

Shavua Tov



A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn Mc Williams

Torah Portion: *Va'etchanan*

ואתחנן

“And I besought”

At that time I pleaded with God, saying . . .
Va'etchanan el-Adonay ba'et hahi lemor

Scripture for Study:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 3:23 – 7:11

Once again we witness our Torah portion beginning with the conjunction “AND”. In Hebrew the word “AND” is added to a word by prefixing the Hebrew letter “VAV” to the word. In Ancient Hebrew word pictures, the letter VAV is the picture of a nail. Nails are used to join things. The purpose of a conjunction is to link or join things together, such as “Tom AND Jerry”, “Soup AND Sandwich” or “this AND that”. The “Va” of “Va’etchanan” in the name of our portion is the conjunction “AND”. Clearly this indicates that the opening story of our portion is connected to, and is in fact a part of, the preceding portion’s historical narrative. Beginning just a few verses earlier and continuing to read through the end of chapter three, we see the opening story of Va’etchanan clearly belongs to the narrative of the preceding portion of Devarim.

*“And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying Thine eyes have seen all that YHVH your Elohim hath done unto these two kings; so shall YHVH do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. Ye shall not fear them: for YHVH your Elohim he shall fight for you. And I besought YHVH at that time saying, O Adonai YHVH thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness....”
(Deuteronomy 23:21-24).*

In this case the seemingly misplaced opening story is due to a man made decision. We need to realize that the Torah was not originally divided into portions. The division of the Torah into 54

portions was done for the purpose of the public reading of the Torah at synagogues. By reading a set portion of the Torah each week, the whole Torah could be read by a community within a year. There have been many such divisions and schedules for the reading and studying of the Torah throughout history. We should also know the Torah was not divided into chapters and verses until well after the invention of the printing press.ⁱ Therefore, it was the sages of old who chose to separate this story from its original context and place it as the introduction of our current portion.

Unlike the first example, there is a second misplaced story in our portion which was intentionally placed by Moses in the actual writing of the story. After forty verses encouraging the children of Israel to carefully keep all the statutes and ordinances that YHVH was giving them through Moses, he suddenly interrupts this flow of the narrative to appoint three cities of refuge.

“Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sun rising; That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live: Namely, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country, of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Giliad, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites.” (Deuteronomy 4:41-43)

Immediately following this appointment of cities of refuge, the preceding narrative continues. One could easily omit verses forty-one through forty-three from the overall narrative and not miss it.

“40 Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth which YHVH thy Elohim giveth thee, for ever. 44 And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel: These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt...”

Clearly the insertion of the story of the appointment of cities of refuge is out of place in this portion. We must then ask ourselves, why did the sages of old see fit to separate the opening story from its original context, and why did Moses choose to insert this particular story into an otherwise smooth flowing narrative? I believe the answer to both of these questions is connected with and forms the basis for a common theme running throughout the whole portion Va'etchanan. Let us begin to solve these mysteries by looking at some of the details of the opening story of our portion.

The opening story of our portion begins with Moses reporting that he had pleaded with YHVH to allow him to enter into the Promised Land. We should recognize that Moses is reporting a past event. What was the timing of this event? It was shortly after the victory over king Sihon and king Og and just prior to the defeat of Midian.ⁱⁱ After having been shown so much grace in

the victory over the kings of Moab and Midian, Moses dared to ask YHVH for such grace to be shown to him that he may enter the land of promise with the children of Israel.

“And I besought YHVH at that time saying, O Adonai YHVH, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what Elohim is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee let me go over, and see the good land that is beheld the Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon.” (Deuteronomy 3:23-25)

But YHVH stands his ground and refuses to allow Moses the grace to enter the land. Moses reports,

“But YHVH was wroth with me for your sakes and would not hear me: and YHVH said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see. So we abode in the valley over against Bethpeor.” (Deuteronomy 3:26-29)

There are a number of important details to understand in these verses; but first let us revisit the reason Moses was forbidden to enter the land. Towards the end of the 40 years of wandering, after Miriam died in the wilderness of Zin, the children of Israel again began to grumble about the lack of sufficient water. The children of Israel complain to Moses and to Aaron, who then take the complaint once more before YHVH. The Holy One commands Moses to take his rod and go and SPEAK to the rock and bring forth water.

“And YHVH spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes and it shall give forth his water and thou shalt bring forth his water and thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.” (Numbers 20:8)

This was not the first time Moses was instructed to bring water from a rock. Immediately after leaving Egypt, the children of Israel began realizing the logistical nightmare of providing for 2.5 million people in the desert and quickly began complaining about the lack of water. Moses intercedes with the Creator and receives his instructions.

“And YHVH said unto Moses, Go on before the people and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exodus 17:5-6)

Here we need take careful notice of the variations in the instructions given to Moses. The first time Moses is instructed to bring forth water from the rock, he is told by the Holy One to take his rod and to **smite the rock**. The second time Moses was instructed to take his rod and **speak**

to the rock in order to bring forth water. In the second incident, however, Moses did not speak to the rock but to the people and he smote the rock.

“And Moses took the rod from before YHVH, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly and the congregation drank and their beasts also.” (Numbers 29:9-11)

For this infraction Moses was forbidden to enter the land.

“And YHVH spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”

This seems such a harsh punishment for so faithful a servant as Moses. Surely one small mistake should not be considered so heinous that it would keep Moses from entering the land. But this is indeed the case. What is it about this incident that is so grievous to YHVH? To answer this question, let us first turn to our Rabbi, Y’shua. While arguing with the Pharisees Y’shua challenges them,

“For had ye believed in Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:46-47)

After his resurrection from the dead Y’shua walked on the road to Emmaus with two of his talimdim and helped them to understand who he was and why things happened the way they did. Y’shua did this by teaching them from the Tanak.

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)

From these and many other verses we learn that the Torah contains many teachings concerning the Messiah. As we have studied the Torah we have pointed out numerous shadow pictures of the Messiah. This is especially true of the imagery of water coming from the rock. There are numerous references in the Brit Chadashah of Messiah both as a rock or stone, as well as the source of life-giving waters. For the sake of convenience we will only mention a few.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock;” (Matthew 7:24)

“Y’shua saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Matthew 21:42)

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold; I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be

disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.” (1 Peter 2:6-8)

“Moreover, brethren I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Messiah.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

“Y’shua answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of Elohim, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” (John 4:10)

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” (John 19:34)

When we realize the Rock that flows with living water is a shadow picture of the Messiah, we may begin to understand why Moses’ infraction was so serious. The first time Moses was to bring forth water from the rock was a picture of the crucified and smitten Messiah. Thus it was important that Moses take his rod/speak and smite the Rock/Messiah with it. By this smiting, the living waters came forth unto those that could believe. However, the second time Moses was commanded to bring forth the living water from Messiah the Rock, he was told to simply speak to the Rock. This is so because Messiah is risen from the dead. We do not have to crucify Messiah again and again. It is appointed but once for men to die.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore we need only ask the Messiah to send us this living water and he will do so. By smiting the Rock the second time, Moses changed the shadow picture, he changed the image of Messiah, and therefore failed to sanctify YHVH in the eyes of the people. This changing of the image of YHWH is indeed a serious offense. To change the image of YHVH is to put forth a false image, an idol before the eyes of the children of Israel and the nations. This is indeed a major prohibition in the Torah. Understanding this truth will help us understand the rest of the portion.

Our portion begins with Moses reminding the children of Israel he will not be entering the promise land with them because he failed to protect the image of YHVH. The Torah has already told us Moses was the meekest man on the earth.^{iv} Three times, however, in the opening chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, we hear Moses seemingly blaming the children of Israel for his short comings, and prohibition from the land.

“Also YHVH was angry with me for your sakes, saying Thou also shalt not go in thither.” (Deuteronomy 1:37)

“But YHVH was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me; and YHVH said unto me; Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter...for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.” (Deuteronomy 3:26-27)

“ Furthermore YHVH was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which YHVH they Elohim giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over and posses that good land.” (Deuteronomy 4:21-22)

Could it be that Moses is passing the buck to the children of Israel? A careful comparison of the words used in these three passages will remove any question about the character of Moses. Moses is not blaming the children of Israel. What he is saying, however, is that YHVH is punishing Moses so that the children of Israel will realize the severity of this infraction and not make the same mistake. If changing the image of YHWH was enough to keep Moses, the very prophet of YHVH, from entering the land, then how much more the children of Israel should be cautious against desecrating the image of YHVH. Moses recalls this awful truth for two reasons. The first reason Moses shares this story is to warn the children of Israel against making the same mistake. The second reason Moses shares this story is to again remind them that he will not be with them. What, we may ask, is the connection between these two reasons for sharing the story? We may recall the last time Moses was absent from the people for any length of time, the children of Israel forced Aaron to build them a Golden Calf to call their Elohim.^v This worshipping of false images and idols is the very reason Moses was prohibited from entering the land and the very reason YHVH will cast the children out of the land. Thus, Moses craftily warns the children of Israel of this danger. It should not escape our attention that the last words in this opening story are “Beth Peor”. Moses closes this part of the narrative with the reminder of the fall of 24,000 men of Israel, who fell to the seduction of the women of Moab and Midian, and worshipped false elohim.^{vi} By alluding to the fall at Beth Peor, Moses reminds the children of Israel they are no different from their fathers who worshipped the Golden Calf.

Our portion continues with numerous reminders to take heed to hear and do the commandments of YHVH. This is the calling upon the children of Israel. Moses reminds the children of Israel that they have a special calling and purpose in the world.

“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as YHVH my Elohim commanded me that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath Elohim so nigh unto them, as YHVH our Elohim is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Torah, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy son’s sons.” (Deuteronomy 4:5-9)

*“But YHVH hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.”
(Deuteronomy 4:20)*

YHVH called Israel to be the bearer of his image. To this end YHVH gave Israel the Torah. The Torah is the self revelation of YHVH ELOHIM. By keeping the Torah and DOING it, Israel embodies the Image of YHVH in the world. It is for this reason that idolatry is so emphatically forbidden to the children of Israel. Throughout the rest of this portion we witness two themes playing off of each other. The first theme is the commandment to hear, do, and teach the Torah as YHVH has commanded it. The second theme is the prohibition against making or worshipping false images.

Theme One: Hear, Do and Teach the Torah

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them...” (Deuteronomy 4:1)

“Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as YHVH my Elohim commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them...”(Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

*“Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee this day that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee...”
(Deuteronomy 4:40)*

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.” (Deuteronomy 5:1)

“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them.” (Deuteronomy 5:29)

“But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it. Ye shall observe to do therefore as YHVH your Elohim hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which YHVH your Elohim hath commanded you...” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33)

“Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which YHVH your Elohim commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear YHVH thy Elohim, to keep all his statutes and his commandments...” (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

“Hear O Israel, and observe to do it.” (Deuteronomy 6:3)

“Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of YHVH your Elohim and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of YHVH.” (Deuteronomy 6:17-18)

“And it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments before YHVH our Elohim, as he hath commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6:25)

“Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which I command thee this day, to do them.” (Deuteronomy 7:11)

Let us be clear here, the purpose for YHVH giving Israel the commandments was that they be observed, kept, and done. This is also the difference between the Greek understanding of doctrine as something that is believed in, and the Hebrew understanding of doctrine which is something that is done. Israel received the Torah that it may DO the Torah. It is in the DOING of the Torah that Israel’s purpose is fulfilled. To this end, Moses reminds the children of Israel that when YHVH invited them to become his special people it was with this purpose in mind.^{vii} Moses also reminds the children of Israel of their response to YHVH’S unique calling;

“We will hear it, and do it.” (Deuteronomy 5:27)

Theme Two: Prohibition against making, worshipping false images.

“Your eyes have seen what YHVH did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, YHVH thy Elohim hath destroyed them from among you.” (Deuteronomy 4:3)

“And YHVH spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.” (Deuteronomy 4:12)

“Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that YHVH spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image the similitude of any figure the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of anything that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven; shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which YHVH thy Elohim hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.” (Deuteronomy 4:15-19)

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of YHVH your Elohim, which he made with thee, and make you a graven image or the likeness of anything, which YHVH thy Elohim hath forbidden thee.” (Deuteronomy 4:23)

“Thou shalt have none other elohim before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow

down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I YHVH thy Elohim am a jealous Elohim.” (Deuteronomy 5:7-9)

“Then beware lest thou forget YHVH which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear YHVH thy Elohim, and serve him and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you.” (Deuteronomy 6:12-14)

“And when YHVH thy Elohim shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son, for they will turn away thy son from following me that they may serve other elohim. So will the anger of YHVH be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shalt ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.” (Deuteronomy 7:2-5)

These two themes come together in a profound way in several verses within our portion.

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of YHVH your Elohim which I command you.” (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Once again we must understand this statement in light of Torah as the image or self revelation of YHVH. The Creator being eternal is beyond our comprehension. We cannot possibly see or even understand the vastness and completeness of the Holy One. What we do know of our Creator is what he has chosen to reveal of himself, in and through his creation, and in particular, through mankind.^{viii} The Torah is the means by which YHVH has chosen to bring forth his image and revelation in the world. Clearly from all of the Torah’s prohibitions against graven or molten images we may deduce that YHVH is a living Elohim and therefore cannot be embodied in inanimate objects. Elohim is not the work of men’s hands. Elohim has chosen to reveal his image in living men. To this end YHVH has called a people to embody his revelation. To add to this revelation in any fashion is to add something to the image of YHVH. By diminishing from the revelation as given by YHVH it is to desecrate the image of the Holy One. When we add to or diminish from the revelation, we are presenting a false image of YHVH ELOHIM to the world. This is the same as worshipping idols. The Church has for years taught that Messiah came and did away with the Torah, leaving only a remnant of moral laws still in effect. By diminishing the Torah, the Church has put forth a false and blasphemous image of YHVH as well as the Messiah. By replacing the Feasts of YHVH with pagan holidays, and creating a Nicolaitan hierarchy, the Church has also desecrated the image of YHVH by endowing their man-made customs and traditions with equal authority to the word of Elohim. The Church is not the only desecrator. Pharisaic Judaism likewise has desecrated the image of YHVH by diminishing and adding to the Torah. Over the years, the Rabbis have reversed clear meanings of the Torah and given divine authority to their own teachings and rulings. The Rabbis teach that there are now Two Torahs; one written the other oral. Both the Christian

Church and Rabbinic Judaism have crossed the line of this clear commandment not to add to or diminish from Torah of YHVH. Let me be very clear here. I do not advocate that we through out all the writings of the Christian Church, or the Mishnah, Talmud, or writings of the Rabbis. There is a great deal of wisdom in these writings, and many positive benefits to traditions and customs that have developed over time. We must be clear that they are, in fact, the writings, customs, and traditions of men and do not have the same authority as the Torah. Without getting further involved in the debate over the Written Torah vs. the Oral Torah, let us continue now to answer the second question concerning the location of the teaching on the cities of refuge.

If the two major themes running through our portion are, doing the Torah, and refraining from false images why, we may ask, would Moses suddenly include a teaching on the appointing of three cities of refuge? To understand this we need to remember the purpose of the cities of refuge. Moses teaches if a man should inadvertently kill another man, he is to run to a city of refuge and stay there until a trial may be held to determine if this man is worthy of death or not. As long as the killer remains in the city of refuge he is to be safe from any relatives of the victim that may, in anger, desire to avenge the death of their kinsman. For the one guilty of manslaughter or unpremeditated killing, the appointed city will be a sanctuary for him. On the other hand, if a man is guilty of premeditated murder then he may flee to the city of refuge but upon being sentenced, the guilty man is handed over to the avenger of blood.^{ix} Now we may ask, what does all of this have to do with doing the Torah and refraining from false images? This is explained in the Ten Commandments which are likewise restated in our current Torah portion.

Let us look at how the Ten Commandments fit into the whole of the Torah. A little outline will help us here. The very heart of the Torah is summarized in the confession of faith known as the Sh'ma.

“Sh'ma Yisrael YHVH ELOHAYNU, YHVH echad”

“Hear, O Israel, YHVH is your Elohim, YHVH is ONE.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This is the first and foremost commandment in the Torah, the recognition that YHVH alone is Elohim and that YHVH is ONE. Everything else in the Torah is helping to define the truth of the ONE TRUE ELOHIM.

We should take note that in the Torah scroll itself there are two enlarged Hebrew letters in this phrase. The word SH'MA (SHIN, MEM, AYIN) ends with an enlarged AYIN. The last word in the portion, ECHAD (ALEPH, CHET, DALET) likewise ends with enlarged DALET. Together AYIN, DALET spell the Hebrew word AYD which means WITNESS. The Sh'ma is our witness that YHVH is the one true Elohim. From this primary commandment flow the two commandments to love Elohim and to love our Neighbor.^x The two tablets of the Ten Commandments are an explanation of these two commandments, which are further explained by the 613 commandments contained in the rest of the Torah. Thus we may outline the relationship of these commandments as follows:

- I. The Sh'ma
 - A. Love Elohim
 - 1. I am the YHVH your Elohim
 - 2. You shall have no other Elohim
 - 3. You shall not take my name in vain
 - 4. Remember the Sabbath
 - 5. Honor your father and mother
 - B. Love Neighbor
 - 1. Thou shalt not murder
 - 2. Thou shalt not commit adultery
 - 3. Thou shalt not steal
 - 4. Thou shalt not bear false witness
 - 5. Thou shalt not covet.

a) The 613 Commandments

There are numerous teachings to be gleaned from all of this, but we are going to focus only on those that explain why Moses would include the cities of refuge in this portion. There are two ways to view these Ten Commandments. Let us picture two tablets side by side with five commandments on each tablet. The first tablet is the explanation of what it means to love Elohim; the second tablet explains what it means to love our neighbor. We should note however that the first commandment on each tablet is explained by the four that follow it. On the first tablet we see the command, "I am YHVH your Elohim." While this may not appear to be a commandment, it is. It is calling us to submit to the truth as described by the Sh'ma. It is a command to hear and receive the yoke of Torah. "I am YHVH your Elohim" is a command to accept YHVH as our sole Elohim. Having no other elohim, not taking the YHVH upon us in vain, keeping the Sabbath, and honoring our father and mother, (Abraham and Sarah) all explain what it means to keep the first of these commandments. The same thing is true for the second tablet. "Thou shalt not murder" is explained by the four commandments that follow it. Adultery is a form of killing in that it is pretending the husband of the woman doesn't exist. It is mentally killing the husband to remove the emotional guilt of the sinful act. Stealing is also mentally killing the rightful owner and acting as if he is dead or that his rights do not matter. Bearing false witness is a means of killing a person's reputation. Coveting, likewise, is the desire that something wicked might befall another person so that you may possess their wealth or property or even their spouse.

Another way of looking at the Ten Commandments is to see their horizontal relationship to each other. For example, the first commandments on each tablet form a pair. In this way of looking at the commandments "I am YHVH your Elohim" is paired with "thou shalt not murder", "You shall have no other elohim" is paired with "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; "Do not take my name in vain" is paired with "Thou shalt not steal"; "Remember the Sabbath" is paired with "Thou shalt not bear false witness"; and finally "Honor thy father and mother" is paired with "Thou shalt not covet." I strongly urge you to contemplate upon the meanings found in these pairings. For our portion however, I want to focus upon the first pair. For here

is where our answer is to be found. We should remember that YHVH expressly commanded Noah the reason murder was wrong was because man is created in the image of YHVH.

“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of Elohim made he man.” (Genesis 9:6)

The teaching of the Torah is clear. We are to respect all men because man is created in the image of YHVH. Though the nations may have desecrated that image by their rejection of the Torah, they are nonetheless created to be the bearers of the image of YHVH. Therefore, to murder a man is to desecrate the image of YHVH. Now we may begin to see why Moses included the teaching about the cities of refuge in a portion predominately focusing upon protecting the image of YHVH. In other words, Moses is teaching us that just as a man who inadvertently kills another man may find refuge, and even forgiveness in the city of refuge, so too may we, who inadvertently desecrate the image of YHVH by failing to keep the Torah through ignorance, find refuge in Torah and the Messiah. But if we intentionally desecrate the image of YHVH by willfully diminishing or adding to his Torah, we have no place to hide and will indeed suffer the judgment. This is why Y’shua was so hard on the Pharisees, Scribes, Priests, and teachers of Israel, and yet showed great compassion and patience to the ordinary person, including gentiles.

As the children of Israel, we have willingly covenanted with YHVH to be the bearers of his image, his self-revelation, his Torah. It is important that we understand the commandments and that we do them as YHVH has commanded them. It was the failure of the children of Israel to make distinctions concerning the Torah that caused them to be removed from the land. Now we live in exile and under constant attack as chastisement for our sins. But we are not without hope. Moses prophesied to the children of Israel,

“When thou shalt beget children and children’s children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing and shall do evil in the sight of YHVH thy Elohim, to provoke him to anger. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And YHVH shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither YHVH shall lead you. And there ye shall serve elohim, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone which neither see nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But if from thence thou shalt seek YHVH thy Elohim, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to YHVH thy Elohim, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For YHVH thy Elohim is a merciful Elohim;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of the fathers which he sware unto them.” (Deuteronomy 4:25-31)

Here we are given hope in the mercy and faithfulness of YHVH ELOHIM that he will allow himself to be found by those who turn from the false images of man-made religions and seek

him with whole hearts. What joy it is to hear the promise that YHVH will neither destroy nor forget us. We must realize, however, that we will remain in the fires of exile until the corrupting dross of man's false images has been removed from us. I believe that even now the Ruach HaKodesh is raising up teachers in Israel and within the Diaspora, men like Michael Rood, Avi Ben Mordechai, Nehemiah Gordon, and many others who are calling the children of Israel to return to seek YHVH with all their heart by laying aside the additions and subtractions of man's customs and traditions, and to keep the Torah as YHVH has commanded it.

SHAVUA TOV!

ⁱ The Kestenbaum Edition Tikkun, Mesorah Publications, pg. 175

ⁱⁱ Numbers 21:10-35; 31:1-18

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 9:27

^{iv} Numbers 12:3

^v Exodus 32:1ff

^{vi} Numbers 25:1ff

^{vii} Exodus 19:5-6

^{viii} Genesis 1:27

^{ix} Numbers 35:1ff

^x Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39