

ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS

A Devotional Meditation on Behar (On the Mount) and Bechukotai (In My Statutes)

Leviticus 25:1-27:34; Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 16:19-17:14;

John 10:29; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Peter 2:9

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Our oldest daughter is a very good driver. She mastered basic road skills quickly once she received her learner's permit, but before she took the test for her license, she had to pass Dad's driving test. That meant navigating the Washington Beltway from our home in Alexandria, Virginia, all the way around the District of Columbia and back. She covered the first 60 miles in about an hour, but then came across stalled traffic a few miles from the end of the journey. The cause was construction on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge over the Potomac River. The heavy traffic came as a surprise to her, but not to me. I knew that on that day, all but two lanes would be closed due to a critical phase in the bridge work. It took another hour to cover the last ten miles, and my young driver quickly got frustrated. That was the point: I wanted to see how she handled a variety of traffic situations. She did very well, working through the frustration of stalled traffic like an expert. Even so, she wasn't happy about it. As we approached the last exit before the bridge, she asked if she could take an alternate route. I answered, "It won't help. You still have to get across this river somehow."



Woodrow Wilson Bridge, looking northwest over the Potomac River toward Alexandria, Virginia. Traffic flows freely in this photo, but several months earlier, the final stages of construction on the new bridge severely constricted traffic in both directions. Photo: Virginia Department of Transportation, December 14, 2008, [via Flickr](#).

I spoke as a loving father who put his child through a difficult test so that she would learn valuable lessons for life. Now she instinctively applies those lessons every day, and I am very proud of her. In teaching her how to navigate the highways, I learned some things about how our Heavenly Father teaches us to navigate life.

To understand these lessons, we must first understand our identity in Messiah Yeshua. By pledging our allegiance to the Son of David, we become citizens of the covenant nation of Israel, the nation God established through Abraham. Paul says this very clearly in his letter to the Galatians:

For you are all sons of God through trusting in Messiah *Yeshua*. For all of you who were immersed in Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah *Yeshua*. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's seed—heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:26-29 TLV

When we realize this identity, then we begin to see how the instructions God gave through Moses have shaped our adoptive nation into the redemptive agent the Creator intended. We catch a glimpse of where that process is going in Leviticus 25, the chapter about the Sabbath and Jubilee years. Every seventh year was to be a year of rest for the land and people of Israel. There would be no sowing or reaping, but instead there would be a cancelling of debts, and release of indentured servants. After seven Sabbath years, the Jubilee would be proclaimed at the start of the 50th year. The Jubilee was a special Sabbath year. Not only were the land and people to rest for a second year in a row, but every property that had been sold would revert to its original owner, every remaining debt would be cancelled, and every Israelite slave would go free.

That word “slave” can mean an indentured servant whose term of service lasted seven years, or it could mean a person bound to service for life. Hebrews – meaning Israelites – could not enslave fellow Hebrews, but they could buy foreign slaves. However, if any Hebrews became too poor to support themselves, they might sell themselves to a foreigner. Then they would be bound to their masters until someone redeemed them, or until the Jubilee. Thus, even in the worst case, their time of bondage would never be more than 50 years.

But what about the foreign slaves? Our modern minds take issue at that, and yet God made provision for them as well, establishing ways they could be freed and, should they choose, take part in the covenant of redemption. Israel thus would become a nation of immigrants, receiving new citizens from every nation who pledged allegiance to the Redeemer King and kept the terms of His covenant.

This is a word of hope for us, demonstrating prophetically the deliverance Messiah Yeshua provides from bondage to sin and death. Our Jubilee is drawing near, and with it true liberty. God does this because He cherishes us all. We learn that from the concluding chapter of Leviticus, where the Lord establishes the value of every person. That means, in negotiating a laborer’s hire, or the price of a debt, no one could diminish the intrinsic value that the Creator Himself established for those made in His image. God does not allow loopholes, especially for those who might exploit their fellow human beings.

And then there is the provision for redeeming the firstborn. In Exodus, the Lord specifies that every firstborn man and animal would be His. In Leviticus 27, He says:

Nevertheless, no devoted thing which a man sets apart from all that he has for *ADONAI*, whether man or animal, or from the field of his possession, may be sold or redeemed. Every devoted thing is most holy to *ADONAI*.

Leviticus 27:28 TLV

This means everyone and everything dedicated to God become holy, and therefore no one may ever take it back. Anyone who tries to do so must not only return what was taken, but add a fifth part to the value thereof.

Now consider this. When God commissioned Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, He gave him these instructions:

You are to say to Pharaoh, “This is what *ADONAI* says: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’”

Exodus 4:22 TLV

God declares the entire nation of Israel as His firstborn! That means all who come into that firstborn nation become holy to Israel's Redeemer. This is why Peter quotes Moses:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9 TLV

It is also why Yeshua declares that those who follow Him ultimately belong to His Father, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:29).

But what does this have to do with teaching my daughter how to drive in heavy traffic across the Potomac River? The connection is in Leviticus 26, where God explains the benefits of keeping His commandments, and the consequences of disregarding them. He tells His covenant nation that He will discipline them for disobedience. If they listen and obey, then He will bless them, but if not, terrible curses follow. This is not cruelty, but the tough love of a Father Who understands that experience is the best teacher. He knows they will fall away, but He also knows there is a process for bringing them back and perfecting them to take part in His eternal purposes. That process extends through time and space, embracing multiple generations and every nation on earth. It is a redemptive process far greater than any individual or single generation might comprehend, but it is destined to be complete in time. The Father's very Name and reputation are at stake. That is why He declares this ultimate word of hope:

"Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I hate them into utter destruction, and break My covenant with them, for I am *ADONAI* their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am *ADONAI*."

Leviticus 26:44-45 TLV

This is our comfort and hope. The trials we face are very real, and we cannot know when they will end. Yet, just like my daughter who trusted and obeyed my word, we can trust our Father to bring us across the River to our final redemption.