

Jewish Identity and the Torah

Part 2 by Rabbi Baruch

Jewish Identity and the Torah – Part 2

Part one finished with the idea that the Torah is not in force today. Therefore it is incorrect to speak about Torah observance in the sense that an individual can keep Torah law. I am not speaking about the impossibility of Torah observance in the same way that Joshua did as I spoke of in my first article; i.e. humanly impossible because of one's sinful nature; but rather the impossibility today because of the fact there is no Temple. The destruction of the Temple brought a monumental change to Judaism. In the same way that in Psalm 137 the statement appears, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" one needs to recognize that it is impossible to keep the Torah without a Temple in Jerusalem.

Both Biblical and Rabbinical perspectives understand the Torah as a unit. This means that Torah is only observed when **all** of its commandments are potentially possible to be fulfilled. James also alludes to the Torah being a unit when he says,

"For whoever keeps the entire Torah, but stumbles in one (commandment), he is guilty of all." James 2:10

Rabbinical Jewish Law says in regard to a Torah scroll, that it is only Kosher when all of its letters are correct. This means that if one letter is missing, or one letter written in a wrong place, then the entire Torah scroll is not valid.

Hence today because there is not a Temple in Jerusalem, the

Torah cannot be observed in its totality and if not in totality then it becomes not in force. This should not be a surprise because the prophet Hosea wrote about the period of time when the Torah would not be in force, saying,

“For many days the Children of Israel will dwell without a king, without a government official, without a sacrifice, without a pillar, without an ephod, and without Teraphim. Afterwards the Children of Israel will return and seek the L-rd their G-d and David their King, and they will fear the L-rd and His goodness in the last days.” Hosea 3:4-5

These two verses are critical in understanding the time in which we are living. Hosea informs the reader that the Children of Israel will go through a long period without a king or a government. There will be no sacrifices offered nor will there be any remnants of the Temple, nor will there be any active Priesthood. However in the last days the Children of Israel will return to the land of Israel and seek the Lord. How? They will seek G-d by means of the Messiah. Notice that the text actually says David. This is of course a reference to the Son of David, i.e. Messiah. Why is this text so important? It is important because it reveals that since the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. that the Torah could not be observed. This is the basis for the shift away from the Priest and Levites and the leaders of Israel to the Rabbis. Now it is rabbinical law which is binding according to Judaism and not the Torah. Therefore, when one speaks about Torah observance today, the real allusion is to rabbinical law and not the Biblical Torah. It is amazing to me that people find it hard to believe that the Rabbis teach that the Torah is not in force. Here is a classic example to illustrate this point.

According to the Torah if a Jewish individual knowingly and willfully transgresses the Sabbath day the punishment is

death. However if a secular Jew today chooses not to follow rabbinical law in regard to the Sabbath law, a rabbinical court cannot inflict any punishment on this individual whatsoever. It is most clear that Torah law and rabbinical law differ in many points.

A friend of mine asked me to read a couple articles in regard to Jewish and Gentile obligations to the Torah. The articles grapple with the question of if there is a difference between the obligations of a Jew to that of a Gentile in regard to the Torah. The fallacy of these articles is that they assume one can keep / observe the Torah today. As we learned from the prophet Hosea, G-d has providentially placed us in a time period where neither a Jew nor a Gentile can keep / observe the Torah. Some will read this and immediately think about the words of Yeshua where He says,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill.” Mt. 5:17

Is not this conclusive proof that Yeshua is not against the Torah? Absolutely, but most do not understand what He was intending in this verse. Yeshua was without sin, and in regard to the Torah commandments, every commandment that was pertinent to Him (some of the commandments were addressed to women, or kings, or priests, therefore not relevant to Him) He preformed perfectly. Hence Yeshua was the only One Who was Torah observant. When He laid down His life on the cross the Bible says that He Who knew no sin, became sin for us. That is, our sins were placed upon Him and His righteousness (Torah obedience) was placed upon us (believers in the Gospel). Hence every believer is declared righteous before G-d because of the sufficiency of Messiah's work.

This declarative statement that the believer is righteous is known as a salvation experience. Believers are told to work out their salvation. This statement is speaking to the issue of sanctification. Sanctification is related to one's behavior. This is really the issue at the heart of this article (Part 1 & 2). In other words, should our behavior include observing the Torah and is there a different answer to this question for a Jew compared to a Gentile?

The first part of this question has already been answered—**no one today can keep / observe the Torah**. However one needs to be careful. Just because one cannot keep the Torah does not mean that it has been done away with. We read in the Scripture that until heaven and earth pass away not one part of the Torah will be done away with (See Mt. 5:18). The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says that the Torah is getting ready to vanish (see Hebrews 8:13) but it is clear that the Torah will not vanish away until the New Jerusalem is established. Please note that the New Jerusalem will not be established until after the Millennial Kingdom. It is also most significant that in the New Jerusalem **there will not be a Temple** (See Rev. 21:22). Proving the point where there is no Temple the Torah is not in force.

Even though this is the case today, the Torah does teach me about sin and righteousness; that is, that through the Torah commandments and all of Scripture for that matter, one can learn how G-d wants one to behave. Is this not Torah obedience? Not exactly, for this is why Paul was inspired to write to believers,

“But now we who are delivered from the Torah, being dead therein where were held; since now we serve in the newness of the Spirit (The Holy Spirit) and not in the oldness of the letter.” Roman 7:6

I ended the first part of this article with this verse because it accurately and succinctly states the position of a believer in regard to the Torah. One is not under any obligation to a law or a commandment. This is what Paul was saying when he wrote,

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable. All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify.” I Corinthians 10:23

Frequently people will respond and say does that mean I can do whatever I want? Does not such a view give people a license to sin? Notice that Paul says in this verse, “All things are lawful for me...” One needs to understand the unique position of a believer. The Bible is most clear that the punishment of sin, i.e. violation of a Torah commandment is death. Hence because every person is sinful we all deserve death. The death that Messiah died he died for humanity. This is why Paul says in Romans chapter 6 that when Messiah died, so also the believer died. Hence through Messiah’s death, the believer has already received the punishment of the Torah and no longer bound to the Torah (for death frees an individual from the Torah). This truth is demonstrated in the fact that Jewish law forbids one to wear tzitzit (the fringes at the end of a four corner garment that relates to the commandments of the Torah – see Numbers 15:37-41) in a cemetery.

Even though the believer is free from the punishment of the Torah, one should not conclude that this will lead to ungodly behavior. The one who accepted Messiah did so because he wanted to be free from not only the punishment of sin but also from sin itself. Paul makes it clear in this chapter of Romans that the believer wants to now live his life unto the L-rd and serve Him. Paul expressly says the believer will want to use his body for the purpose of

righteousness. (See Romans 6:1-18) Once again the true believer will want to live in a manner that fulfills the righteousness of the Torah, not according to the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of the Spirit. What does this mean? Yeshua reveals this in the Sermon on the Mount when He spoke concerning the true application of the Torah. Yeshua selected two examples to illustrate this point; murder and adultery. His disciples would understand that not only are murder and adultery wrong, but so also is having hate or lust in one's heart. The goal of the Torah was for man to love the L-rd with all of his heart, soul and might and his neighbor as himself. This is exactly what the believer is led to do by faith in Messiah, and what he is empowered to do by the Holy Spirit.

Micah the prophet stated this same goal in a different way in this well known verse,

“Declared to you o man what is good and what the L-rd seeks from you; that you do (execute) justice and love mercy and humbly walk with your G-d.” Micah 6:8

For the believer, there is no longer a divine punishment for violation of a Torah commandment per se, but when a person does not behave in accordance with the aforementioned goal of the Torah, then one is guilty of sin. A believer then should study all the commandments and the rest of Scripture and utilize the wisdom and admonitions contained therein having been endowed with the Holy Spirit to behave in a manner that fulfills the righteousness of the Torah. This is true not only for the Jew, but also for the Gentile.

Before I conclude the second part of this study I want to deal with an issue that is related in practice to what we have been discussing. This issue is the concern of some

within in the Messianic community that there will be a loss of Jewish Identity if Gentiles adopt a lifestyle based on Jewish tradition.

I find this concern is baseless. Those Messianic leaders who describe Gentiles practicing Jewish traditions or even adopting a rabbinical observant lifestyle as a type of theological or spiritual holocaust is much to do about nothing. First I think the term holocaust should **only** be used in regard for the attempted extermination of the Jewish race during the World War II era that led to the tragic death of over six million Jewish individuals. Second, even though assimilation is a problem, one must define assimilation properly. It is not when a Jewish individual adopts a lifestyle devoid of rabbinical cultural norms, but when a Jewish person fails to embrace the righteousness that is contained in a personal relationship with Messiah Yeshua and embraces a lifestyle that is based in the principles of the world. To me it is just as problematic when a Gentile also rejects Yeshua and lives according to the ways of the world.

Related to this issue is the question, should a Jewish believer live differently than a Gentile believer? This will be the subject of the third and final part of our study.

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