



The Torah portion for this week is Ki Tavo and means, "when you enter." We teach the Torah portions because it was instituted by God's holy prophets, perhaps Nehemiah. Yeshua would have taught from the portions and that is what He was doing in Luke 4:21. There is also a teaching following the Torah study.

This is the season just before the "High Holy Days." This is a time to examine our lives and make changes to do better at following God. Rosh Hashanah begins the new year and perhaps looks forward to the new heaven and earth where we will reign with Yeshua. 2 Timothy 2:11-12 NKJV says, "This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." So, in order to be part of the future kingdom, we must continue and endure to do what is "right and good." Deuteronomy 6:17-18 NKJV says, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good."

Inspect yourself and be open to areas in your life that need change. Proverbs 3:7 NKJV says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil." Doing right and good is to keep God's commandments; doing evil is not to keep them.

God's ways are simple and ordinary; they lead to blessings for life. Perhaps we think of the ordinary as not being too exciting, but good results in life are truly exciting even without the extraordinary. I have been thrilled with my relationship with God; and why not, after all, He is the creator God. Doing what is right can bring us personal peace. I remember this guy years ago who tried to amaze people with his stunts and he paid for it with numerous injuries. That doesn't sound like it is too exciting to me. That is what he got out of life.

There different paths to take in life, but there is only one true and good way. Not all paths lead to God. Some people say that God is good and will not deny anyone eternal life, but if they have denied God's good advice, they have denied and despised the goodness of God.

We may try to do all kinds of things to please God, but following His instructions is always the best way to live. Sometimes we think that we must make up something extra to do to please God. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NKJV says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." So, be careful to do what God wants us to do first. Our first duty is to love God, "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always;" Deuteronomy 11:1 NKJV.

Torah Study

After Israel came into the land that God provided for them, they were to present their first fruit to the Cohen (priest) at the place where God chose to place His name and recite a message of humility; the people were to have joy for what God has given them. We too need to be mindful that God is over all and that He provides for us.

We often read right over these scriptures on the first fruit without thinking; God's people are to make themselves humble before God. We are to confess that we are a pagan Aramean. It teaches us that we were all at one time sinful people. That was our heritage. I remember my dad reciting that scripture about us being Aramean; it was quite startling for me. "We are what?!" It is about our ancestors originally being sinful idolaters and not about our victory over Laban as some say. It teaches us to be a humble people.

Shaul talks about humility in Romans 3:10 NKJV; "There is none righteous, no, not one." He is quoting Psalms where it says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one." Psalms 14:1-3 NKJV.

As we can see, it is talking about someone who does not believe in God. Shaul uses these verses because it is Jewish practice to be humble. In this case, he is talking about being humble enough to accept the help of the Holy Spirit. Those reading his letter would have understood this. Most people quoting this verse do not share the true context of this verse because they do not understand how to take the Bible in its true context. Shaul means in Romans 3:10 that although we work at doing what is right, we know intuitively that we still make mistakes and sin.

Some people flippantly use Shaul's scripture in Romans 3:10 to say we can do nothing good. That is ridiculous and not true; The Bible says, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good;" Genesis 1:31 NKJV. Their "nothing good" man-made philosophy is a non-biblical philosophy being applied to God's word. They are practicing self abasement which is not biblical. Some religions practice things like hurting themselves; that is wrong. God asks us to do what is right and good, but we still sin at times. We need to be humble enough to accept that. Humility is to be part of our thinking.

God brought Israel out of Egypt so they could do what is right and good. Deuteronomy 6:17-18 NKJV says, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you." They could actually do what is good and so can we. When I say we are to do what is right and good, I am actually quoting scripture.

God also helps us to live right (be righteous) through His Holy Spirit; we are given the Holy Spirit through the Messiah Yeshua to help us live holy lives. If we follow God's commandments, some day we will be part of His future eternal kingdom. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."

The portion continues; after they presented their first fruit, they were to have joy in what Yehovah had given them. They were also to set aside every 3rd year a tenth for the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows; after they did that, they were to say a prayer and ask for a blessing from God. They were to give a little over 10% every year. On the 3rd and 6th years they were to give to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. The other years except for the 7th year they took their giving to Jerusalem.

Every 7th year the land was to rest and debts were forgiven (Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 15:1ff). People were to share with others who had need. The shmitah year of course poses a problem for those who need income and food on the 7th year. Farmers now rotate their crops and leave some of their land fallow and therefore give their land rest. Not leaving land fallow makes the land barren and unable to grow anything. Perhaps this is why God had them do this. Some Jews follow a complex concept of shmitah; one of the things they do is to only buy from Gentiles on the 7th year. God's commands were never intended to be complex.

There is a lot that can be talked about regarding the shmitah year. Canceling all kinds of debt could make it impossible for a person to own a house because it would call for full payment within 7 years. That is because all debt then becomes relative to the 7 year shmitah. Owning a house and making payments is considered an asset and not so much a debt. Perhaps only incurring other debt to last over 7 years would be an applied practice for the law of shmitah. Certainly, having good foresight and careful money management would be a good way to apply shmitah. Setting proper borrowing limits would enable people to keep a short term clean slate financially. Obviously, lenders are not practicing proper borrowing limits and the individual would need to take charge of their own limits. Taking some extra time off on the shmitah year could be a way to observe this command, but it's not a rest from work; the land is at rest. Most certainly, rotating crops would be a proper application of the practice of shmitah. We shouldn't overthink this commandment and make it convoluted in practice. We don't live in an all farming society any more as they did.

This portion goes on to say, by agreeing to obey God's commands and be holy, God would make them His treasured people. This is often mentioned in the Old Testament portion (Exodus 9:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalms 135:4) and quoted in 1 Peter 2:9. We are also God's treasured people when we obey God's commandments. They were to write the Torah on stones on Mt. Ebal after they crossed over, set up an altar, make offerings, and rejoice.

After they crossed over to the promised land, curses were to be given from Mt. Ebal and blessings from Mt. Gerizim. Then Moshe told them cursed is anyone who makes an idol, mistreats their parents, moves a landmark, mistreats the blind, or pervert's justice. Cursed is anyone who lies with his father's wife, or an animal, or his sister. Cursed is anyone who takes a bribe or does not agree to the Torah.

This portion talks about the curses for not doing what God commands and the blessings for obeying. We also can be cursed, if we are not obeying God's commandments. Those who are willfully sinning can incur consequences for their sin which includes sickness, losses of various kinds, and God releasing His protection over them.

Understand though that Yeshua said we will all experience trouble; it is wrong to think that just because someone is having trouble that it is something that they are doing that is causing that. Yeshua said in John 16:33 NKJV, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." We know that living godly and good lives blesses our lives even though we all can suffer troubles at times.

We all suffer, but doing wrong often brings more troubles. Rabbi Shaul (Paul) also associates curses with sin in the New Testament portion. "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due;" Romans 1:26-27 NKJV. Shaul says they received a penalty for their sin. He says it was something that believers saw happening to those who were committing these sins. Even in our modern society, 25% of homosexuals have the deadly disease AIDS. As of this writing, 31 million people have died from AIDS; most of them participants in sexual sin.

If they obey the law, God will bless them wherever they are; He will bless them in conception, against their enemies, with their stored food, their livestock, and rain. They will be an exalted nation. If they disobey God's commands, they will lose these benefits and they will be struck with sickness, plague, war, loss, and blight; they will be destroyed and they will be scattered. The people respond and affirm various commandments in this portion. Notice that the 10 commandments are not all of God's commandments. Moshe closes by relating about their time in the desert and by telling them that they should obey God's commands so they will prosper.

The Haftarah for Ki Tavo is Isaiah 60:1-22. This Haftarah portion says that the nations will see the glory of God through Israel and that the nations will acknowledge that and bless Israel. The nations that don't will perish. It says shalom will be Israel's leader, they will do what is right, and God will be their light.

This portion is talking about a future time when the Prince of Peace (namely Sar Shalom) will be their leader (the Prince of Peace or Sar Shalom is another name attributed to Yeshua). Likewise in Revelation 22:5, Yochanan says that God will be their light in the new Jerusalem.

Even in the present we see God's blessings on those who do what is right and good. Someday those who love God will be with Him forever and experience God's goodness and blessings forever.

Isaiah 60:1-3 CJB from the Haftarah says, "Arise, shine [Yerushalayim], for your light has come, the glory of ADONAI has risen over you. For although darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples; on you ADONAI will rise; over you will be seen his glory. Nations will go toward your light and kings toward your shining splendor.

When I read this, I think about pillars of light coming down from the sky? I enjoy looking at amazing sunsets, clouds, and beautiful skies. The pillars of light sometimes give me thoughts of God's divine light coming down from heaven. It a nice spiritual picture, isn't it? Do we actually allow God's light into our lives?

For fun, what kinds of things in the natural can sometimes make us think about God?

Pillars of light – God giving His light from heaven.

A rainbow – God's promises are true.

A dry field – life without God is barren and difficult.

A beautiful sunset – in the end, we will be blessed for being faithful to God.

Flowers – God's creation is beautiful and amazing.

What other things in nature might relate to God or make you think about God?

Further Study

Be Approved to God

(A practical teaching to accompany the Torah teaching, Ki Tavo)

* People think they are learning biblical truths, but they can be an incomplete or muddled versions of truth; it can often be founded on some topical rendering of doctrine; these are often characterized by specific doctrinal movements; for example, the faith movement, shepherding movement, Toronto blessing, the sacrificial living movement.

* God's true ways speak to us and help us live right; they touch all components of life.

* We may start out thinking that one version of a belief system is truth when in fact it is only part of what God wants us to understand. Don't forget about the working of the Holy Spirit; it is very important.

* We may feel devoted to a faulty belief system; God wants to set us free and to have joy in a more complete design of biblical truth.

People think they are learning biblical truths, but they can be an incomplete or muddled versions of truth; it can often be founded on some topical rendering of doctrine; these are often characterized by specific doctrinal movements; for example, the faith movement, shepherding movement, Toronto blessing, the sacrificial living movement.

The Bible tells us to be diligent to do things God's way and when we are only concentrating on a single idea from the Bible, we are missing out on some of the message that God intends us to understand. Shaul said in 2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV, "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God**, a worker who does not need to be ashamed."

How many of us have worked hard to show ourselves approved to parents, or to bosses, or the community. Years ago, I hoped to get the approval of my future wife and I still try to please her – that's part of being married to someone. I made a lifelong commitment to my wife and I've made a lifelong commitment to God. Both require our day by day effort. Colossians 3:23-24 CJB says, "Whatever work you do, put yourself into it, as those who are serving not merely other people, but the Lord. Remember that as your reward, you will receive the inheritance from the Lord. You are slaving for the Lord, for the Messiah."

We are serving God and not our denomination or belief system. Faith is very important and we are to have faith towards God in all that we do, but not all scriptures are interpreted in terms of faith or trust in God. The faith movement might say about 2 Timothy 2:15 that we are to be diligent in our faith. That might be true, but it is saying we need to be approved to God in all we do and a major part of that is to keep God's commandments. Yeshua, Shaul, and the Messianic message of the gospel of John make a strong point for faith, but we need a well rounded spiritual life. We are to live out our life in faith.

The shepherding movement was great at making sure that people had proper follow up and grew up spiritually. Some used to assign people to do this with each new person. People definitely need help to grow, but after awhile the movement got a little controlling. Kefa said, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;" 1 Peter 5:2-3 NKJV.

Instead, its better to make sure people have opportunity for instruction and growth. That's why we have these teachings; so we can be reminded how to live right and grow spiritually. Some say they only want to have group sharing sessions; that is great, but we also need solid teaching to help us live right. I'm all for a during the week meeting as well; we need teaching to help us understand God's word the way it was originally intended to be understood.

*In our culture there is a serious need
for biblical teaching in its proper context.*

I remember hearing a story about this pastor who was trying to impress his congregation. Someone said to him afterwards, "Where did you get that from?" What's most important; just giving lots of impressive information or teaching people to do what is right and good? Deuteronomy 6:18 NKJV says, "You shall diligently ... do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD." Remember, 2 Timothy 2:15 said to be diligent to be approved to God. Amazingly similar in thought, aren't they?

Many read the Bible out of context and they are not doing themselves any favors. It says in 2 Peter 3:16 NKJV, "Which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. If you are reading the scriptures without the context of the Old Testament portion, then you are in trouble Kefa just said. They didn't know the Torah; they were untaught; there was no New Testament portion at the time.

The Toronto blessing movement and those associated with it got out of control. People started going to their churches just to hear prophesy. Shaul said that is important (1 Corinthians 14:1) and the work of the Holy Spirit is important, but that is only one of the things we need as a believer. We also need God's word and His instructions.

The sacrificial living movement has its roots in asceticism. Asceticism means denial of self. While that is not a bad thing to do at times; and fasting can be a good way to readjust your focus on life towards God; again, it is not the only thing we are to do. When I fast, I think about how God more important than worldly things. Shaul says that an acetic way of living is wrong.

People can go to extremes in this.

The self denial we are to engage in is to stay away from sin; to stay faithful to God.

Shaul tells us that that we are to keep God's commandments and not indulge our fleshy desires.

Colossians 2:23 NKJV: "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

Moshe chose to keep God's commandments instead of sin. The affliction came from unbelievers.

Hebrews 11:25 NKJV: Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin."

Kefa also says we are to stay away from sin.

1 Peter 2:11 NKJV": "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

Shaul tells us to fight a spiritual fight by bringing our thoughts under control and keep God's commandments.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NKJV: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Yeshua tells us to be faithful; some may persecute us or break off relationships with us. We may lose our belongings. We may have to do those things in order to receive eternal life.

Matthew 19:29 NKJV: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life."

Yeshua said we may even have to take up our execution stake (cross) and die for our faith. Yeshua died on a stake and not a cross. The translators were reading that into the scriptures. The word for cross always means stake.

Mark 8:34 NKJV: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Yeshua said in Revelation 2:10 NKJV, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

God's true ways speak to us and help us live right; they touch all components of life.

Deuteronomy 27:15-26 and 28:15-68 contain a multitude of commandments that touch on many areas of life. Don't commit idolatry.; don't treat parents poorly; don't remove landmarks; don't mistreat the blind; be just toward the disadvantaged. It is quite a lengthy list and is worth your time to read. As you can see, the Bible covers a lot of important attitudes and commands that we should do. It makes sense to treat everyone well, especially your parents. No one should cheat people out of their land by moving a landmark. We should treat everyone well including the disadvantaged.

God give us His good words in the Bible. They are truths that we can live by. Psalm 26:3 NKJV says, "For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth." Psalm 40:11 NKJV says that God's word can preserve us, "Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me." God wants us to know His truths so we can be wise. Who wouldn't want to be

wise? Psalms 51:6 NKJV: "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."

We may start out thinking that one version of a belief system is truth when in fact it is only part of what God wants us to understand.

Each of the things I talked about earlier need to be understood properly. People can get all excited about prophesy and then stop reading the Bible! Some may get controlling in their attitudes, but we are to try to guide people and not be a lord over their life. We can fast at times, but we are not to continually live that way. What's most important is to stay away from sin and keep God's commandments. We should never abuse ourselves or beat ourselves like some pagans do. The Bible teaches us to protect life (Luke 14:5).

Don't forget about the working of the Holy Spirit; it is very important.

Some denominations completely ignore the scriptures that talk about the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-29). Kefa said, "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38 NKJV. The Holy Spirit is good, so the gifts of the Holy Spirit are also good; we are to seek God's good gifts. Yeshua said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Luke 11:13 NKJV.

We are commanded to seek the spiritual gifts associated with the Holy Spirit. "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy;" 1 Corinthians 14:1 NKJV. Shaul even says that what he writes about the gifts of the Holy Spirit are commandments of God, "Let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord;" 1 Corinthians 14:37 NKJV. I think people skip over 1 Corinthians Chapters 12-14 because they are told to. They wouldn't ignore the gifts of the Holy Spirit if they knew they were disobeying God for not seeking God's gifts mentioned in the Bible.

*People don't realize they are disobeying God's commandments
by not pursuing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

We may feel devoted to a faulty belief system; God wants to set us free and to have joy in a more complete design of biblical truth.

I was just talking to someone about believing in the Bible. I used to go to a church where the pastor taught his personal good advice. He said he believed in the Bible and I'm sure He would defend that, but he actually didn't believe in doing what the Bible said. He trusted in his own good advice instead of teaching the Bible. That's crazy, isn't it? If we are not teaching people to do what the Bible says, do we believe in the Bible? Do these people who are teaching us not to do all the Bible says, believe in the Bible?

We are in relationship with God by actually doing what He tells us. We are part of the family and God is our Father if we make Him our Father and trust in Him and His word. Have you ever noticed that people who lack joy are often negative and draining to us and others. Actual trust

in God requires we have joy in serving Him and in keeping His commandments. We are commanded to serve God with joy. Deuteronomy 28:47-48 NKJV says, "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy ... He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you." When the Israelites would go to Jerusalem, they would travel along on their pilgrimage with joy and singing. What a beautiful picture of what our life's pilgrimage should be. I love having a feeling of joy. We need to watch our attitudes.

Moshe closes this portion by telling them about their time in the desert and that they should obey God's commands so they will be in relationship with God and prosper. They were to stay in relationship (covenant). "Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do;" Deuteronomy 29:9 NKJV. We are to trust God and keep His commandments with joy.

When the Israelites would go to Jerusalem, they would travel along on their pilgrimage with joy and singing. What a beautiful picture of what our life's pilgrimage should be.

There are more commandments in this portion. We should remember that God gave us His commandments to help us. If we keep His commandments God says we will be His treasured people. I want to be one of God's treasured people. The Bible teaches us that we are to be a humble people. We can incur curses by not keeping God's commandments and will receive blessings if we keep God's commandments. We need biblical truths and not an incomplete or muddled version of truth. God's ways are true, they help us live right, and are intended to be part of all our life; it should include the working of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to keep His commands, to have all of His good blessings, and have joy in life.