



# Parashat Bechukotai, Shabbat 21 May 2011

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## NEWS

### CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN IN ISRAEL

**I**t has been a great pleasure for us believers in Israel to receive Clifford Goldstein and to work with him for more than a week.

Clifford is very well known in our community, specially in Israel, since he was in Israel, living in a kibbutz in the North of Israel when he met the Messiah and was immersed in the Jordan river.

Today Clifford is working in Washington D.C. as one of the leaders in the Adventist headquarters. He is a powerful speaker and writer. Currently he is holding the position of Editor of the Sabbath School quarterly.

During his sermon on Shabbat morning he preached on the origin of Evil and the freedom of choice everyone of us has. In the afternoon meeting he captivated everyone giving his story, how he met the Messiah in Israel.

Then during the week Clifford joined us in a pastor meeting when he answered many questions the pastors had on the General

Conference work, on some theological point and of course on his work as Editor of the Sabbath School lessons.



### RACHEL HYMAN'S NEXT MUSICAL ALBUM

**I** received this news from Rachel Hyman and I am happy to share it with you. "About six months ago I was begging G-d to send me a professional music producer who could work with me long term, to create Jewish music sound tracks for me so I can continue giving Jewish musical concerts as an outreach tool for the Jewish community and also as an educational tool for the Adventist community. Lo and behold, a friend of mine recommended me to call Marteen—music producer who she thought would be of help to me.

The rest is history. Marteen used to work for SONY Records, producing songs and albums for some of the most famous singers in the world- Madonna, Michael Bolton, and Celin Dion to name a few. Marteen converted to Adventism and now only works with spiritual artists. So when I told him about the new Jewish album that I wanted to produce, he was just as excited as I was. Marteen had already been studying Hebrew just for the fun of it, and loves ethnic music. He also happened to live only 30 minutes away from where I was living, near Tampa, Florida. Since his recording studio was so close by, we were able to work on some songs before I moved to Michigan. We will be finishing the recording of the vocals in August and the instrumental in September. The album, entitled 'To Remember' will be released in October.

# OVERVIEW

## BECHUKOTAI

### Leviticus 26:3 - 27:34

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The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. Sefer Vayikra, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of erachin the process by which someone vows to give the Beit Hamikdash the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property..

### VAYIKRA, LEVITICUS

In the eyes of many commentators, the Book of Vayikra, which we finish reading this Sabbath, occupies a very special place among the Five Books of Moses. It is the midpoint of the Torah, surrounded on each side by a pair of holy books. It deals specifically with the topics most related to holiness and contains some of the most sublime commandments of the Torah such as "Love your neighbor."

### READING THE TORAH

Parashat Bechukotai begins, "If in My statutes you will walk and My commandments you will keep and do them; then I will give your rains in their seasons and the land shall yield its produce, the trees of the field shall yield their produce and your threshing shall reach vintage and the vintage shall reach into the sowing time; and you shall eat your bread in fullness and satisfaction and you will dwell in safety in your land. And I will give peace in the land..." (Lev 26:3-6).

After describing the many blessings which will come as a result of observing G-d's commandments, the Torah describes the

punishments which will befall the Jewish people if they (G-d forbid) abandon G-d's commandments.

Twice in the Torah (in this Parasha and again in Deuteronomy, Parashat Ki Tavo), we find a detailed description of punishments—called *Tochacha*—for not observing the Torah.

Since people may feel uncomfortable being called up to the Torah for a section which includes punishments, it is customary not to call up anyone from the congregation for this part. Instead, the one who reads the Torah takes the Aliyah and read G-d promises.

### YOU HAVE WON YOUR BROTHER

The Torah states: "And a man shall stumble upon his brother ..." (Leviticus 26:37) Rashi cites a midrash which explains this verse thus: "One shall stumble through the iniquity of another, for all the people of Israel are responsible for each other."

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the Chofetz Chaim, related the following analogy:

Mr. Cohen loaned Mr. Green a large sum of money. Mr. Shapiro agreed to guarantee the loan; he would pay Mr. Cohen if Mr. Green will be unable to pay. If Mr. Green were investing his money in a business that was sure to lose money, Mr. Shapiro would definitely do everything in his power to prevent Mr. Green from becoming involved in that business. Mr. Shapiro knows that if Mr. Green wastes his money, the obligation to repay the loan will be his. "The same applies to preventing others from transgressing," said the Chofetz Chaim. "If someone has the ability to stop another person from transgressing and fails to do so, he is held liable for that offense." Yeshua says, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." (Matt. 18:15)

### WATCH AT YOUR BEHAVIOR

The Torah tells us the consequences of our actions: "And if you shall reject My statutes..." (Leviticus 26:15) It is interesting that in many synagogues this portion is read in a low voice and often very fast.

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, gave an analogy of someone who had to travel on a dangerous path. It was on a very high and extremely narrow mountain and he could easily trip and harm himself. So, he decided he would wear a blindfold because it was too scary to watch! Anyone with intelligence will realize that the person is in greater danger being unaware of the true situation. Likewise, regarding not behaving properly. By realizing the consequences of transgressions and failing to do good, you will watch your behavior more closely and will gain immensely."

## TORAH FOR ALL AREAS OF OUR LIVES

**T**he Torah states regarding a person who wishes to give the value of his house to the Temple (the one that was and will be on the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem), **"A person who sanctifies his house, the Cohen shall evaluate it..." (Leviticus 27:14).** The Kotzker Rebbe tangentially comments that when a person is involved in spiritual matters, it is relatively easy for him to do so in a sanctified setting. However, true holiness is when a person sanctifies the seemingly mundane activities in his household. When one behaves in an elevated manner in his own home, he is truly a holy person.

Rabbi Packouz says "Torah ideals and principles are not only for when one is in a yeshiva or synagogue; they are for all areas of our lives. With strangers or in a public setting it is often easier to be patient or behave properly. Therefore, one should focus that his first priority should be treating the family properly. The more sanctified your behavior at home, the greater you become!"

## G-D'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL

**T**his parasha is not only about the punishment —Tochacha— but it includes also G-d's promises to Israel: **"I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they**

**rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the L-rd their G-d. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their G-d. I am the L-rd."** These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the L-rd established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses." (Leviticus. 26:42-46) What a wonderful G-d we have in this text, even though Israel has been unfaithful, not keeping the laws and the decrees of his G-d, he is not rejected by G-d. That is the good news we have to proclaim to the world. G-d is a G-d of Love and when he contract a covenant with his people it is forever. This discovery of G-d's love should incline us to study every day his Word.

G-d Commanded us to study the Torah constantly. **"The words of this Torah shall not be lost from your mouths, and you shall delve into it day and night" (Joshua 1:8).** Yet people have other activities. They move around, they work at tasks, and cannot constantly be reading from texts. It is important to remember that the learning of the Tanach thousand years ago was more orally than reading a written text. That's why a person can be involved in Torah study even while doing other things. Today one can drive while listening to classes, discuss Bible concepts while walking, and think about the Bible while working around the house.

### **"Who is wise? He who learns from every person." Pirke Avot**

Every person has certain quality traits in which they excel. Every person goes through their individual personal challenges and experiences in life. Every person is unique, for there are no two people exactly alike. Every person has something to offer to others. A wise person will look for those qualities and learn from them. *Rabbi Zalmen Marozov*

## RABBI AKIBBA

The days between Passover and Shavuot are known as the days of the Omer. These 49 days are counted as we anxiously await the 50th day – Shavuot – (this year June 8-9) when we commemorate the giving of the Torah.

It was said that Rabbi Akibba had 24,000 disciples from Gabbatha to Antipatris; and all of them died at the same time because they did not treat each other with respect. The world remained desolate until Rabbi Akibba came to our Masters in the South and taught the Torah to them. These were Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua; and it was they who revived the Torah at that time. A Tanna taught: “All of them died between Passover and Shavuot”. Rabbi Hama ben Abba or, it might be said, Rabbi Hiyya ben Abin said: “All of them died a cruel death.” What was it? Rabbi Nahman replied: “Croup.” (Yevamot 62b)

Rabbi Akiva was an ignorant shepherd who worked for Kalba Savua, one of the wealthiest men in Israel at that time. Kalba Savua had a beautiful and talented daughter, Rachel, who recognized Akiva’s spiritual qualities. They married without her father’s knowledge. When Kalba Savua found out, he drove the couple away from his home to live in great poverty.

Rachel encouraged her husband to study Torah. Akiva, who was 40 years old, didn’t even know the Hebrew Aleph Bet! Our Sages tell us that Akiva was so sensitive about his ignorance that he actually hated Torah scholars!

Rachel, however, urged him to study Torah in Jerusalem, but Akiva was hesitant. He didn’t believe that at the age of forty he still had a chance.

One day, Akiva passed a large rock on which drops of water continuously fell. Upon closer examination, Akiva noticed that the water made an indentation in the rock. Akiva thought, “If water, which is so soft, can make an impression on a rock, surely the Torah can make an impression in my heart and mind!”

Akiva then decided to listen to his wife

and left for the Yeshiva. Upon being accepted in the Yeshiva, he sat together with little children and learned the Aleph Bet. Akiva dedicated his entire being to studying Torah and excelled. He eventually became one of the leading Sages in Israel.

## LAG BA’OMER

Sunday May 22 will be Lag Ba’omer, the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer. It is a very special day in the Hebrew calendar called, “Lag B’Omer.” “Lag” is comprised of the two Hebrew letters, “lamed” (30) and “gimel” (3). Added together, the two letters numerically represent “33”—hence, the name Lag B’Omer—the 33rd day of the Omer. Two things took place on Lag Ba’omer; the plague which took the lives of 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva, stopped. It is also the remembrance day of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, or as he is commonly called by the acronym of his name; Rashbi. He, together with his son, Rabbi Elazar, are buried in Miron, Israel.

Rabbi Shimon lived around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple when the Romans dominated the Holy Land. Rabbi Shimon spoke out against the Roman conquerors, for which he was sentenced to death. To save his life, Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar hid in a cave for 13 years.

They sustained themselves from a carob tree which miraculously grew near the cave and water from a nearby stream. Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar spent their entire time studying both the revealed and mystical parts of the Torah and attained great spiritual heights.”

## EDITOR

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## HAFTARA

### Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14

**J**eremiah lived in a time of trouble. Jerusalem was about to be taken by the Babylonians, and he was himself misunderstood by the people of Israel and her leadership, but his confidence and strength were in the L-rd, that's why he says, "O L-RD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble" (Jer. 19:19).

Jeremiah encourages everyone who stays faithful to the L-rd, even though they are in a time of trouble. He says, "Blessed are those who trust in the L-RD, whose trust is the L-RD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer. 17:7-8).

But at the same time he reminds the unfaithful that they will receive the consequences of their actions. "whose hearts turn away from the L-RD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land." (Jer. 17:5b-6).

The L-rd is a faithful G-d who does not punish the innocent and continues to give choices. Everyone has the possibility of following him and bearing fruit. "I the L-RD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings" (Jer. 17:10).

The structure of this text is in A-B-C - C'B'-A' that means it is an alternate focus on righteous and weak and comes back in reverse. Thus Jeremiah praises the L-rd again for his righteousness "O glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, shrine of our sanctuary! O hope of Israel! O L-rd!" (Jer. 17:12). Then he comes back to the weak to tell them that running away from the source of life is not the best choice they can make. He is the sustainer of the universe. "All who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the underworld" (Jer. 17:13). The text finishes with a positive statement and praise. "Heal me, O L-rd, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise." (Jer. 17:14)

## BESORAT-YESHUA

### Revelation 21:1-8

**T**he parasha this week gives G-d's promises to G-d's people. "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. . . I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be my people." (Lev 25:6, 11, 12, ). This promises we have in this chapter of Leviticus are very important promises for the people of Israel, knowing that G-d will not give up his people.

In fact analyzing the promises, someone can argue, than never happen and will never happen. Humanly speaking we can yes, it is right, but when we look at the global promises of the Bible we can say that many promises of the Bible will be fulfilled only in the Kingdom of the Messiah, and they are still G-d's promises. Yochanan saw in his book of Revelation a vision of the 'olam Habaa, he said "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." (1) It is really a vision of the 'Olam Habaa, because he clearly said that the first earth (the one we know today) had passed away. He saw what we call the "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" the golden Jerusalem coming from heaven "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from G-d, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." (2) this bride reminds me the Kabbalat Shabbat song we sung "Lecha Dodi". There in that new Yerushalayim we will see the fulfillment of G-d's promises, all of them, as they are written in the Tanach and the Brit Hachadasha. we recognize the promises of our parasha in these words "Now the dwelling of G-d is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and G-d himself will be with them and be their G-d." Rev 21:3)