

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 28/09/2013

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Gen 3	Josh 8-9	Ps 4-6	Mat 5
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Two Trees (Genesis 3)

Genesis 3 may be one of the most important passages in all of Scripture. Its importance for understanding our nature, our need and our condition cannot be underestimated.

The chapter begins with the appearance of the serpent, whom Revelation 12:9 identifies as Satan. Satan's interaction with Eve provides a very instructive lesson in how he entices us to sin. First, notice his question: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (verse 1, NIV) This is emphatically not what God had said. God had said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17, NIV). God had placed only one restriction upon Adam and Eve. Nothing else was withheld from them. Satan's question was designed to magnify the restriction beyond its true proportion, to distort Eve's perception of right limits, and thereby to instill a sense of being personally wronged.

She replied that only one tree was forbidden. But with doubt planted, her perception altered, her emotions stirred and an erroneous premise in mind, Satan then offered a very different explanation of the situation: "The serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (3:4-5). Satan's words were a mixture of lie and deception. The assertion that Eve would not die was an outright lie. His statement that Eve would know good and evil was a deception, for the true nature of "knowing" good and evil was not disclosed to Eve. Satan's appealing assertion would have its effect upon Eve's unenlightened mind.

As affirmed in verse 22, Adam and Eve did indeed come to be like God in the sense of "knowing" good and evil. But just what does this mean? To answer, we might ask, in what way does God "know" good and evil? One very important way is that He determines it—that is, He decides what constitutes good and evil. And that is what Adam and Eve now did—they determined for themselves good and evil. In verse 6, Eve "saw that the [forbidden] tree was good for food." That wasn't true according to God's standard. But according to her own new standard, it was. In reality, she made that determination in her mind—albeit with Satan's influence. And mankind has followed suit ever since. For "there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). This is the bitter result of relying on ourselves to determine good and evil—right and wrong—rather than trusting in what God reveals on the matter.

It should also be pointed out here that while Eve fell prey to Satan's deception, there was greater culpability on the part of Adam, who may have been right there "with" Eve during the talk with Satan (compare Genesis 3:6). As the apostle Paul later explained, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam freely chose to join his wife in transgression—perhaps to avoid the pain of separation from her that would have ensued. In any case, Paul tells us that it was "through one man [that] sin entered the world, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12)—that man being Adam. The episode with the two trees helps to explain human civilization ever since. For all of us, these two trees remain a figurative representation of the choice we have—either to embrace what God has to say about right and wrong and be blessed with life or to decide for ourselves and be cursed with suffering and death (compare Deuteronomy 30:19). Man, in general, has ever since Adam and Eve been cut off from the tree of life. Indeed, man has been cut off from right knowledge of God—so that to come to Him for life and spiritual direction requires that He call us out of this evil world (compare John 6:44). For this reason, even many who believe they are seeking God's definition of right and wrong are going along with what others have told them rather than what God's Word actually says. Indeed, in a sense the Scriptures themselves, the "words of eternal life" (John 6:63, 68), may be equated with the tree of life. But cut off from God, mankind is not truly able to understand the words unless God empowers them to do so. Sadly, man continues to choose from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This has had some measure of positive results—as man has embraced some truly good things as good (as experimentation and reason will often demonstrate the need and since man has retained elements of God's truth though sometimes corrupted). This explains why we find kindness and other right virtues among false religion—or even among people with no religion. But because mankind rejects other good and vital things as wrong or unnecessary and, at the same time, embraces so many bad and harmful things as good and acceptable, the overall effect of mankind's ongoing choice is all the pain and heartache we see in the world. Thankfully, Jesus Christ is returning soon to this earth to make the knowledge of God available to all nations (compare Isaiah 11:9).

Destruction of Ai (Joshua 8)

God commands Joshua to stretch out his spear toward the city of Ai (verse 18). Not only was this a signal to begin the attack (verse 19), but it was also a symbol of God's presence and help to His people in the battle (compare verses 1, 18)—displayed in the fact that Joshua did not lower his spear until the victory was won (verse 26). This is powerfully reminiscent of Israel's first battle upon leaving Egypt against the Amalekites, where Moses held aloft the rod of God, which was also a symbol of God's participation in the battle (Exodus 17:8-16). Remarkably, Joshua had been the military commander in that former battle, looking to Moses with the rod. Now here he was with raised spear, standing as the one others were looking to. Of course, it was recognized in both instances that God was the one directing the outcome.

Along with the defeat of Ai, the city of Bethel is also mentioned (verse 17). "Bethel was near Ai to the west (7:2), although its exact site is disputed. The inhabitants of Bethel came out of their city to help the men of Ai. Since the Israelite ambush was stationed between Bethel and Ai [8:12], they may have felt threatened by the Israelites. Or it may be that Ai was a small outpost for the larger city of Bethel (7:3) and an attack on Ai was understood to be an attack on Bethel. The text does not record Bethel's defeat, although its king is listed among those conquered by Joshua (12:16). It may be that in the defeat of Ai, Bethel was also defeated and no further reference was needed" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 8:17).

Following the Israelites' defeat of Ai, Joshua led them to Shechem, which is between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, near modern-day Nablus. There he carried out the commands of God and Moses to build an altar, erect massive stones engraved with the Book of the Law, review the law, and rehearse the blessings and curses (verses 30-35; compare Deuteronomy 11:29-32; 27:1-26). Afterward, they apparently returned to Gilgal, where they first camped after crossing the Jordan (compare 9:6).

Treaty With the Gibeonites (Joshua 9)

Gibeon was a powerful city in the region (10:2), possibly due in part to the shrewdness of its people (9:4). While their scheme for saving themselves involved deceit, it is amazing to see the extraordinary measures they were willing to take for peace and survival. Their deceit resulted in perpetual servitude for their people (verses 22-27), and perhaps there would have been better ways to escape death by submitting to God or agreeing to peacefully leave the territory. But once the agreement was made, they seem to have held to their part of it. And when Saul later broke the agreement, God Himself punished the Israelites on their behalf (2 Samuel 21:1-14).

This whole situation would have gone differently for Israel if its leaders had done what they should have in the first place. Even though they were initially suspicious of the Gibeonite ambassadors (Joshua 9:7), the Israelites relied on their own intellect to determine whether or not they were being truthful. This was a big mistake. Joshua, the most likely author of this book bearing his name, had evidently learned his lesson by the time he wrote down the words in verse 14: “But they did not ask counsel of the Lord.” Indeed, this is the crux of the whole chapter. The omnipotent God was there to provide answers, if Joshua had only sought them as he had been instructed (Numbers 27:21).

We can make the same mistake. Many times, we rush to a major decision without seeking counsel from God. No, we cannot seek His answers in the Urim and Thummim anymore. But there are other means available to us when it comes to discerning God’s will. We can pray, with fasting if need be, asking for direct inspiration from Him through His Holy Spirit. We can seek His answers in the laws and principles found in His Word. And we can counsel with other brethren in whom His Spirit dwells, particularly the ministry that He has specially ordained. Indeed, we should avail ourselves of all of these means. For no major decision in our lives should be made without seeking God’s will. As Proverbs 3:5-6 states so eloquently, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

Psalm 4

Psalm 4 is one of David’s prayers for deliverance. It “is linked to Ps. 3 in mood and concept. Both speak of the possibility of finding such peace in God’s presence that even when torn by physical and emotional pain, a person may still have restful sleep (3:5; 4:8)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 4).

In the superscription, where the King James Version leaves a word untranslated, “on Neginoth,” the New King James Version properly translates this as “With stringed instruments.” (As noted in the Bible Reading Program introduction to Psalms, this may be the postscript for Psalm 3.)

Getting into the words of Psalm 4 itself, “O God of my righteousness” in verse 1 “can also be translated ‘O my righteous God.’ The phrase has two meanings: (1) Only God is righteous. (2) All of a person’s righteousness is found in him alone” (note on verse 1).

David addresses those who are currently troubling him: “How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame?” (verse 2). “That is, through slander rob David of the public honor he had enjoyed under the Lord’s blessing and care (see 3:3...) and bring him into public disrepute” (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on 4:2).

David knows that God has set certain godly people “apart for Himself.” David was such a person, set apart by God to be king over Israel (1 Samuel 16:12-13). For this reason, he is confident that God hears his prayers and intervenes to help him.

David calls on his enemies to search their hearts, saying, “In your anger [against me] do not sin” (verse 4, NIV). Since anger can lead to sin, his detractors need to quiet down, bring their requests and sacrifices to God and trust Him to resolve their complaints (verse 5). This is remarkable in that the wicked are offered a way to redemption rather than a pronouncement of doom. In the New Testament the apostle Paul quotes verse 4 about being angry and yet not sinning in a different context—to describe the proper exercise of righteous indignation (Ephesians 4:26).

In Psalm 4:6, David recognizes that many have become discouraged, asking, “Who can show us any good?” (NIV). David knows that only God can restore confidence in the nation and end the present crisis. “Lift up the light of your countenance upon us” (verse 6). The related priestly blessing in Numbers 6:26 adds an additional phrase: “The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” With that in mind, it is interesting to note that David concludes with a determined focus on joy and peace. Again, he is able to sleep peacefully even in the present circumstances because God provides safety.

Psalm 5. The superscription (the first part of which may refer to Psalm 4, as the Bible Reading Program’s introductory notes on Psalms explains) apparently describes accompaniment “with flutes,” the latter word seeming to translate the Hebrew “Nehiloth” (KJV).

Psalm 5 is a morning prayer (verses 2-3) in which David seeks help for another day. Because the world is corrupt, God makes Himself a refuge and shield for the righteous (verses 11-12). Because the world is confused, He provides clear guidance if we will seek it: “Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness...make Your way straight before my face” (verse 8).

Only the righteous can come into God’s presence and enjoy His blessings (verses 5, 11-12). David says in verse 5, “You hate all workers of iniquity.” The Hebrew word for hate “is a strong term that speaks primarily of rejection” (Nelson, note on 11:4-6). We should understand this in terms of ultimate judgment, as the next verse continues: “You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.” What God really hates (what He rejects and wants to destroy) is what the wicked think and do—that is, the things that classify them as wicked. God in fact loves all humanity so much that He has provided an atonement for them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see John 3:16)—if they will repent and accept it. Yet ultimately, if they still reject God, then all that will constitute them are the things God hates—and He will in perfect justice utterly annihilate them (for their own good and the good of everyone else).

David immediately balances his reference to God’s just hatred of evil by referring to “the multitude of Your mercy” (verse 7). “Mercy here is *hesed*, a term also translated as ‘love,’ ‘covenant love [or loyalty],’ and ‘loving-kindness.’ *Hesed* reminds us that God is totally committed to humankind. The love we see in Calvary’s ultimate sacrifice draws us, as God’s mercy drew David, to worship and serve the Lord” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verse 7). Relying on God’s mercy, David expresses his intent to worship God and asks for help in following Him—to provide no basis for his enemies’ accusations—as he knows he would not succeed in obedience on his own (verses 7-8).

It is interesting that David says he will worship toward God’s holy temple (verse 7) when there was as yet no temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps David was speaking of God’s temple in heaven (compare Hebrews 9:23-24; Revelation 15:5-16:1). Or perhaps during his preparations for the building of the physical temple late in his life, David wrote this psalm (or modified an earlier one) to be sung when the temple was standing. Note

that the psalm's superscription (or alternatively the postscript at the beginning of Psalm 6) is addressed "To the Chief Musician." For us today, the temple of God, in a spiritual sense, can also refer to the body of believers with God's Holy Spirit—the Church of God (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:17).

David asks God to pass sentence on his enemies because they have "no faithfulness in their mouth" (Psalm 5:9). They boast, flatter, lie and curse. "Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction" (same verse, NIV). "Their throat is an open tomb; they flatter [deceivingly] with their tongue." Paul used these words to argue for the depravity of all humanity (Romans 3:13). Jesus stated that a man is defiled by what comes out of his heart: "Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:18-29). The sins of the wicked (verses 4-5, 9-10)—which means everyone until they repent—spring from rebellion against God: "Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you" (verse 10, NIV). As mentioned above, ultimately the wicked will be cast out: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19).

But God surrounds the righteous—those who repent and seek His will—with protection and favor, making Himself their refuge and shield (Psalm 5:11-12). Of course, this does not mean that God will allow no calamity to overtake His people, as we saw in the book of Job. But everything happens within His oversight, as He directs all things to a positive outcome for those who faithfully serve Him (see Romans 8:28). And in general, He does maintain a protective defense around His people, and He provides them with constant blessings.

Psalm 6. Where the King James Version gives the superscription (perhaps the postscript of Psalm 5) as "on Neginoth upon Sheminith," the New King James gives the likely translation "On an eight-stringed harp."

In Psalm 6, David is distressed by an illness that he senses God has sent as a punishment for his own sinfulness (verse 1). He suffers intense pain—"my bones are troubled" (verse 2)—with no remission in sight: "My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?" (verse 3). He believes the illness to be mortal (verse 5).

We do not know when this situation occurred. David wrote a number of psalms associated with serious illness that may concern the same time. Some have speculated that this came on him after the episode of taking a census of Israel, which focused more on national strength than the need for God's help (see 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21). God sent a plague on the people, who were likely complicit in self-sufficient thinking. Yet David, who had ordered the census despite Joab's warning, took responsibility. As 2 Samuel 24:17 says: "Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, 'Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house.'" Perhaps his concluding words here came to pass when the plague on the nation was halted, though we cannot know for sure.

Whatever sin it was that apparently brought on his illness, David calls on God's mercy—His unfailing love (Psalm 6:4). As in Psalm 5, the word here again is *hesed*. Says The Nelson Study Bible: "Perhaps the most significant single term in the Hebrew text regarding the character of God is the word rendered *mercies* here. The Hebrew word describes what some prefer to call the loyal love of God. The translations vary because the word has much depth. Aside from the personal name of God (Yahweh), it may be the single most important term describing Him as the object of praise in the Book of Psalms" (note on 6:4).

David warns his enemies in verses 8-10 that he is confident in God's healing and that they will be ashamed, dismayed, and suddenly disgraced for reviling him and, in so doing, dishonoring God, who declared David His servant.

Matthew Chapter 5 (<http://www.yashanet.com/studies/matstudy/mat6a.htm>)

Matthew 5:1-16?A Midrash on Torah Observance

THE "SERMON ON THE MOUNT"

NOTE: Traditionally, the section of Scripture from Matthew 5:1 to 7:29, has been called "the Sermon on the Mount," due to the physical location of Yeshua when He spoke. Unfortunately, this title misses the point of the teaching, thus we have chosen to refer to it by its content, a midrash on Torah observance. (Midrash = teaching)

This midrash is broken up into several sections, beginning with 5:1-16, where Yeshua declares what have become known as the "beatitudes," followed by gentle reminders to his Jewish audience as to what their God-given role is to be. These "introductory statements" will be followed by the bulk of the message concerning the Torah.

5:1 Disciples

The relationship between the rabbi and his talmidim (disciples, followers, students) was very close. It was not only one of learning, but also imitating his conduct and character. In turn, the rabbi was responsible for his talmidim. It is important to note that Yeshua's audience here is exclusively Jews. He did not preach directly to the gentiles in His lifetime. Nonetheless, what He says to His Jewish brethren would apply to any gentile coming into the faith of Israel, as God does not have a "separate" revelation and faith for the gentile world (Ephesians ch. 4). There is one God for Jew and gentile (Romans 1:16).

5:3-10 Blessed are ...

Hebrew: Asher – with a combined meaning of; 'happy and fortunate.'

... the poor in Spirit (re: Isaiah 57:15; 66:2)?... the mourners who will be comforted (re: Isaiah 61:2; 66:10,13)?... the meek who inherit the land (re: Psalm 37:11)?... they will be satisfied (Isaiah 66:11-12)?... merciful who obtain mercy (re: Psalm 18:26 – 2 Samuel 22:26)?... pure in heart (re: Psalm 22:4; 51;10; 73:11)?... persecuted for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom (Isaiah 66:5)

"Blessings" as such are also found in the Qumran (Dead Sea) scrolls. In the following portion wisdom is clearly exalted. Wisdom and the law are viewed as inseparable. (Missing scroll portions are bracketed):

5:9 Peacemakers

What's is God's concept of a peacemaker? It may not be what one would call "politically correct." For instance, there is one person in the Scriptures specifically called a peacemaker. He is Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron. What did he do to earn this title from God? He took a spear and simultaneously ran it through a man and woman who were fornicating. For this specific action of killing these people, God praises him and calls him a peacemaker (Numbers 25:6-13). Pinchas later became the High Priest.

5:10-13 Semitic Poetry (1)

Verses 10-12 are an example of Semitic poetry in a form called a chiasmus, where verses are repeated but in reverse order. Here, the verses follow an A-B-C-B-A order:

A. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:

B. for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

C. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

B. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:

A. for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Verse 13 is an example of Semitic poetry in a form called formal parallelism, where a concept in one line is expounded on through several subsequent lines.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

5:13 Salt

Salt has a specific relationship to the eternal covenant God has with Israel.

This is found in Scripture:

Leviticus 2:13 – Neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking

Numbers 18:19 – It is a covenant of salt forever

5:13-16 WHO are the salt and the light?

As mentioned earlier, Yeshua here is addressing Jews within their Judaism. (It is critical to understand the meaning of this and every verse in its original context before expounding on it or trying to apply it to another situation.) This is Yeshua's first recorded "public address" to the Jews, after having spent some time preaching to them in the Synagogues (Matthew 4:23).

Yeshua Himself said He came for the lost sheep of Israel, not the gentiles, and told His apostles to do the same (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24). Gentiles would receive their direct invitation to join the faith of Israel through the Messiah, after His suffering, death and resurrection.

Israel is also God's "Messiah" (meaning: anointed one). Their job was/is to bring the revelation of God, that the Lord Himself gave them at Mount Sinai, to the entire world. Here Yeshua is issuing them a reminder of their responsibility in these verses. Israel is still "God's chosen people," and the faith they received through the giving of the Torah and work of their Messiah, is still the only one God has ever established.

5:16 Good works ... glorify your Father

Good works are the positive commandments of the Torah. These are the "works" that would distinguish Israel and cause gentiles to give glory to the Father, who gave His Torah as a means for His people to sanctify (set apart) themselves.

Matthew 5:17-20?5:17 the "Law"

Christian Bibles consistently refer to "the Law," meaning the Law of Moses, as given in the first five books of the Bible. The Hebrew term for this is the Torah. However, the correct translation of "Torah," is not "law" (not in the western legal sense of the word). Rather, Torah is correctly translated as revelation or instruction from God.

When understood in its proper Hebrew context, here is some of what the "New Testament" says about Torah:

Faith does not abolish any part of the Torah as a whole (Matthew 5:17-20, James 2:10)

Keeping the Torah is part of the faith that gets you to heaven (Matthew 19:17; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14)

You will abide in Yeshua's love, if you keep Torah (John 14:15-23) as He abided in the Father's love by keeping Torah (John 15:10; Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:15)

Faith in Yeshua does not cancel out what the Torah says, it establishes it (Romans 3:31)

Torah is itself "liberty" and the standard we are to judge ourselves by (James 1:22-25)

It is those of the flesh who are not subject to the Torah (Romans 8:5-8)

If you say you know Him, and ignore His Torah, you are a liar (1 John 2:3-7)

It does not matter if you are a Jew or a gentile, what matters is keeping God's Torah (1 Cor. 7:19)

The "law of love" is that we keep his Torah – which is by no means a "burden" (1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6)

Matt. 11:29,30)

These “New Testament” references to Torah might at first confuse people, as they aren’t used to thinking in these terms. However, when the Hebrew New Testament authors, and Yeshua Himself, spoke of law/commandments in their first century Jewish religious context, it must be interpreted as “Torah,” unless there is a clear reason to do otherwise, as this was what it meant to them.

5:17 Destroy ... Fulfill

First, a brief look at two of the Greek words behind the King James text in verse 17:

Destroy = kataluo, meaning “to overthrow completely” or “abolish”? Fulfill = plerosai, meaning “to fill” or “to complete.”

The second half of verse 17 is used by some people to support a doctrine that says the believer in Messiah is now “not under the Law.” Some claim that by “fulfilling the Law,” Messiah did away with it, and the believer no longer has a relationship to it.

Although we will address this in detail throughout this and our other online studies, one need not look further than this verse itself to see that such an interpretation is incorrect, as:

The word plerosai (fulfill) DOES NOT mean to “do away with” or to “overthrow.”

The word kataluo (destroy) DOES mean to “do away with” or to “overthrow,” and Yeshua said He did NOT come to do that. (1)

Furthermore, Yeshua then goes on to emphasize in verse 18, that not even the tiniest part of the Torah (the “Law”) is done away with, and won’t be until the heavens and the earth are no more.

He then takes it even further, and issues a warning to anyone who “breaks” any of the Torah, or teaches anyone to do the same. The Greek word for “break” is luo, meaning; “to infringe upon, loosen the force of, or render not binding.” (1) Hence, Yeshua is teaching that His work in no way diminishes the authority or continuation of the Torah.

Verses 17-20 set the theme and agenda for the entire “Sermon on the Mount.” Yeshua the Messiah makes fuller the understanding of his disciples concerning the Torah and Prophets, so they can more fully express what being God’s people is all about. This is consistent with Judaism, as one of the Messiah’s main functions would be to complete our understanding of the Torah & Prophets. The “evidence” for Yeshua being the true Messiah is that He meet the criteria set forth in the Tanakh (Old Testament), which in turn says the Torah is eternal.

Much of the remainder of chapters 5-7 give specific cases where Yeshua explains the fuller meaning of the Torah — teaching the people to not only keep the Law, but to go beyond the “letter of the Law – understanding the Godly principles behind the commandments, as this is how we come to know God, which is His desire for us all.

5:20 – the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees

Yeshua never criticized the scribes and Pharisees for carrying out the Torah. In fact he told the people to follow their example (Matthew 23:1-3).