

## BEYOND THE RULES

### A Devotional Meditation on Vayalekh (And He Went)

Deuteronomy 31:1-30; Hosea 14:1-9; Micah 7:18-20;  
Ecclesiastes 7:1-4, 8:14-15; Isaiah 22:12-14; Hebrews 12:1-11

Albert J. McCarn  
September 27, 2025

My biblical worldview took shape in a Christian academy where our godly teachers helped us learn to think, holding up God's Word as the foundation of truth. We did, of course, have strict rules of conduct. It wouldn't be right for Christians to talk, act, and dress like heathens, of course. So we obeyed the rules, at least outwardly.

All of us bent the rules at times, and some flagrantly disregarded them, but the rules were still the rules. After graduation from high school, some of my peers walked away from the church, not desiring to encumber themselves any further with what they perceived as an antiquated repressive patriarchal system. Others dove into the frenetic pace of modern life, giving little thought to its meaning other than what popped up on Sunday mornings, or at the occasional wedding or funeral. They still played by the rules – not necessarily because they understood or believed them to be absolutely right, but because it was the proper thing in polite Southern society.

Then there were those who obeyed the rules because they were God's rules. I was one of those. A few of us had taken our school lessons to heart and embarked on a journey beyond the rules toward the heart of the Rule Maker. In my case, statements by our teachers provoked deeper thought to explore beyond the surface. One such statement challenged us with the idea that, if there were no God and no salvation in Jesus Christ, then the best alternative would be, as the saying goes, to “eat, drink, and be merry because tomorrow we die.”

That ancient saying refers to something both Solomon and Isaiah wrote. Solomon's version appears in Ecclesiastes:

There is another enigma that occurs upon the earth: there are righteous people who are requited according to the work of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are requited according to the work of the righteous. I said, “This also is meaningless.” So I recommend enjoyment, because there is nothing better for humanity under the sun except to eat, drink and enjoy it. So this joy will accompany him in his labor all the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 8:14-15 TLV

This is the same Solomon who also wrote:

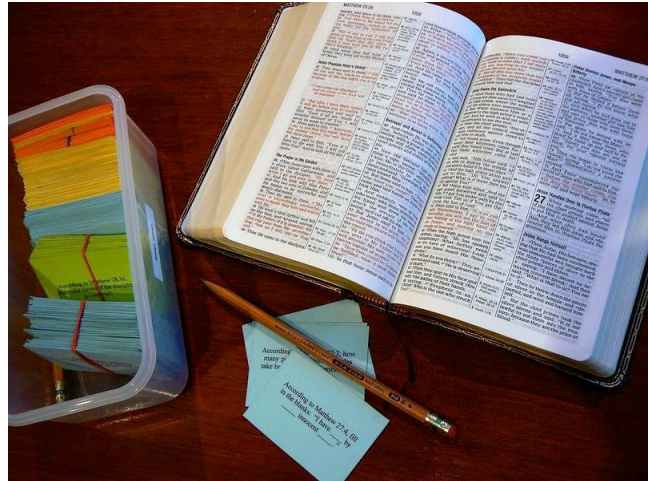


Photo by Vicki Ashton, January 3, 2008, [via Flickr](#).

Better to go to a house of mourning  
than to go to the house of feasting,  
since that is the end of all mankind  
—and the living should take it to heart.  
Grief is better than laughter,  
for though the face is sad, the heart may be glad.  
The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 TLV

This takes a lifetime to understand. At the heart is this difficult question: why would God create human beings in His image just so we could be mournful and endure lives filled with trauma?

A standard Christian answer comes from the book of Hebrews. It's also a standard Jewish answer since the writer of Hebrews is quoting King Solomon:

In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed. Have you forgotten the warning addressed to you as sons?

“My son, do not take lightly the discipline of *Adonai*  
or lose heart when you are corrected by Him,  
because *Adonai* disciplines the one He loves  
and punishes every son He accepts.”

Hebrews 12:4-6 TLV (quoting Proverbs 3:11-12)

Why does God discipline us? Why does He love us in the first place? If all we do is rebel and go our own way, why does He even bother bringing us back?

We don't have answers for those questions yet. They are hidden beyond the veil of this present age, but the answers are there, nonetheless. For now, all we can do is trust and obey. This is something far greater than individual salvation, and much bigger even than establishing a biblically-based society over the earth. This is about God nurturing into perfection a people after His own heart. He calls that people Israel – the ones who strive with God and man and who prevail, just like our father Jacob.

This is the same people God redeemed out of Egypt, even though on the eve of Moses the redeemer's death God explained to him and to the nation of Israel that they would abandon Him and break His Covenant, and therefore He would abandon them in turn. So why didn't God just end it there? Because He couldn't, and wouldn't.

Creating and perfecting this people was something He promised to do. That's why the Jewish remnant of Israel still exists to this day. It's why they are returning to His Covenant as He promised, and He is returning them to their Promised Land. It's also why His Messiah has gathered unnumbered multitudes from the nations to join them in this Covenant, and why He is transforming all our hearts by the renewing of our minds.

We still don't know why He is going to all this trouble. We'll have to wait for Messiah's return and the revelation of our eternal destiny to understand. Until then, we of the Commonwealth of Israel, Jews and us from the nations, can be comforted that we are beginning to say just what the prophet said we would say:

What more are idols to me?  
I have responded and observed Him.  
I will be like a luxuriant cypress tree.  
From me will be found Your fruit.  
Hosea 14:9 (8) TLV