

24 Iyar, 5777 (20/5/17) ***Learning to Do It His Way: The Ultimate Reality Check*** J. M. Terrett

Behar/Bechukotai On the Mountain/In My Statutes
Remaining Good Tenants

Torah:	Leviticus 25:1 - 26:2 Leviticus 26:3 - 27:34
Haftarah:	Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14
Brit Chadashah:	Matthew 22:1 - 14
Reading:	Jack pp. 83, 85 Ps. 105
Jewish hero:	Jochebed
Torah carrier:	Marie

Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek

In making my preparations for this week's Torah Meditation, I revised our permanent List and moved Behar from the "good" category to the "technical" category because it deals with the special, somewhat complicated, provisions of both the Sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee. I did this because the passage requires a careful reading to avoid misunderstanding about where the people got their food from during these two special periods of time.

Before we get into these two excellent passages, let me briefly refer to the prophetic and New Testament portions.

In Jeremiah, the prophet explains the sad reality which led up to the captivity and the glad reality of G-d's enduring, faithful love. There is a double warning/blessing in chapter 17 which first places a curse on those who place their ultimate trust in men and a blessing on those who place their ultimate trust in G-d. It is not saying that we should never trust anyone or that we should always be suspicious of everybody – it is talking about our ultimate trust or the final source for our inspiration and direction. Men and governments come and men and governments go, but G-d endures throughout eternity and His Word should be our singular guide as we pass through this fading life on our way to eternal life.

The next warning/blessing in chapter 17, first says that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked above all things and unable to be fathomed by anyone. The blessing part gives a balance and says that G-d tests the heart and searches the depths of the mind in order to render to men according to their works. Unless our inner decision-making processes involve being guided by G-d through His Word, then we will never be able to sort out the complexities which regularly overwhelm us. G-d's Word needs to be our primary "gut feeling" and the only one which we trust as completely reliable.

The New Testament portion is also a double warning, first to the generation which refuses to recognize the Groom who is calling them to His wedding banquet and then to the guest who arrives improperly dressed.

It foretells the needless destruction of Jerusalem and the extension of a banquet invitation to the nations, who are referred to as both the good and the evil who are found anywhere. One of the guests arrives without a wedding garment and is excluded for assuming that the standards of the kingdom had also somehow been set aside or lowered.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Israel has been replaced by the nations as the people of G-d, but

Israel is frequently warned that any generation of the House of Jacob which abandons the call of G-d, will lose its place to others who are more willing to heed this call.

A rejection of a generation is not the same as the rejection of the covenant people. This would be an excellent topic to discuss during our weekly Yeshiva Bible Study on Thursdays.

Since the Torah portion is doubled this week, I will leave the bulk of the content to your personal study and just briefly touch on four insights which I gained from my study of this excellent final section of the Book of Leviticus.

First of all, let me touch on a double declaration made in a discussion of both how the land is to be treated and also how its inhabitants are to be handled. The land is to be given a Sabbatical year to rest and a generational year of Jubilee when all land ownership is to return to its original owners. The portion affirms that the land remains the permanent possession of the L-rd and those who dwell there remain His tenants. This could apply to us today, anywhere we live, because the earth and all it contains is the L-rd's and we remain generational tenants, who have stewardship of its resources, but never really own them.

The portion also affirms that the Children of Israel remain His slaves who need to conduct their lives according to the stipulations of their Master and not just do as they please. We are also subject to this same realization and when we are judged, it will be an evaluation of how well we have followed His stipulations and not just spent our lives doing our own thing.

Related to this double declaration is a reminder that Gentiles or strangers who dwell in the midst of Israel have full resident rights and are subject to the same rights and privileges as those of the House of Jacob. They are not to be mistreated as if they were second class citizens. They too have fled the darkness of the world and have also taken shelter under the wings of the Almighty. Faith and obedience alone allow us to move into the shelter of His wings. Where are you sheltering as you pass through this life?

The third insight has to do with how the people got their food during the Sabbatical and Jubilee years and a close reading of the text reveals a double food source during these special times of rest.

While the people were not to engage in a formal, organized sowing and reaping during these years, they were allowed to gather what grew of itself, both from their fields and from their vines and trees. They did this as if they were the gleaners who, in regular years, gathered what the regular harvesters had not collected. We must not assume that the people left the grain and the fruit in the ground or on the trees and only picked what they needed, as they did with the manna which they collected daily during their wilderness wanderings.

They were allowed to collect what grew of itself and did not leave it to dry out in the ground or rot on the trees and vines. This may not have been as substantial as what they would have harvested during a regular year, but they were allowed to collect and eat what grew of itself, along with all the other human or animal resident gatherers of the land (25:6).

Above and beyond this provision is a special promise made for the Jubilee year, which followed a regular Sabbatical year. People could store up enough food on the sixth year to last them until the harvests of the eighth year, along with the food which was gleaned during the Sabbatical year. However, when there were two sabbatical years in a row, the L-rd promised to give enough food on

the sixth year to last for three years. This would mean that on the 48th year, enough food would be produced to last until the harvest on the 51st year – along with all the food which was permitted to be gleaned from that which grew of its own accord. The ground was not to be disturbed or worked for two years.

These provisions would allow the land to lie fallow without it going completely back to a wild state and would provide both the land and the people with a much needed rest. How good are you at learning to take rest when you need it? The L-rd will always look after us when we understand that we are His slaves and that all of our possessions are His.

On a quick side note, 26:44 says that if the people fail to obey the commandments and provisions of the L-rd, He will chastise them, but even when He has to treat them for their disobedience, He will never allow them to become completely exterminated.

In the last section of this double portion I want to deal with an addendum to this book concerning the making of voluntary non monetary oath offerings for the upkeep of the sanctuary. There is no English term which satisfactorily explains this activity, which is why I have coined the phrase: *voluntary non monetary oath offering*.

These could be made with people, animals or land and a monetary value was assigned to this offering, because it was assumed that a resale would usually occur, so that the value of the offering could be applied to the upkeep of the sanctuary. Grain and fruit offerings are not dealt with, because their value was already known and they could either be resold or just consumed by the Levitical community, who would have to purchase them anyway for the sustenance of this special community.

One kind of voluntary non monetary oath offering concerned that which was: "*dedicated to destruction*" and it usually concerned the spoils of war prior to a battle as a promise of what would be done once the fighting was over. Everything and everyone who was subject to this special kind of offering was to be burned or killed (in the case of people) and could not be redeemed. Precious metals which survived the fire, would be added to the sanctuary coffers.

Usually, when a voluntary non monetary oath offering was made, the person making it could redeem it before it was sold on the open market, by adding a fifth to its value. However anything or anyone dedicated to destruction could not be redeemed. The theft by Achan falls into this category and he was executed for his violation of this provision. Two unfortunate applications of this dedicated to destruction oath are first, when Jephthah said anything which came out his gates would be dedicated to destruction and it ended up being his daughter. Saul also dedicated to destruction anyone who would eat food before he was avenged of his enemies, but the people did not let him kill Jonathon. Come to Yeshiva and discuss whether there are situations where this kind of oath would still apply in today's world.

We are all just tenants and the message of this passage is that we need to learn to be good tenants because everything we are and everything we have ultimately belong to G-d. What kind of tenant are you?

[Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek](#)

[Sermon: Learning to Do It His Way: The Ultimate Reality Check](#)

Passage: All Scripture is inspired by G-d and is useful for doctrine (teaching), for reproof (conviction), for correction and for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man of G-d would be accomplished (adequately equipped) and able to perform every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

There are three initial concerns we need to briefly deal with, before we talk about how the ultimate reality check actually works. First of all what does the term inspiration actually mean? Second of all, how do we know that the Bible we have is the Scripture which G-d actually inspired? Lastly, how do we know that the Bible we have today is the same one which G-d originally inspired?

Now to fully answer these questions in any detail would require several Yeshiva Bible Study sessions and on any given Thursday, when people show up and want this level of instruction, I am prepared to lay it out in greater detail. My answers to these questions this morning are summaries derived from both my Bible School and Seminary training and from my own study over the years. Buckle up here we go, campers!

Peter clearly said that all Scripture is inspired by G-d and that the inspired prophets spoke exactly what the Holy Spirit ordered them to say. He also stipulated that what they said could not be open to private interpretation, even when passages, like some of what Paul said, were hard to understand. He warned that sometimes ignorant and unstable people will twist these passages so that their intended meaning is lost (2 Peter 1:20,21 and 3:15,16). If we understand that not all which G-d has inspired is in the Bible, by the same token we must acknowledge that nothing which G-d has inspired will contradict the Bible.

For our purposes here, only that which is recognized as inspired can be used as part of the ultimate reality check and we have to ask ourselves how what made it into the Bible was recognized as inspired, while so many other documents were rejected.

The L-rd selected 12 men to act as guardians of His sayings and as judges of how these sayings were to be integrated into the life of the redeemed community He founded. Consequently when the church finally got around to canonize an official collection of all that these men taught, three considerations went into the selection and rejection process. It occurred at a place in Asia Minor called Nicaea and was attended by around three thousand church leaders and scholars, under the supervision of the Roman Emperor Constantine. He was looking for an official version of Christianity to impose on the empire, but he unwittingly helped collect the only untainted source of authentic apostolic teaching. This collection is still recognized as the Word of G-d and remains our sole spiritual guide, as believers have used it to generationally engage in the ultimate reality check.

In order to be included in this collection, which came to be called the New Testament, the gathering looked at three criteria: authorship, content and circulation. It had to be written by an apostle, the disciple of an apostle or the disciple of an apostle's disciple – no more than three generations from the L-rd.

Secondly, of the thousands of documents which believers from every corner of the ancient Middle East brought with them, only those which did not contradict the oral traditions left by the apostles, were included. It also had to be included by unanimous consent, because the council was looking to preserve all that the apostles taught, before it was watered down and polluted by the ideas of men.

Lastly, it had to be circulated among all the churches, so that no region could claim a special

revelation which other believers had no knowledge of.

It was a thorough, lengthy process and even if subsequent material should surface, it could not add to or subtract from this definitive collection of authentic apostolic teachings, because the council only wanted to recognize the Word of G-d and did not claim divine inspiration for that which was only of human inspiration.

The Bibles you hold in your hands today came to us through a four stage process which ensures that the content is authentic and not spurious: inspiration, canonization, transmission and translation. But how do we know that the content we have which came down to us through transmission and translation is an accurate rendering of that which was inspired and canonized?

I am so tempted to order pizza and spend the rest of the day digging deeper into this question, but bring your questions and your pizza to our Thursday Yeshiva Bible Study and if we spend the whole summer dealing with this, it will be time well spent!

Basically, the study of how our Bible came down to us and how well it represents the originals we only have copies of, is called textual criticism. It looks at the oldest manuscripts we have and traces how they have been copied and translated over the centuries. Let me say that it can be clearly demonstrated from textual evidence that the Bible we have in whatever academic translation we use, has come down to us from the apostles virtually unchanged – and its content can be shown to be 99.5% pure, with nothing added or subtracted.

Now I can hear some of my professors howling that, while I am making a true statement, it does not give enough credit to the many thousands of hours of painstaking effort spent copying and studying, so that we have the authentic Word of G-d in our hands. Well in deference to these fine men and women who did their best to train and civilize the wild man from Africa, let me offer the following brief summary of all their hard work.

There are from between 150 to 400,000 textual variants among the manuscripts we possess, but only 4 or 500 affect the meaning. Of these only around 4 to 50 change the meaning, but all of these are cross referenced so we can know what is intended.

So our text comes to us purer than ivory soap and is the most accurate set of ancient manuscripts mankind possesses. We can be sure it is inspired and we can be sure that this inspiration was canonized so that we could determine if that which is said to us really comes from G-d (Acts 17:11). It has been transmitted faithfully over many centuries and has been accurately translated whenever scholars have access to this authentic body of manuscript evidence. What has come down to us is authoritative and definitive, so that if any other manuscripts were to surface and claim divine inspiration, we could judge their contents and reject anything which contradicts the apostolic teaching we already have in hand.

You have the Word of G-d in your hands, but how do you use it and in what way does our passage say that it is the ultimate reality check? In his leadership advice to Timothy, Paul first affirms that all Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New, is inspired by G-d, then he outlines a fourfold process of positive integration which we adhere to at B'nai Chayim.

The Greek Words are sometimes interesting to translate, but as I studied them, I saw a fourfold process which occurs whenever we study the Word of G-d.

First of all, it teaches doctrine and as such, is a summary of all the divine truths about the meaning of existence which the L-rd wants us to base our lives upon. It tells us all that we need to know about the redemptive purposes of G-d and introduces us to all the requirements He places on our lives, both as individuals and as a community.

Next it begins a long process of reproof to convict us, whenever how we live or what we believe, departs from this singular source of divine truth. These passages of reproof and conviction are found in every section of the Bible and the ups and downs of Israel are frequently used as examples of what to do and what to believe and what to avoid and what to reject. It is the most "in your face" book on the planet and doesn't pull any punches, nor make any excuses for what it teaches and for what it condemns.

Next, it does not just kick you and leave you lying bruised and bleeding on the side of the road. It picks you up, dusts you off and begins a long, thorough cleansing, healing process until all the damage and all the stains of the flesh, the world and the enemy are completely purged from your heart and life.

If we resist the convicting process and reject the correcting, healing process, we are either sent into a wilderness of our own making or go into a personal captivity, until we come to our senses are ready to let go of everything in our lives which gets in the way of G-d's Word and His Kingdom. He makes us do laps around every mountain and every fortress which rises up against the knowledge of G-d, until we finally listen to the words He spoke from the mountain and cast down these fortress in our lives until there is no opposition of any kind left to the progress of His kingdom in our lives.

Again, He does not just leave us convicted, corrected, cleansed and empty, He moves us on to the final process in this ultimate reality check, now that the coast is clear and we are ready to move on and leave all the darkness and stupidity of this world behind us.

When we first came to faith, we encountered a series of truths and requirements which our lives were both too cluttered and too stubborn to receive. Before we can move on and begin lying down in green pastures, with oil anointed heads an overflowing cups, feasting peacefully even in the presence of our enemies, He has to get rid of all the junk we should not have in our lives. He moves us from the sand to the solid rock and He takes apart anything in our lives which is built with hay, wood and stubble, so that it can be rebuilt with gold, silver and precious stones. He wants us to live storm proof and fire proof spiritual lives.

So He brings us back to the same, original content and picks up where He left off and instructs us in the righteousness which His Word and this process outlines and we begin to actually grow spiritually, instead of spinning our wheels and just putting in time. We move from wandering in the wilderness and languishing in captivity and start building the foundation of His Kingdom in our hearts and lives. This is the goal of His ultimate reality check.

There are shows on TV where people demolish all or part of poorly constructed houses and remove all the faulty, rotting construction material, so that they can build their dream homes, instead of dwelling in a decaying dump. How is your spiritual dwelling doing?

Right from the start, the L-rd wants to accomplish the same goal for us in the realm of our spirituality. He desires for us to be accomplished and equipped to perform every good work which He has prepared beforehand for us to do. He wants to build the righteousness of His Kingdom into our lives and He is prepared to do everything which is necessary for this to become a reality in our lives.

Whenever we wander away from this objective or get stalled, He will not permit us to move on in His Kingdom until all barriers to His Word are removed. This includes removing all the junk of the flesh, the world and the enemy, and providing any healing or cleansing which needs to occur, so that we are salt and light and not tasteless darkness, as we wander through this fading world on our pilgrimage to our Father's Home in Glory.

Frequently, He will interrupt our lives and stop us in our tracks and faithfully subject us to His ultimate reality check. How is this process working in your life? How is this process working in our community?

Are you receptive to learn the doctrine of His Word? Are you a teachable disciple?

Do you receive the reproof of His Word when He wants to convince you that something in your life is against His Word and has no business being there? Are you lurking in the shadows or moving into the light?

Are you open to correction so that the removal of all and any junk from your life will make room for the treasures He wants to replace it with?

Do you realize that what He has said to you from the beginning, will continue to be said until it is firmly rooted in your life? How open are you to His ultimate reality checks?