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Multiply and Fill the Earth

Genesis 1:28

And God **blessed** them. And God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**”

Genesis 1:28 can be a source of debate. It clearly states that man is to be fruitful and multiply, but linguistically, is it a command?

Some would argue that it was a command from YHWH, even at an individual level. Yet, others would argue that it was simply a blessing. So which is it, a command or a blessing?

If it is a command then what about all those couples who can never have children?

So today we are going to cover this topic and look specifically as what is written in TANAKH. Our goal will be to attempt to understand the plain meaning.

Genesis 1:27-28.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. **And God blessed them.** And God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**”

In this verse, we see that YHWH first blessed the man and woman. The very thing YHWH did for us was to bless us.

Is that blessing related to being fruitful and multiplying? Is the “be fruitful and multiply” a blessing instead of an instruction?

The Hebrew words we are focused on are “*parah*” and “*rabbah*.” Both *parah* and *rabbah* are verbs.

Genesis 1:20-22

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above

the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And **God blessed them** (*vay’barekh otam*), saying, “**Be fruitful and multiply** (*paru ur’bu*) and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

The context of this blessing is only water creatures and birds. They also were told to be fruitful and multiply in the context of this blessing. In this way, it is precisely what is also said to man.

Can birds and fish distinguish between a blessing or a command? Not too likely.

However, birds and fish certainly do procreate and increase upon the earth.

A key difference between them and us is that we are able to discern between blessing and command.

Genesis 8:17

Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and **be fruitful and multiply on the earth.**

YHWH instructs Noah after the flood to free the animals from the ark so that they may be fruitful and multiply on the earth.

Noah cannot cause the animals to be fruitful and multiply, yet it is said directly to Noah.

Genesis 9:1-7

And **God blessed Noah and his sons** and said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.** The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.
And you, **be fruitful and multiply**, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

We also see that Noah and his sons were blessed, which was once again followed by being fruitful and multiplying.

Genesis 17:20

As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, **I have blessed him** and will **make him fruitful and multiply him greatly.** He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.

Once again, the blessing is related to being fruitful and multiplying.

Genesis 28:3

God Almighty **bless you** and **make you fruitful and multiply you**, that you may become a company of peoples.

Once again, the blessing is related to being fruitful and multiplying.

Genesis 35:9-13

God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, **and blessed him**. And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: **be fruitful and multiply**. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.

Once again, the blessing is related to being fruitful and multiplying.

Genesis 48:3-7

And Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and **blessed me**, and said to me, ‘**Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you**, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.’ And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).”

Yet, another issue presents itself here. If YHWH commanded all peoples in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply then why does he Himself make the children of Israel fertile and multiply as a blessing to them? Either the Genesis 1 account was also a blessing or it is a contradiction.

Leviticus 26:3-9

“**If you walk** in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **then I** will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. **I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you.**”

In the context of being fruitful and multiplying, we are presented with an if/then scenario. If Israel was to walk in YHWH’s commandments, then YHWH will also confirm His covenant with Israel, one of those being YHWH making them be fruitful and multiply.

Therefore it cannot be a command to all humankind in Genesis 1 and yet conditional to Israel. In

addition, it is YHWH stating that it is His promise to make us be fruitful and multiply, meaning it is a blessing.

When all is considered, we can see that when YHWH blesses and says, be fruitful and multiply, it is not a command. Being fruitful and multiplying is a blessing, and something YHWH promises for His people that follow in His ways.

Bringing this into the New Testament, or Brit Hadasha, we see that Paul says it is ok to not be married, as not even Paul was married.

1 Corinthians 7:8

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.

Now Paul is not encouraging not getting married, he is simply saying it is both good to be married or unmarried, depending on one's situation.

If it was a command to the individual to be fruitful and multiply, then Paul would have certainly been violating the Torah by offering his opinion on it being acceptable to remain single.

In examination of both the TANAKH and the Brit Hadasha, we find that being fruitful and multiplying is a blessing YHWH afforded his people for being faithful in His ways, and it is something that He does for us.

We hope that this teaching has blessed you, and remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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