

Finish the Old Year with the Washing of Repentance

In this week's *Torah* Reading, *Parashat Ki Tavo*, Moses instructs the people of God this way: "¹ Now when you enter the land that Adonai your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, ² you are to take some of the first of all the produce of the soil, which you gather from your land that Adonai your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place Adonai your God chooses to make His Name dwell. ³ You are to go to the kohenin charge in those days and say to him, 'I declare today to Adonai your God, that I have entered into the land Adonai swore to our fathers to give us.' ⁴ The kohen is to take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of Adonai your God" (*Deut. 26:1-4*). This speaks of the first of the fruits (Hebrew, *raysheet*) but this is **not** the tithe (the word tithe comes from the Hebrew word *ma'aser* which means literally a tenth) of our efforts (our harvest). This indicates that whatever comes first from our field of effort we should bring it to the Lord. We have specific instructions about the tithe (*ma'aser*) such as in *Mal. 3:8-10*: "⁸ 'Will a man rob (hold back or defraud) God? For you are robbing Me!' But you say: 'How have we robbed You?' 'In the tithe and the offering. ⁹ You have been cursed with the curse, yet you keep robbing Me—the whole nation! ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Then there will be food in My House. Now test Me in this"—says Adonai-Tzva'ot—"if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out blessing for you, until no one is without enough." At the beginning of our *Torah* reading we have instructions on what to do when we experience blessing – when we harvest from the inheritance that the Lord is giving to us. This speaks of generosity, and it speaks of an attitude of giving back to the Lord as a form of worship. All giving is worship, but that which we bring to the House of God, whatsoever we offer Him in the *Tzedakah* box, both tithe (*ma'aser*) and first fruits (*raysheet*) is in obedience to that which He has asked for from us. Are you obedient in this area? If not then you have disobeyed.

Last week I shared that ministerial leaders often understand that their flock needs to go through the washing of repentance. This is why many schedule times of revival and bring in guests to motivate them to do so. Others in the Body of Messiah never seem to go those kinds of services. But we in Messianic Judaism (MJ) have scheduled times where the Lord has already written in His *Torah* that He is attentive to hearing from His people to make things right. Did you realize that we are in the last week of that special time? Today is the 21st Day of *Elul* (the sixth month) and we have exactly eight days before the seventh month – the start of the new civil year in the month of *Tishri* – arrives. In MJ we are reminded that it is time to obtain repentance and re-soften our heart towards the Almighty. During this season of Repentance (*T'Shuvah*) we Messianic Jews evaluate (introspectively) our lives and, hopefully, we all come to a realization that we in desperate need of forgiveness so we can fully return (*T'Shuvah*) to Him.

I believe that we desperately need a soft heart instead of a hard heart. We need a soft heart that is able to hear with compassion and with humility. A soft heart that is able to see the benefits of living through Him, for Him, and in Him. A softened heart equips a person with the resolve to obey the Lord with joy. A hard heart does not understand this way of living and results in an unwise individual because wisdom is *viewing life from God's perspective*. "*In Him we live and move and have our being*" (*Acts 17:28*) and are able to operate in a supernatural dimension. However, just before the *maftir* of this week's reading Moses reminds the Children of Israel (and us) that: "However, just before the *maftir* of *Parashat Ki Tavo* Moshe reminds them (us) that: "³ But to this day Adonai has not given you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear" (*Deut. 29:3*). If the Lord has not given you (us) this kind of heart, eyes and ears, then it is time to ask! Yes, it is time to ask. Today is the day to ask the Lord to give us, by His Spirit, a heart (and a soul, which is our mind, will, and emotions) that is ready, willing and able to respond to Him this way. If as a congregation we want to soar (mount up with wings as eagles) to the next level, we must have that kind of heart. What has kept us from having that type of heart? Sin.

T'Shuvah speaks to all people. Messianic believers are called this month to examine their lives and see where they have departed from God. For us it is also a call to carefully examine the Scriptures and weigh the evidence that *Yeshua* is who He said He was. Is *Messiah Yeshua* King of your life and your heart yet? God always warns the people before He proclaims judgment. He warned the people before the flood and He warned Nineveh before it was ruined. He does not ever want anyone to receive the wrath of His judgment so He pre-warns us. We need an awakening from the sleep induced by sin so the power of the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in the heart of a believer who trusts in God's Salvation (*Messiah Yeshua*) and *who asks for forgiveness*. *T'Shuvah* is God's gift. Do you want it? Many are operating in various degrees of unbelief and it is time to stop it! By His *Ruach* we rebuke unbelief. Let us pray...