאֵלָתוֹ	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	בְּבְרִית	לְעִבְרְךָ			11
which	and into his oath,	thy God,	the Lord	with	into covenant	That thou	shouldst enter	
<u>834</u>	<u>423</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>1285</u>	<u>5674</u>		
		הַיּוֹם:	עִמָּךְ	כָּרַת	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה		
		this day:	with thee	maketh	thy God	the Lord		
		<u>3117</u>	<u>5973</u>	<u>3772</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>3068</u>		

As Moses is reaching the conclusion of his long sermon known to us as *Devarim*, he turns to the topics that he anticipates will cause us some real problems. He seems to expect and then warn against losing our focus on G-d, causing division, strife, and a downward spiritual death-spiral.

As you read his words, you can see that Moses feels that this new generation might soon forsake the holy covenant that the former generation saw come to fruition.

This generation didn't know anything of the hardships of slavery. They didn't see the great buildings and stonework of Egypt.

They didn't live through the terrors of that first Passover night when Yeshua walked through the streets of Egypt and killed the firstborn... sparing those who ate the lamb of deliverance in homes marked with its blood.

They didn't find themselves trapped at the sea, and watch it open as G-d made a way where there was no way. They didn't see it close again to chew-up the army of Egypt who were set on murder.

They didn't stand at the foot of Mt. Horev, and declare, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (Ex 24:7-8).

All those who saw these things, who lived these things... were dead.

This new generation only heard stories. They were good stories, first-person stories, ... but they were only stories.

It is true that they were watching the miracle of the canopy and the pillar of fire (or smoke), the rock that rolled around giving them living water,

and the *manna*, but since they had grown up with all that, it was “normal” for them.

This generation was living a life of relative ease. In many ways it was as close to the Garden of Eden as people had ever been since creation. Food sprang up every day. The best water in the universe was there for the taking (free delivery, even). And the canopy above them kept the sun off the backs of their necks. Their clothing and shoes didn’t wear out.

And the best thing of all... G-d dwelled among them on earth. Not bad, all things considered. If this was their punishment for the cowardice of the ten spies, it was a light affliction indeed.

In many ways, the previous generation had seen G-d’s mercy... and His judgment. They had been wooed and even driven into His arms by a holy closeness that we can only imagine. Moses made it clear that the covenant he was initiating today was also for future generations.’

Deut 29:14-16

14 "Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, 15 but both with those who stand here with us

today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those
who are not with us here today

In Talmud (Shavuot 39a) our sages stated that all Jewish souls (both
born and pre-born) were present to hear the words spoken at the foot of
Mt. Horev, and thus we are bound together throughout all generations in
the covenant established there.

Our rabbis have rightly said that the Hebrew people were betrothed to
G-d at Mt. Horev, and the Torah is our ketubah (marriage contract).

But we can see that the covenant that G-d made with us at Mount Horeb
was not a new covenant. It was a re-iteration and reaffirmation of a
former one.

Gen 17:6-8

6 "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make
nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. **7 And I
will establish My covenant between Me and you and your
descendants after you throughout their generations for an
everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your
descendants after you.** 8 And I will give to you and to your

descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

G-d is making a covenant not only with the one present, but with those who follow after that one in the faith of the One true G-d. Here "descendants" signifies spiritual descendants, not genetic ones.

Moses knew that the closeness to G-d is not merely due to His proximity in the camp. The closeness that gives life is a product of walking with Him, with an amazing level of two-way intimacy.

Moses knew that we couldn't take and keep this Promised Land without each successive generation walking hand-in-hand with G-d. And he decided to offer at the end of his life the warnings we see in the remainder of *Devarim*.

Moses knew that walking with G-d means living a holy lifestyle, and repenting of our failings when we don't. It is not merely doing what we should be doing. It is having the correct heart while we live a life consistent with His instructions. Repentance is not repentance without a broken heart behind it.

Moses had seen occasional flashes of greater closeness between G-d and His people. But it had been interrupted all too often by episodes of rebellion and disobedience. Moses knew that for the Hebrew people to remain in G-d's protection and favor, they must not only grow closer to G-d but must maintain an increasing level of holiness throughout all subsequent generations.

I wonder if Moses worried whether their current life of relative ease, removed from the rigors of Egyptian slavery, had made them too comfortable, and feeling self-sufficient. Fleshly self-sufficiency seems to blur or even extinguish a reliance upon G-d for everything, and a recognition of His provision.

It is said that difficult circumstances produce hard men. Hard men produce easier circumstances. Easier circumstances produce soft men. And soft men produce difficult circumstances.

Maybe Moses was seeing a similar dynamic unfolding before him as he spoke the last few words of his great sermon on the east banks of the Jordan.

By the time this parasha was written, the permanent record of all but two of the commands of Torah is completed.

After reading from the Torah, we lift it and proclaim *“V’zot haTorah, asher sam Moshe, lifnei b’nai Yisrael, al pi Adonai, b’yad Moshe.”* And these [words] are the Torah which were given by Moses in the presence of the children of Israel, from the mouth of the L-rd, by the hand of Moses.

We have understood from our Sages that we have been given 613 commandments. But some ancients noted in Talmud (Makkot 23b-24a) that Moses gave only 611 commandments, not only because the numerical value of the word “Torah” is 611, but also because there were two commandments which seem to be set apart because they were directly given by G-d in His own voice in our hearing.

Ex 20:1-3

20 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

I find that interesting, but not persuasive. For G-d kept speaking from the mountain, and we kept listening to Him.

Rabbi Sachs, of blessed memory, reached a similar conclusion, but took a different pathway. He noted that in parashah, *Vayalech*, Moses himself gave us two over-arching commands which seem to be central to our national survival in the conquest of the Holy Land, but also in our survival for all generations. These two commands were given *after the Torah* was completed.

Deut 31:9-13

9 So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. 10 Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. 13 And their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

This national assembly is called the “*Hakhel*”. This once-very-seven-years national assembly of unity was for the public reading of the Torah. This command now is number 612.

But we are not only to hear the Torah, we are to actually spend some time writing it as well. Later in this same parashah we find,

Deut 31:19-20

19 Now therefore, **write this song for yourselves**, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel.

We know that the Torah is one song, that we sing in every generation back to the Almighty. Our Sages have concluded that the command to write “the song” is not given to Moses, because he has already finished his writing. This command was given to us, individually. And “the song” that is intended to be written is the very words of Torah.

They believed that it is incumbent upon every Jew to take part in writing at least some of the Torah himself. This is command number 613.

As part of your study of Torah, have you copied certain passages for yourself? If so, you have fulfilled this command. There is no end to the study of Torah, so there should be no end to the writing of passages for yourself as you study.

These two final commands seem calculated to preserve and reinvigorate all those which come before. For if we neglect them, we are likely to forget.

If we as a nation read (and believed) the Torah at least once every seven years we will be reminded of all that G-d has done for us, and all the benefits of his Instructions. A great revival would follow.

If we as individuals write for ourselves a few of the verses of Torah, then those parts will stick into our souls a bit better, and we can live a better life... a holier life. And we are more likely to choose life.

The covenant found in Genesis with Abraham, and the covenant found in Deuteronomy with Moses, is not the final generational covenant.

Yeshua, when He was preparing Himself to be the covenant sacrifice to pay for our sins (both ours, and those who are to come after us in faith), invoked precisely the same generational aspect to covenant.

John 17:13-21

13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Who are the “these” to whom He refers? They are those who are alive and standing with Him on that day.

Who are the “those” to whom He refers? They are those from every successive generation who will come to faith, and who will tell and retell the stories of our redemption and the goodness of our G-d.

This theme of generational covenant is presented over and over in scripture. The covenant of life is repeatedly laid before us.

In the book of Nehemiah at chapter 6, we find that the wall around rebuilt Jerusalem was completed on the 25th day of Elul. The anniversary of that completion is this coming Monday.

So, it was at that time in history and at this very time of year that an amazing “revival” occurred, and we read about it in chapter 7. Nehemiah gathered all the people by their families and tribes, and after recording the genealogies, it was now the first day of the month of Tishrei. That day will come to us again on this coming Saturday.

That timing was not accidental. It was the L-rd’s schedule that they finish the wall and assemble to hear the Torah on Yom Teruah, which we today also know as Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah will be this coming Saturday a week from today.

We see in Nehemiah chapter 8 a great national revival occurred. But what started it all? It began when they remembered what they had previously forgotten – their covenant with G-d which is tied to His instructions and which is tied to an abundant life.

Neh 7:73-8:12

And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

8 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right

hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum,
Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. **5**
And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people
for he was standing above all the people; and when he
opened it, all the people stood up.¹ 6 Then Ezra blessed
the Lord the great God. And all the people answered,
"Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they
bowled low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the
ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub,
Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad,
Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the
people while the people remained in their place. **8** And they
read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give
the sense so that they understood the reading.

9 Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the
priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people
said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your
God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were
weeping when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he
said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send

¹ This is where the tradition began that we raise the Torah opened once it is read, we stand facing it when it is raised, and raise our hands toward it acknowledging that it contains our instruction for life, and life abundantly.

portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. **Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.**" 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 **And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.**

The theme of “remembrance” is central to our celebration of our upcoming festival of Rosh Hashanah.

Lev 23:23-25

23 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, **a reminder by blowing of trumpets** [lit. *teruah*, only done by blowing a shofar], **a holy convocation.** 25 'You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord.'"

This provides one of the three names we have for this festival day, *Shabbaton Zikron* (Sabbath of Remembrance). The Scripture tells us that the sound of the shofar is directly tied to the concept of remembrance.

So, we know that we are commanded to remember... but we are not told in Torah precisely *what it is* that we are to remember.

Could it be that one of the things we are to remember is the same thing that the people of Israel and Jerusalem remembered in the day of Nehemiah and Ezra? Could it be that the hearing and study of Torah is the pathway to an abundant life?

Maybe the final passage in the Christian arrangement of the Tanach gives us part of the answer.

Mal 4:4-6

4 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. 6 "And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children,

and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

The remembrance of Torah is so important to G-d that He ties that to the concept of eternal life.

Ps 133

133 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing — life forever.

John 10:7-11

7 Jesus therefore said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 "The thief comes only

to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.

Yeshua showed us how to live-out Torah in a better way. He showed us not only that, but how a holy life brings an abundant life.

Beginning in a week, we enter the “10 days of awe.” Our people believe that judgment begins in heaven on this day and is finalized on Yom Kippur 10 days later.

Tradition is that G-d determines during these 10 days the fate of each individual, the fate of each people group, and the fate of each nation. He does so based upon how they have acted throughout the previous year.

Let's take the next few days to begin the process of reconciliation if there is an unresolved conflict in the body. This is a serious matter and must not be neglected. As we do so, let's meditate on the final urgings of Moses which were echoed and expanded upon by Yeshua.

Deut 30:15-20

15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love

the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. **19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."**

Choose life!