

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 03/01/2015



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By Joseph F. Dumond

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Ex 23	Isaiah 30-33	Ps 139	John 11
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More Than “Thou Shalt Not...” (Exodus 23)

God revealed to Israel laws that prohibit slander, backbiting and lying. All these are based on the Ninth Commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” God Himself is not a respecter of persons and commands that we treat all people equally. He looks on the attitude of our heart, which is manifested in how we live each day. Obedience to God is much more than just following a list of dos and don'ts. The law tells us to perform acts of service for others. Even though we may have a problem with our fellow man, if we fail to help him when there is a need, we have broken God's law.

God also revealed laws that regulate mankind's relationship with the environment. One of these laws, the land Sabbath, is recorded in this chapter. The purpose of this law was to allow the land to regenerate the nutrients in the soil. When followed, this would allow for a much healthier crop to be harvested in the future. Today, man disregards this law and dumps all kinds of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on the soil. There indeed is a way that seems right to a man, but the result is the way that leads to all kinds of unforeseen problems-including, ultimately, death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Interestingly, there was another purpose to the land Sabbath law-to allow the poor to glean whatever produce grew on its own in the year when the land wasn't planted or harvested (and there would certainly be produce for them in the vineyards and orchards). Thus, even this law promoted loving treatment of one's neighbor, particularly those who were less well-off. Moreover, it was also an act of faith-as the Israelites had to trust God to meet their needs during the year they neither planted nor harvested crops.

“Speak to Us Smooth Things”; “This Is the Way; Walk in It” (Isaiah 30)

Because of the threats against them from the Assyrian Empire to the north, Israel and Judah sought help from the empire to the south—Egypt. Hoshea of Israel had sought help from So,

king of Egypt (2 Kings 17:4)—to no avail. Judah apparently did so during Hezekiah's reign, as described by the Assyrian general who attacked Jerusalem (Isaiah 36:6). And they did not seek God's counsel in the matter.

Isaiah is told to write the message from God on a scroll—"that it may be for time to come, forever and ever" (verse 8). Yes, it was a message for Isaiah's day. But it is one for our day too—the very reason we are reading it right now! The people didn't want to hear God's commandments (verse 9). They didn't want to hear any warning message (verse 10). In fact, they demanded that their religious leaders tell them only the things they wanted to hear.

It is the same today. People do not like correction and rebuke, as needful as they are: "It's dangerous for a patient to ask [his or] her doctor only for good news. Once a serious illness is diagnosed it can be treated. If that same illness is simply denied, it is likely to kill. It's the same with God's words through the prophets. Their warnings may not be pleasant. But only if we listen and take them to heart is there hope" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 10).

Despite the rebellion of the people, God will at last humble them and bring them to repentance—offering them salvation at the return of Yeshua. And they will at last flourish.

In Isaiah 11:9, God said of the millennial rule of Yeshua, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." And now we get a glimpse of how this will be ensured. God says: "Your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (29:20-21).

What this is saying is that godly teachers will no longer be persecuted and driven into a corner—out of sight and ignored. Instead, people will generally welcome God's guidance. Moreover, it is stated that when people start to veer out of line from God's law, a voice will remind them of what they should do. (We will consider what this means in a moment.) The voices will be those of their teachers, whom they will at times actually see. And amazingly, the teachers, the priesthood of that time, will be the glorified followers of Yeshua from this age—at last made perfect to rule with Him over all nations.

Now, what are we to make of this instructive intervention? It clearly does not refer simply to general instruction. A word "behind" someone implies that he is caught in some action. So does that mean people will be completely prevented from sinning every time they start to entertain a wrong thought? That just does not make any sense. People will still have to choose the right way and then exercise the character to do right and think right continually, for they must develop holy righteous character through this process. It is most likely that people will be allowed to make mistakes in order to learn from them—perhaps even commit crimes like lying and stealing. Where there are flesh-and-blood human beings, there are a host of problems. And no doubt, there will be even then.

Yet imagine if a person were about to commit a serious violent crime against another person—rape or murder for instance. Surely the incidence of such attempts would be diminished through general righteous instruction. But that alone would not utterly eliminate impulsive actions. God, however, says that people will not be allowed to hurt or destroy in all of His Kingdom. The answer? They will hear a word behind them—to mercifully guide them into right thinking if they will be so led. And if not, they will be restrained and perhaps punished. God’s saints, the “policemen” of the world to come, will not allow people to afflict terrible atrocities on one another. Such evil is allowed today because this is not God’s world. The Kingdom age is a different story—for then it *will* be God’s world.

We can perhaps also envision people who go through a period of drifting from God and His ways. Eventually, such people may need to be directly confronted by their teachers. The fact is that we don’t really know how often such intervention will be required. It will probably be reserved for drastic situations rather than as a matter of course. On the other hand, people seeing their glorified teachers and receiving general instruction from them will likely be more commonplace.

If you commit to God now and remain faithful to Him, yours will be one of the voices providing guidance and direction to human beings in that amazing time to come.

Finally, God states that He will be the One to destroy the Assyrians, not Egypt (verse 31). This is apparently part of the prophecy of end-time events, of which the destruction of Sennacherib’s army in Isaiah’s day was a forerunner. Notice the reference to Tophet in verse 33. “Tophet, located south of Jerusalem, was the place where the valleys of Hinnom and Kidron met. It was probably a deep, wide pit containing a bonfire of blazing wood, where children had at times been burned to death as offerings to pagan deities (2 Kin. 23:10; Jer. 7:32, 32; 19:6, 11-14). The area has filled in significantly through the centuries” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Isaiah 30:33).

It is interesting to note that God says Tophet was prepared for the ruler of Assyria—here a reference to the end-time European dictator known as “the Beast” in Revelation. God said in Joel 3 that the destruction on His enemies at the end would occur in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is often identified with the Kidron Valley (see highlights on Joel 3). And Yeshua used Gehenna (*Gai Hinnom*—the “Valley of Hinnom” outside Jerusalem where trash was burned) to represent the coming “lake of fire,” which, according to the book of Revelation, will burn up the wicked. In Revelation 19:20, we learn that the Beast and his accomplice the False Prophet will be cast into the “lake of fire,” which appears to be a reference to this place of Tophet, where the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys meet. Christ will evidently ignite Hinnom (Isaiah 30:33) and will perhaps keep it burning throughout the Millennium, since Satan (the *ultimate* ruler of Assyria) is cast into the lake of fire where the Beast and False Prophet were cast—and he is cast there at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:10). Thus it is a fire in the same place if not the very same fire. This fire will eventually engulf and purify the entire earth, burning up all the incorrigibly wicked (compare verses 13-15; 21:8; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Malachi 4:1, 3)

Deliverance Is from God; The Righteous King (Isaiah 31-32)

Chapter 31 restates much of the theme of chapter 30: The people were looking to Egypt for help instead of looking to God. And ultimately Assyria would fall, but not because of Egypt. This was true of the destruction that came upon Sennacherib's army in Isaiah's day. And it will also be true of what happens at the return of Yeshua—when He destroys the armies of the nations, including Assyria, that come against Him.

Indeed, this is all primarily an end-time prophecy, since chapter 32 carries right on from God's victory. The king who would reign in righteousness was not a reference to Hezekiah, who already sat on the throne of Judah. Rather, this speaks of the reign of the Messiah. Verses 5-8 describe how, under His righteous rule, there will be no more labeling of right as wrong and wrong as right. Everything will be seen for what it truly is. Evil will be decried and judged, and good will at last be exalted.

Verse 10 says, "In a year and some days..." The King James Version has "many days and years." The literal wording is "days upon a year" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 10). If it really does mean a year and some days, this was perhaps a reference by Isaiah to the coming destruction of Sennacherib in 701 B.C. The women and daughters of verses 9-11 are possibly understood to mean "the cities and villages of Judea" (note on verses 9-20). Many of them will be ravaged and destroyed. Jerusalem will not be: "Not Jerusalem itself, but other cities destroyed by Sennacherib in his march... However, the prophecy, in its full accomplishment, refers to the *utter* desolation of Judea and its *capital* [Jerusalem] by Rome [soon after Christ's first coming], and subsequently [by the end-time resurrection of Rome—the final Assyria and Babylon], previous to the second coming of the King (Ps. 118:26; Luke 13:35; 19:38); 'the joyous city' is in this view, Jerusalem" (note on verse 13).

But the days of trouble will not last forever. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles, Peter cited the book of Joel to explain what was occurring (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32). Of course, prophecies of God pouring out His Spirit were not limited to Joel. Isaiah 32:15, for instance, also describes this outpouring—though, as with Joel, its ultimate fulfillment is yet to occur, when God's Spirit is available to all mankind (see also Isaiah 44:3; Proverbs 1:23; Ezekiel 39:29; Zechariah 12:10).

It is this outpouring of God's Spirit, in concert with the direct rule of Yeshua, that will at last bring peace to the world. For God's Spirit (Isaiah 32:15) enables righteousness (verse 16)—the keeping of God's commandments (Psalm 119:172). And the keeping of God's commandments results in peace (Isaiah 32:17)—which Yeshua Himself will maintain throughout His rule (verse 18).

Ambassadors of Peace Weep; Then Jerusalem a Quiet Home (Isaiah 33)

This “woe differs from the others in that it is addressed to Assyria, not to Judah [that is, it starts out that way]. By focusing exclusively on Assyria’s defeat and Judah’s salvation, the prophecy magnifies Judah’s exalted King (vv. 3, 5, 10). This woe oracle consists of an introduction of the main themes of the oracle (vv. 1-6); an emphasis on Judah’s need for salvation and the LORD’s provision of that need (vv. 7-13), and its spiritual impact on sinners (vv. 14-16); and a conclusion showing the majestic King in His beauty (vv. 17-24)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on chap. 33).

In verse 7, we see how the hopes of the ambassadors for peace have been dashed. How often this has been true—particularly of Jerusalem. This ancient city’s name means “Possession of Peace.” But of all the war-racked and violent places on the earth, Jerusalem has been one of the worst. Thankfully, God will at last intervene for His people. He will defeat the enemies of peace and establish it permanently. Yeshua will reign in Jerusalem—a “quiet home.” It will at long last live up to its name and truly be the city of peace.

Incidentally, many believe that America’s Founding Fathers considered verse 22 as part of their justification for establishing three separate branches of government in the United States— the judicial, legislative and executive branches.

Prayer for the all-knowing God to punish the wicked and to examine and lead His servant
(Psalms 139)

In **Psalm 139** David acknowledges, in great wonder and awe, God’s omniscient care in guiding his life and expresses his solidarity with God against the wicked.

God has searched within David and his life and knows everything there is to know about him. He carefully investigates each facet of David’s life to discern all his actions—from when he gets up in the morning to when he goes to bed at night (verses 1-2a). God is thus familiar with all David’s patterns, habits, preferences and ways of doing things. Moreover, God looks penetratingly into David’s heart to discern his inner motives and secret thoughts (verse 2b). In fact, God knows David so well that He anticipates his words before they are spoken (verse 4). God has an exhaustive knowledge of David—just as He has of us (see Hebrews 4:13).

The beginning of Psalm 139:3 is variously translated: “Thou compasses [i.e., encompass] my path” (KJV); “You comprehend my path” (NKJV); “You discern my going out” (NIV); “You search out my path” (NRSV); “You sift my path” (J.P. Green’s Literal Translation). The latter is probably the correct sense (Strong’s No. 2219). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* renders the phrase as “You have winnowed me” (note on verses 1-6). The idea is apparently that God sifts all our actions, “putting them through a sieve, as it were, so as to discover every detail about them, what has motivated them, what effect they have upon me and upon others, in fact, everything conceivable about them” (George Knight, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series, comments on verses 1-6).

Yet the purpose of God's intimate knowledge of His servants is not to play "gotcha" and condemn us. Rather, as verse 5 makes plain, God's intention is to protect and guard us-to keep and hold onto us, to steady and guide us, as the objects of His care. God's all-knowing understanding and concern is just too mind-boggling for David to take in (verse 6).

In verses 7-12, David remarks on the fact that there is nowhere he can go to be out from under God's watchful oversight-for God is everywhere (omnipresent) through His infinite Spirit (see verse 7). There is no way to be concealed from Him. He can see and reach everywhere, all the time, day and night, light or dark. For some this might seem a negative thing-that is, there is no escape! But David clearly did not mean it that way, for he says that no matter where he is, God will lead him and uphold him (verse 10). He is greatly *encouraged* by the fact that God is all seeing and all-knowing. Incidentally, the word "hell" in verse 8 is translated from the Hebrew *sheol*, meaning pit or grave, thus explaining David's statement about making his "bed" there (i.e., his deathbed). So nothing, not even the grave, will separate us from God's caring oversight of our lives-for His intervening hand will lead us even from death (compare Romans 8:35-39).

In verses 13-16 of Psalm 139, David reflects on the fact that God's care in his life was there from its very beginning, acknowledging God's oversight in his conception and prenatal development. Where the NKJV says that God "covered" David in his mother's womb (verse 13), other translations render this "knit me together" (NIV) or "wove me." The Hebrew here literally means *entwined*, implying weaving but perhaps the weaving of a fence or cover of protection (Strong's No. 5526). In any case, David praises the miracle of life and birth of which he is the product (verses 14-15).

In this he remarks that God saw him "made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (verse 15). The location here is not meant literally, but is rather a metaphor for a dark, mysterious, unsearchable and unfathomable place. Such is God's workshop in the cells of the human embryo within the womb! The unformed "substance" in the next verse is a reference to the embryo.

In the latter part of verse 16 David says that all the days prepared for him were written in God's book before these days commenced. What does this mean? Some would use this verse to argue that every day of David's life was completely mapped out in advance-and to argue that the same applies to us. This, however, violates the principle of free will and choice-which we find repeatedly in Scripture (compare Deuteronomy 30:19). Furthermore, "all...the days" does not have to mean each and every day but could mean the days taken as a whole-a lifetime. Based on this, others might argue that the verse means merely that David's lifespan was generally predetermined from his genetics since conception. While possible, it seems likely that more is intended.

Commentaries typically maintain that David used the metaphor of a book to portray God's exquisitely detailed plans for each person-plans He has in mind before a person's birth. Elements of David's life, at least in a general sense (particularly his reign over Israel), seems to

have been plotted out by God ahead of time (while still allowing David free will as to whether to serve God or reject Him). And this plan may have been written in an actual spiritual record, rather than this signifying a mere metaphor. David in another psalm remarked that his tears were written in God's book (Psalm 56:8), which seems to be the same as the book of remembrance for those who fear God in Malachi 3:16. This may or may not be synonymous with another book David mentions, the book of the living (69:28), apparently equivalent to the Book of Life, God's heavenly registry of the righteous (see Exodus 32:32-33; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15, 17; 22:19). David's reference in Psalm 139 could also be to the "Scripture of Truth," the Bible of heaven as it were, wherein a lengthy prophecy of the future was already inscribed before it was given to Daniel to write down in his own book as God's written revelation to us (see Daniel 10:21).

The theme of one's purpose in life is a key topic in the Bible. Note what God announced to the Jewish nation in exile: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Indeed, David remarks in the next verse of Psalm 139 on how precious and countless are God's thoughts toward *him* (verses 17-18).

The end of verse 18 then states, "When I awake, I am still with you." Perhaps the point is that David is amazed to consider that every day he wakes, he is still in God's care—returning to the thought at the beginning of the psalm of God observing His "sitting down and...rising up" (verse 2). Yet some suggest that he is speaking in a future tense of his resurrection—remarking in the context of verse 16 that after the passing of his days, he will awake from death and even still be with God.

Enraptured as he is with God's intimate and all-seeing care in his life—demonstrative of God's care for all His servants—David still can't help but think about the wicked who, despite God's wonderful intentions over which he's been musing, still cause trouble for him and all of God's people (as highlighted in the next five psalms). As he closes Psalm 139, David expresses the wish that God would justly deal with this outstanding problem. God has, in fact, already pronounced a death sentence in His law against the bloodthirsty and the blasphemous. David is here supporting the carrying out of that sentence (verses 19-20).

David then unequivocally declares that he hates those who hate God and rebel against Him, loathing them and hating them with a perfect or complete hatred (verses 21-22). Many today are disturbed at such language in light of Yeshua's instruction in the New Testament: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you in and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Indeed, caring for one's enemy was also an Old Testament directive (compare Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21).

But we should consider a number of factors here. First, as in other psalms, the hatred David is speaking of in Psalm 139 should be understood primarily in the sense of rejection and strong aversion. Note his words in verse 19 calling on the bloodthirsty to get away from him. That is,

David wants nothing to do with them. He won't support them or make common cause with them. He will not befriend them or accept their friendship, for he counts them as his enemies (verse 22). This is a second point to emphasize. David's hatred here does not equate to personally taking vengeance or even mistreatment on a personal level. It equates to counting the wicked as his enemies. He opposes them. If they are *God's* enemies, then they are *his* enemies. That brings us to a third factor to note here. David is not declaring hatred for those who merely bear him personal ill will, but for those who hate and rise up against God. Of course, those who bore David animosity usually did so on the basis of opposition to God and His law-yet it was this rather than personal hurt that was the basis for David's declared hatred against them. In essence, David was declaring his complete solidarity with God against God's enemies.

None of this, by the way, precludes following the New Testament instruction to pray for one's persecutors and to do good to them. Even given the strong words David spoke, he still could and may well have followed what Christ would later explain-as he clearly did in his dealings with Saul. Indeed, we should be careful to not misconstrue Christ's teaching in this regard. Consider that praying for one's persecutors obviously does not mean praying for their success in persecution. It primarily means praying for their long-term well-being, realizing that God intends to eventually lead them to repentance. It may include praying that He will lead them to repent *soon* -at least of their present antagonism and offending behavior. Barring that outcome, praying for enemies could even mean asking God to exercise judgment on them to stop them from their evil and greater guilt. Doing good to persecutors, loving our enemies, does not mean supporting them in their evil plans or making common cause with them. Recall what Jehu the seer said to King Jehoshaphat of Judah for his joint operations with evil King Ahab of Israel : "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you" (2 Chronicles 19:2). As is stated here, we are not to "love" the haters of God in this sense. Rather, we are to oppose them.

David ends with a prayer that God will search his heart and investigate his anxieties to see "if there is any wicked way in me" (Psalm 139:24). Some commentators relate his request to his declared abhorrence of God's enemies-the idea being that he is asking God to search his heart to see if his expressed thoughts are the product of a righteous stand with God or born out of personal concerns. Other commentators understand the verse as a general request that God examine him for *any* wickedness-that is, having discussed wickedness in others, that God check to see if there is wickedness to be dealt with in *him*. David deeply desires to be led out of wickedness and, as he says in verse 24, into the way that leads to everlasting life.

As a final note, if the first part of the superscription of this psalm, "To the Chief Musician," actually belongs to the previous psalm as a postscript, then the same phrase at the beginning of the superscription of the *next* psalm may actually be the postscript of this psalm.

John 11

Yeshua is informed that one whom He loved was sick, El'azar. His response shows us He knew what was to take place and that this too was so that the great esteem of Elohim would be made manifest and also the esteem of the Son of Elohim. Even after He received the news, He remained where He was with His taught ones two more days. After two days, He then went to Yehudah.

His taught ones were fearful for Him for they knew the last time He was in Yehudah He was nearly stoned by them. When Yeshua told them plainly that El'azar had died and was not merely sleeping, they decided with the leadership of T'oma to go with Him. When they arrived, El'azar had been in the tomb already for four days.

As they approached Beyth Anyah both Martha first and then Miryam went out to meet Yeshua and both said, "Master, if you had been here, our brother would not have died." Yeshua testified that He is the resurrection and the life and that El'azar would rise again. Martha professed her belief in Him and that He indeed is the Messiah, the Son of Elohim.

They brought Yeshua to the tomb and He ordered the stone blocking the entrance to be rolled away. He prayed to the Father aloud so that all would hear Him for their benefit. He called El'azar to come forth, and he did. Many were amazed and believed on Yeshua but some went away from there and told the Pharisees what had happened. The Pharisees took counsel and let it be known their greatest fear and it was this: The Romans shall come and take away from us both PLACE and NATION if the people believe upon Yeshua. This is when Qayapha prophesied that one Man should die for the nation, and not the nation only but for to gather together into one the children of Elohim who were scattered abroad.

From that time on, they plotted to kill Him and as the Passover approached again, they spread the word to be looking for Yeshua so that they could seize Him.