



Hedges

Protection During the Exile

With the recent presidential election, there is a feeling among many Bible-believing conservatives that maybe God has slowed the removal of the “hedge” around America and has given us an undeserved reprieve. If that is the case is yet to be seen. After all, we thought the “hedge” had come down in 2011 with the attack on the Twin Towers. It was then that we realized that the two great oceans that separate us from rest of the world are no longer a protection we can count on. Since that time, we’ve seen the “hedge” to our south being crossed as if it were not there by those who do not want to become a part of us, but instead hope to “take back” that part of our country they believe is theirs.

Did God put a hedge around our country? If He did, and if He is in the process of taking it down, what does that mean for us, and what can we expect in the future? The Bible does talk a little about the hedges, and so in this message, let’s see what a hedge is and how God uses one in regards to His people.

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary¹ the primary definition of a hedge is:

“a fence or boundary formed by a dense row of shrubs or low trees.”

We understand this to be true because we’ve seen them many times. A person will oftentimes plant a hedge for the purpose of separating his property from that of another, especially if he wants privacy from his neighbors or does not want to see what is in his neighbor’s back yard.

Though it was much more prevalent years ago, hedges are also used to keep animals in. In fact, building a fence to keep an animal from going astray is the meaning of the Hebrew word “shamar” which we translate as “keep”. Jeff Benner² describes it this way -

“The Hebrews were a nomadic people raising livestock. It would not be uncommon for a shepherd to be out with his flock, away from the camp, over the night. In order to protect the flock, the shepherd would construct a corral of thorn bushes. The shepherd would then guard over the flock, and the corral would be a hedge of protection around them. The Hebrew word for a thorn is שָׁמִיר (shamiyr, Strong’s #8068) and derived from the verb שָׁמַר (shamar, Strong’s #8104), which literally means to guard and protect . . .”

Thus a hedge, especially one made with thorny type bushes (such as holly) can be used to protect the sheep as well as keep them corralled. By extension, the word “keep” as in “keep the commandments” means to corral and protect them . . . but that’s another study.

In the KJV version of the Old Testament, the word “hedge” is translated from two different words - *mesukah* (מְשֻׁכָּה - 4881) and *gederah* (גְּדֵרָה - 1448). Though both words have similar meanings, a *mesukah* is a thorn hedge and a *gederah* is a fence or wall.³ For the remainder of this study, I want to focus on the Bible’s use of a *mesukah*.

The Mesukah

The first place we see the word *mesukah* is in the book of Proverbs -

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hedge>

² Jeff Benner; Ancient Hebrew Research Center; http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/language_aaronic.html

³ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/hedge/>

^{NKJ} **Proverbs 15:19** The way of the lazy *man* is like a hedge (**4881 - mesukah**) of thorns, But the way of the upright is a highway

Here we see that the path of a lazy person is filled with painful obstacles while that of an upright (Heb. - “yashar”; straight) person is like a smooth highway. Obviously the later option is better and less painful.

To better understand the concept of a *thorny hedge* let’s look at the verbal root of *mesukah* which is the word *suwk* (שׁוּכַּ - 7753). To *suwk* means “to hedge or fence up”. The ancient Hebrew characters would be of woven hands - one perpendicular to the other - (the letter “kaf” - כּ - which means “palm of the hand) and something that pierces (“shin” - שׁ - which means “teeth”). So a *mesukah* is something that is intentionally woven for the purpose of piercing. Thus a hedge is like a barbed or razor-wire fence. It can be used to keep something you value in (i.e. - sheep) or for keeping something undesirable out (i.e. - wolves). It is a means of separating good from bad.

The Sukkah

At this point you may be thinking that *suwk* sounds a lot like the word *sakak* which is the root word of *sukkot*, and you would be correct. The words are clearly related. In fact, *sakak* (סָכַךְ - 5526) means “to hedge, fence about, shut in”. Thus a *sukkah*, though it is a temporary dwelling, is primarily a type of hedge - it can keep the good in, and keep the bad out. We’ll be referencing the *sukkah* a little bit later.

Hedge of Protection

With that background, let’s now go to the first place in the KJV where we see the word “hedge” and that would be the story of Job. In that story, the adversary (haSatan) had been “going to and fro” on the earth, obviously “seeking who he might devour”⁴. YHVH then asked him “have you set your heart on my servant Job? ⁵” HaSatan answered in the affirmative by stating in so many words “Yes - but you have built a hedge around him and I can’t get to him”⁶.

According to the adversary (haSatan), because God had built a hedge around Job, he (the adversary) was unable to get to Job. The text shows that God had in fact built three hedges; the first around Job’s possessions, the second around his household, and the third around Job himself. Each hedge formed a thorny wall of protection around Job. After God was challenged by haSatan and was willing to grant access to Job and his family, all He had to do was to take down the hedges - which He did one by one. When He took down the first two hedges; Job’s possessions, then his household (except for his wife) were destroyed. Finally, YHVH took down the hedge around Job himself and HaSatan attacked him up to the point of taking his life.

In the example of Job, we see that it was the three hedges that kept HaSatan at bay; but once the hedges were removed, destruction came upon him. We can therefore understand that when YHVH builds a hedge around us, He is in fact protecting us from the evil one and thus protecting us from calamity. This is exactly what He did for Israel after delivering them from Egypt. Reading from the LXX ⁷, the prophet Isaiah says -

^{LXE} **Isaiah 5:1-2** Now I will sing to *my* beloved a song of my beloved concerning my vineyard. *My* beloved had a vineyard on a high hill in a fertile place. ² And I made a hedge around it, and dug a trench, and planted a choice vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and dug a place for the wine-vat in it: and I waited *for it* to bring forth grapes, and it brought forth thorns.

⁴ 1 Peter 5:8

⁵ Job 1:8 in Young’s Literal Translation

⁶ Job 1:10

⁷ The Septuagint. A 3rd century BCE Greek translation of the Tnakh (Old Testament)

The vineyard that YHVH built is identified as the kingdom of Israel, and the men of Judah were the ones responsible for righteously judging the people.

^{LXE} **Isaiah 5:7** For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his beloved plant: I expected *it* to bring forth judgment, and it brought forth iniquity; and not righteousness, but a cry.

Obviously, Judah did not perform her calling. She (the southern tribes including Judah, Levi, and part of Benjamin) were given the responsibility of teaching and interpreting the Torah. They failed in their calling and thus the nation as a whole went astray. So what did YHVH do? He took down the hedge around the nation of Israel.

^{LXE} **Isaiah 5:5-6** And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be for a spoil; and I will pull down its walls, and it shall be *left* to be trodden down. ⁶ And I will forsake my vineyard; and it shall not be pruned, nor dug, and thorns shall come up upon it as on barren land; and I will command the clouds to rain no rain upon it.

As a result of God's people failing in their responsibility, the hedge of protection around the people was taken down and the calamity fell upon them and the land. The Israelites were driven out of the land and the land ultimately became a barren wasteland as it is today. Without a hedge around His people, the adversary is all too willing to seek out and destroy.

Though hedges are often used to keep unwanted things out, they are also used to keep valuables in. As we will see, God sometimes used a hedge to keep His people "hedged in" so that they cannot get into trouble. That was (and is) the case with the descendants of the northern tribes of Israel as we will see in the prophecy of Hosea.

Hedge of Restriction

Hosea was a prophet to the 10 northern tribes of Israel. He prophesied of their impending captivity which was due to their proclivity to worship idols. In Hosea's prophecy, he showed what God was going to do for Israel once they are taken captive and exiled from the land of Israel. God said -

^{NKJ} **Hosea 2:6-7** " Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, And wall her in, So that she cannot find her paths. ⁷ She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find *them*.

As part of their exile, God built another hedge around the rebellious house of Israel. He did this so that she would not be successful in her depravity. He cut off her ways (roads) so that even though she would chase her idols, she would never be able to catch up with them (in order to be married to them). In other words, she was never able to fully replace YHVH with idols.⁸

So the hedge kept her (Israel) in a somewhat protected place. It restricted her so that she could not fulfill her desires. And though it's not mentioned in the text, the hedge kept the adversary at bay. In addition to God's protection, being confined to the hedge also allowed YHVH to bless Israel. Hosea continues -

^{NKJ} **Hosea 2:7-8** . . . Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, For then *it was* better for me than now.' ⁸ For she did not know That I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, And multiplied her silver and gold -- *Which* they prepared for Baal.

According to Hosea's prophecy, God continued to provide for Israel, giving her food, riches, and clothing⁹, but for the most part, she never knew where it came from. It is somewhat like the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, living in booths. In fact, that just might be the connection between the hedge

⁸ 1 Kings 17:32-33; 41

⁹ Acts 14:17

and the sukkah. God provided Israel's every need during the wilderness journey. He put her in a sukkah, a hedge, a thorny sheepfold, a temporary covering to protect her those 40 years; and He's doing it for exiled Israel today.

America is Hedged In

I believe that this nation is the people spoken of in Hosea's prophecy. We are that rebellious house. We are the nation that has had a hedge about it for the past 250 years, and we have been the most blessed people on the face of the earth in spite of the fact that during that time we've given lip service to God while worshipping Him as if He were an idol.

But there comes a time when God has had enough and will remove the blessings from Israel. He will in fact, take down the hedge. Hosea continues the prophecy saying -

^{NKJ} **Hosea 2:9-13** " Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time And My new wine in its season, And will take back My wool and My linen, *Given* to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, And no one shall deliver her from My hand. ¹¹ I will also cause all her mirth to cease, Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths -- All her appointed feasts. ¹² "And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, Of which she has said, 'These *are* my wages that my lovers have given me.' So I will make them a forest, And the beasts of the field shall eat them. ¹³ I will punish her For the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; But Me she forgot," says the LORD.

I believe we are approaching that part of the prophecy. In fact, we might already be there. But there is a remedy, and it is given to us in the psalms -

^{NKJ} **Psalms 80:12-19** Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit*? ¹³ The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it. ¹⁴ Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine ¹⁵ And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself. . . ¹⁷ Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself. ¹⁸ Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. ¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

Once we realize that the hedge has been taken down and calamity has come upon us, if we then turn to the God of Israel and once again call on His name, He will revive us, and according to Hosea, He will again take us to the wilderness and speak to our heart. ¹⁰

^{NKJ} **Hosea 2:14** " Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her.

Knitting Together

If indeed we are the God's vineyard, the people spoken of by Hosea, there is another point we need to be aware of in regards to hedges.

You will recall that the Hebrew root word for hedge is *suwk* and that the pictographic meaning is to weave together things that pierce, i.e. - thorns. It just so happens that the phrase "knit together" comes from that same root word as well. We find it in this passage in Job -

^{NKJ} **Job 10:11** Clothe me with skin and flesh, And knit me together (**7753 - suwk**) with bones and sinews?

¹⁰ In this passage, the Hebrew word translated "comfort" is "lev" (Strong's 3820) which means "heart".

The concept of knitting together is derived from the picture of a person using a sharp object to “weave” thread through the various body parts in order to hold them together. This may be what Paul was saying to the Colossians.

^{NKJ} **Colossians 2:18-19** Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.

The point is that we, as exiles living in a sukkah, should be striving to keep the body “knit together” while we are on our journey.

Conclusion

We have seen that in a Biblical context, a hedge is used to separate the good from bad. God can build a hedge around someone in order to keep the adversary from attacking that person (as in the case of Job), or He can hedge a person in to keep him from running after evil (as in the case of Israel).

Did God build a hedge around America? Does God still have a hedge around us? I believe the answer to both questions is “Yes”. In fact - just as it was with Job - there may be many hedges, and it appears that God is tearing them down one by one as our nation falls deeper into depravity and lawlessness.

Now is the time for our people to return to God and become the people God intended for us to be.

Shalom Alecheim