

Parashat Ekev עקב

Torah: Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25

Haftarah: Isaiah 49:14–51:3

What Does God Ask of You?

General Overview

God said to Israel, “My children, do not think that I desire to treat you like a slave whose master desires to sell him at an auction for what he may fetch, but I will go on bringing chastisement upon you until you direct your heart towards Me” (Devarim Rabbah 3.2).

Have you ever heard a loving parent sharing his concerns with the child about the child’s welfare? The parent does not speak with a loud voice. Nor does he use harsh words. Instead, you can almost sense the tears in the parent’s eyes as he pleads with the child, exhorting him to follow in the parent’s ways. You know that the child is listening, or at least giving the appearance of paying attention. However, more than anything else, you can sense, hear, and see the parent’s compassion and graciousness. Somehow, it just seems to ooze out of his words and expressions toward the child. In the end, you are confident that if the child follows the parent’s teaching and pleas, life will be happy and productive for him. If he doesn’t, you are afraid that the warnings the parent gives will, in fact, somehow come to pass and the child will once again be in the presence of the parent, only this time the tears will be in his regretful eyes, as well as in those of the sensitive parent.

This is essentially the scenario before us in *Parashat Ekev*. The “parent” is the Lord God of Israel. The “child” is Israel. The pleas are those regarding life for Israel in the Land and their relationship to Torah.

Exposition

Let us examine this Parent’s pleas and get a real glimpse of His wisdom and compassion as He exhorts Israel, His son. We will see that there are at least three things about which our Abba speaks:

- I. Reward
- II. Remembrance
- III. Request

In this excerpt from Parashat Ekev, we will focus on section III, Request.

III. Request

We now move on in our text to Deuteronomy 10:12 where it says, “Now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you?” God had just discussed the prized rewards that He had for His children. He also pleaded with them to remember carefully His instructions. Now He is telling Israel that there are certain requirements in order to enjoy these blessings.

Before we explore these, we need to look into the Hebrew word that is translated as “require” in some English versions. When we do, we find that the word “require” is actually too strong. The Hebrew word is the simple word for “ask” *sha'al* (שאל). By using this word, The Holy One was teaching that in order to enjoy the blessings there are certain things that He asks of His Children. As we specify these, please remember that these “requirements” are not conditions for receiving the blessings, but for enjoying and experiencing them. The text first sets forth these requests in summary form. Then it expands on them in Moshe’s sermon that follows. All we can do here because of time and space is to summarize them.

A. To Fear Him

The first request of Israel is to fear God. Most commentators are in agreement that the word “fear” should be rendered “respect” or “revere.” Actually,

There are two levels of God-fearing. The higher of the two is a sense of awe and reverence, and this is what Moshe called for here.¹

Israel was to have the deepest respect for God. Notice that this verse follows the section that warned Israel against resting their hopes upon their own righteousness. The fear of the Lord is that respect of God which causes man to relinquish any hope of meriting righteousness, realizing that compared to God’s righteousness that of man is just like “filthy rags.”

Observe that fear is first in this list of covenant requests. In chapter 6, it was “love.” The two go hand in hand. “For love without fear makes men remiss, and fear without love makes them servile and desperate.”²

It is also significant that “fear” is first because in God’s book of wisdom, Proverbs, fear also comes right at the beginning. In fact it is the first real “proverb” (1:7). In essence, the Holy One is teaching that in order to enjoy all the blessings He gave us, and in order to understand them in their deepest spiritual sense, we need to fear, honor, respect, and revere Him above anything else. For, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

B. To Walk in All His Ways

Many commentators give a great deal of attention to the “fear” in this verse and fail to comment on the other requests. It seems that they assume that if one fears God, then all the rest will follow. If this were the case, however, the Lord would have spared His words and left out the rest of His requests.

Accordingly, the second request is “walk.” This is also a covenant word. It has to do with living our lives according to His Words. Our “walk” is our “way of life.” It is conceivable that one may say that they fear God, yet have a life that is inconsistent with that claim. God, however, not only asks us to respect Him, but to show that respect by how we live — in accordance with “all of His ways,” i.e., Torah!

¹ *The ArtScroll Chumash*, 991.

² C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 343.

C. And to Love Him

Love is one of the most phenomenal words in Deuteronomy, as well as being repeated often. It tells us that God does not expect legalistic obedience to His Word. Instead, we follow His Word because we love Him!

It is important to keep in mind that immediately after the lofty confession of faith, the *Shema*, the Lord then tells us to love Him! (6:4–5). He can do that in this book because He also tells us that He loves us. Similarly, in the Renewed Covenant Scriptures, 1 John 4 says that since God loved us, we are, then, able to love — both others and God.

All of this has great covenant significance. God, the Great King, has chosen to enter into a personal “treaty” or covenant with His people Israel. At the very core of that relationship is love, not legalism. Likewise, it is the same with all who are part of God’s Redeemed Community. Before the earth was formed, God placed His love on us. He then demonstrated His love through the giving of His Son, Yeshua. Finally, He applied His love to us through His Spirit when He personally came into our lives and made us part of His people. In return, He so recreated our nature that now He can tell us to love Him and love others — and we can do it!

Hence, when He asks us in Deuteronomy 10:12 to love Him, He is merely telling us to respond to Him in the same way that He has to us — with love. He is also telling us to relate to Him in accordance with our newly created hearts.

D. To Serve the Lord your God

If we revere the Holy One, we will walk with Him and relate to Him in love. Only when we love Him can we serve Him properly. This then is the fourth request, *service*.

God took a horde of needy slaves out of Egypt and molded them into a nation of protected and loved servants. This also was part of the covenant agreement. God, the Great King, provided protection and provision. In return the people, the children of Israel, were to serve Him and Him alone.

The text specifies what kind of servant-hood was requested from Israel: “... with all your heart and with all your soul.” Only the ones who were truly redeemed in the spiritual sense could do this. Accordingly, we can see that this covenant was, in reality, being made with the remnant, the real Israel of God, although spoken to the whole nation.

On a personal level, when this commentator heard these words “serve God with all of your mind and being,” they served to produce spiritual frustration inside of me. I heard that this is what God asks of us, but I could not do it! It took several years before the Messiah came into my life. However, the Spirit of God used this standard of service to work conviction in me over the years, until I came to realize that I could not do this of my own accord. Now, after being a believer for many years, I can testify that the service of God flows freely (though not all of the time because of my flesh!) from my new creation mind to serve Him with all my mind and being!

What does it actually look like to fear, walk with, love, and serve God? Both the Tanakh and the Renewed Covenant Scriptures agree, “... If we love Him, we will

follow His commandments.” The only commands that Yeshua and His students knew were written in the Torah! Indeed, for approximately 1400 years, the only commands God’s people had were written in the Torah. When David praised God for His commands and said they were sweeter than the honeycomb, he was talking about the Torah. When the Prophets called Israel to repentance, it was a call to obey the Torah the way God told them. When the Holy One expelled Israel from the Land, it was because they did not live the Torah, as He had instructed. Finally, in Deuteronomy 30, the Lord promises to bring Israel back to the Land and to plant His Spirit in us and then He will cause us to follow His commands — the Torah of Moshe.

Do we get the point? Certainly, as believers we walk according to the teachings of the Renewed Covenant Scriptures. However, what lies at the core of practically all of those teachings? It is the Torah with its commands! Hence, what does the Lord request of both Israel and us as believers but to follow the Torah.

The next several chapters in Deuteronomy are devoted to teaching and reminding us of very specific commands of the Torah. It will show us what following the commands actually looks like, but for now, this verse (10:12) shows us in a general way what a New Creation Israelite looks like: he is one who fears God, walks with Him, loves Him, serves Him, and observes and keeps His commands. This passage is, as Leibowitz put it, “The essence of the whole Torah.”³

³ Nechama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Deuteronomy*, 98.