

Sermon for Saturday: What is the Mark of God?

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This week's Torah portion includes Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11; Isaiah 40:1-26; Matthew 23:31-39; Luke 3:2-15: <https://tinyurl.com/ys2sdb7w>.



Shabbat Shalom brothers and sisters. Over the past several Shabbats, we've been covering the story of Israel as they made their final approach toward the Promised Land. Just as many of them called on the Name of the Lord, but fell short and died in the wilderness before they could reach the Promised Land, so too will many who call on the name of Yeshua fall short of God's coming Kingdom if they get caught up in temptation and turn away from the Lord. Yeshua said this would happen, for those who "practice lawlessness" will not be able to stand in God's presence (Matthew 7:21-23). Only those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Yeshua will endure until the Kingdom comes (Revelation 14:12).

And so, within the past few weeks, we spoke about how the second generation of Israel that came out of Egypt stood untouchable from the intended curses of Balak king of Moab, because Balaam did not obey Balak but obeyed our God who blessed the faithful children of Israel, just like so many Christians stand untouchable today when they confess Yeshua is Yahweh and believe He conquered death and now leads us into His Kingdom by the power of His Holy Spirit. However, just as 24,000 Israeli men died because they were drawn into the sins of the flesh when the women of Moab and Midian tempted them to fornicate and worship their demon gods through cult prostitution, so too will "many" who call on the name of the Lord be cast away when they cave-in to the sins of the flesh in this age, whether they practice these sins themselves or approve of them who practice them (Romans 1:32).

We also spoke about Balaam, who turned away from his corrupt heart and pagan sorcery to obey the commands of the Lord and prophesy blessings over Israel and the coming of Messiah Yeshua by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, just as so many Christians leave behind false religion and embrace the love of Yeshua by obeying His commandments and confessing the salvational grace we enjoy because God came to tabernacle with us in the flesh (1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 John 4:2). However, just as Balaam was drawn into the sins of the world and traded his salvation for some temporary monetary gain, convincing the women of Moab and Midian to tempt Israel, many Christian leaders trade godliness for dishonest gain, looking to fill their pews so they can fill their pockets rather than fill the souls God entrusted to them with the Word of God. Rather than join the nation he blessed, Balaam was destroyed by the sword of Godly Israel who obeyed the voice of God. So too will any Christian pastors or prophets be destroyed when they look to furnish their own worldly desires rather than prepare other Christians for the world to come.

We also spoke about Midian, who followed the advice of Balaam and tempted all of Israel to sin by overtly bringing their abominable cult prostitution into the Tabernacle of God, which left unchecked would have destroyed the whole congregation of Israel, and we know that the World is encroaching on so many churches and synagogues today, bringing the same pagan wickedness of old right back to the altar of God. Like Phinehas, servant of the Most High God, who took swift action and ended this abomination, preventing the further spread of sin, so too must we be willing to call out sin within the Body of Yeshua to prevent its deadly spread. For those churches that are not exposed for supporting sin, both they and all their congregants will be lost. For we know that at God's direction, Phinehas later led an army of 12,000 Israeli men to destroy the nation of Midian, and not one of the 12,000 men from the tribes of Israel were lost. While our battle is not with the sword of war, we are equipped with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), and we ought to wield it rightly to expose the present darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Not one of us who does this boldly with the love of God in our hearts will lose our souls.

In this summary, we can see a clear pattern emerge, and this is what we're going to discuss today. In brief, there is a dichotomy between those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in God and those who don't—the first group lives while the second group dies. I'm speaking, in case it is not clear, about the End—the Last Day—the Day of Judgment—the Day when our time to choose whom we will serve expires. And when we speak about death in these verses, I want you to understand that the Word is prophetically speaking about the Second Death through

the narrative of our historical allegory in the wilderness right outside the Promised Land. In Spirit and in Truth, these stories have immense relevance to us as Christians today. To get us started, let me show you a key verse toward the beginning of our Torah reading in Deuteronomy this week that references the finer points of the summary I just provided from Numbers 22-31. Here's Deuteronomy 4:1-4, where we read: "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you."

Now clearly, one of the Lord's interests was eliminating those who sinned as well as those who tempted them to sin, and His Word indicates this was accomplished. But it's also clear that God's greater interest was in preserving those who held fast to their faith in Him. We read the key point that I want to emphasize here in Numbers 31:48-49. The setting for these verses is the aftermath of the battle, after all of the men of war have purified themselves. We read: "Then the officers who were over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; and they said to Moses, 'Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and not a man of us is missing.'"

So this is the context of our verse in Deuteronomy, but what is the Lord trying to communicate here? He tells us right up front. He wants us to listen—those of us who are grafted-in to Israel through faith in Messiah Yeshua—and carefully observe the statutes and judgments that the Lord has taught us, so that we can enter the land that the Lord has GIVEN us. How is this any different than the grace that saves us through faith in our Messiah Yeshua? The Lord has given us salvation as a free gift, and so we should walk in the good works that the Lord commanded we walk in, Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

There are two analogous passages that the Lord provides, one from our reading and another a little further along in the New Covenant. I want to present these to you here to try and drive home the main point I'm trying to make; namely, that we are saved by

the Lord's grace—something we don't deserve but He gives us anyway because He loves us. On account of this gift; however, He expects our gratitude, our thankfulness, and He expects that we will desire to do things His way rather than our own way, and He will not allow those who rebel against Him and His gift to enter His Kingdom.

First, consider Deuteronomy 7:6-11, which reads: "you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them."

Of course, the Lord speaks about the children of Israel here, but I want you to remember that Israel included "a mixed multitude" of people who came out of Egypt with them because they too feared the Lord, and Israel included several of the children of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law from Midian, because they too were convinced to share in the blessings of the Lord. Ultimately, the children of Israel who crossed into the Promised Land to live would include Rahab the prostitute and her family from Jericho, which was destroyed by the people of God. As in the Old Covenant, so in the New, for the Lord grafts all Gentiles into Israel who trust in Yeshua and keep the Lord's commandments, as we read prominently in Romans 11, Ephesians 2 and so many other passages of Scripture. Our sermon today is not about how Gentiles are grafted-in to Israel, but Peter alludes to this in our analogous New Testament verse, and I think it's important to note that Peter is talking not to Jews by blood in 1 Peter 2, which we're about to read, but to those people, both Jews and Gentiles, who are grafted-in to the Tree of Israel through faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Let's read 1 Peter 2, verses 1-10: "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and

precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.' Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."

In summary, I think it's clear that the Lord has called a people for Himself out of bondage—and the bondage of Pharaoh in Egypt is symbolic for the bondage to sin in which all man suffers at the hands of the spiritual hosts of wickedness that plague us in this place. God has called out many people from bondage, because He loves us, and we are freed from the chains of sin through God's grace alone, but not all of the people who he calls by grace—not all of the people who accept the blood of the Lamb for their spiritual freedom—not everyone who is baptized and begins to follow after the Lord—not even everyone who walks faithfully with the Lord for many years—not everyone who is called becomes elect by enduring in faithfulness until the Lord comes to bring us into the Promised Land. This is why the Lord warns repeatedly, in both His Old Covenant, where we've read, "know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them; and in His New Covenant, where we've read, "to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.'" Thus both Moses and Yeshua, through the hand of Peter, urge us to continue in the Lord's kindness through faithfulness to His commandments, which shows that we truly do love Him and want to be with Him. And for those of us who do keep the commandments of God and the faith in Yeshua until that Last Day, not one of us will be lost.

After one of His great parables recorded by the Apostle Matthew, the Lord Yeshua concludes with this consequential verse in Matthew 22:14: "Many are called, but few are chosen." This verse has everything to do with what we've been talking about so far. The word "called," or klétos (κλητός) in Greek, means "summoned by God to

salvation.” Strong’s Concordance, interjecting some interpretation, indicates that this offer of salvation has been made to everyone who lives today, and I agree that it does, but I also believe that the context of the verse implies the many who have also accepted God’s grace, the promise of salvation and begin to walk in faith. Those who are saved must endure in their salvation, as Paul explains in Philippians 2. First He explains that every tongue will confess that Yeshua HaMashiach is Yahweh to the glory of Elohim, our Father, and then He says in verse 12-13: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” It is with humble and contrite hearts that we ought to live, desiring to do God’s will and good works in order to please Him, so that we can endure in this life until our ultimate salvation on the Last Day. In our verse, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” the word “chosen” is eklektos (ἐκλεκτός), meaning "select, chosen out." According to HELPS Word-studies, eklektos means those who are selected or chosen from or out of [a group], “especially as a deeply personal choice.” In a second definition, the reference notes that eklektos “typically” describes “people who choose to follow the Lord,” and I believe this latter group choose this path of faithfulness on account of the grace God offers freely through Messiah Yeshua. In other words, those who make it into the Promised Land have “held fast” to the Lord on account of all the great things He has done for them as well as because they believe in what He has promised.

Reading through Deuteronomy 3-7, we can see that Moses repeats these themes many times to emphasize them. Rather than quote all of these examples for you, and all of their nuance, I think it’s imperative to hone in on one key verse that we repeat every week as part of our liturgy, and that of course is the sh’ma. Now sh’ma (שמע) is the word often translated as “hear,” but I want to point out before I read the passage in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, that the word in its completeness truly means to both “hear and obey.” This is how Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance reads: “A primitive root; to hear intelligently (often with [the] implication of attention, obedience,” and so on. The idea is not that we should simply listen to the words that were written by Moses in Torah, but that we should obey them also and make practical use of them in our lives, not out of blind fear, but out of love for our God who spoke them to us (More on this later). And so we read in Deuteronomy 6:4-9: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall

bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Let's go through this passage word by word, just to make sure we truly understand what is being said here. First of all, the Lord is calling Israel to hear and obey His words, and those words are clear, “Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is one!” I need to stop here and clarify this statement, because it is imperative to our faith that we both hear this and obey it. We do not have three gods. We have one God. Our God is echad (אֶחָד). Anyone who says Yeshua is Messiah or Lord but denies He is God is violating this commandment, for we know that the Lord has said there are to be no other gods who we worship beside Him. Yeshua is either God and can be worshipped as God, or we need to throw the whole New Testament out because the Son testifies over and over again concerning His unification with the Father (John 10:30, for instance.) More prominently, Yeshua does not rebuke any of His disciples who worship Him, not even Thomas, who in John 20:28 said directly to Yeshua, “My Lord and my God.” In response, Yeshua does not correct him, but rather exhorts him, by saying in John 20:29, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Believed in what? Believed, of course, that Yeshua is both Lord and God, one in being with the Father. Taking this one step further, Yeshua said very clearly in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.” I could do this all day long, but please rest assured, we have one God, and He manifests Himself in three different ways, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, sometimes all at once and sometimes independently. He is God, and He is One, and He is greater than our understanding. This is something we need to both hear and obey.

Now that I've established this, or at least declared it for those who are still skeptical—and I truly do pray for your faith in the Lord and will spend the rest of my life showing you if that's what it takes—I want to move on in our passage for now. Next, Moses explains that it is our duty to love the Lord our God Yeshua with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our strength. Yeshua Himself calls this “the Greatest Commandment” in Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28. The heart, or “levav” (לֵבָב), means our “inner man,” our “mind,” our “will,” or our “heart.” This is the same “mind” that we must renew the spirit of daily, as Paul explains in Ephesians 4:23. He also explains how we ought to “take every thought captive” in 2 Corinthians 10:5. Our thoughts, our intentions, and our will ought to align with God's will, which is articulated in His commandments. We ought to be like King David, men and women after God's own heart. In other words, our will, our minds, our inner most being ought

to align with God's will, though not out of blind faith but out of purposeful choice and desire. This is what it means to love the Lord with all of our heart. Next, we have to love the Lord with all of our "soul," or "nephesh" (נֶפֶשׁ), which means the part of us that is alive. The term is used to describe a living being, created from the dust of the earth and the breath of God, the self, the person, and perhaps in some uses, the emotions, desires, passions and appetites. Yeshua has said in Matthew 16:24-25, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." We must be willing to give our entire life to the Lord, to put Him first, no matter what the consequences. This is what it means to love the Lord our God with all of our soul. Finally, we are to love the Lord our God with all of our "strength," or "meh-od" (כֹּחַ), which literally means "muchness, force or abundance." In other words, we are to love the Lord our God with everything we think, say and do, with everything we own, with everything we are, and with everything we might become. We ought to love the Lord vehemently, first, before all else. We are to have no other god before Him. He ought to be our first love, our first thought, our first everything. Yeshua explains this best when He said in Luke 14:33, "whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." This includes father, mother, wife, husband, children, brothers and sisters, even our own lives, according to Luke 14:26. This is not to say we are not to love other people, for Yeshua said the second greatest commandment is to "love one another as He has loved us," but what it does very clearly state is that love of God comes first.

I think this Greatest Commandment can be easily summed up by yet one more verse that Yeshua gives us to identify His oneness with God the Father, for He said as recorded in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." If you love God, keep His commandments. Yeshua here identifies Himself again with the Father, and He also makes it known that the Commandments God gave in the beginning were given by Him, because He is God. The Sh'ma in Deuteronomy says the very same thing as our Messiah Yeshua, for the next part of the passage reads, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." Yes, the Lord's commandments shall be in our inner-most being, in our thoughts, in our mind, and as a reflection of our will. And the Lord said in Matthew 15 and Mark 7, our words and actions proceed from out of our heart. If our heart is wicked, our words or actions will defile us and expose us to be wicked, but if our heart is aligned with God per the commandments, our words or actions will also reflect this because they will be in obedience to God's will. In Matthew 7:16-20, the Lord explains that we will know men and women by what they say and do, and false prophets or wicked hearted people will ultimately be destroyed.

He says, "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them." The good news in this is that our Messiah Yeshua intends to help us keep His commandments if our desire is to obey Him out of a deep love for Him, as we have been discussing. The Lord knows our hearts. He said in Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings." And so, if we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments, and the Lord will know whether we're doing this out of rote obligation or half-heartedness or whether we're doing this with all of our hearts. If we are keeping His commandments with all of our hearts, He has promised that He "will pray the Father, and He will give us another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." The Lord concludes, so we are not confused, He says, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." So the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, our One God, will come to dwell within us and help us when our desire is to love Him and keep His commandments, and He will, through His Spirit, help us to do this, because we can't do it on our own. But it's all about our desire. In Revelation 3:15-16, the Lord says to those who have not loved Him with all of their hearts, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." Yes, these words that He commanded, which came out of His mouth, must dwell within our hearts, or the Lord will vomit us out of His mouth. In other words, He will judge us with the very same Word that He spoke, as we read earlier, "He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them." Thus, it is essential, brothers and sisters, that the words God commanded us dwell with joy and gratitude deep within our hearts.

To round out this section, the Lord basically repeats Himself in beautiful metaphorical language, but in so doing, He directs us to also love our neighbor as ourselves. In order to love the Lord our God in our heart, soul and strength, and to keep the commandments of God, we have to live them out in our lives and teach them to others. We read, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." This means that everywhere we go, no matter who we speak to, we ought to both keep the commandments and teach the commandments. Right before Yeshua ascended into Heaven, He gave us one last commandment that sounds very familiar to

this. We read in Matthew 28:18-20: "And [Yeshua] came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" These verses are saying the same thing. Teach the commandments to your children, talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. In other words, make disciples of all people, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them all the things God has commanded us. But He doesn't just leave things here, for the Lord also said, "I am with you always," or in other words, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for Yahweh your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9). He will help us when our heart is to serve Him and put Him first. This is His promise to us, and it is a promise He fulfills for me personally every time I sit down to write a sermon to share with you, praise be to God. Our Lord Yeshua is deserves thanksgiving and praise, for He keeps His promises for those who love Him.

And that leads us to the last section of the Sh'ma, which is going to bring us back toward where we started with today's message while tying in everything I've shown you so far. We read: "You shall bind them [God's commandments] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Now anyone who has been over my house knows that I have mezuzahs on my doors. What's a mezuzah you ask? Well, it's a box with the Hebrew letter shin written on it, which stands for "El Shaddai," or God Almighty. Within the box is a tiny little Torah scroll that includes Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which is the very verse we've been studying, as well as Deuteronomy 11:13-21, written in Hebrew. I don't have the mezuzah on my door because I believe it fulfills the commandment, for if I did believe that, then I would also have to wear Tefillin boxes containing Torah verses on my right hand and on my forehead, and I don't do that. I do believe the mezuzahs are a good reminder of God Almighty, and every time I see those boxes I turn my heart toward Him in Heaven, and I think that's a good thing. But again, I don't believe the mezuzahs or the tefillin or the tzit-tzit that I wear on my belt, on account of Numbers 15:37-39 for that matter, fulfill the commandments. This is where the Spirit and Truth of Scripture really comes into play, and I believe the true meaning of these verses is far more beautiful and scary at the same time.

I'm going to take you on a brief hiatus before we really get into this. Let me ask you this: What is the mark of the Beast? Is it not bound to the right hand or between the

frontlets of our eyes (forehead). We read in Revelation 13:16-17, “[The Beast] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” Now, there are all kinds of crazy theories about what this means, but I’m going to give you a rather simple explanation that applies not just to the time of the End, but to all people who have all times since the Book of Revelation was written, and to me, this makes the most sense. I submit to you one interpretation of the Mark of the Beast is as simple as disobedience to God’s commandments. Thus, the Mark of God, if you will, is obedience to God’s commandments out of a love for Him and a desire to please Him. The commandments are so important, God asks us to bind them as a sign on our hand and as frontlets between our eyes, to put them on our doorposts and on our gates. To be bound to the right hand according to a Hebraic understanding literally means the actions that a person takes. Yeshua is at God’s right hand, for instance; He is the action of God in the World; the Word who became flesh. And our thoughts are what emanate from between the frontlets of our eyes. When we think rightly, we are keeping the Lord’s commandments in our heart, but when we think sinfully, such as when we look at a woman with lust in our hearts, we sin against God’s commandments in our heart. Likewise, when we leave our home or our property, do we dwell on God’s commandments and keep them, or do we forget about them and act in a way that is more in line with the world?

We have a choice in this life: We can take the Mark of God, which begins with repentance from sin and is followed up by belief in Yeshua’s sacrifice to cover our sins, and faith in our promised salvation through His grace, and this we follow-up with voluntary obedience to God’s commandments because we love Yeshua and desire to please Him. This process reflects thoughts and then words or actions. As an alternative, we might take the Mark of the Beast, which means that we either willfully or nebulously disobey the commandments of God by living a life following the desires of our own hearts. The rest of Scripture seems to give some credence to this interpretation, for we see in Revelation 20:4, that those who DO NOT take the mark of the beast sit on thrones and become judges with Yeshua. The prophet continues, “Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to [Yeshua] and for the Word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” In this life, those of us who witness about the Deity and accomplishments of Yeshua and who stand by His commandments, which are the Word of God, even unto death, will reign with Yeshua in His Kingdom. We read earlier

how we must be willing to give up our lives for the love of God, if that is what it takes, and there may come a time when we are faced with a choice to either violate God's commandments and preserve our worldly life or give up our lives to gain eternal life with God. This choice has been made correctly by many throughout history. On the other side of the equation we read in Revelation 14:9-11, "...If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." It is quite clear that if we deny Yeshua, if we reject God and His commandments, there is no hope for our life in the Kingdom that is coming. Fence sitters will come to a point in their lives when they have to pick a side, and a life of weakness without trust in the Lord is very unlikely to lead to obedience to God, but there is always hope for repentance until the end. My recommendation is to get right with the Lord today, for He is clear in His Word, as we continue into Revelation 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of [Yeshua]." The Saints—the set apart ones—those whom the Lord has called out of bondage because He loves us—those who respond to this call—those who are *eklektos* (ἐκλεκτός), "people who choose to follow the Lord"—those who choose to keep the commandments of God and their faith in Yeshua (God willing this includes you and me)—those who take the Mark of God, who bind the commandments on their right hand and between the frontlets of their eyes—these will inherit a place in the Kingdom of God. Do not be deceived and do not take the Mark of the Beast. Take the mark of God and obey the commandments of God.

In Hebrews 10:26-31, we read some of the most terrifying words of Scripture that bring some of these points to their logical conclusion: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The Ten Commandments are certainly at the heart of God's law, which Yeshua said to keep if we love Him. While the Sh'ma that we've been studying generalizes these commandments and basically says, love God by keeping His commandments and love one another by teaching God's commandments, and Yeshua said, "on these two commandments hang all the law and prophets" (Matthew 22:40), I think it's important to really hone in on the Ten Commandments today and read through them again, like we do each week, as we get close to the end of today's message. Please join me in reading this out-loud if you are so inclined. You see, the greatest and second greatest commandments are certainly great summaries for the commandments, but it is critical to actually read the decalogue to get a greater sense of God's intent. And all of the Torah, in one way or another, explains many of the circumstances that might come up and how to interpret these commandments in those circumstances. Outside of this, the Holy Spirit helps us, as the Lord has promised, and ultimately what matters most is the thoughts and intents of our hearts. And so, while the Ten Commandments are first written down in Exodus 20:1-17, in his closing sermon to the people of Israel before they enter the Promised Land, Moses retold them like this in Deuteronomy 5:6-21: "He said: 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'You shall have no other gods before Me. 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. 'Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. 'You shall not murder. 'You shall not commit adultery. 'You shall not steal. 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male

servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

We know in Matthew 5 that our Lord Yeshua not only indicated that this law would never be done away with, but He then went on to explain how it ought to be interpreted with more vigor from the love of God we have in our hearts. It's not enough to refrain from murdering another person, Yeshua explains, but He said "whoever is angry with his brother ... shall be in danger of the judgment." Just to have uncontrolled anger brings cause for repentance, according to Yeshua. While Torah explains that we should not commit adultery, Yeshua said that to have lust in our hearts is enough to convict us of sin that leads to death. To close out this section of His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua used some hyperbolic statements to stress how important it is for us to get our hearts aligned with God's commandments. In Matthew 5:29-30, Yeshua said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." While it is true that we are forgiven of our sin through the blood of Yeshua when we repent, what is also true is that we cannot turn His grace into lewdness, as Jude wrote in Jude 1:4, for Messiah Yeshua is not a Minister of sin, Paul wrote in Galatians 2:17. We can't keep on sinning and expect to inherit eternal life.

While our reading also makes it clear that God wrote the Law on tablets of stone during the time of Moses, today He writes the law on our hearts so that the Holy Spirit can empower us to abide in it when we love God and desire to please Him with our whole heart. Through His Spirit, the Lord also corrects us when we stumble and directs us back on our path. God prophesied that He was going to do this ahead of time: He said in Ezekiel 36:26-27: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them."

Let us pray, brothers and sisters, that the Spirit helps us to walk according to the commandments of God, but even if we fail, the Lord in His Mercy has given us a way back to Him through Messiah Yeshua, so long as we truly repent, which means to walk away from sin, and instead fully embrace the commandments of God within our hearts. To close, we read in Deuteronomy 4:29, that we will fall short of the glory of God, "But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul." Shabbat shalom.