

## CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE TREE OF WOE

### A Devotional Meditation on Ki Tavo (When You Enter In)

Deuteronomy 26:1-29:9; Isaiah 60:1-22; Jeremiah 30:8-25, 31:31-34;  
Acts 14:22; Ephesians 2:8-13; Hebrews 8:8-12

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One of the movies that appealed to me as a young man was *Conan the Barbarian*. As a much older man, I now see the problems of watching a movie like that filled with violent, occultic, and sexual content. However, I remember a few points that can be turned toward good life lessons. For example, when the evil Thulsa Doom is about to pronounce a sentence of death on Conan, he explains to him how wrong he has been in his life choices, and then says, “Contemplate this on the tree of woe.”

As we might expect, that is how Conan is sentenced to death by crucifixion. He does find a way to escape and exact revenge on his enemy, but that’s not the point here. What I would like to examine is the role of crucifixion, not only as a means of execution, but as a rite of passage into the Kingdom of Heaven.

It’s hard-wired into the Christian mind to think immediately of Christ on the cross when we hear the word, *crucifixion*. That’s understandable. It is, after all, through our Messiah’s suffering that we who had no hope, being excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise, have been granted access to the redemption our Creator offers. However, there is something more to consider.

Yeshua of Nazareth was not the only Jew crucified by the Romans, nor was He the only person wrongly condemned to death for trying to bring justice into a world where justice serves only the strong. Tens of thousands of Jews died by crucifixion as a result of the two great wars against Rome that left the land of Israel utterly devastated and the Jewish remnant of Israel scattered to the four winds of heaven. That was what Moses said would happen if God’s Covenant Nation failed to live as He intended:

*ADONAI* will scatter you among all peoples from the one end of the earth to the other, and there you will serve other gods—wood and stone—that you and your fathers have not known. Among these nations you will find no rest, and there will be no rest for the sole of your foot. But there *ADONAI* will give you a trembling heart and failing eyes, and a despairing spirit.

Deuteronomy 28:64-65 TLV

That’s the ultimate judgment, after the nation suffers escalating adversity intended to get their attention and turn them back to the way of the LORD. Sickness, famine, drought, economic collapse, foreign occupation, and the total collapse of moral standards and social structure precede that final judgment. It happened not only with the Jewish part of



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the nation, but with the non-Jewish tribes who rebelled against the House of David and established a separate kingdom. They experienced the national death sentence at the hands of the Assyrian Empire, over a century before the Jewish kingdom of Judah experience the same at the hands of the Babylonians. All because the generations after Moses forgot what he said about their identity:

This day *ADONAI* your God is commanding you to do these statutes and ordinances—so you are to take care and do them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have affirmed *ADONAI* as your God, that you will walk in His ways, keep His statutes, *mitzvot* [commandments] and ordinances, and listen to His voice. Now today *ADONAI* has affirmed you as His treasured people, as He promised you; that you are to keep all His *mitzvot*; that He will set you high above all the nations He has made, for praise, fame and honor; and that you are to be a holy people to *ADONAI* your God, as He has promised.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 TLV

Notice that God didn't say the Hebrews would have an easy life. Living as His special treasure, separate from and high above all the other nations, was as hard for them in ancient times as it is for us today, and they had the benefit of a national culture that walked out this identity, at least externally if not by heart. That's another thing Moses explained:

You have seen all that *ADONAI* did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land—the great trials that your eyes saw, those great signs and wonders. But to this day *ADONAI* has not given you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear. I led you 40 years in the wilderness—your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. Bread you have not eaten and wine and strong drink you have not drunk—in order that you may know that I am *ADONAI* your God.

Deuteronomy 29:1-5 TLV

We should take note of two things here. First, the heart change required to keep God's commandments correctly was a future event, to be paid for in the blood of Messiah when He ushered in the New, or Renewed, Covenant with Israel. Second, the life of those coming into and living in the Covenant Kingdom of Israel is paved with hardship. Paul and Barnabas explained as much many centuries later:

They were strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in faith, and saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:22

But what does this have to do with crucifixion?

It's in the way God's Covenant Nation shares the sufferings of our Redeemer. He is the firstborn and the First Fruits in all things, which means He sets the example for us to follow. He has to be God become flesh, because only the Eternal can suffer such horrendous things to the point of death, and then after death return from the grave.

As with the Bridegroom, so with the Bride. An Eternal King cannot die, and neither can the nation He has called out of all nations to be His special possession. That's why God promises to Israel:

“For I am with you,” declares *ADONAI*, “to save you, for I will make a full end of all the nations where I scatter you, but I will not make a full end of you. For I will discipline you justly, but will not leave you unpunished.”

Jeremiah 30:11 TLV

This is why the continued existence of the Jewish people as the visible remnant of Israel is the greatest evidence that there is a God, and why the return of the Jewish people to the promised land of Israel is the greatest evidence that He is willing and able to keep His promises. It's why we from the nations are joined to Israel, regardless of our ethnicity or national origin. Israel is the only nation that, like her King, suffered the sentence of national death by crucifixion and returned to life as a nation.

Both halves of Israel's covenant people, Jews and Christians, have suffered excruciatingly in the process of testifying to the world of God's steadfast love, His desire to redeem and restore the whole world, and the ways He intends the redeemed to live in His renewed Kingdom. Jews have kept the ways of the Kingdom as part of their culture, even in exile, and now are wrestling with how to transform that culture into national life once again. Christians have carried the message of redemption through Israel's Messiah to the whole world, and are now wrestling with the revelation that there are ancient roots to this redemption declared from the beginning by Moses and the Prophets. It's the redemption from the curse that fell on all of us when our first ancestors ate of the Tree of Woe. Now, at the end of this age, we have the choice of continuing to eat that fruit, or share what we have learned in our contemplations on the tree.