

Sabbath Sermon: Trust in the LORD
Andrew J. Manuse, Pastor — 6/1/2024
First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of
Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Bechukotai (In My Statutes):
Leviticus 26:3-27:34; Jeremiah 16:19-17:14;
Matthew 16:20-28; 22:1-14; John 14:15-27:
<https://tinyurl.com/4keyzydh>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Please turn to your neighbors with a hug or a handshake and say good morning with the love of our LORD Yeshua. — — [pause, title screen]. — — You may have heard that we have an election coming up in America.... Maybe.... Right? Speculations and rumors are rampant. You might have heard some news this week about a former president that baffles the mind. If you didn't, praise God, because let me tell you, everyone's talking about it. It's hard to miss, and even when I personally really, truly and honestly wanted to miss it, there was just no way. Maybe you succeeded in avoiding the drum beat of text messages invading your phone with the news? Even though I blocked every new phone number texting me the same pithy political updates that I really don't want to see, the messages just kept coming in from one new number after another. I'll tell you what: I'm so glad it's Shabbat and my phone is now in Sabbath mode! You might have strong opinions about what happened this past week one way or another, and that's fine. Please don't bring them up in conversation today. I mean it. Please! It's Shabbat. Even if I did want to talk about these things, today is not the day. Now, if you spoke to me 10 years ago about similar topics—you may know this—I might have put on some figurative boxing gloves and said, "Let's dance!" I'd argue politics with anyone—any topic at any time—and I would do it all day long if you let me. I was a state representative in New Hampshire at one point. Politics was what I lived and breathed every day. I thank God that He has freed me from that anxiety and suffering to give me new purpose—a purpose I hope and pray will always be His purpose, and not my own. Now, before I get into things, don't mishear me; I do believe in our civic duty to vote and participate in public discourse and I'll be exercising my rights at the appropriate time. But I can tell you this: I don't trust in and nor do I fear the outcome of elections any longer. Yes, they have consequences, but I put my hope and trust in the LORD, and He is with us to help us no matter what happens in the world or in this country! Today, I have no greater desire than to dance with Yeshua—my spirit with His Holy Spirit—and to dwell in the House of the LORD; frankly, all the days of my life. I am hopeful that I can

communicate the importance of this today as we continue into today's message, because I think the truths from God's Word I'm going to share with you are going to have significance in our lives, especially as the days move on.

To get us started today, I want to read and analyze Psalm 146 to you in its entirety. It's short. It goes like this: "Hallelujah (הַלְלוּ-יְיָ)! Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God, Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps Truth forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners. The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD raises those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. The LORD shall reign forever—your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!" Hallelujah (הַלְלוּ-יְיָ) indeed! It may be obvious why I brought you here, but I'm going to explain anyway. The psalmist tells us plainly not to put our trust in princes, specifically men born of men who govern their portion of the earth for a time, and his reasoning is simple: These men will die, or in modern terms, they will get voted out of office or hit their term limits, and then their plans will end. Anything they might have desired to accomplish for the people they govern will not continue past their departure. While unlikely and rare, a successor might pick up a project where their predecessor left off, but it usually won't turn out exactly the same way it was originally intended, and if it does, it will be an exception rather than the rule. We could talk about King Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem according to his father King David's intentions as perhaps one of the most successful executions of a multi-generational plan, but I'll ask you this: Where is that Temple today? Those plans perished with the man—eventually, and ultimately it stemmed from Solomon's disobedient heart. He took on 1000 wives and concubines—literally—and they turned the king and the people of Israel on a collision course with idolatry and death. But even the initial success of David's Temple plans through his son Solomon is exceptionally rare. Most of the time, successors don't pick up their predecessors' plans, but they reverse them and set everything back. We see a remarkable example of this with King Hezekiah, who trusted in the LORD for his success in this life more than any other king of Judah, but when he died he left behind his son King Manasseh. This wicked king brought more evil to Jerusalem than had ever been seen in the land, even more evil than the wicked pagans who were ruling Canaan before Israel. It is clear in these and so many other examples that we trust

other men for our welfare to our detriment, especially when those men who are given the authority to govern have turned away from the LORD themselves.

Rather than trust in men, the psalmist explains that we ought to trust in the God of Jacob. And while this phrase—“the God of Jacob”—identifies Yahweh, the Most High, as the subject of our trust, it also sets up a rather substantial barrier to the blessings that come from Him. Importantly, to receive the blessings of God, we must put our own hope in Yahweh (יהוה) Elohay (אֱלֹהָיו), the psalmist explains. The Hebrew translates directly to “the LORD his God,” but when we consider the meaning of this phrase in a more grammatically accurate manner as it reads in the psalm, the main point the psalmist makes is that we have to put our trust and hope in the LORD our God. He can’t just be Jacob’s God, but He has to be our God, too. In other words, we have to build a relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth and everything in them, the One who keeps Truth forever, because He is Truth and His Word is Truth. And this powerful Truth about the God who wants us to know Him leads me to this: This God with whom we have to put our trust is the Word who became flesh, who was called the Son of Man, but also the Son of God, and He came to live in the flesh so we could come to know Him intimately. His plans did not perish when He died on the cross; rather, His plans were fully executed and continue perpetually to this day, and they will carry on into eternity. What’s really powerful about this, and will become even more relevant later, is Yeshua’s prophesy recorded in Matthew 24:35, where we read: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will by no means pass away.” Again, the plans of our God will never perish. He shall reign forever—beyond the very existence of this universe. As we discussed in recent weeks, He is the one who executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, frees the prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, raises up the humble, watches over the strangers, the fatherless, and the widow, and upends the ways of the wicked. This Yeshua, who did all these things in the flesh and still does them today in the Spirit, reigns forever and ever, and His plans are being executed and will be completely fulfilled. Even though His flesh was put to death, He rose again because death could not contain the Son of God, and the Son of David is presently building a Temple inside the Body of His faithful followers that will never be torn down. If we are a part of His heavenly building, and we remain there by trusting in Him and doing His will, hoping in His promises, then we will enjoy His company among all of the Saints forever more. His Kingdom has no end.

Psalm 146 works well as a launchpad into our Torah portion discussion this week, particularly as it pertains to the Haftorah portion from Jeremiah, which I will show you. First a little relevant history: Jeremiah wrote his prophesies during the reigns of Kings

Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah leading up to the Babylonian captivity, and he himself witnessed the horrible end to the Kingdom of Judah. The Temple was destroyed, the city of Jerusalem was burned, and many of the rulers and elders of Judah were carried away into captivity. Jeremiah prophesied all of this as a man who knew the Word of God and put all of His trust in God Most High, but His Word of warning did not have a lasting effect on the people of Judah in those days. In the beginning of Jeremiah's tenure, King Josiah had risen to power and repented for all of the evils committed during the short, two-year reign of his father Amon and the disastrous 55-year reign of his grandfather Manasseh. And even though Josiah repented with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength and strove to make things right with the LORD, and even though his righteousness delayed the judgment of the LORD on Judah, I want to point out how his actions as a man were not enough to stop the judgment that God was bringing upon the land. Josiah's plans for righteousness lasted during his lifetime, but after he died, they fell apart. There is evidence in Scripture that too many put their trust in men, and followed them astray, so much so, in fact, that when a righteous man came along in Josiah, his plans for righteousness did not last beyond his death. The context of Scripture explains that the culture was lost and the people had by and large turned away from the LORD, hoping instead in false prophets, pagan worship, and their enabling rulers, despite Jeremiah's call to repentance and Josiah's obedience. Even a morally blameless, humble leader did not have what it took to set things right beyond his own reign, and this is the very point of Psalm 146 and also Jeremiah 16.

We read in 2 Kings 23:25-26 a humbling prognosis relative to Josiah's repentance: "Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him." In other words, there was never a king who repented and turned back to the LORD more fully than Josiah did. And as noted, it wasn't enough—maybe it was for him personally (let the LORD be the judge), but it wasn't for Judah. We read: "Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him." Just one chapter later in 2 Kings 24:3-4, Scripture provides a closer look at the meaning of this as King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came in and began to overwhelm the land. We read: "Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from [God's] sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon." It wasn't just Manasseh doing these evil acts, but

the whole people, as the Scripture will bear witness, and so this is the reason why one man's repentance was not enough to turn away the wrath of God.

We could look back at all of the abominations of King Manasseh and how he so angered the LORD, but I think it's important to pinpoint the reason the LORD explained for judging Judah, even after the repentant reign of Josiah. We read in 2 Kings 21:16, "Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, beside his [other] sin..." I don't want to go too far down a rabbit hole on this, but let me be clear: Manasseh was the abortion king. I can't talk about the judgment on Judah without referencing it, because it was the very reason for God's judgment. When we consider the Torah in Exodus 21:22-23, it's clear that the LORD takes this sin very seriously. We read: "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, ..." The harm being discussed here is relative to the unborn child who is born prematurely, and the LORD equates the life of the unborn with the life of the aggressor. The husband may impose a penalty on his wife's aggressor even if no harm comes to the now premie child, but if harm comes to the child, the aggressor ought to be put to death. Take note: This is for one "aborted" child. This is a serious matter. As we move into some analysis of Jeremiah's prophecies about Judah, we should also note what the LORD said to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet. I don't believe it's a coincidence when we read, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). While this Word surely does refer to the LORD's calling on Jeremiah's life, it is not just about the prophet. While Jeremiah would prophesy Judah's demise on account of Manasseh's sin against innocent human life, it's important to also deduce that the LORD knows each of us BEFORE He formed us in our mother's womb. He created each of us for a purpose to serve Him in a specific manner, and His desire is that we fulfill that purpose and seek Him in doing so.

It is for this very reason that the LORD treats this topic so seriously. There are many other references I could give you, but we'll look at just a few more for now. Let's look quickly to Genesis 9:6, where the LORD explains, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man." Again, this verse shows that God requires a reckoning for even the shedding of one man's blood, no matter his or her age. How much more of a reckoning is required for a multitude? We can discern an answer from Numbers 35:33, where we read: "you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the

land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.” In short, there is a reckoning for spilling innocent blood, especially when the innocents have no way of defending themselves. Before we continue, I want to point out that our LORD died on the cross to atone for sin like this. Anyone who confesses their sin with a humble and contrite heart will be cleansed by the blood of Yeshua from all unrighteousness, but they must go and sin no more. Note then, Manasseh had spilled so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it, as we have read, and so his actions had multiplied into a culture of death that was out of control, and God would not pardon that sin without a cultural revival. Judgment would have to come to bring that about, and until then things grew worse and worse.

Jeremiah wrote in chapter 17, verses 1-4, “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars, while their children remember their altars and their wooden images by the green trees on the high hills. O My mountain in the field, I will give as plunder your wealth, all your treasures, and your high places of sin within all your borders. And you, even yourself, shall let go of your heritage which I gave you; and I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you do not know; for you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever.” Through the leadership of Manasseh, the people of Judah were sacrificing their children to pagan demon gods at an alarming rate. They had adopted the practices of the pagan culture that had come before them and were going out to sacrifice their children in natural places, such as the high hills, and in keeping with the pagan tradition, they were going through with this heinous crime as a sacrifice for their own prosperity. Does this sound familiar? Do you know any other culture that values prosperity above human life? — In any case, the people of Judah were so addicted to spilling innocent blood at this point that despite Josiah’s ascent to the throne and his valiant attempts to reverse course, the nation didn’t turn back. The children who survived this era repeated the evils of their fathers, not seeing the irony, and the good plans of Josiah did not last beyond his reign. While this is a case where it would have been good if the king’s plans did not perish with him, and perhaps a remnant of faithful believers also hoped for the same end, this is also a case that shows how important it is that we do not place our trust in men, but instead, we fully place our trust in God. — I can’t help but think of where we’re at in America today, especially with the recent Dobbs decision as a type of turning back toward what is righteous. Accurate statistics are hard to find, but by looking through a host of them, I can confidently say that redirecting abortion’s legal status back to the states has decreased the prevalence of this pagan practice. That being said, abortion proponents are foaming at the mouth seeking to reverse even the small effort that has been made

so far to preserve innocent human life, and despite the current political debate, tens of millions of children have already been snuffed out before they could take their first breath. Innocent blood is staining the fruited plains of America, and much of the fruit being produced by today's Americans is pretty rotten, and I think this directly correlates, one thing to the next. Like Manasseh, who introduced all manner of evil to the nation of Judah that ultimately led to its destruction, our nation's thought leaders have produced such a corrupt and evil culture that it is very hard for God's remnant to focus on the next best thing that might help reverse course. But here's the point that will tie everything together here: No man, no rally, no march, no court decision, and no election is going to provide a permanent solution to our nation's depravity, and nor will it atone for the blood that has already been spilled. Only God's blood on the cross can atone for our sins, and only a national revival on a grand scale can effect change. This all starts with you and me individually, and the calling that God has put on our lives. The best solution, and frankly, the only solution to this or any of the problems our nation or world is facing right now will come from each of us putting our complete hope and trust in the LORD, and teaching others to do the same. We have six days of the week to do this, and the LORD has commanded that we work on those six days.

And this critical point leads us back to Jeremiah 17. In what is clearly an echo of Psalm 146, we read in Jeremiah 17:5-8: "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.'" Again, I'm not telling you and I don't believe the LORD is telling you to abandon all political efforts to make things right in our state and our country. What I believe the LORD is saying here is that our most successful efforts will be built in relationship with Him, and that relationship starts with obedience to His Word. As it was in Judah's case, so it may be with us. Perhaps we are past the point of no return and God's judgment is imminent if not already upon us and increasing in intensity for the sins of our countrymen? If this is true, and I believe it is, then by trusting and hoping in Yeshua and doing His will in our lives we will withstand the evil day and produce great fruit for the Kingdom of God in the midst of it. That is not to say that we will get through this time unscathed. Far from it. Our roots stretch down to Yeshua, for He is the living water that gives us life. Our leaves and our fruit are the growth that comes from our obedience to His Word, no matter how much

heat is around us. Remember the story in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas were thrown into prison for casting a demon out of a slave girl and depriving her masters of their profits. Can you picture that scenario today? It's not far fetched. In any case, the two faithful men were beaten with rods and they received many stripes before they were cast into their prison cells, where they proceeded to joyfully pray and sing hymns to God. The LORD sent an earthquake and broke open their prison cells, but instead of fleeing to a tenuous freedom, the two believers remained in their cells out of concern for the prison guard who had beaten them. They called out to him as he was about to kill himself for failing in his duties, advising him that they were still in their cells at his disposal. Responding to their amazing faith in the LORD and kindness toward him, the man asked what he could do to be saved, and Paul and Silas brought the faith of Yeshua to him and all of his household. This is the fruit those of us who trust and hope in Messiah Yeshua can produce in the midst of heat because our roots reach down into the living waters of God's Holy Spirit. This is what it means to trust and hope in the LORD, even in the midst of great trials and tribulations. We have to start asking ourselves whether we are ready to put our trust in the LORD, and do His work in the midst of a world that rejects everything about our faith. Paul and Silas didn't start a political campaign against slavery or against pedophilia, though they certainly rejected both ideas as we do as well, I hope and pray. They freed a girl caught up in bondage and then they freed the captor's accomplice simply through faith and obedience to the Gospel of Messiah Yeshua. Though torn and beat up in the process, the fruit they produced will echo into eternity, and this is the fruit that we also ought to be hoping for.

There are other dynamics to this that we ought to explore. As you know, Yeshua said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments and I will pray the Father, and He will give you 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. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18). In following Yeshua and putting our faith and trust in Him, it ought to be our first desire to keep the commandments of God. He has promised to bless us abundantly when we love Him and keep His commandments; if not in this life, then certainly in the life to come. Not only will He provide us with everything we need to do His will in this way, but He will help us stand with courage against our enemies, with love, despite the persecution they might bring against us. Our goal should not be to go out and find trouble, or to invite persecution, but to go out and preach Truth, to do what the LORD asked of us, and we ought to plant our roots deeply in the living waters of the Holy Spirit through Yeshua in the process. Tribulation will come as a result, but we ought to keep our peace in the LORD. The God who created the

Heavens and the Earth and everything in them will literally come to dwell within us when we love Him and show it by keeping His commandments. One of those commandments, as I'll explain in more detail as we continue, is to fulfill the Great Commission that Yeshua gave to His disciples before He ascended to His throne. He commanded us to make disciples for Him in all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teach them His commandments, while living them out ourselves, of course, for this is how we trust and hope in the LORD (Matthew 28:18-20). As we continue along these lines, I want to bring you back to our place in Jeremiah 17, because the verses that directly follow Jeremiah's exhortation to put the LORD first in our lives provide us with guidance and caution that we ought to consider relative to what Yeshua is teaching us here.

We read: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? 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" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). This section has both negative and positive connotations, so to speak. First, there's a warning, and it relates directly to the dichotomy we read about earlier in the chapter; namely, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength" and "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose hope is the LORD." It's clear from these verses, I think, that we ought not trust in political leaders, movements or other worldly pursuits to solve the world's problems, but I think what's also implied here is that we ought not trust in our own strength or the thoughts and intents of our own hearts as we go out to do the work of the LORD. As Hebrews 4 explains, it is the Word of God that is living and powerful, and we come to understand it fully when we cultivate hope and trust in Yeshua by the power of His Holy Spirit, for the Word of God is the discernor of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. We may have great ideas concerning what the LORD has called us to do. We might even see the LORD's hand at work, helping us along the way. But if there ever comes a time along the Way when our heart is telling us to pursue a work, but the Word of God says that we ought not do the work a certain way, it is critical—it's life or death, really—that we humble ourselves to obey the Word of God. Our ideas may have merit; they may even be God's will, but if we apply them with human understanding rather than according to the Word of God, we can fall short. That being said, the LORD knows our hearts, and this is the positive side of Jeremiah's prophesy. We will reap what we sow. If our hearts desire to serve God, and we are doing God's will according to His Word to the best of our understanding, then He will give us what we are due on account of that—blessings for our heart's obedience to Him, and curses for our heart's disobedience. The LORD

looks upon the heart, so we must let our hearts surrender to the will of Christ so we do not fall into the wickedness of our own desires. This is major!

How easy is it for us to fall into this trap? As we read Matthew 16, even the Apostle Peter is subject to this human failing. Peter had just confessed Yeshua as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and Yeshua told him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.” Peter’s heart was aligned with God’s Word in recognizing Yeshua as the prophesied Son of God who would come in the flesh, and His words verifying His understanding of this Truth brought great blessing upon him. But it wasn’t long after this high point that Peter’s own human understanding tripped him up, and the Apostle’s follow-up statement actually brought a curse upon him. We read in verses 21-23: “From that time Yeshua began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” As we know now, Yeshua’s sacrifice was essential to save all of humanity from sin and provide the redemption price so that we could be reconciled with God. But Peter didn’t see it. He saw an earthly kingdom right then and there instead of at God’s appointed time. Rather than trust in God, he looked to his own desires and the errant teachings of his human fathers. As we read on, we see that “Peter took [Yeshua] aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’” Can you imagine rebuking God?!? So many do it today, but it’s really not a good idea. Yeshua “turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matthew 16:21-23). That — is — harsh, I’m just saying, but it was also warranted. In this powerful passage showing the dichotomy of the human heart, we can see that Peter fell into the trap of his own deceitful heart just moments after making a statement of great faith. In this simple example, we see the prophecy of Jeremiah fulfilled—“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,” but “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose hope is the LORD.” We may not understand the suffering that we witness in the world or even experience ourselves, we may have different expectations than what God has planned for us, but here’s the Truth that we must surrender to: We will be blessed when we humble our own will to God’s will and rejoice in the path He has ordained, whether or not we understand it every step of the way. The important part is whether we are actually walking on the Way that the LORD has planned for us according to His Word, rather than the path that our own heart imagines or the plans of other people who think they speak for the LORD.

This can be hard to discern, for “without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed,” we read in Proverbs 15:22. It’s interesting that this verse applies to individuals, and then Solomon pens another similar Word relative to nations. We also read in Proverbs 11:14, “For lack of guidance, a nation falls, but with many counselors comes deliverance.” The question might come up following both of these passages, who then are the counselors referenced here? Certainly, your elders can be listed among them, but only, and I mean only, if our counsel aligns with Scripture. It means something else, too, and Psalm 119:23-24 ties all this together. We read: “Princes also sit and speak against me, but your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies are my delight, and my counselors.” If we are God’s servants, and it is certainly my greatest desire to be, then it is the Word of God that ought to be our counselor, with the Holy Spirit. At the same time, remember this: “every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (2 Corinthians 13:1), and “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Corinthians 14:32). We cannot practice isolational analysis, taking one verse out of context, but all of Scripture must align in order to determine Truth. And so, in all of this searching for God’s counsel with clean hands and pure hearts, we must be humble and contrite; we must search ourselves for any pride, any sin, any strong self will that is contrary to the LORD’s will so we can confess our shortcomings and repent, so we can fully yield to Yeshua’s Spirit and love the way He loves. We ought to pray, “LORD, let your love encompass me and flow through me always and subject my will to yours.”

And God has confirmed this in Isaiah 66:2, where we read: “On this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My Word.” In other words, the LORD offers His grace to those who humble themselves before Him, acknowledging who He is, but also who align themselves to His Word and His will. This means the LORD expects us to deny ourselves—our own ideas about what is right or what we should be doing—and instead surrender to His will, which He defines in His Word and by His example. We can see the LORD Yeshua give us the very same message in Matthew 16. Right after rebuking Peter for adopting a worldly understanding, Yeshua explained this principle to His disciples. We read: “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. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:24-27). Blessings flow when we subject our will to His will and do the things He has commanded us out of love for Him and a desire to serve Him.

And one of the things He taught us was to love one another as He loved us. This was a new commandment, because never before had God walked in human flesh and showed us how to keep His commandments, and now in Yeshua the Messiah, He had done just that. What a wonderful record of accurate Scriptural interpretation we have in the human life of Yeshua and the apostolic ministry that followed, but also in the way He taught and still teaches Torah and prophets as interpreted by the Holy Spirit. Recall that the commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself,” comes from Leviticus 19, and this text gives us additional context concerning what it means to love one another. Love is not tolerance of sin, and nor is it affirmation of sin. Yeshua did not in any way exhibit either attitude toward sin. Rather, love is the Great Commission; it is disciple making. It is love to teach our neighbors about God’s Truth with patience and gentleness without bringing judgment into the equation, for judgment is the LORD’s and He shall repay. It is sometimes dusting off our feet and moving on to find the next disciple with a willing heart and ears to hear. But love is also showing others by example what it means to keep God’s commandments, just as Yeshua did, and this is of even more importance for us, especially so that no one can call us hypocrites. We do not want to be among the hypocrites. In 2 John 5-6, the Apostle John said this very thing. We read, “And now I plead with you ... that we love one another. [And] this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.”

And with that, I want to finish off today’s message in Leviticus 26, one of the last two chapters of this most wonderful and powerful book smack dab in the middle of Torah. In Hebrew understanding, being in the middle highlights its importance as the central theme of the whole book, so let that sink in for a moment. — In any case, Leviticus 26 shows us in no uncertain terms how God’s commandments were designed for our good. I want to provide a simple example before we go over the Scriptures relative to God’s blessings and curses for His children. It really is akin to a father commanding his three-year old son not to touch a hot stove. It is good for the toddler to obey, and pain and suffering will result from his disobedience—pain and suffering that is not the father’s fault. Clearly, in this case, the pain of the toddler touching the hot stove in defiance may indeed be discipline enough, but the father will still need to spend time addressing the consequences of that defiance, perhaps with the hope of preventing his son from repeating the error again. With obedience, on the other hand, the father’s time can instead be spent on building a relationship with his son, and blessing will result. The toddler learns to trust his father to lead him properly, and the father grows fonder toward the toddler as a person whom he can spend quality time with rather than focus on discipline. Whether that’s throwing a ball around or playing a game, it doesn’t

matter. The point is that blessing results from obedience, and in this example, perhaps, it's easy to see how that might work. Likewise, disobedience brings a curse, not because the father wishes to bring a curse upon his son, but because the law that He put in place was designed to prevent the curse to begin with. And so, with that example, here's what the LORD said in general relative to the blessings He desires to give His children who trust and hope in Him, and these are just some highlights of the section. We read the LORD explain in Leviticus 26: "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ... I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; ... 'For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you.... I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Leviticus 26:3-4, 6, 9, 11-12). Can you see the LORD's heart for His people? Not only does He give us good laws that are meant for our good, He also provides abundant blessing to us when we obey them. When we hope and trust in the LORD, there is nothing but a bounty of blessings and joy to believe in, if not now then in the life to come.

As the chapter continues, the LORD identifies a number of consequences that will result from disobedience to His commandments, but just like in our simple example with the father and his toddler, these curses are not mean to destroy God's children, but to redirect them toward what is good back into relationship with the Father. In verse 14-22, the LORD explained increasing degrees of consequences for defiance, but in each of them, we can see His desire to call the people back to Him. Take verses 18-19, for example. We read, "And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power." In other words, if you trust in your own righteousness, if you trust in man, if you trust in your own imagination or contrivances, if you go your own way, the LORD will allow the consequences of these bad choices to play themselves out in a perfect way in order to encourage a return of heart to Him. We can see this same heart of the LORD repeat itself in verse 21, where we read: "Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins." The consequences are not inflicted by God, though many people read this into the language. Rather, the consequences are what the LORD allows to encourage a return to Him, for He actually does know what is best for us, and returning to a good relationship with Him will bring about eternal life, while anything outside of that is death of our own making. There will come a time when the LORD will stop trying to pursue rebellious children and bring them back to Him, and this indeed is a frightening

thought. We can see this play out in verse 23, where we read, “And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.” The chapter continues for a while, providing details concerning all of the consequences that might result for a people who continue to rebel against the LORD and the good Way that He has shown us. There comes a point when the LORD’s long-suffering comes to an end, and He will no longer tolerate a rebellious people living in His land among Him. This is akin to a rebellious teenager living in his parent’s house while violating every rule they have. At some point, the parents will pack their son’s bags and push him out the door. God is no different than this. He will not tolerate children who violate all of the good commandments He has given them, and ultimately, He will force them out of the land He has given them. We see that play out in verses 27-39, and here is an excerpt of that: ‘And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; ... I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.’ And this is what happened to both Israel and Judah on account of persistent lawlessness. This is what Jeremiah prophesied, and ultimately it is sadly what came to pass.

But the LORD also made a way of return, and in this we see the very heart of the Gospel of Yeshua right here in Leviticus. Though He disciplines His disobedient children, He really does desire their hand of fellowship. The LORD created us for His glory, so that He might enjoy the company of our love, and we might enjoy His love forever, but this is not a love He will force. Ultimately, the LORD has given us this right of return through Messiah Yeshua, for He has redeemed us by His blood. The LORD has said, the punishment for sin is death, which is separation from Him, but through Messiah Yeshua we may all be redeemed to return to Him. When we confess our sins and return to the LORD, desiring to do His will and follow His way, by hoping and trusting in Him and His promises, He will restore us into His presence. We can see that play out prophetically in the law of return that the LORD articulates in verses 40-45. Here is an excerpt: “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt—then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. ... for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I

am the LORD.” This is the same thing we read in 1 John 1:9; namely, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Amein, and Hallelujah!

Ultimately, we ought to remember these general principles as followers of Yeshua, especially as the civilization around us crumbles and becomes more and more corrupt. It's very sad to witness, but we know the Way out. Our study of Psalm 146 and Jeremiah 16 really identifies the dichotomy between the two ways we might go as a people. I believe it is our duty to call our countrymen to repent, to explain to them the good news as we understand it, to show them God's Way through our example and our words, if we have the opportunity. I personally don't believe that any effort outside of hope and trust in God is going to be successful, and I really want to reemphasize this point, only in Yeshua do we have any hope, but those efforts might look different for different people, and I'm open to whatever the LORD will have us do. We're called First Fruits Ministries because I believe we each have something to give to God to produce fruit for His Kingdom on the six days of work, and for each other right here on our day of rest. My goal is to keep brainstorming what those ministries might look like each Sabbath as we prepare to go out the other six days of the week to execute the plan God is laying out for each of us. I truly want us each to be disciple-making disciples of Yeshua, ready to do whatever the LORD calls us to do, according to His Word. If we are meant to help instruct a remnant for God that must endure until the end outside any revival in society, then so be it. But as a remnant, it is imperative that we remember what the LORD is teaching us through His Word, which is this: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). There is always hope in the LORD, but let His will be done and not our own will. And so, as the psalmist prays in Psalm 139, I conclude today's message and ask you to pray along with me by reading Psalm 139:23-24 up on the screen. We read: "Examine me, God, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts. See if there is in me any hurtful way, and lead me along the eternal way." Amein. Let us walk forward with humble and contrite hearts fully relying on our LORD Messiah Yeshua to lead us into His ways everlasting. Shabbat shalom.