

Parsha: Ki Tavo

“When you come in to the Land . . . ,” opens the Parshah of Ki Tavo, “you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the Land . . . and put it in a basket; and you shall go to the place which the L-rd your G-d will choose to place His name there . . .”

Upon presenting the bikkurim (first-ripened fruits) at the Holy Temple, the Jewish farmer makes a declaration avowing his gratitude for all that G-d has done for His people:

You shall speak and say before the L-rd your G-d:

An Aramean nomad was my father, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and became there a nation great, mighty and populous.

The Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us; and they laid upon us hard bondage.

We cried to the L-rd, the G-d of our fathers; and G-d heard our voice, and He looked on our pain and our toil and our oppression.

G-d brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, with great awe, with signs and with wonders.

He brought us to this place, and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land which You, O G-d, have given me.

You shall set it down before the L-rd your G-d, and prostrate yourself before the L-rd your G-d. You shall rejoice in every good thing which the L-rd your G-d has given you, and your household—you, the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.

Clearing the Tithes

The law of bikkurim is followed by the rules governing the separation of the various tithes the Jewish farmer sets aside from his crop (for the Levite, the poor, and for his own consumption in the holy city of Jerusalem). Every three years, any undistributed tithes must be “cleared from the house.” Like the bringing of bikkurim, this too is accompanied with a “declaration”:

When you have made an end of tithing all the tithes of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, and you have given it the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, that they may eat within your gates, and be replete—

you shall then declare before the L-rd your G-d:

I have removed the hallowed things out of my house, and also have given them to the Levite, to the stranger, to the fatherless and to the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.

I have not eaten of it in my mourning, nor have I consumed any part of it when unclean, nor given of it for the dead; but I have hearkened to the voice of the L-rd my G-d, and have done according to all that You have commanded me.

Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the land which You have given us, as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Mutual Regard

This day the L-rd your G-d has commanded you to do these statutes and judgments; you shall keep them and do them with all your heart, and with all your soul.

You have avouched G-d this day to be your G-d, to walk in His ways; to keep His decrees, His commandments and His judgments; and to hearken to His voice.

And G-d has avouched you this day to be a people for His own possession, as He has promised you; and that you should keep all His commandments.

And to make you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name and in glory; and that you be a holy people to the L-rd your G-d, as He has spoken.

Inscribing the Torah

Moses then instructs the people on the particulars of the special “swearing-in” ceremony—mentioned earlier in the Parshah of Re’eh—which they will conduct when they enter the Promised Land under the leadership of his disciple, Joshua.

A special altar, built from twelve stones taken from the Jordan River (representing the 12 tribes of Israel), should be constructed on Mount Ebal; the stones should be plastered over, “and you shall write upon the stones all the words of this Torah very plainly.”

The twelve tribes then divided into two groups: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin positioned themselves on Mt. Gerizim, while Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali faced them across the valley on the opposing Mt. Ebal. The blessings (for those who uphold the Torah) and curses (for those who violate it) were then pronounced—the blessings facing Mt. Gerizim, the curses facing Mt. Ebal.

Reward and Rebuke

Moses proceeds to spell out the blessings of a life in harmony with the divine will:

It shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently to the voice of the L-rd your G-d, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command you this day, that the L-rd your G-d will set you on high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings shall befall you and overtake you, if you shall hearken to the voice of the L-rd your G-d.

Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your beasts, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your sheep.

Blessed shall be your basket and your store.

Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

G-d shall cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face; on one road shall they come out against you, and on seven roads shall they flee before you.

G-d shall command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all unto which you set your hand; and He shall bless you in the land which the L-rd your G-d gives you.

G-d shall establish you a holy people to Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you shall keep the commandments of the L-rd your G-d and walk in His ways.

All people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of G-d, and they shall be afraid of you.

G-d shall make you plenteous in goods, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your soil, in the land which G-d swore to your fathers to give you.

G-d shall open to you His good treasure, the heaven, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand; you shall lend to many nations, and you shall not borrow.

G-d shall make you the head and not the tail, and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath, if you hearken to the commandments of the L-rd your G-d, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them. You shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

The very opposite, however, shall come to pass “if you will not hearken to the voice of the L-rd your G-d, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this

day. These curses shall come upon you, and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field . . . ,” and so on.

After spelling out the flipside of the enumerated blessings, Moses launches into an even more detailed account (called The Rebuke) of the terrible calamities destined to befall the errant people—ninety-eight “curses” in all, including the horrible scene (which came to pass during the siege of Jerusalem) of fathers and mothers eating the flesh of their children in their desperate hunger.

The Time of Recognition

Moses called to all Israel, and said to them:

You have seen all that G-d did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his servants and to all his land. The great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles.

Yet G-d has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear, until this very day . . .

Keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.