

Shalom Ori,

It seems like it has been forever since I wrote to you and for that I am sorry. The last time we talked you were about to go do your finals and so was I. I hope all of yours went as well as mine did. (Of course, when you are giving the test it is a lot easier than when you are taking them!) I read your last letter but I seem to have misplaced it so I will respond from memory and then go from there. I hope you enjoyed the book on the feast and festivals of the LORD, it is one of my favorites. It is an easy read but it gives a great start to understanding how fun and meaningful the Torah can be.

You nailed the definition of sin and the item that YHVH hates yet allows...divorce! You get an A+! This may seem simplistic but it is a truth that most of Christendom does not grasp even though it is very clear in the scriptures.

“what is wrong with limiting obedience to the repeated commandments in the NT...” Did your parents restate every rule of the house when you left it each day? Do you re-read the drivers education book each time you drive? Of course not! On a spiritual level does God/YHVH change? **Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

NKJV Since He is the same forever how could He be discarding the standards that He said were forever in favor of “new” standards, “repeated” in the NT? If Yeshua/Jesus is the same as YHVH/God then the entire Torah is His, not just repeated sections. Last week I was at camp in the “land of the Baptist” and one of the sponsors talked about Shabbat and the food rules being bondage. That was a terrible disconnect because Yeshua said that His burden is light and easy. He said that the Pharisees’ burden was heavy and they wouldn’t lift even one finger to lighten the load. **Matt 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” NKJV**

Matt 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. NKJV

The disconnect is that if Yeshua is YHVH/God from the OT then the Torah is His burden which He calls light. The Scribes and Pharisees’ also have a burden that He calls heavy, it can’t be Torah. It is what we’ve talked about before, the Oral Torah called the, “Tradition of the Elders” in the NT. **(Matt 15:2, Mark 7:3, Mark 7:5)** Unfortunately most of our Christian brethren don’t realize that there is a difference between the two and therefore see the Torah as a bad thing regardless of how the Torah is referenced in the NT. In the book of Romans Paul says this about the Torah; **Rom 7:6 What shall we say then? Is the Torah sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the Torah. For I would not have known covetousness unless the Torah had said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the Torah sin was dead. 9 I was alive once without the Torah, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. 12 Therefore the Torah is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. NKJV**

This passage is the quintessential passage on the purpose of the Torah. It is and was created to show us what righteous and unrighteous behavior looks like. If you don’t know how you are supposed to act you can’t be held accountable for bad behavior. You also can’t be sure of what is good behavior. In your own life I would bet that you know of people who have been “saved” over and over again. You may have even been the one doubting your own salvation. I know that there were times when I wasn’t sure. But with Torah as a clear guide to how to live out the born again life, the doubts just melt away, everything is well defined and not left to the discretion of what the Pastor or denomination says is right and wrong.

“...what is the issue with the Law of Christ concept?...” I have covered this idea some in the previous paragraphs and that is that the Bible only has one section called the Law/Torah and it is Gen-Deut. There is no other section called the Law/Torah of Christ/Messiah. The Torah is the Law of Christ and it is an easy yoke, not a heavy burden.

Before I leave this topic I should say that the oral torah is not the enemy of the believers in Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua agreed with much of what is in the Oral tradition and followed it when it did not conflict with His written Torah. For example Yeshua blessed the food before a meal. That practice is found in the Oral Torah. The written Torah says to bless the meal after you eat. **Deut 8:10 When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. NKJV** The problem we have with the Oral Torah is that in many/most Jewish groups it is put on a level with the written Torah and even is placed a little higher. So... we like the Oral Torah, but it is subject to the written Torah not the other way around. The following is a quote from an Orthodox publication on the book of Ruth: **“Just as a Jew can use his God-given wisdom and sanctity to draw new knowledge from the Oral Torah, so he can even add to the Written Torah by means of his dedication and good deeds.”**¹ As a Messianic I firmly reject this position. For us the Torah, and by extension, the rest of the Bible can't be added too or taken away from.

Now to close out this posting I want to cover some Jewish cultural ground. Do you know what a Parashah is? We have a tradition of reading and studying through the Torah on a regular cycle. It is not the only bible study that we do but it is done constantly. That may seem boring at first, but believe me the things you will discover are awesome. It was ten years through the cycle before I really felt like I got an okay handle on the Torah. There are three cycles: one does the Torah in 7 years, one in 3, and one covers the Torah in 1 year. In the 3 year cycle you average a little over one chapter a week. The 7 year I am not very familiar with, and the one year has about 4 chapters a week. Most people today, including us, are on the 1 year cycle. Interestingly enough in Yeshua's day most of the Jewish world was on the 3 year cycle. But there is more!

During the period from the book of Malachi to Mathew was 400 years. That is the period of Alexander the Great's conquest. One of the Greek rulers over Israel in that time decided to unify his kingdom by forcing everyone to worship the same god. The Jews, (our people), said no which led to the Maccabean revolt, and that led to Hanukah. During this time it was against the law to study Torah but you could study the prophets so...our ancestors would read a section of the prophets that reminded them of that week's parashah/Torah portion and then discuss the Torah! If the Greeks, or turncoat Jews, came in they would hear and see the Prophets and the people gambling with dreidels, (as camouflage), and God's Torah was saved. The section of the Torah read each week is the Torah portion, called a Parashah. The section of the prophets that we still read today is called Haftorah meaning after the Torah.

Each parashah is divided into 7 sections and seven people go up to the front and read each section. Because you go up, each section is called an *“aliyah”*, meaning to rise up. The first aliyah is given to a *Cohen* when possible, and the second is given to a Levite if one is present. Cohen is the Hebrew word for priest and they are direct descendants of Aaron, Moses brother. You should know that no one acts as a priest today since there is no Temple, but they are ready to resume their role when Messiah comes.

I will try to get a copy of the “Complete Jewish Bible” sent to you as soon as I can. It has all the Parashot, (plural of parashah), and many other very helpful resources in it so that you can join us in spirit as we study each week. It has been so long since I wrote to you that once you have the parashot I hope that it will help you feel like you belong even when we are out of communication for long periods of time.

Please write to me of any other questions you have and I will do my best to answer them. Shalom achi, Gary Gardner

¹ “The Interlinear Book of Ruth” Schottenstein Ed. Brooklyn NY 2010 page xx.