

#45 VaEtchanan Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

By Moshe Schwab

Names

Kefa – Peter
Moshe – Moses
Shaul – Paul
Yeshua – Jesus
Yochanan – John

Terms

Haftarah – the weekly reading from the prophets
Parashah (portion) – one of 54 portions of the Bible from the Torah
Rabbi – Jewish leader
Tanakh – Old Testament portion
Torah – 1st 5 books of the Bible

VaEtchanan means, "and I pleaded". Moshe begins by relating that he asked God if he could go into the promised land; he would not be allowed to go. Instead, Joshua would lead Israel into the land. In this portion, the 10 commandments are listed again, we find the command to love God with all our heart, and the command to put up scriptures at our entrances. Moshe tells them to listen to the commands of God and do not add or subtract from them. He says that if Israel keeps God's commandments, all the nations would see their wisdom and understanding.

It is important to understand that the commandments in the Tanakh (Old Testament portion) give us a good life. Some say His commands are done away, but God says the wisdom of the Old Testament commandments would be a witness to the nations. In this portion it says in Deuteronomy 4:6 NKJV, "Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people;'" So why are some people saying that God's commands in the Old Testament portion are not for us? They even contradict God's word and say they are wrong!

They have been taught a system of man-made philosophy that has been passed down to us. It says in Numbers 23:19 that, "God is not a man, that He should lie." So, who is lying, God or man-made theology and philosophy? These people who are subtracting from God's commandments will have to face God someday. It also says in this portion in Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV, "You **shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it**, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

Since God's commandments give us the wisdom of an all-knowing God, we ought to be hanging on every word. I know someone who played pro basketball and I still remember almost every word they told me on how to play basketball. That's how we should be listening to God. The Shema is also in this portion where it says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength;" Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV. How do you love God? Deuteronomy 11:1 NKJV says, "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. Why wouldn't we want to listen to an all-knowing and good God that has our best interests at heart?"

We have enough troubles in life let alone doing things contrary to God's commands. The consequences of not keeping God's commands brings evil into the world. There are at least 39 words of encouragement to keep God's commandments in this portion, maybe more. Do you think it is important to keep God's commands! Shaul tells Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke,

exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 2 Timothy 4:1-2 NKJV. There was no New Testament at the time; he is talking about the Old Testament portion!¹ Yeshua will judge us it says; He will also judge those who are teaching false doctrine. Teach people to keep God's commands. In this portion it also talks about God being merciful if we return to Him (Deuteronomy 4:30-31).

Also in this portion, Israel was to tell their descendants about all the events that took place from Egypt until their entering the promised land. We as well should talk about the goodness and power of God both in the Bible and from our own experiences.

Moshe then tells them about how they stood before Yĕhōvāh² and what they experienced at Mt. Sinai. The mountain was ablaze and they heard God speak from the sky. He says they are not to make any representation of God to worship. They were to be an inheritance to God. Moshe tells them not to forget their covenant by worshipping idols. Israel would be destroyed if they worshipped idols. If they repent though, God will not forget them.

Moshe tells them that Yĕhōvāh is God and there is no other so keep His commands. Moshe then creates three cities of refuge for the unintended killer to flee. Again, Moshe tells them to listen to God's commands and then repeats the 10 words they heard at Mt. Sinai; he again talks about their encounter at Mt. Sinai. He says listen to God's commands so that they may have a long life and then he gives them the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. Part of the Shema says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV. Yeshua quotes this in Matthew 22:37.

Moshe tells them again to observe God's commands and to tell their children all that God did for them. He says observing God's commands will make them righteous (in other words, it will help them to live right; righteous means to live right). Some don't understand what the word righteousness means and treat it more like a stamp of approval instead of what it really means. It means to live right. Also, Israel was to go and take the land and get completely rid of the idolaters there and their idols. Yĕhōvāh kept his promise to their ancestors (he will keep His promise to them), and so they were to obey God.

This Torah portion is often read near Tisha B'Av which is a day morning for the loss of the of the first and second Temples and the date of other Jewish disasters. It would be an appropriate day to fast on. We are not commanded to fast on Tisha B'Av (the 9th day of Av on the Jewish calendar). It is connected with this portion because Moshe tells them that they will be scattered among the nations in this portion. It also says in this portion that God will not forget His covenant with Israel. God will restore His people to Him when they repent.

Over and over in this portion, we see Moshe reminding them to keep God's commandments. The writer of Hebrews says the same thing (in Hebrews 3:5-4:2). As Moshe says there are dire

¹ Timothy's mother was Jewish (Acts 16:1); the Holy Scriptures being talked about is the Old Testament. "And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures;" 2 Timothy 3:15 NKJV.

² Ye-Ho-VAH is pronounced as, "Yĕ" like the word "yes," "Hō" like "home," and "Vāh" as in "pah;" Yĕ-hō-vāh. The accent is on the -VAH. Exodus 3:15 says that this will be God's name forever. It means, He existed, He is, and He will be. We are to pray using God's real name: "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them;" Numbers 6:27 NKJV. If we are not using God's real name, we are not putting His name on His people.

consequences for not following God, the writer of Hebrews says the same. Hebrews 3:12 NKJV says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." Contrary to what some say, we can depart from our relationship with God. It is important to maintain our relationship with God. Watch out for people who may give exciting or interesting teachings, but don't bring you in relationship with God. Shaul also talked about those with itching ears; watch out that you are not one of them (2 Timothy 4:3). Have a deep faith, not a superficial one.

The Haftarah for VaEtchanan is Isaiah 40:1-26. In Isaiah 40, Isaiah says that Israel is to take comfort. The glory of the Lord will be revealed. Isaiah says that mankind is like the grass that dries up, but the word of God stands forever. 1 Peter 1:23-25 quotes from this: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever;" 1 Peter 1:24-25 NKJV.

Teaching for this Torah portion

- * We don't know all the goodness of God; at present we live lives that are to be a glory to God in a dark world.
- * We rise up spiritually; we make haste to go forward to win the race; we are not weighted down with worldly things.
- * Money is not our goal. We look at the plan of life in spiritual terms.
- * We are in the arena of life; waiting our turn to step in and fight spiritually.

We begin to live a new life through God's commandments and the help of the Holy Spirit that God gives to believers in the Messiah Yeshua. We **have not** arrived yet; we need to grow up spiritually. It says God's word lasts forever. Congregations today think that leading people to a building will save them. They are leading them to wood and stone. Psalm 138:2 NKJV says about the Old Testament scriptures, "I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for **You have magnified Your word** above all Your name." Notice that **it doesn't say**, "I will worship your Temple for you have magnified your Temple above your name. It is God's word that's important.

It says we are born again through the word of God. Those who live a changed life and follow God's commandments (God's word) will endure forever. Born again means to live a changed life. Life is short, but those who live a changed life and follow God's commands will endure forever.

Some use these verses in 1 Peter to mean it doesn't matter what they do; they think they will be in the future kingdom of God no matter what. That is not true. It is God's word and His commandments that will endure. We will endure too if we keep God's commands. It's plain to see this in Ephesians 5:5-6 NKJV, "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **Let no one deceive you with empty words.**" An unclean person refers to a person who lives a sinful life. Shaul says, "Let no one deceive you." Don't be deceived by these people who are

taking the scriptures out of context. They are going to the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8); don't go to the lake of fire with them.

Also, Isaiah said Israel was to cry from the mountain tops that "here is your God." This is a Messianic scripture. After Yeshua came, many Jews and Gentiles believed. The Jews told the world about their Messiah. It's not true the Jews did not believe; that was a lie produced by the false pagan religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine was the leader of the Mithras cult which celebrates Sunday as the day to the pagan sun god. When Constantine produced his false church mixed with idolatry, he even made keeping God's feasts illegal including the true day of rest ("The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, **these are My feasts;**" Leviticus 23:2). The real day of Shabbat is our Friday night at sunset to Saturday at sunset.

Saying Sunday is Shabbat is an inappropriately applied man-made law. Yeshua said, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men;" Matthew 15:9 NKJV. Deuteronomy 4:2 says we are not to add or change God's commandments. We can end up with almost anything by adding and changing God's commands. That's how some ended up with thousands of extra commands from the Old Testament. There are appropriately applied commands. We even see some commands added and changed in the Torah. It is okay to apply appropriate commands to the Old Testament commands. That's how we got 1,050 New Testament commands; they are appropriately applied commands from the couple hundred commands of the Old Testament. Our laws in the United States have their basis from the Bible; we've expanded the law in the United States now to over 2 million laws.

I use the following as an example a lot because it is simple. Shaul says that we are not to muzzle the ox while it is at work (Deuteronomy 25:4); he uses this to mean we should support our leaders (1 Timothy 5:17-18). That is a properly applied commandment. Some say that the day of Shabbat changed because that is when Yeshua rose from the dead. Yeshua actually rose on our Saturday, perhaps near sunset. Since the 7th day was the day God rested from creation, keeping Shabbat as a day of rest recognizes God as creator. Genesis 2:3 NKJV says, "God blessed the seventh day and separated it as holy; because on that day God rested from all his work which he had created."

God blessed the 7th day and separated it as a holy day (holiday, feast day). So, those who say otherwise contradict God. These Messianic verses say we are to keep Shabbat: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil;" Isaiah 56:1-2 NKJV. Stop defiling the true Sabbath; if you believe that God is the creator, then honor Him on Shabbat. Believe what the Bible says and do what the Bible says to do. Yeshua said that in vain you worship God with your man-made commands. Don't go along with inappropriate man-made commands.

It said in Isaiah 40 that humanity is like the grass that withers away and is gone. There was a popular song years ago that said something like, let's sing and dance because life is short. The Bible also says that life is short, but we have good news; those who follow God's

commandments and believe in Him will have a glorious life with Him for all eternity. Those who keep God's commands will endure forever.

In the present, we don't know all the goodness of God; at present we live our lives to the glory to God in a dark world. To compare even the good times we have now, to what we have waiting for us can't be done. Shaul quotes Isaiah 64:3 in 1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV and says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." Shaul obviously bases his teaching on the Old Testament.

We've talked about the evil eye in previous portions; it is a standard Jewish teaching. First of all, there is a good eye, "... If there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things;" Philippians 4:8 NKJV and context; and there is an evil eye that is contrary to the way God wants us to view life and live life. The evil eye views things with mistrust, evil intentions, envy, resentment, and can even see others as threats. It produces greed and arrogance. Yeshua talks about the good eye and the evil eye, "Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness;" Luke 11:34 NKJV. People in the United States are filled with an evil eye these days. Yeshua said that those with an evil eye are full of darkness.

Mankind needs to hear the teachings of the Bible and start living right. I should also mention that in some cultures, people will curse others with their eyes. That can be another meaning of the term evil eye. The good eye comes from an application of loving your neighbor. Yeshua was properly applying the commandment to love your neighbor. So those who have an evil eye are disobeying God's commandment to love your neighbor. We need teaching on how to apply the Torah properly. People have not learned how to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14: "Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.)

We need to rise up spiritually and get our lives in order and move forward to win the spiritual race.

Shaul tells us to get disciplined so we don't get disqualified from the race. Live life in such a way so we receive eternal life.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

I don't want to be disqualified, and I don't want you to be disqualified either. We are to keep God's commandments; we don't behave in a worldly fashion, but we are to be disciplined and spiritually pure. We don't run the spiritual race with worldly shoes. Shaul is using an example from the culture of his time. Those who competed in physical games worked hard to win a prize. It's the same in our era. People work very hard at sports so they can win. We are to discipline ourselves spiritually.

Money is not evil in itself and can be a good thing, but our goal in life is not just to accumulate things and money. Money is not our goal. We look at the plan of life in spiritual terms. It is so easy to get caught up in worldly things. I'm not sure why this is, but people are often drawn to songs written by foolish people. Ecclesiastes 7:5 NKJV says, "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools." It's difficult to hear that we've done something wrong, but it's much much better for us than some of the music that is out there.

Psalms 141:5 NKJV says, "Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. and let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it." Oil was used for anointing God's holy things; namely, those implements that were separated to be used at the Temple. God's holy people were also anointed and those who were anointed were to be respected. Being willing to follow God's commandments and be a people of God separates us to be God's anointed people; namely, we are to be a holy person who is separated from the ways of this world to be used by God.

We don't let worldly things dictate how we live; make God a priority and seek what is right and true. We are to act like we are God's people, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth;" Deuteronomy 7:6 NKJV. Yochanan said we are to follow God and not worldly things, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17 NKJV. Our goal is to live in the future kingdom of God; we don't make worldly things god over our lives. We are true subjects of our God and king.

It is not always easy to always forge forward spiritually, but there is nothing better than doing what is right. We see what the world has to offer; hatred, sin, and lies. Instead we long for blessings, goodness and truth. We are in the arena of life; waiting our turn to step in and fight spiritually. Again, Shaul said, "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified;" 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 NKJV.

We most certainly are to run towards our God; we are most certainly in a spiritual fight to do what is right. We will not give up; we will not fall short. Psalms 37:27 NKJV says, "Depart from evil, and do good; Shaul told us in Ephesians that we are to stand strong, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might ... stand against the wiles of the devil. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore;" Ephesians 6:10-11, 13-14 NKJV.

In this portion, Moshe tells the people over and over that they are to keep God's commandments. They will give them wisdom and understanding. The Haftarah tells us that God's word endures forever and if we follow God's word and His commands, we will endure forever in an amazing future kingdom that is unimaginable. Rise up spiritually and forge ahead and be disciplined. Our main goal in life is not just to collect things and money, but to live for

our King. We are to fight spiritually and resist doing evil. We are to be God's holy anointed people who do what is right and good and are available to be used for God's kingdom purposes.