

Parashah One Hundred and Thirty-Two

Deuteronomy 8:1–20; Jeremiah 9:22-26; John 15:8–10

notes by Tim Hegg

Man Shall Not Live By Bread Alone

As Moses prepares the nation of Israel to enter the Land promised to them under oath by the Almighty, he reminds them that they are to “guard in order to do” all of the commandments (תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת, note *paragogic nun* which may indicate emphasis). Some English translation have “be careful to do” (NASB, ESV) or “be careful to follow” (NIV) or “diligently observe” (NRSV). The KJV has “observe to do” while the NKJV translates “be careful to observe.” The Stone Chumash has “you shall observe to perform.” Unfortunately, our English word “observe” in its modern usage does not fully convey the import of the Hebrew *שָׁמַר* (*shamar*, “to guard,” “take care of,” “protect”). The other English translations attempt to overcome this by using something like “be careful” or “diligently.” This may come closer to the meaning, but the Hebrew term emphasizes the need to be active in “guarding” or “protecting” the commandments in order that they may be performed. From this we learn that intention is not enough. We may have every good intention on obeying God’s commandments, but unless we are careful to guard them, we may render ourselves unable to perform what God commands. Therefore, guarding the commandments is equally important with doing them. The one proceeds to the other.

It is also interesting to note that our *parashah* opens with בְּלִי-הַמִּצְוָה, literally “all of the commandment,” or more idiomatically, “each commandment.” Israel was not to “pick and choose” among the commandments, for in reality, the commandments are a single entity, woven together into a single cloth. This unity of the whole Torah is why we so often find the word “commandment” in the singular when it actually refers to the whole body of commandments given to us in the Torah. For instance,

And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (Matt 15:3)

Likewise, Paul writes:

So then, the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (Rom 7:12)

The use of the singular “commandment” often stands for the whole Torah, because the Torah was always understood as being a unified whole. It was only the later Christian theologians that dissected the Torah into categories such as “moral, civil, and ceremonial.” Neither Moses, the Prophets, Yeshua, nor His Apostles would have ever considered such a division of the Torah commandments.

How do we “guard [each commandment] in order to perform them?” First, we give ourselves to knowing what God has commanded, meaning we study God’s word to know what He has revealed. It is obvious that we cannot do the commandments if we don’t know them. Second, we discipline our lives in order to be ready to obey the commandments. This means ordering our lives in such a way that we have both the time and the means to obey God. For example ,making necessary

preparation to keep the Shabbat is essential to actually keeping the Shabbat. Third, we incorporate into our daily lives those things that foster our growth in faith. Obeying God requires faith, and the more we set ourselves to walk in His ways, the more it will require our full reliance upon Him. The disciplines of faith include regular times of prayer, consistent study and meditation upon His word, and regularly being together with one's community for corporate worship, fellowship, and study.

A further aspect of "guarding in order to do" involves "remembering." "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness...." Often, our faith is strengthened as we rehearse what God has already done for us. Especially in times of hardship, reflecting on God's faithfulness to us in the past strengthens our faith for the future. In our *parashah* Moses reminds the Israelites of God's faithfulness to them while they sojourned in the wilderness. Their garments did not wear out, nor did their feet swell. In other words, God provided for their physical needs when they were in greatest need. But Moses also reminds the people that God's provision for them during the days of their sojourn came as a test. God led them in order "to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." Here we learn a very valuable lesson: the hardships that come upon the people of God may be from the hand of God to prove the reality of our faith—our love for God. Now, in order to accept difficult times in this light requires faith in the first place. Faith begins with the fundamental confession that God is good. And from this beginning, faith reasons that life's hardships are not the result of random, unplanned events in our lives, nor are they punishments from a God Who can never be pleased with us. Rather, life's hardships, including divine discipline, are ordered by the Almighty for our good and His glory.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28)

God has chosen those who are His, and by His own grace He has brought them into a covenant, family relationship with Himself. In His all wise and sovereign providence, He brings those things into our lives that will temper the metal of our faith and at the same time offer opportunity to display our love for Him. This does not always give us a settled rationale for why bad things happen to good people, but in spite of our inability at times to understand the ways of the Lord, we nonetheless affirm that all of His works are righteous, and that the events of our lives are ordered by His loving hand as a father. If we, in the midst of the difficult events of life, remember that such events offer us an opportunity to manifest our enduring trust and love of Him, we gain strength to meet the challenges we face.

Moreover, when we have walked through the fire, and He has preserved us through it, we are able to see that, indeed, He has dealt with us as a father deals with his son:

You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. (v. 5)

This reminds us of Prov 3:12,

For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (cf. Heb 12:6)

The reason that God chastened Israel is because He loves Israel, and has chosen them for Himself. A parent who thinks he or she is loving their child by withholding correction is self-deceived. The example of the Almighty is that He disciplined Israel because He delighted in them.

And the author of Hebrews takes up this very same theme (no doubt based partially upon our *parashah*) and teaches us:

For they [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb 12:10–11)

The ability to receive the discipline of the Lord in this manner is the fruit of genuine faith, a faith that considers God’s word as the very substance of life itself. This was also to be the lesson that Israel learned from the miracle of the manna. The manna sustained their physical life, but it also entailed trusting in God, because the manna came with a commandment: gather enough for today, but don’t try to gather and store it for tomorrow; on Friday gather twice as much because the manna will not be given on Shabbat. In other words, the manna was given to sustain physical life, but it also was to teach the important lesson that life as God intends it is sustained through obedience to Him. This is the meaning of v. 3, “that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Adonai.” Here is the crux: life is to be more than mere physical existence. Life, as God intends it, is to be made complete through conforming to His words—to all that He reveals to us as true. This is the message of our own Master when He reproached the enemy by quoting this verse (cf. Matt 4:4).

Our *parashah* also alerts us to one of the greatest deterrents of faith and obedience to God, that is, affluence. It is the fallen human nature to think that when all is good and happy, it is the result of our own abilities and hard work. When Israel would be blessed by God, and given wealth she did not earn, crops she did not plant, herds and flocks she did not tend, silver and gold she did not mine, and houses and cities she did not build, the tendency would be for her to say: “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth” (v. 17). We live in the richest nation on earth and all of us enjoy material wealth unparalleled in the human history of cultures and nations. It is very possible, then, that the Psalmist’s assessment of Israel in the wilderness may be true of us as well: “He gave them their request, but sent leanness to their soul.” America, with all of her material wealth, has forsaken God. More than ever, then, we must shine as lights in a dark world. We must show, through word and deed, that the God of Israel is the giver of life—there is none other.

And what is the God-given antidote to the insidious nature of wealth and affluence? The command to thank God for the food we have eaten: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (v. 10). The blessing after the meal is not merely a tradition we do, nor does it have to be done in the traditional manner (though admittedly the traditional *Birchat HaMazon* incorporates wonderful blessings, and covers a great many things for which we should always give thanks). The exercise of regularly thanking God for the food we have eaten helps us remember that the very sustenance for our lives comes from God. Moreover, the fact that this commandment to give thanks is attached to meals means that it will be done regularly. If we obey this commandment, and regularly give thanks after we have eaten and are satisfied, then we will constantly be reminded Who the real source is of the good things we

possess.

But the blessing after the meal takes us a step further: it reminds us that we do not live by bread (food) alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. In giving our thanks for the physical food, we should be reminded to give thanks for the spiritual food that nourishes our soul, even the word of God.