

Parashat Re'eh ראה

Torah: Deuteronomy 11:26–16:17

Haftarah: Isaiah 54:11–55:5

Guarded Worship

General Overview

Parasha Re'eh begins the enumeration of the specific commands of the Torah that God has been exhorting Israel to keep. In terms of the covenant format, we now begin the “Stipulations” section, having completed the Preamble and the Historical Prologue. The next major section will be the “Blessings and the Curses,” although at the end of the Historical Prologue, there is a mini-preview of the blessings and the curses, which appear at the beginning of the parasha in 11:26–32. We will reserve our comments about the blessings and curses until that time.

Exposition

Our approach to this sidra will be to treat each section of the parasha as it comes. The main topics covered this week are:

- I. Worship
- II. Eating
- III. Tithing
- IV. Shemittah Year
- V. Pilgrim Mo'adim

In this excerpt from Parashat Re'eh, we will focus on section I, Worship.

I. Worship

D. Guarded Worship

This sidra teaches that we must guard the worship of God and refrain from worshipping anything or anyone else. In fact, there is even a warning against false prophets who may lure us into going after other gods. We read in 13:2–6 that these false prophets may even come performing miracles to prove that they are correct. However, the text says, “Do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to the dreamer of a dream, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (13:4). There is so much wisdom packed into these verses which many believers need to take hold of in today's world. Again we turn to Leibowitz for keen insight into the issue. She exhorts us by saying,

Signs and wonders are then no criterion of true prophecy. It is immaterial whether the signs performed are of a natural character or violate the laws of the universe, since both the natural and the supernatural are the work of God and the success of the false prophet can only be furthered by the help of God in order to test our loyalty. Success often deceives the individual into imagining that it is synonymous with truth Whatever success attests him, whatever wealth, honor and praise he enjoys we are

not to believe his message or subscribe to his teaching (anyone who summons us to violate the Torah) since truth cannot be established by miracles or any visual spectacle.¹

The Torah is quite firm about the rejection of a prophet who, even though he may perform miracles, leads us away from the Torah. In fact verse 7 indicates that even if that prophet is a family member, they must be taken out and stoned.

1. The Miracle-Working Messiah

The idea of miracles not confirming a prophet is deeply ingrained into Jewish thinking. Leibowitz's quote, however tells us the key to the Jewish understanding — which should also be all believers' thinking. The key is that a false prophet is one who teaches against the Torah, and all that that implies.

However, can we imagine the impact of a man who not only teaches Torah perfectly but also follows it faultlessly, coming along and attesting to himself with signs and wonders? Well, such a man did come. His name is Yeshua ben Joseph. He is our Messiah! No Jewish person who follows God would believe in Him if He only did miracles. However, many Jewish scholars today are becoming more and more aware of the fact that He taught and lived Torah perfectly. This miracle-working prophet is One who needs to be reckoned with!

Yeshua has been accused of being a false prophet and therefore we will examine this accusation. Rabbi Munk typifies the rabbinic case against Yeshua, as the following quotation will indicate: (Please note that, among other things, we do not agree with the quotation's assertion that Yeshua was "the founder of Christianity"!)

It is striking that this chapter seems to hint at the acts of the founder of Christianity. Accordingly, it is not difficult for a Jew to accept the idea of his having performed miracles. Such miracles were characteristic of a very troubled era, which had to distinguish between those who were continuing the true tradition and those, invested with a semblance of God's power yet who misused it and introduced into Israel a desire to forsake Torah. R. Hoffman comments that the founder of Christianity clearly did not act to fulfill the Law of the Torah, but founded a completely new religion. The founding of Christianity was, then, according to the Torah's words (verse 4), a test for Israel. Israel passed this test well.²

Thus, the rabbis, whose opinions may be represented by Munk, consider Yeshua to have been a false prophet. They are not impressed with His miracles.

As a false prophet, His power was, according to them, a test from God for Israel, to see if they would reject Him even though He came performing miracles. Moreover, they state, a main indication that Yeshua was a false prophet was that He did not teach Israel the Torah, nor did He follow it.

What are we to make of such an accusation? First of all, we need to remember that many rabbis, like Munk, are not writing based on historical and literary research, but rather, based on their own emotion. Munk, particularly, was a survivor of the Holocaust, an event which many Jewish people consider to be the culmination of Christian anti-Semitism. Thus, it is easy to see why they could

¹ J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 131, 133.

² Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah: Devarim*, 144.

propagate such errors about Yeshua — the name of the god that Hitler claimed to worship through his "acts of cleansing."

However, not everyone in the Jewish world gives in to such emotion. There are more objective scholars — even from within the Orthodox camp. One such scholar is Dr. David Flusser, who was a distinguished professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. According to Flusser,

Jesus regarded the Torah, with all its jots and tittles, as a world complete in itself, on which the existence of the real world depended (Matthew 5:17–20), and he was therefore faithful to the Torah in its entirety.³

Flusser is not alone. Most scholars, if they study the texts of the Renewed Covenant Scriptures properly and objectively, come to the same conclusion: Yeshua was a faithful, Torah observant, Jewish man. If this were not so, then the Book of Hebrews would not say that He was, "... tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

With regard to the accusations of Yeshua being a false prophet, there is something else which needs to be said. The Torah (Deuteronomy 13:10) states that a false prophet in Israel should be put to death by stoning. There was a very small but loudly outspoken group of religious leaders in Yeshua's day who wanted to kill Him. Certainly, they knew this injunction in the Torah. Yet, when it was time for them to seek the death penalty for Yeshua, it was not stoning that they sought but a Roman crucifixion instead!

This tells us several things. First, it confirms that Yeshua was not being accused of being a false prophet. If He were, then they would have stoned Him instead of having Him crucified. Secondly, if they were accusing Yeshua of being a false prophet, then they themselves did not follow the Torah because they sought the wrong death penalty for Him, according to Torah law. Hence, by the current rabbinic standards, those who sought to have him killed also would have been false prophets because they did not lead the people to follow the Torah!

The last thing that we can say in Yeshua's defense is that He most certainly did not fit the characteristics of a false prophet as described in the Torah. Yeshua *never* encouraged or taught the Jewish people to "follow gods of others that you did not know." On the contrary, when someone asked Him what was the greatest commandment, He responded by quoting the Shema, the traditional Jewish statement of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:4 (see Mark 12:29).

In conclusion, there is, in reality, no biblical evidence that Yeshua was a false prophet according to Deuteronomy chapter 13.

³ David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, 34.