

The Importance of the Land for Keeping the Commandments

by Nehemia Gordon

Commandments Given for the Land

Behold, I taught you statutes and judgments as Yehovah my God has commanded me to do thus **in the midst of the land** to which you are going to inherit. (Deuteronomy 4:5)

רָאָה לְמַדְתִּי אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּן
בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּאִים שָׁמָּה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: (דברים ד:ה)

This is the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which Yehovah your God commanded to teach you, to do in the land which you are passing over to inherit. (Deuteronomy 6:1)

זֹאת הַמִּצְוָה הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים
שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: (דברים ו:א)

Our Relationship with Yehovah is Connected to the Land

And you shall *dwell in the land* which I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I shall be your God. (Ezekiel 36:28)

וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם
וְהָיִיתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִכִּי אֶהְיֶה לְכֶם
לְאֱלֹהִים: (יחזקאל לו:כח)

Living Outside Israel is a Punishment

You shall keep all my statutes and all my judgements and do them so that the land to which I am bringing you to dwell in it does not spit you out. (Leviticus 20:22)

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת כָּל
מִשְׁפָּטַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִקְיֵא
אֶתְכֶם הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֶתְכֶם
שָׁמָּה לְשֹׁבֵת בָּהּ: (ויקרא כ:כב)

(26) And the wrath of Yehovah burned in that land to bring upon it all the curse written in this book. (27) And Yehovah uprooted them from their land with anger, with wrath, and with great fury, and he cast them into another land as this day. (Deuteronomy 29:26–27)

(כו) וַיַּחַר אֵף יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא
לְהַבִּיא עָלֶיהָ אֶת כָּל הַקְּלָלָה הַכְּתוּבָה
בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה: (כז) וַיִּתְּשֵׁם יְהוָה מֵעַל
אֲדָמָתָם בְּאֵף וּבַחֲמָה וּבִקְצָף גָּדוֹל
וַיִּשְׁלַכְם אֶל אֶרֶץ אַחֲרַת כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
(דברים כט:כו-כז)

Exile is Synonymous with Idolatry

(27) And Yehovah will scatter you among the peoples and you will remain few in number amongst the nations where Yehovah will lead. (28) And you shall worship there gods made by the hands of men, of wood and stone who do not see, who do not hear, who do not eat, and who do not drink. (29) And you will seek from there Yehovah your God and you will find, when you seek with all your heart and with all your soul. (Dt 4:27–29)

(כז) וְהִפִּיץ יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בְּעַמִּים | וְנִשְׁאַרְתֶּם מִתֵּי מִסְפָּר בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִנְהַג יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה : (כח) וְעַבַדְתֶּם שָׁם אֱלֹהִים מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם | עֵץ וְאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִרְאוּן וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּן וְלֹא יֵאָכְלוּן וְלֹא יִרְיַחוּ : (כט) וּבִקְשַׁתֶּם מִשָּׁם אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּמְצֹאתֶם | כִּי תִדְרְשׁוּנוּ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם : (דברים ד: כז–כט)

(18) And [David] said, Why is it that my master chases after his servant, for what have I done and what evil is in my hand. (19) And now, let my master the king please hear the words of his servant. If Yehovah has incited you may he smell an offering and if human beings then they are cursed before Yehovah for they have driven me out today from being attached to the inherited portion of Yehovah saying, Go worship other gods. (1 Samuel 26:18–19)

(יח) וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה אֲדַנִּי רִדְף אַחֲרֵי עַבְדוֹ | כִּי מָה עָשִׂיתִי וּמָה בְּיָדִי רָעָה : (יט) וְעַתָּה יִשְׁמַע נָא אֲדַנִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת דְּבָרַי עַבְדוֹ | אִם יְהוָה הִסִּיתָ בִּי יָרַח מִנְחָה וְאִם בְּנִי הָאָדָם אֲרוּרִים הֵם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כִּי גִרְשׁוּנִי הַיּוֹם מִהַסְתַּפַּח בְּנַחֲלַת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר לָךְ עַבַד אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרַיִם : (שמואל א כו: יח–יט)

(7) And she went forth from the place where she had been, her two daughter-in-laws with her to return to the Land of Judah. (15) And [Naomi] said [to Ruth], Behold your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. (16) And Ruth said, Do not ask me to leave you from following after you for where you go I will go and where you sleep I will sleep. Your people is my people and your God is my God. (17) Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. So shall Yehovah do to me and even more if anything but death separates between me and you. (Ruth 1:7, 15–17)

(ז) וַתֵּצֵא מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה שָׁמָּה וּשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֵּיהָ עִמָּה | וַתֵּלְכֶנָּה בְּדֶרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה : ... (טו) וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבַמְתָּךְ אֶל עִמָּה וְאֶל אֱלֹהֵיהָ | שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבַמְתָּךְ : (טז) וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל תַּפְגַּעִי בִּי לְעֹזִיב לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ | כִּי אֶל אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלַיךְ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי אֵלַיִן עִמָּךְ עִמִּי וְאֵלֵהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי : (יז) בְּאֲשֶׁר תַּמּוּתִי אַמּוּת וְשָׁם אֶקְבֹּר | כִּהֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִּי וְכֵהן יִסִּיף כִּי הַמָּוֶת יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ : (רות א)

God Implores Us to Repent and Live in the Land

(4) And Yehovah your God sent all of his servants the prophets, sending them from the early morning – but you did not listen nor did you incline your ear to hear – (5) Saying, Return now each man from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds and dwell in the land which Yehovah your God has given to you and to your fathers for ever. (Jeremiah 25:4–5)

(ד) וְשָׁלַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת כָּל עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִאִים הַשְּׂכֵם וְשָׁלַח וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם | וְלֹא הִטִּיתֶם אֶת אָזְנוֹכֶם לְשִׁמְעַ: (ה) לֵאמֹר שׁוּבוּ נָא אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הַרְעָה וּמִרַע מֵעַלְלֵיכֶם וּשְׁבוּ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם וּלְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם | לָמֶן עוֹלָם וָעַד עוֹלָם: (יִרְמִיָּהוּ כה: ד-ה)

The Covenant is Inextricably Tied to the Land

Abraham's Call

(1) And Yehovah said to Avram, Go from your land, from your birth place and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. (Gen 12:1)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ | אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: (בְּרֵאשִׁית יב: א)

Covenant Between the Pieces

On that day Yehovah cut a covenant with Avram saying, To your seed I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river the Euphrates. (Gen 15:18)

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת אַבְרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר | לְזֶרְעֶךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם עַד הַנְּהַר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר פָּרָת: (בְּרֵאשִׁית טו: יח)

Covenant of Circumcision

(7) And I will establish my covenant between me and between you and your descendants after you according to their generations, an *eternal* covenant, to be for you a God and for your descendants after you. (8) I will give you and your descendants after you the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, as an eternal possession, and I shall be for you a God. (Gen 17:7–8)

(ז) וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם | לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ: (ח) וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרִיךָ אֶת כָּל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְאֶחְזָת עוֹלָם | וְהִיְיָתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: (בְּרֵאשִׁית יז: ז-ח)

(17) You shall diligently keep the commandments of Yehovah your God and his testimonies and his statutes which he commanded you. (18) And you shall do that which is right and good in the eyes of Yehovah in order that he will do well for

(יז) שְׁמוֹר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם | וְעֲדֹתָיו וְחֻקָּיו אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ: (יח) וַעֲשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה | לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לְךָ וּבָאתָ וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטְּבָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם:

you so that you will come and inherit the good land which Yehovah swore to your fathers. (Dt 6:17–18)

(דברים ו)

Land of Israel Has Special Providence

(11) The land which you are passing over to inherit... (12) is a land which Yehovah your God looks after; the eyes of Yehovah your God are always on it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. (Dt 11:11–12)

(יא) וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ... (יב) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ | תָּמִיד עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מֵרֵשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה: (דברים יא:יא–יב)

Yehovah Gathers Us Into Israel

Thus says Lord Yehovah, who gathers in the dispersed of Israel, I will gather [others] in addition to those of his whom I have gathered. (Isa 56:8)

נֹאֵם יְהוָה אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל | עוֹד אֶקְבֹּץ עָלָיו לְנִקְבְּצָיו: (ישעיהו נו:ח)

The First Ingathering

(2) Thus says Cyrus King of Persia, Yehovah the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has commanded me to build a Temple for him in Jerusalem of Judah. (3) Anyone among you out of all his people who his God is with him let him go up to Jerusalem of Judah and let him build a Temple of Yehovah the God of Israel; he is the God that is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2–3)

(ב) כֹּה אָמַר כְּרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס, כֹּל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם | וְהוּא פָקַד עָלַי לְבָנוֹת לוֹ בַּיַּת בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בִּיהוּדָה: (ג) מִי בְכֶם מִכָּל עַמּוֹ יְהִי אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ וְיַעַל לִירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בִּיהוּדָה | וַיִּבֶן אֶת בַּיַּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלַם: (עזרא א)

1. Waves of return: Zerubavel, Ezra, Nehemiah
2. Returnees threatened by foreigners

Dangers of Ingathering

(21) And I called a fast there by the river Ahava to afflict ourselves before our God, to ask him for a straight way for us, for our children, and for all our property, (22) because I was embarrassed to ask the king for soldiers and cavalry to protect us from enemies on the way because we told the king that the hand of our God is upon all

(כא) וְאָקְרָא שֵׁם צוּם עַל הַנָּהָר אַחָוָה לְהַתְּעַנּוֹת לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ | לְבַקֵּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ יִשְׁרָה לָנוּ וּלְטַפְּנוּ וּלְכָל רְכוּשֵׁנוּ: (כב) כִּי בִשְׁתִּי לְשֹׂאוֹל מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ חֵיל וּפָרָשִׁים לְעֲזָרְנוּ מֵאוֹיֵב בַּדֶּרֶךְ | כִּי אֲמַרְנוּ לְמֶלֶךְ לֵאמֹר יָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל כָּל מִבְּקָשׁוֹ לְטוֹבָה וְעִזּוֹ וְאִפּוֹ עַל כָּל

those who ask him for good and his mighty
wrath is upon all those who abandon him.
(23) So we fasted and we asked God
concerning this and he answered us. (Ezra
8:21–23)

עֲזָבֵינוּ : (כג) וְנִצְוָמָה וְנִבְקָשָׁה מֵאֱלֹהֵינוּ
עַל זֵאת וַיַּעֲתֵר לָנוּ : (עזרא ח)