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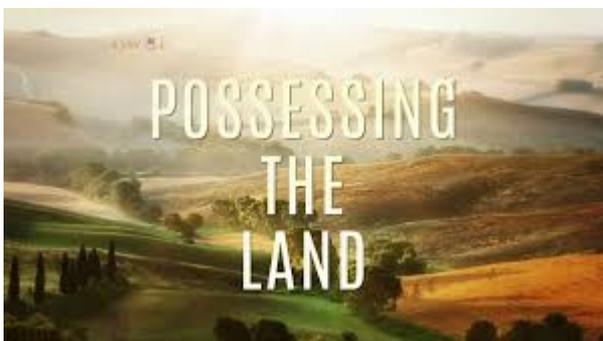
Possess the Land

11: 8-25

Possess the Land DIG: Why is “the Land” the key word in this section. What was the requirement for Isra’el to take possession of the Land? What was the difference between the land of Egypt and the Land of Promise? How did this increase the people’s responsibility to obey God’s mitzvot? What does God’s abundance depend on? Does this book teach a prosperity gospel? Are God’s promises bound to disobedient people? How do we claim God’s blessings? What were phylacteries (T’fillin) and why were they used?

REFLECT: In the haftarah, what is God calling you to trust Him for? What acts of obedience is He calling you to do as a “stepping out in faith?” In what way does the promise of Isaiah 51:1-3 apply to you? In the B’rit Chadashah reading, to what degree are you motivated by your feelings and life circumstances? To what degree are you motivated by your faith in your covenant relationship with God through Messiah?

Isra’el’s possession of the Land depended on her obedience to the mitzvot of ADONAI.



They key word in this section is **land**, used at least a dozen times, referring to **the land** of Canaan, which **YHVH** promised to Abraham and his descendants when He entered into a covenant relationship with him (**Genesis 13:14-17, 15:7-21, 17:8,**

28:13; Exodus 3:8). Canaan was not only **the Promised Land** because **God** promised **it** to **Isra’el**, but **it** was also “**the land of promises**” because in that **land**, **Ha’Shem** would fulfill many of the promises relating to **His** great gift of salvation for the whole world. **The land of Isra’el** would be the stage on which the great drama of redemption would be enacted. There, **the Savior** would be born and live, and there **He** would die for the sins of the world. **He** would be raised from the dead and ascend to heaven, and to the believers in that **land**, **He** would send the gift of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. From that **land**, **His people** would spread out across the world to share the gospel.²⁸⁷

Requirement: the people are urged once again to keep the mitzvot of YHVH (11:8). You shall therefore keep the whole mitzvah that I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land that you are crossing over to possess (11:8). The word **therefore** underlines the fact that **ADONAI’s** claim to **Isra’el’s** obedience rests on what **He** had already done for **her**. But the fulfilment of the divine promise was not automatic.²⁸⁸ **Moses** repeats **his** exhortation from **6:1** for **the Israelites** to accept **YHVH’s** requirement of **their** total loyalty. But now the focus shifts from the lessons of history to the anticipation of the future. **The people** were to **obey the mitzvot** soon to be declared to **them**, not only because of **their** knowledge of **God** drawn from past experiences, not only because it was **for their own good (10:13)**, but also because without such obedience, **they** would not find the strength necessary to take **possession** of **the Land** of Promise.²⁸⁹

Illustration: the good Land compared to Egypt (11:9-12). And so that you may prolong your days on the land that **ADONAI** swore to give to your fathers and to their descendants - a land flowing with milk and honey (11:9). **The Promised Land** was a **land flowing with milk and honey**, but if **the rain** didn’t come as its appointed seasons, nothing would grow and the people would starve, and only **God** could send **the rain**. Ba’al was the Canaanite storm god, and often in **their** history, **the Jews** turned to this false god for help, and then, **Ha’Shem** had to discipline **them**. Elijah’s dramatic encounter on Mount Carmel with the priests of Ba’al proved that **the LORD** was the true and living **God (First Kings 18:16-39)**.

Unlike **the land of Egypt**, which depended on irrigation from the Nile River, **the land of Isra’el** received the life-giving **rains from heaven**, sent by **ADONAI**. **For the Land you are going in to possess is not like the land of Egypt from**

which you came. There you planted your seed and watered it by foot channels, through which the water could flow, like a vegetable garden. But, in contrast, the land you are crossing over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, drinking from the rain of the heavens it drinks in water. In the Promised Land, therefore, **they** would be dependent not on human techniques, but on the provision of **God**. This direct provision, however, increased the responsibility of **the people of God to obey His mitzvot**. If the nation of **Isra'el** feared **Ha'Shem**, loved **Him**, and **obeyed Him**, **He** would send the crops in their seasons and feed **the people** and the flocks and herds. **YHVH** wasn't "buying" **their obedience; He** was rewarding **their faith** and teaching **them** the joys of knowing and serving **Him**.²⁹⁰ **It is a land that ADONAI your God cares for - the eyes of ADONAI your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year up to the end of the year (11:10-12).**

Requirement: obedience, love, and service (11:13). The agricultural point having been made; the moral lesson is obvious. **If you need rain to survive, and if YHVH sends the rain, He declared: If you listen obediently to My mitzvot that I am commanding you today - to love ADONAI your God and to serve Him with all your heart and soul, then, My abundance would be poured out of the heavens (11:13).**

*Dear Amazing Heavenly **Father**, I love you! How awesome to think of spending eternity with **You** in the eternal home in heaven that **Yeshua** is preparing for those who love **Him**. **In My Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you may also be (John 14:2-3).** Any early joy lasts but a moment, however worshipping **You** will go on for all eternity! Life is full of many things that keep us busy, but it is so worth it to make time to meditate on how awesome you are! At night, just before I fall asleep I love to meditate on **Your** power over any world kingdom. I retell in my thinking all about the 10 plagues of Egypt and your victory in safely bringing **Isra'el** thru the Sea of Reeds. It is **Your** power that is most important. **Isra'el** was victorious and won because of **Your** Almighty power. Knowing and loving **You** is worth any trial that I go through. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** I love **You!** In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Illustration: the fertility of the good Land (11:14-17). Whereas the previous illustration had contrasted the past with the future (**11:9-12**), the focus is now entirely on the future and **the good land** promised to **Isra'el** by **YHVH**. **Moshe** declared: **Then He will give rain for your land in its season - the early rain and the late rain** - two terms indicating the beginning and the end of the rainy season in Palestine, extending approximately from October to April. **So that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you will eat and be satisfied (11:14-15).** The **LORD** promised to provide rain, in its season, which was necessary for the sustenance of men and beasts, provided that **His people obeyed His mitzvot**. However, **their obedience** would not *earn* the blessing of fertility, nor would it somehow magically *induce* fertility. That blessing was already there in the very nature of **the Land** and its relationship to **YHVH**, but it could be appropriated and enjoyed only by **a people** prepared to live a life of **faith** and **obedience**.²⁹¹ **Yeshua** said it this way: **Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).**

Watch yourselves, so your heart is not deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. The reference to the danger of turning to foreign **gods** is common throughout **Deuteronomy**. But it is introduced here for a specific reason. The Canaanites believed that the gift of the rains lay in the power of the god Ba'al. **The Israelites** needed to be careful to recognize that **the LORD** is **the Giver of the rain** and if **they** worshipped other **gods, they** would learn that lesson the hard way.²⁹² **Then the anger of ADONAI will be kindled against you, so He will shut up the sky so that there will be no rain and the soil will not yield its produce. Then you will perish quickly from the good land ADONAI is giving you (11:16-17).**

Does **Deuteronomy** teach a prosperity gospel? The question arises as to how far one can generalize, or dogmatize, from the relationship in these verses between moral obedience and material blessing (**to see link click Cc - Because You are Listening**). **Deuteronomy** repeatedly correlates the two, and in the rest of the TaNaKh this equation remains an underlying principle witnessing to the truth about **God** in relation both to the earth and to **God's people**. It should not, however, be universalized in a rigid way. Indeed, the thought of a prosperity gospel is challenged head-on in books like **Job** and **Ecclesiastes**, and fuels the baffled lament of **Psalms** like **37** and **73**. But the connections between obedience and prosperity are neither guaranteed nor reversible. This is, we cannot deduce that prosperity proves

prior obedience or **that suffering necessarily proves personal guilt, as the rabbis taught.** The overriding principle is that **YHVH** does respond justly to our response to **Him**, and that **He** remains in ultimate control of everything that affects human life, including variable factors like climate and fertility. **ADONAI's** historical justice and **His** sovereign providence are, however, the non-negotiable factors.²⁹³

Summary: spoken on every Shabbat around the world (11:18-25):
Therefore, you are to set these words of Mine in your heart and in your soul. You are to bind them as a sign on your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes. One of the most ancient commands of the Scriptures is that **the Hebrew people bind** certain reminders of **their** relationship to **God** on **their hands** and **foreheads**. Like the *mezuzah* on **their** doors and the *tzitzit* on **their** garments (see the commentary on **Numbers C1 - Tzit-tzit and the Blue Thread**), **they** were reminders of **God's** commands even on a **Hebrew** man's body. From ancient times, traditional **Jews** have fulfilled this commandment in the custom called *t'fillin*. The Hebrew word is related to the word for prayer (*t'fillah*) and provides the focus for this tradition. *T'fillin* were designed to provide practical help for the prayer life of the **Jew**.



Over the generations, the *t'fillin* took the shape of leather boxes that contained portions of the Torah that were strapped to the forehead and to the hands. This type of *t'fillin* existed before the first century, as there are references to them in **Jewish** literature. **Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentioned the use of the t'fillin, as did an early Talmudic sage, who spoke of receiving the t'fillin handed down from his grandfather. More recent discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls have also confirmed that the Qumran community used many of**

their parchments in the *t'fillin*.

Although there have been variations to this custom throughout the ages, the practice of *the t'fillin* has remained remarkably unchanged for over two millennia. Some pious **Jews** of earlier days wore *t'fillin* constantly. However, the common practice today among observant **Jews** is for the males over the age of thirteen to wear these leather boxes at daily morning prayer services. By doing so, they are reminded that the commandments of **God** should be on their mind (**forehead**) and applied in their life (**hand**).

Jewish tradition developed two distinct parts to a set of *t'fillin*: “for the head” (*shel rosh*) and “for the hand” (*shel yad*). *Shel rosh* consists of four individual compartments, each containing a parchment with handwritten passages from the Torah (Exodus 13:1-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21). In contrast, *shel yad* is a single compartment that holds all the same passages written on a single parchment - passages that have the common commandment to bind the Word of **God on one’s forehead and hand. Some have compared *t'fillin* to putting on the armor of **God** for spiritual battle.**

As we have seen, **the Jews** took this mitzvah literally and made phylacteries for **their** arms and heads, and mezuzahs for **their** houses, but unfortunately today, most have failed to receive **His** Word into **their** hearts. Gentiles today face the same danger. It’s much easier to wear a cross on your chest than to bear **Messiah’s** cross in daily life, and to hang Scriptures on the walls of their homes than to hide **God’s** Word in their hearts. If we love **the Lord** and cling desperately to **Him**, we will know **His** Word and obey it in every area of our lives.²⁹⁴

Only by letting **God’s** Word invade every are of **their lives** and **homes** could **the nation** hope to escape the seduction of false worship and find permanent prosperity on **the Land**. **You are to teach them diligently to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. You are to write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied on the land ADONAI swore to give to your fathers, as long as the heavens are above the earth (11:18-21).** The same principle applies today. Commitment to know and obey the Scriptures keeps believers from contemporary forms of false worship (**Second Timothy 3:14-17**). Therefore, **Paul** encouraged all believers to **let the word of Messiah**

dwelt in you richly (Colossians 3:16a).²⁹⁵

Moses returns to a theme developed in the beginning of this section (**11:8-9**): **Isra'el's** genuine obedience to **YHVH's** demands would insure a successful conquest of **the Promised Land**. **For if you will diligently keep all this mitzvah that I am commanding you to do - to love ADONAI your God, to walk in all His ways and to cling to Him - then ADONAI will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves (11:22-23)**. **God** intends to fulfil **His** promise ultimately, but **He** is not bound to fulfill **His** promise immediately in the case of a disobedient **people**. Hence **Isra'el** must take great care to do what **Ha'Shem** had commanded through **Moshe**. It is not merely formal, external, legalistic obedience that **He** desires, but obedience based on the love and close attachment to **the LORD**.²⁹⁶

Every place where the sole of your foot treads will be yours - from the wilderness to the Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea will be your border. No one will be able to stand against you - ADONAI your God will put the fear and dread of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has promised you (11:24-25). How do we claim **God's** blessings? But stepping out in faith. This is what **God** commanded **Abraham** to do (**Genesis 3:17**), as well as **Joshua (Joshua 1:3)**. It was this promise that **Caleb** claimed when **he** asked for **his** inheritance in the Promised **Land (Joshua 14:6-9)**, and it's the promise all believers must claim if they expect to enjoy the blessings **the Lord** has for them. You don't "claim the land," by studying a map and dreaming of conquest. You claim the land by stepping out by faith, believing **God's** Word, and depending on **His** faithfulness. J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, said, "Not by striving after faith, but by resting in the Faithful One."²⁹⁷

Haftarah 'Ekev: Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 49:14-51:3
(see [Af](#) - Parashah)

Isaiah is speaking to **a people** dealing with the negative consequences of **their** covenant **faithlessness (49:14)**. **ADONAI**, however, remains **faithful** to **His** promises because **He** is **the Promise Keeper (49:15-16)**. The second half of **49:26** reveals **God's** agenda in choosing **Isra'el** - revealing **Himself** to, and through, **her** to reach every nation in the world (see the commentary on [Isaiah Iq](#) -

The Gentiles and the Return of Isra'el).

B'rit Chadashah 'Ekev: Hebrews 11:8-13

Abraham is the model of a man to whom **ADONAI** made promises (**Genesis 12:2-3** and **15:4-7**). **He** was also given obligations (**Genesis 12:1** and **17:1, 9-14**) that **Abraham** fulfilled because **he trusted God. Walking by faith (Hebrews 11:1)** means not always immediately receiving everything that **God** has promised, but doing with **He** says and enjoying your relationship with **Him** as you go – regardless of your circumstances.

Also see: suggested readings for **Parashah 'Ekev: Mattityahu (Matthew) 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; Ya'akov (James) 5:7-11**