

What Does God Love ?

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I often suggest

to Christians that they should love the things God loves. The next thought has to be, “So what exactly does God love?” This sent me on a Bible detective search. I was surprised to find fewer direct references than I thought. Still, there are a number of clear statements about what God loves. I would suggest that these could all fall into three broad categories: people, righteousness (and justice) and Zion.

God Loves People

Probably one Scripture that all Christians know by heart is John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Of course the Creator must rejoice over the natural world that He brought forth out of nothing. My husband and I love to go to places of natural beauty. Nature itself speaks to me of the Creator and some of the most inspirational moments with God are in these places that He designed. However, it is clear to me that in this passage the apostle John is not talking about the physical earth, rather he is saying that God loves all the people of the world.



WHEN I CONSIDER YOUR HEAVENS,
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SON OF MAN THAT YOU VISIT HIM?

PSALM 8:3–4

David, the great psalmist said, *“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet”* (Ps. 8:3–6).

When God created humankind it was the crowning moment of creation. So, yes, God loves the world (the people that He created).

While it is very clear that God has love for all people—believers and unbelievers—there are two specific groups that are singled out as recipients of God’s love: the Children of Israel (the Jewish people) and believers in Jesus (Yeshua).

The Children of Israel

From the time of my childhood, I have been taught that the Jewish people are God’s chosen people. Later, God showed me the deep love He has for the Jewish people. Then He planted deep in my heart a love for them.

I am surprised to understand that there are Christians who don’t love the Jewish people. I ask myself, “How can someone love Jesus (Yeshua), their Jewish Savior, and not love His family?” Often, Jewish people will ask me in confusion, “Why do some Christians—like you—love us, and others become involved in



the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement? Why do they hate us? How can we tell the difference?" I tell them that true Christians who love God and His Word are more likely to love the Jewish people than cultural Christians. The first group views the Bible as the inspired Word of God, while the second picks and chooses the Bible passages they want to follow. If we love God, then surely we will want to love what He loves. Let's explore His love for the people of Israel.

In the book of Deuteronomy we find a beautiful passage describing God's relationship with the Children of Israel. *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples...And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land which He swore to your fathers to give you"* (Deut. 7:6-7, 13 emphasis added).

The prophets also talk of God's love for them. *"But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. ...Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you...'"* (Isa. 43:1, 4 emphasis added).

“‘At the same time,’ says the LORD, ‘I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.’ Thus says the LORD: ‘The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest.’ The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, **I have loved you with an everlasting love**; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt...’” (Jer. 31:1–4a emphasis added).

“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. ‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. ‘Yet you say, “In what way have You loved us?” Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ says the LORD. **‘Yet Jacob I have loved’**” (Mal. 1:1–2 emphasis added).

The psalmist says, “He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of **Jacob whom He loves**” (Ps. 47:4 emphasis added).

The apostle Paul recognized God’s unchanging love for the Jewish people, even though they had not all accepted Jesus. “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election **they are beloved** for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29 emphasis added).

Parents know that as much as they love and cherish their firstborn child, their hearts expand for those who follow as well. As a child I didn’t understand this. I remember, to my shame, telling my younger sister that Mom and Dad loved me more. My reasoning? Since I was older they had loved me longer, and longer is more. My thinking was childish, and exhibited a selfish nature—I wanted to be loved more than my sister. I think I feared they would love the new child more than me.



Sometimes I have sensed that some Christians resent the deep love that God, our Father, has for the Jewish people, His firstborn. How could God forget His firstborn? “But Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me, and my LORD has forgotten me.’ ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me’” (Isa. 49:14–16).

Followers of Jesus (Yeshua)

As followers of Jesus (Yeshua) we don’t have the length of history with God that the Jewish people do, but the Scripture tells us of His great love for us.

Jesus said, “...**for the Father Himself loves you**, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (John 16:27 emphasis added).

Jesus taught us to love, saying, “This is My commandment, that you love one another **as I have loved you**” (John 15:12 emphasis added). See also John 13:34.



The apostle John confirms God's love for the followers of Jesus, *"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed **the love that God has for us**. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him"* (1 John 4:15–16 emphasis added).

Jesus also assures us of His love, *"As the Father loved Me, **I also have loved you**; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:9–10 emphasis added).

God Loves Those Who Love Him

Just as we respond to love, God responds to the loving hearts of His children. The love He responds to is not merely sweet words of warm feelings, rather it is love expressed in actions.

"Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments..." (Deut. 7:9).

"The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness" (Prov. 15:9).

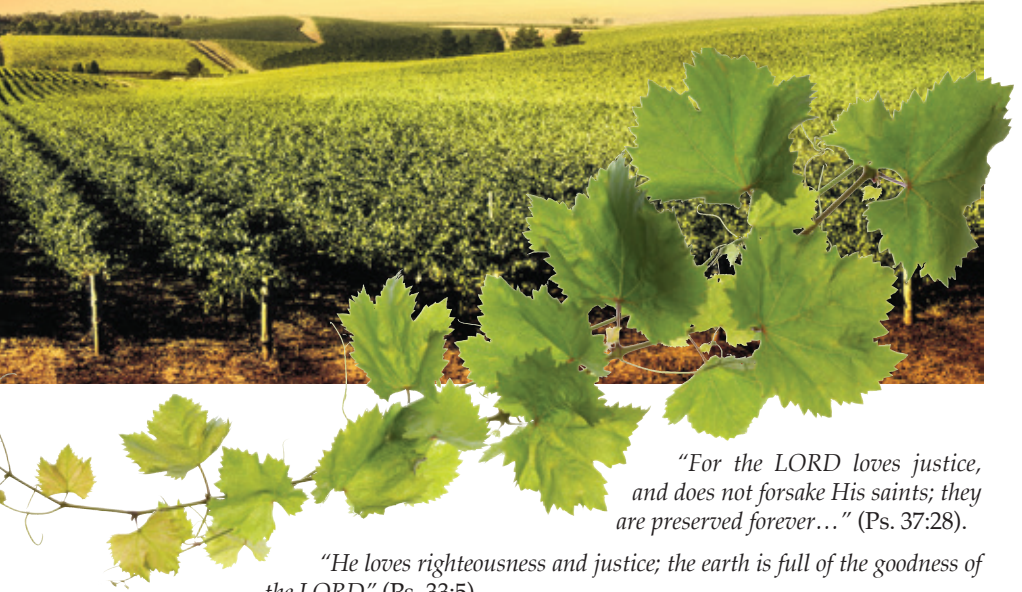
"...the LORD loves the righteous" (Ps. 146:8).

God Loves Righteousness and Justice

"For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright" (Ps. 11:7).

AS THE FATHER LOVED ME, I ALSO HAVE
LOVED YOU; ABIDE IN MY LOVE.

JOHN 15:9



*“For the LORD loves justice,
and does not forsake His saints; they
are preserved forever...” (Ps. 37:28).*

*“He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of
the LORD” (Ps. 33:5).*

I grew up in a loving Christian home. I knew that my parents loved me. They didn't stop loving me when I was naughty—they loved me regardless of my behavior! My acceptance into the family was not based on my actions. I was born into the family and as such was loved. Similarly, God loves those born into His family unconditionally. He doesn't expect us to be able to perform perfectly. I am so thankful for His grace, mercy and love.

I was taught from a young age that our family behaved in certain ways. There were rules and expected behavior. Wrong choices and actions inevitably led to unpleasant consequences.

God also has a code of conduct and He expects members of His family to embrace His way of living. Those who willingly and joyfully follow His ways experience a life of abundance, peace and spiritual health. Those who choose to live contrary to God's ways experience the consequences of their actions.

The Bible refers to living God's way as righteousness. If you were to say it the simplest way, you could say that righteousness is doing what is right. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* defines righteousness as “the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations. Righteousness is not an abstract notion but rather consists in doing what is just and right in all relationships.” The article continues saying, “Righteous action results in social stability and ultimately in peace.”

The prophet Isaiah said, *“The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever”* (Isa. 32:17).

The psalmist said, *“Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven”* (Ps. 85:10–11).

The Jewish sage Eleazar Ben Shammua (AD 150) said, *“The world rests on a single pillar, righteousness.”*

The subject of righteousness and justice is a huge one, and I know I will only be able to scratch the surface. I am praying that God will show us His heart in this study.

Why does God love righteousness? Is it because He somehow likes to make things difficult for us? Let’s go back to the statement above. Why would Shammua say that the *“world rests on a single pillar, righteousness”*?

Imagine a world where everyone lived righteously. There would be no hatred, coveting, murder, adultery, lust and greed. What if everyone were to follow God’s perfect law of love. What if everyone did everything according to God’s plan? We would live in a completely different world. People would care about each other, their community and their world, more than their own desires.

The idea that God is righteous and loves righteousness is intricately connected with the first concept in this letter—God loves people. He wants to see us live in harmony and peace. If mankind had done so, we would live in an entirely different world.

The biblical Hebrew word translated righteousness is *tzedek* (צדק). Words from the same root include *tzadik* (righteous) and *tzedakah* (charity).

We have a problem—who can truly be righteous? Human beings often aspire to right living, but often fall short of even our own expectations. How can we hope to please God? Solomon wrote, *“For there is not a just (righteous—tzadik) man on earth who does good and does not sin”* (Eccles. 7:20). The apostle Paul agreed when he said, *“...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23).

As Christians we are so glad that God in His mercy sent Jesus (Yeshua) to live a sinless life, and to shed His blood for our sins. Through faith in Him, we become the righteousness of God in Messiah Jesus (Rom. 3:22). Does that mean we stop concerning ourselves with righteousness, since God now views believers through the righteousness of sinless Jesus? Paul addressed this when he said, *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* (Rom. 6:1–2).

The *Encyclopedia Judaica* article cited earlier goes on to make this statement, *“The impossibility of achieving absolute righteousness, however, does not preclude the constant striving toward this end.”*

As believers, we not only have the gift of salvation through Jesus’s work, but we also have the gift of the Holy Spirit, who guides us to righteousness. As Christians we don’t have a free pass to sin, rather we have all the tools we need to



HE LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE; THE EARTH IS FULL
OF THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

PSALM 33:5

overcome. Every hour of every day we are faced with choices. We choose how we want to live. We choose to live righteous or not.

Let's consider a few statements from Jesus, Paul and John.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

"And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6:13).

"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34).

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Eph. 5:8-10).

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness..." (Eph. 6:13-14).

"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29).

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10).

In these passages we see that we are to practice righteousness; to choose to live righteously; and to resist sin (unrighteousness). It is not impossible but it is not easy.

Remember, *"I can do all things through Christ (Messiah) who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13).

It will require effort on our part: *"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Phil. 2:12).

The concept of justice is one of legalities. Someone is brought to justice when a wrong has occurred. Or, bringing justice to the needy is to right a wrong. Justice is necessary because of unrighteousness. If people always choose to do the right thing, there would be no need for courts, lawyers, judges or judicial punishment. There would be no poverty, because righteous men would care for those in need. There would be no sex trade, because lust would be bridled. God loves justice because He wants to right wrongs. His heart is for people.

In Jewish thought, the concept of charity, *tzedakah*, which comes from the same root as righteousness, is essential if one wants to be righteous (a *tzadik*). Caring for those in need is an essential part of biblical and Jewish thought. In 2 Corinthians 9 we find another thing that God loves. Paul is talking about giving (*tzedakah*) and says, *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor. 9:7).

God Loves Zion

The Bible says that God loves Zion. Zion is another name for Jerusalem! *"The LORD loves the gates of Zion"* (Ps. 87:2); *"Mount Zion which He loved"* (Ps. 78:68).

He loves Israel! *"The land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God*



cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year” (Deut. 11:11–12).

Let's Love What God Loves

At the start I said that I encourage believers to love what God loves. Let's recap. We should love people—believers and unbelievers. We should love the Jewish people. We should love righteousness and justice. We should love to give, especially to the needy. We should love Jerusalem and Israel.

How do we practically implement these concepts into our lives? Let's start with the easiest. Come to Israel. See for yourself the Land and city that God loves. Fall in love with the people of Israel, as you see them returning to the Land God promised to their fathers. Embrace the ideal of righteousness and justice. In every way endeavor to make right choices and to influence right action. With God's help it is possible. Share from your provision with those in need. *“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:17–18).*



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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or O.T.) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or N.T.)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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