Parasha Re'eh

רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה: אֶת-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹת יהוה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם:

Our Torah portion begins with one simple Hebrew word that is so familiar we can easily overlook its significance: Re'eh—"*See.*" "*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of Adonai your God... and the curse, if you do not listen...*" (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). This opening is remarkable because Moshe does not begin with the word shema—"hear." Throughout Judaism, hearing is the language of covenant. Every observant Jew knows the words of the Shema: "*Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is One.*" Hearing is how faith begins. Yet here Moshe deliberately says, "See." Why? Because hearing receives information, but seeing speaks of understanding. A person may hear every word of God's commandments and still fail to understand what God is doing. Spiritual sight means learning to perceive life from God's perspective rather than merely reacting to circumstances. The Hebrew verb ra'ah, from which *Re'eh* comes, means more than simply looking with the eyes. It often carries the idea of perceiving, discerning, understanding, and recognizing what God is revealing. That is exactly where Moshe begins. Israel is standing on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Forty years earlier their parents had stood at another border, looking toward the Promised Land. Instead of seeing God's promises, they saw giants. Instead of seeing opportunity, they saw obstacles. Instead of seeing God's power, they saw their own weakness. The tragedy of the wilderness generation was not primarily that they lacked courage. It was that they lacked vision. They saw the wrong thing. The spies returned from Canaan carrying grapes so large that two men carried a single cluster upon a pole. Those grapes testified that God had spoken the truth. Yet ten spies saw only fortified cities. Only Joshua and Caleb saw God. The circumstances were identical. The difference lay in what they chose to see. That lesson has never changed.

The rabbis frequently taught that one's life is determined not merely by circumstances but by perspective. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch observed that when Scripture speaks about "seeing," it often refers to moral perception. The righteous learn to interpret life through the character of God rather than through appearances. How desperately we need that wisdom today. The world teaches us to evaluate life through economics, politics, popularity, or personal success. God teaches His people to evaluate life through covenant. That changes everything. When Joseph sat forgotten in an Egyptian prison, he could have concluded that God had abandoned him. Instead, years later he declared, "*You intended evil against me, but God intended it for good.*" Joseph had learned to see beyond the prison.

When young David faced Goliath, everyone else saw an impossible giant. David saw a Philistine defying the armies of the living God. When Elisha's servant looked outside the city walls, he saw an enemy army surrounding them. Elisha prayed, "*Lord, open his eyes.*" Suddenly the servant saw that the mountains were filled with horses and chariots of fire. Nothing had changed except what he could see. Faith does not deny reality. Faith sees a greater reality. Jewish tradition often speaks about possessing an ayin tovah, a "good eye." In *Pirkei Avot*, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai asked his disciples what quality a person should seek above all others. Rabbi Eliezer answered, "A good eye." His teacher agreed. Why? Because a good eye changes everything else. A person with a good eye notices God's blessings. He rejoices in another person's success. He looks for opportunities to serve. He assumes gratitude before complaint. By contrast, the sages warned against the ayin ra'ah, the evil eye. This is not merely superstition. It describes a heart poisoned by envy, selfishness, and constant dissatisfaction. Such a person always sees what he lacks rather than what God has provided. The wilderness generation illustrates this perfectly. Every morning manna appeared upon the ground. Every evening quail arrived. Their clothes did not wear out. The pillar of cloud guided them by day. The pillar of fire protected them by night. Water flowed from the rock. Yet they complained. Their problem was never God's provision. Their problem was their vision. They had lost the ability to recognize blessing.

A beloved Hasidic illustration tells of a rabbi who stood beside a window and then beside a mirror. He asked his students, "What is the difference?" One answered, "The mirror reflects us." The rabbi nodded. "Both are made of glass. But when silver is placed behind the glass, all you can see is yourself." He paused before adding, "When a person's heart becomes covered with the silver of pride, wealth, or self-interest, he sees only himself. Remove the silver, and he can once again see the world that God created." How often that happens to us. When life revolves around ourselves, we lose sight of God's activity all around us. We begin measuring every circumstance by one question: "*What does this mean for me?*" The covenant teaches a different question: "*What is God accomplishing?*" This command to "see" also distinguished Israel from every nation surrounding them. Ancient pagan religions assumed that the gods were unpredictable. If crops failed, perhaps some unknown deity was angry. If sickness came, perhaps another god had been offended. No one could know for certain. Religion became an endless attempt to appease invisible powers. The Torah shattered that darkness. The God of Avraham was not hidden. He revealed His Name. He revealed His character. He revealed His commandments. He entered into covenant. The Psalmist later declared, "*He made known His ways to Moshe, His deeds to the children of Israel.*" Think about how extraordinary that statement is. The Creator of heaven and earth wanted His people to know Him. Not merely know about Him.

Know Him. Jeremiah would later write, "*Let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows Me.*" Relationship has always been God's desire. The commandments were never barriers keeping Israel away from Him. They were pathways leading Israel closer to Him. There is another small word in Moshe's opening statement that deserves our attention. He says, "*I set before you today a blessing and a curse.*" The covenant is always lived in the present. Yesterday's obedience cannot replace today's faithfulness. Tomorrow's intentions cannot substitute for today's decisions. Every sunrise presents another opportunity to walk with God. The Baal Shem Tov taught that each morning a believer should receive the Torah as though standing once again at Mount Sinai. God's Word never becomes old. Its truths are ancient. Its application is always fresh. Every day we choose once again whom we will trust. Every day we decide how we will see.

When we come to the Apostolic Writings, we discover that Yeshua repeatedly restored physical sight. Blind Bartimaeus received his vision. The man born blind saw for the first time. Yet every physical miracle pointed toward something greater. Yeshua came to restore spiritual sight. Rav Sha'ul (Paul) later prayed that believers would have "the eyes of your heart enlightened." That language echoes the spirit of Re'eh. God desires more than informed minds. He desires transformed vision. The closer we walk with Him, the more clearly we begin to see. We begin seeing trials as opportunities for growth. We begin seeing interruptions as divine appointments. We begin seeing people not as inconveniences but as those created in God's image. We begin seeing our lives through the eyes of eternity. That is exactly where Moshe begins this great section of Deuteronomy. Before Israel enters the Promised Land... Before they conquer cities... Before they inherit vineyards they did not plant... Before they enjoy homes they did not build... They must first learn to see. Because if they cannot see through God's eyes, they will never live according to God's ways. And so Moshe's first word still speaks to every believer today. Re'eh. See God's faithfulness. See His covenant. See His mercy. See His promises. See beyond the circumstances that surround you. For the direction of your life will ultimately follow the vision of your heart. Having commanded Israel to see, Moshe immediately presents the choice that confronts every generation: "*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.*" Notice that Moshe does not say that blessing and curse are matters of fate. Neither are they the unpredictable acts of an arbitrary God. Throughout the pagan world, people believed life was controlled by gods whose moods changed without warning. A drought might mean one god was angry. A disease might indicate another deity had been offended. Humanity lived in constant fear because no one truly knew what the gods expected. The God of Israel shattered that way of thinking. Adonai revealed His will. He revealed His character. He revealed His covenant. The blessing and the curse were not mysteries. They were the natural outcomes of either walking with God or walking away from Him.

This is one of the greatest gifts the Lord ever gave His people. They did not have to guess what pleased Him. They did not have to invent their own religion. They were invited into a covenant relationship in which the King Himself explained how His kingdom was to be lived. That truth remains just as real today. Many people still imagine God as distant, unpredictable, or impossible to understand. Some believe He delights in catching people when they fail. Others picture Him as indifferent to how they live. Neither picture is biblical. Adonai desires to be known. The prophet Jeremiah records God's words: "*Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the mighty man in his might, nor the rich man in his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me.*" Knowing God has always been the goal of the covenant.

One of the greatest misunderstandings about the Torah is the idea that Israel somehow earned God's love through obedience. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider the order of events. Israel did not receive the Torah while they were still slaves in Egypt. God first delivered them through the blood of the Passover lamb. He divided the Red Sea. He defeated Pharaoh. He fed them with manna. He gave them water from the rock. Only then did He bring them to Mount Sinai. Grace always came before commandment. Redemption always came before responsibility. The commandments were not the entrance fee into God's family. They were the family instructions given to a people He had already redeemed. Rabbi Judah HaLevi wrote that Israel's faith rested not upon philosophical speculation but upon God's mighty acts in history. They obeyed because they knew the One who had rescued them. This pattern continues throughout the Scriptures. Yeshua did not tell His disciples to earn salvation by perfect obedience. He called them into relationship. Only after they followed Him did He teach them how citizens of God's Kingdom should live. The Apostle Rav Sha'ul expresses the same truth when he writes that we are "created in Messiah Yeshua for good works." Notice the order. We are not created by good works. We are created for good works. Obedience is not the root of salvation. It is its fruit. As I often remind our congregation, obedience is not the price of relationship; it is the fruit of relationship. That simple truth harmonizes the Torah and the Brit Chadasha beautifully. The Hebrew word berakhah is often translated simply as "blessing," but in Jewish thought it means far more than material prosperity. True blessing is living under God's favor. Sometimes that includes abundance. Sometimes it includes hardship that shapes character. Joseph experienced blessing while sitting in an Egyptian prison because God was with him. Daniel experienced blessing inside a lions' den. Jeremiah experienced blessing while rejected by his own nation. The blessing of God is His presence before it is His provision. Psalm 1 captures this perfectly. "*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked... but his delight is in the Torah of the Lord.*" The blessed man is not described by his possessions. He is described by his relationship with God.

Like a tree planted beside streams of water, his strength comes from hidden roots rather than visible circumstances.

Likewise, the kelalah, the curse, is often misunderstood. Many imagine it as God angrily striking people whenever they fail. The Torah presents something much deeper. A curse is life lived outside God's covenant order. Imagine removing a fish from water. The fish was designed for the sea. Outside the water it begins to die—not because the ocean is angry, but because it has been separated from the environment for which it was created. Humanity was created for fellowship with God. When we remove ourselves from Him, life gradually begins to unravel. Relationships suffer. Peace disappears. Purpose fades. The curse is not merely punishment. It is separation from the Source of life. Moshe desperately wanted Israel to understand that. God was not standing over them looking for excuses to judge them. Like a loving Father, He was saying, "*This is the path that leads to life. Walk in it.*" Notice again that Moshe says... "*I set before you today...*" The covenant is renewed every morning. Yesterday's victories cannot sustain today's faithfulness. David haMelech could not rely upon yesterday's worship when confronted by temptation with Bathsheba. Elijah could not live forever upon yesterday's victory on Mount Carmel. Every generation must choose again. Every family must choose again. Every believer must choose again. Joshua understood this when, near the end of his own life, he declared, "*Choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Serving God is not a single decision made years ago. It is a daily surrender. Yeshua echoed this same principle when He called His disciples to take up their cross daily and follow Him. Faithfulness is renewed one day at a time. *An elderly rabbi once took his grandson for a walk through a neglected vineyard. Wild vines had wrapped themselves around the grapevines until very little fruit remained. The boy asked, "Grandfather, who planted all these weeds?" The old man smiled gently. "No one." The child looked confused. "No one?" "No," replied the rabbi. "The weeds simply grew because no one tended the vineyard." Then he placed his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "The heart is exactly the same. Few people wake up intending to rebel against God. Most simply neglect the garden of the soul until weeds replace fruit.*" That simple story explains much of Israel's history. Their greatest danger was not always open rebellion. It was spiritual neglect. Prayer became less frequent. Gratitude became less sincere. The commandments became routine. Soon they forgot the God who had delivered them from Egypt. That is why Moshe repeatedly commands the people to remember. Remember the Exodus. Remember Sinai. Remember the wilderness. Remember the covenant. Remember your Redeemer.

The choice Moshe presented to Israel still stands before every believer. Every day we choose what will shape our thinking. Every day we choose whose voice we will trust.

Every day we choose whether we will walk by faith or by sight. The good news is that God has not hidden the path. He has revealed it. He has shown us what pleases Him. And through Messiah Yeshua He has not only forgiven our sins but has given us the Ruach HaKodesh—the Holy Spirit—to write His Torah upon our hearts, fulfilling the promise spoken through Jeremiah. The Lord never commands what He does not also enable. Therefore, blessing is not reserved for perfect people. It is experienced by people who continually return to God in humble faith, trusting His grace and walking in His ways. Every sunrise brings us once again to Moshe's words: "See... I set before you today a blessing and a curse." May we always choose the path that leads to life, so that our children, our grandchildren, and those who follow after us will know the joy of walking in covenant with the God of Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Having called Israel to choose between blessing and curse, Moshe now explains how that choice is lived out in everyday life. The next major emphasis in Parasha Re'eh is worship. "*You shall completely destroy all the places where the nations you are dispossessing served their gods... But you are to seek the place Adonai your God will choose from among all your tribes to establish His Name as a dwelling. To that place you shall go.*" (Deuteronomy 12:2, 5) At first glance, these instructions seem to concern geography. In reality, they concern the heart. The Canaanites worshiped wherever they pleased. They built altars on mountains, beneath green trees, beside springs, and upon hilltops. Every community created its own sacred places, its own rituals, and its own gods. Religion became whatever people wanted it to be. Israel was to be different. There would be one God. One covenant. One Torah. One sanctuary chosen by God Himself. The Lord was teaching His people that worship is never determined by human preference; it is determined by divine revelation. One fascinating detail is that Moshe never identifies the location by name. He simply repeats the phrase, "the place that Adonai will choose." Only centuries later would that place become Jerusalem. Rashi observed that God intentionally withheld the location because His people first needed to learn obedience before receiving the destination. They were to trust the One who led them rather than demand to know every detail in advance. That principle appears throughout Scripture. Avraham was told, "*Go to the land that I will show you.*" He left Ur before he knew his destination. Israel followed the pillar of cloud through the wilderness one day at a time. The disciples left their fishing nets before they fully understood where following Yeshua would lead. Faith rarely receives the entire map.
It receives the next faithful step. How often we pray, "Lord, show me Your entire plan." Yet God usually answers, "Take the next step." Walking with God has always required trust. Moshe also commands Israel to destroy the pagan altars completely. This was not an act of intolerance but of spiritual protection. The religions of Canaan were not harmless cultural customs. They involved temple prostitution, occult practices, divination, and even the sacrifice of children to false gods.

The Lord knew that if Israel merely tolerated these practices, they would eventually imitate them. Sin rarely begins with participation. It begins with fascination. Fascination becomes acceptance. Acceptance becomes compromise. Compromise becomes bondage. The Midrash compares idolatry to a spark falling into dry grass. At first it appears insignificant, but left unattended it consumes the entire field. The same principle applies today. Most believers will never bow before a statue of Baal. Yet idolatry has always been much deeper than carved images. An idol is anything that claims the place in our hearts that belongs to God alone. Money can become an idol. Success can become an idol. Politics can become an idol. Even ministry can become an idol if serving God replaces knowing God. John Calvin famously wrote that the human heart is "a perpetual factory of idols." Although spoken many centuries after Moshe, his observation echoes the warning of the Torah. Left to ourselves, we continually create substitutes for the living God.

The rabbis often reminded their students that people gradually become like what they worship. If wealth becomes our highest pursuit, we begin measuring people by possessions. If power becomes our god, we evaluate everything by influence. If pleasure becomes our master, self-denial appears foolish. But when Adonai is the center of our lives, His character slowly becomes visible in ours. The prophet Micah summarized God's desire beautifully: "*He has told you, O man, what is good: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*" True worship always transforms character. It is impossible to draw near to a holy God without gradually becoming more like Him. *Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk was once asked, "Where does God dwell?" His students expected him to answer, "In heaven." Or perhaps, "In the Temple." Instead, he replied, "God dwells wherever He is welcomed."* That simple statement captures the heart of Moshe's teaching. The Tabernacle—and later the Temple—was never intended to convince Israel that God could be confined within walls of wood or stone. Solomon himself confessed at the Temple's dedication, "*The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain You.*" The sanctuary existed because God desired to dwell among His people. It pointed beyond itself to a relationship of covenant love. When we come to the Gospel of John, we discover one of the most beautiful connections to this passage. John writes, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" The Greek word literally means "tabernacled." John is telling us that everything the Tabernacle represented found its fulfillment in Messiah. God dwelling with His people. God revealing His glory. God providing atonement. God inviting humanity into His presence. After His resurrection, Yeshua sent His Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit, so that believers themselves would become living temples of God's presence. The lesson of Parasha Re'eh is therefore as relevant today as it was on the plains of Moab. Every heart contains an altar. Every life has a center. The question is not whether we worship. The question is whom we worship.

When God alone occupies the throne of our hearts, blessing follows naturally—not because we have earned His favor, but because we are living within the covenant relationship for which we were created. That is the invitation Moshe placed before Israel. It remains God's invitation to us today.

As Moshe concludes this section of Deuteronomy, he moves from instructions about worship to the joyful rhythm of covenant life, highlighting the pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These annual celebrations were more than religious observances—they were reminders of God's faithfulness. Throughout Deuteronomy, remembering is essential because forgetfulness often leads God's people away from Him. When Israel remembered the Exodus and God's provision, they responded with worship and trust; when they forgot, they grumbled and turned to idols. In the same way, believers remember Yeshua's sacrifice, renewing their confidence in God's redeeming grace rather than in themselves. A Hasidic story illustrates this truth. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explained that joy flows naturally when one remembers being invited into the King's presence. Biblical joy is therefore rooted not in favorable circumstances but in the abiding presence of God. The parasha closes by returning to its opening word, "Re'eh" ("See"). Moshe calls Israel to see God's faithfulness, mercy, covenant, and commandments as loving instruction rather than burdens. He places before them two paths: one leading to life, blessing, and fellowship with God, and the other to idolatry and sorrow. Like Joshua's later challenge to "choose this day whom you will serve," every generation must decide whether to trust God or themselves. For followers of Yeshua the Messiah, the answer is found in His death, resurrection, and the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh, who enables joyful obedience. Each day we are invited to choose blessing, faithfulness, and life while awaiting Messiah's everlasting Kingdom.

B'Shem Yeshua HaMashiach, Melech Yisrael v'Sar Shalom. Amen.