

Introduction

Part 8

Why Do We Read and Study Torah?

In these introductory sections, we have discussed of studying the Torah as helping us to understand (i) The Inerrancy of Scripture, (ii) it is possible to Believe a Lie without Torah, (iii) The problem of Not Believing Moses, (iv) The Spiritual Significance of Anti-Semitism, (v) what it means Christ is the End of the Law? (vi) what is a Spiritual Stumbling Block, and (vii) The Philosophy of Thought and its Effect on Doctrine in relation to Paul's teaching technique. In each of introductory sections, we have learned how the Torah is a powerful testimony of God such that the Lord has revealed to us the Gospel message of faith, God's deliverance, and His dwelling in our midst. These things reveal to us how our approach to the Scriptures is to consist of a full, contextual understanding of God's Word. When we connect the Tanakh (OT) with the Apostolic Writings (NT), we experience the entirety of the promises of God and our inheritance as God intended! This is why the Weekly Torah Reading are so powerful helping us to realize what God's abundant plans are for His children.

We read according to the book of Joshua the following:

Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in

it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Joshua states that the Word of God should never depart from us because it is important for making us prosperous and successful. The weekly Torah reading helps us in worshiping the God of Israel. The reason I say this is because worship to the Lord begins in our hearts and then in our minds. As God's people, we are called to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, and strength. (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4-5*, וְאָהַבְתָּ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30*) When asked about the greatest command, Yeshua responded with the Shema which we find in *Luke 10:27* and *Mark 12:30*. This reveals to us where we are to start. We begin by loving God with all of our being, seeking Him in all His ways, and asking Him to come into our lives so what we can be with Him! Worshiping, seeking, and dwelling with God starts with our knowing Him through His word! This again is why it is so important for us to study the Scriptures. The Hebrew word for disciple or student is derived from the root word למד meaning to learn or to study. One aspect of having God dwell in our hearts by His Spirit is having the desire to draw near to Him in His Word and having a desire to apply His Words to our lives. This means that our spiritual learning comes from the holy Scriptures, learning God's ways, studying and learning about His Messiah Yeshua, and remembering all that God has promised trusting in Him by faith! When we begin to understand who God is and all that He has done through the narrative of the Scriptures, our hearts will grow in love for Him.

The weekly Torah readings also helps us to connect to our Jewish roots. The weekly reading cycle helps us to understand the spiritual journey of Israel, and helps us to understand the rich tradition of teachings that the children of Israel have grown up in throughout the generations. We also learn what it means to enter into a covenantal relationship with God and the blessings that result. The Torah speaks of the covenantal promises God made to Abraham, and how these were passed down to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to the sons, tribes, and the entire nation. These things transpired over a period of time that

spans 400 years including slavery in Egypt, 40 years of wandering in the desert wilderness, a place of reliance entirely upon the Lord! Then we read of the seven years of conquest in the Promised Land as the people began to see the promises being fulfilled to Abraham. What these things reveal to us is how the promises of God come with a spiritual process of growth. The growth process prepares us to receive the promises through purification, sanctification, and strengthening. The Torah portion reading cycle symbolically represents this spiritual journey through the generations, and this growth and maturing and revelation of God, all of which are needed for us to receive the fullness of God's promises to us. In Jewish fashion, participating in the weekly reading enables us to follow along in Israel's journey of growth, experience, and transformation, as we too learn and grow along with them.

Prophetically speaking, God said by the prophet *Hosea 2:23* *Those who are not my people I will call my people. Then they will say, 'You are our God!'*" (JPS) and Paul said in *Romans 9:25*, this transformation process or journey was not meant to be limited to the children of Israel alone. Paul wrote this in a particular way to the Greeks saying that non-Jews are grafted in, they are adopted into the family of God as becoming the children of Abraham by faith. (see *Ephesians 2:12-13* and *Galatians 3:7-8*). As such, all peoples may become partakers in the promises of God by faith as following in the footsteps of the Messiah, and being transformed in a powerful way by the Spirit of the Living God!

The value of studying the weekly Torah reading brings unity within God's people as we read according to the Torah that the people of Israel were delivered from bondage via a mixed multitude. Studying these things ignites the transformation process as we invite the God of Israel into our hearts, seek the God of Israel in His Messiah Yeshua, and ask for the renewing of our minds by the power of His Spirit and His Holy Word! This truth is found in the transformation, and unification of God's people, no matter what background one may come from, an enduring transformation and unification and love. These things are revealed to us in the giving of the Torah itself. We read the following according to *Shemot / Exodus 19:2*, וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרְפַיִם, וַיִּבְאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר נִיחֹן-שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְגֹד הַקָּהָר: 19:2 *Having*

journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, (Sefaria) According to the Torah, after being delivered by God and given His Torah at Sinai, the people were said to be at one with the Lord. Rashi describes this in the following way:

Rashi on Shemot / Exodus 19:2, Part 1

ויסעו מרפידים. מה ת"ל לחזור ולפרש מהיכן נסעו,
והלא כבר כתב שפרפידים היו חונים, בידוע שממשם
נסעו? אלא להקיש נסיעתן מרפידים לביאתן למדבר
סיני, מה ביאתן למדבר סיני בתשובה, אף נסיעתן מרפי-
דים בתשובה (מכילתא):

AND THEY JOURNEYED FROM REPHIDIM — What does Scripture teach us by again expressly stating from where they set forth on the journey, for is it not already written (Exodus 17:1) that they had encamped at Rephidim and it is therefore evident that they set forth from there?! But Scripture repeats it in order to make a comparison with the character of their journey from Rephidim to that of their arrival in the wilderness of Sinai! How was it in the case of their arrival in the wilderness of Sinai? They were in a state of penitence (as shown by the unanimity with which they encamped before the mountain: cf. Rashi on the end of this verse)! Thus, too, their setting forth from Rephidim was in a state of repentance for the sin they had committed there (see Exodus 17:2) (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 19:2:1).

Rashi states that “*They were in a state of penitence (as shown by the unanimity with which they encamped before the mountain: cf. Rashi on the end of this verse)!*” The redemption of God delivering the people from slavery led to their transformation and repentance before the mountain of the Lord. This was short lived however, as some of the people desired the things of the flesh as opposed to the spirit.

This transformation came about by the presence of God and revelation of His Word. These two things are inseparable and are connected to this unity that God puts within His people. The reading of the weekly Torah portion facilitates this unity of Israel and of God's people, not just for the Jew but also for the non-Jew! According to the Scriptures, the Lord God gave both His Torah and His Spirit on the same day of Shavuot (*Shemot / Exodus 19:2 and Acts 2:1-2*).

In addition to these things, studying the weekly Torah portion also helps us to understand who Yeshua is as the Messiah of God in greater depth. It is traditionally believed that the weekly reading was instituted by Ezra according to *Nehemiah 8*. One of the reasons why studying Torah is so important is because Yeshua taught Torah according to the Apostolic writings. In order to grasp the Messiah's identity, we have to understand how the Torah was taught according to Yeshua which is so powerfully reflected in his ministry. The Messiah's public ministry began, as described in the Gospel of *Luke 4:14-21*, with His being called up to a public Torah reading. Carefully study the Apostolic Writings reveals these things and begs the question "*If the Torah reading was central to the worship of Yeshua and His first-century followers, should it not be central to our worship as well?*" Yeshua said in *Matthew 13:52* He said to them, "*So then, every Torah-teacher who has been made into a talmid for the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of a home who brings out of his storage room both new things and old.*" (CJB) This reveals to us how the Lord God Almighty reveals to us many things through His Words in both the Tanakh and the NT. The Torah states that we are God's treasured possession. (*Shemot / Exodus 19:5*) By studying the weekly Torah portions, we are able to engage in the study of the Torah to help unite the teachings of the Messiah with the teachings of Moshe. This connects the roots of our faith, increases our biblical literacy, and helps us to follow and walk in the footsteps of the Messiah through the transformation and renewing of our minds!

The weekly Torah reading was and is an ancient practice that was kept by both Yeshua and His disciples. Here are two examples from the Scriptures:

Luke 4:14-21

4:14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. 4:15 And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. 4:16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 4:17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 4:18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, 4:19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.' 4:20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 4:21 And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (NASB)

Acts 13:13-34

13:13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. 13:14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 13:15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.' 13:16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 13:17 'The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 13:18 'For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the

wilderness. 13:19 'When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 13:20 'After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 13:21 'Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 13:22 'After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.' 13:23 'From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 13:24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 13:25 'And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 13:26 'Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 13:27 'For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him 13:28 'And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 13:29 'When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 13:30 'But God raised Him from the dead; 13:31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 13:32 'And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 13:33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My

Son; today have begotten You.’ 13:34 ‘As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ (NASB)

Notice how Paul opens with the stories from the Torah because he is expounding upon the Torah portion for that week leading to his discussion on Yeshua as the Messiah of God. The NT confirms that the reading of the Torah was a regular part of worship in the first century. Prior to the writing of the NT books, those who were faithful were regularly reading from the Torah and the Prophets publicly in the synagogues. Remember in those days they did not have the printing press and so the Scriptures were meticulously copied, and these copies were kept in the synagogue for reading. Public reading was the norm for the study of the Scriptures. Yeshua himself participated in this custom as we see his telling his followers that “*he (Moshe) wrote about me*” (*John 5:46*). This point is reinforced in *John 1:45*, *John 5:39*, *Luke 24:44*, *Acts 26:22*, etc. and many more references in the NT text. In *Luke 4* we read how it says that it was his custom to enter the synagogue and the Shabbat and stand up and read. The book of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him, and he turned to *Isaiah 61*. It is generally believed that the weekly Torah portion included enough verses to read the entire Torah in one year, and reading through the Torah year after year. Carefully examining *Nehemiah 8* we see how Ezra the priest coordinated the reading of the Torah to the returning exiles beginning in the seventh Biblical month. *Nehemiah 13* indicates that practice continued. While some critical of this practice say it originated in Babylon, this is not the case. Systematic reading of Torah is an outcome of the return to Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The cycle of Torah reading begins following Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles). Sukkot is called “*the turn of the year*” (*Shemot / Exodus 34:22*) and is traditionally the time the annual reading of the Torah concludes at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. What follows is the day of Simchat Torah which means the “*Rejoicing in the Torah*,” where the scroll is rolled back to the beginning and a new cycle begins at *Bereshit / Genesis 1:1*. Remember, the reading the Torah is a command. We are told to do so in order to

remember what God has done, who He is, and what He has promised so we can remain faithful to Him! The weekly Torah portions is just one way to fulfill that command. It divides the five books of the Torah into 54 sections that can be read over a 12-month period. Sometimes sections are combined because of a shorter or longer year (i.e. leap year) or the timing of Biblical feasts.

The greatest reason for studying the Torah is to walk in the footsteps of our savior! The Apostle John explains this in His epistle saying,

1 John 2:4-11

2:4 The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 2:7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 2:8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. 2:9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 2:10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 2:11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (NASB)

To walk in His ways is to love the study of God's Word, and to apply what the Scriptures say to our lives! Let's ask the Lord to help us to do these things, for the glory of His Name!