

TORAHSCOPE: Ki Tisa (When you take)

by Mark Huey posted 05 March, 2010 www.outreachisrael.net

Exodus 30:11-34:35
1 Kings 18:1-39

“Signs of Life”

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you’” (Exodus 31:12-13).

Ki Tisa covers a wide variety of topics that range from describing the half-shekel tax collected prior to a census to avoid a plague, to the infamous golden calf incident that resulted in a plague, and to instructions regarding the feasts of the Lord. Additional instruction is given regarding hand washing, anointing oil and incense formulas, and how the Tabernacle is to be used. Moses also relates significant interchanges that he has with the Holy One as he received the tablets of testimony, pleaded for the people of Israel, and then eventually witnessed the very glory of God. These, and other events described, give the student of the Torah much to ponder this week.

As one meditates upon this portion, a multitude of impressions can be generated. For this student, three seemingly unrelated passages in the *parashah* became linked. The first Scriptural mention of the Book of Life (Exodus 32) generated some curiosity that led to some reflections about how serious the Father is about His children and their actions. These thoughts were then coupled with the passage about *Shabbat* or the Sabbath being a sign (Exodus 31) between God and His people. Finally, the passage about Moses desiring the Lord’s Divine presence (Exodus 33) struck a chord. Let me explain.

Moses’ Intercession

If you will recall what is chronicled in this portion, the people of Israel are in serious trouble. Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive God’s instruction. While there, the Holy One tells Moses that the impatient Israelites have fashioned a golden calf and are riotously worshipping it. The Lord threatens extermination of these sinners:

“Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation” (Exodus 32:10).

Thankfully, as a result of Moses’ intercession, God decides not to do this:

“So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Exodus 32:14).

At this point, we understand just how serious the Lord is about His people not worshipping other gods. Moses comes down the mountain with the tablets inscribed by the very finger of God. Upon seeing the revelry over the golden calf, he shatters the tablets. Moses issues a call of loyalty to the Most High. At this point, all the Levites respond and they are summoned to take up their swords against all who worshipped the false god. As a result, three thousand Israelites lost their lives, while the Levites are consecrated for the call on their lives to fulfill the obligations of priesthood:

“[T]hen Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.” So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, ‘Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today’” (Exodus 32:26-29).

The next day, God and Moses get into a debate. Moses offers himself as “an atonement” for the sins of the Israelites. I believe that this offer is reminiscent of Yeshua, who will come and

actually become the very sacrifice required as a payment for the sins of humanity. The dialogue between Moses and the Lord continues:

“On the next day Moses said to the people, ‘You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, ‘Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!’ The LORD said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book’” (Exodus 32:30-33).

Interestingly, this is the first mention of the “Book of Life” in the Holy Writ. Upon further study, we receive additional meaning about the “Book of Life” in Revelation 20:

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:12-15).

One thing is very certain from this interchange between God and Moses, when seen through the filter of the Revelation passage: a person does not want his name to be missing from the “Book of Life.” The consequence of sinning against the Most High (Exodus 32:33) “according to their works” (Revelation 20:12, NRSV), is a very frightening concept. Another thing is mentioned when the Lord speaks to Moses. God alone has the ability to blot a name from the “Book of Life.” It is obvious from these two passages that the Father has given His children ample understanding throughout the Scriptures to take His Word seriously. We also learn that actions have consequences.

While pondering the gravity and reality of the “Book of Life,” two passages came to mind from this text. First, God describes an action we can take that will be a sign between us and Him that we are His. Secondly, the evidence of His presence in our midst, as sought by Moses, is a sign that we are His. **One action we can take, and one action God takes.**

Shabbat Observance

Earlier in the portion (Exodus 31), Moses gives the people of Israel more explicit instructions about the commandment to observe and remember *Shabbat*, or the seventh-day Sabbath. Apparently, this day of rest was to be a sign between Israel and the Lord that was to distinguish them among the nations. For the Israelites, keeping *Shabbat* is a willful decision that should be willfully observed:

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.’ When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Exodus 31:12-18).

Here in these verses, as the finger of God has completed inscribing the Decalogue, He twice mentions within the span of a few verses two important things. First, the celebration of *Shabbat* is a sign between the Lord and His people forever. Second, if anyone profanes or works on *Shabbat*, the consequence is capital punishment. This is extremely serious, and the fact that it

is reiterated compounds the gravity of the statute. **The Father is communicating that His people have a personal and corporate responsibility to observe *Shabbat*. There does not appear to be any viable excuses for not keeping what became the Fourth Commandment.**

We do know that when Yeshua comes forth in the flesh, His ministry helps clarify what is meant by “working” or “profaning” the Sabbath. You should recall that Yeshua spent a considerable amount of time working through the issues of the commandments as they related to one’s heart intent (Matthew chs. 5-7). He did not come to fulfill or abolish the Law, as many may inaccurately teach, but instead to fill the Law full of meaning. When it came to the issues concerning *Shabbat*, He demonstrated that healing and doing good was lawful. Remember, it was Yeshua who stated the following: “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NRSV).

The Presence of God

A little further in the portion, Moses records the second visible “sign” that makes Israel the people of God. This is embodied in the reality that His “presence” is with the Israelites:

“Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.’ And He said, ‘My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.’ Then he said to Him, ‘If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?’” (Exodus 33:13-16).

Here, the Hebrew word *panim* (פָּנִים) or “face” is translated as “presence.” In other words, we see that when the face of God Himself shines upon Israel, it is evidence of His favor toward them. **In fact, that favor would be so visible to all the other nations that Israel would become “distinguished.”** This would be a distinct “sign” that Israel had favor with the Creator:

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.’ Then Moses said, ‘I pray You, show me Your glory!’ And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.’ But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’ Then the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen’” (Exodus 33:17-23).

Here, as Moses pleads for the presence of the Most High, He concedes that His glory will be evident, but that Moses or any man would never see His face. **Instead, God’s glory, goodness, grace, and compassion would be evident among the people of Israel.** His attributes, which are embodied in the New Testament term *agapē* (ἀγάπη), would manifest themselves among the people of Israel, because, in time, His very Spirit would be dwelling in the hearts of His people. Those attributes are listed a little further in this portion when the Lord reveals what are commonly referred to being His thirteen attributes:

“Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations’” (Exodus 34:6-7).

How much do these attributes sound like a definition of the *agapē* love that is epitomized by the Messiah Himself, when He offers Himself up as the atonement for sin? Consider Paul’s parallel words in Colossians 3:12-14:

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving

each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

John the Apostle also writes about the great love of God manifested toward us:

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:10-13).

We know that unlike Moses, whose offer of personal atonement was not acceptable, Yeshua’s offer, as the Son of God, is acceptable:

“Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, so Messiah also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to* sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Two Signs

I believe that if you are willfully observing *Shabbat*, while also sensing His presence in your life, that You can sense His presence. *Shabbat* is a special time when you can consistently allow the *agapē* love of the Messiah to work through you. When the following attributes described by Paul become commonplace in your walk, you will know that He is indeed indwelling your temple and operating through you:

“Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if *there are* gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

“*Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:9-17).

As you begin to exhibit these attributes of *agapē* love in your faith experience, you can become confident that your name is firmly engraved in the Book of Life. And if so engraved, you can be confident that one day you will be in the New Jerusalem. There, the glory and presence of God Himself will be evident. As the Book of Revelation tells us, **because of His presence shining** upon the New Jerusalem, there will be no need for the sun or the moon:

“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:21-27).

Of course, there will not be any who practice abominations or lying in the Kingdom, but only those who have been covered by the blood of the Lamb and whose names are written in the

Book of Life. For those of us who are seeking His face, let us delight in *Shabbat* and let His presence in our lives bless those we encounter. Perhaps now we can understand more clearly why the Aaronic benediction is repeated so often in synagogues and congregations around the world. We must desire His presence, indeed His *panim* or face, to shine upon us and through us:

“The LORD bless you, and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

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