

Torah Reading and Tradition

subtitled "Why do we do all this Jewish stuff!"

By Yaakov Ben Arron

Torah reading is a commandment of HaShem and is done with tradition. Even Rav Shaul (Rabbi Paul, the tent maker) said in ***II Thes 2:15*** *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* Because we use tradition to present HaShem's word doesn't make it right or wrong it just makes it culturally Jewish. Any Messianic Congregation would want to consider how first century believers worshipped and How Yeshua expected worship. We do not want a form of religion we want the Ruach (spirit) to indwell us. (***II Tim 3:5*** *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*)

As believers in Messiah we are expected to read and meditate on Scripture. We do this because Messiah commanded us to. However, that is only required if you love him. ***Rom 13:10*** *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."*

The ceremony surrounding the Torah Reading is a tradition that was carried out by Messiah It is interesting to note that the Babylonian congregations read their portion sitting while the Israeli congregations read theirs standing. We see this in (1) ***Luke 4:14-16***; *Yeshua returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.)* and in itself symbolizes what the scripture admonishes. ***Acts 13:15***; *After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."* ***Acts 15:21*** *For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."*

Traditionally, if an ark is used it is opened and everyone stands to show respect for HaShem's word. The Torah is carried around the room to allow all to touch it with the TzTizs and then touch the mouth to symbolize taking HaShem's word into your body. YES, this is a tradition, however is it better than dressing up as a witch or goblin and collecting candy on Halloween, or expecting a bunny to bring you candy and eggs, During Passover!! Oh, yes, I almost forgot the jolly ole fat man in the red suit who some almost worship, [whoops, did I say worship] near the celebration of the cleansing of the temple. That is the Christian celebration of CHRISTmas, which is based on tradition, certainly not scripture.

Psalm 19:⁸ *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*⁹ *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*¹¹ *Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*¹² *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*¹³ *Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*¹⁴ *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.* Since Messiah is the Word and he said to eat his body we symbolize this in the Passover and in touching the Torah then our lips. We DO NOT kiss the Torah even though some may however, I would rather "Kiss the Torah" as some call it than practice Pagan holidays. HaShem expects us to internalize the scripture and this is merely a way for people to demonstrate a desire to do this. **Jerm 31:**³¹ *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.* In that day the covenant is written on the heart.

The Torah is opened and a prayer praising HaShem and thanking him for giving the Torah is said. This prayer is traditionally said in Hebrew because it is the language of the Torah. The prayer starts; Baruch HaShem, meaning Bless the Name of HaShem. In most Messianic Congregations a translation is given after each part of the prayer. It is very seldom provided in a traditional Orthodox or Conservative service. We understand many people in the Messianic community and most in the Christian community do not read or understand Hebrew. With a little practice the prayers can be memorized. The "Torah portion" is a specific part of the Torah called a Parasha which were segmented by the Knesset HaGaDol which was attend by Ezra and Nehemiah over 400 years prior to the birth of Messiah. Reading Torah this way will take you through the first five book in one to three years depending on which Parashah you use. Josephus (Contra Apionem ii.18) ascribes the triennial cycle to Moses. The Talmud explicitly says that the Torah was read through in three years in Israel (Bavli Megilla 29b). The Masoretic text used in all synagogues around the world shows the Torah divided into 150 portions corresponding to the number of Sabbaths in the Triennial Cycle!(1). After the Torah portion is read another prayer is said or sung by the cantor or reader closing the Torah. If we are to Worship Messiah in a way that reflects the original intent of HaShem, and that is the most important factor, not what makes us feel right. Feelings can get you in trouble if the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) is not in it.

Finally, We must know what we are doing and why. It all comes do to 2 points;

1. We are reading HaShem's word
2. HaShem commanded us to

What other reason do we need?

(1) Greg Killian, Triennial Cycle

It is well known that the Jews in Israel completed the reading of the Torah in three years. The Babylonian and European Jews completed their reading in one year. This difference is mentioned explicitly in Bavli Megilla 29b: "... for the people of Palestine, who complete the reading of the Pentateuch in three years."

Books for your consideration

"The Synagogue Lectionary and the New Testament", R.G. Finch

"The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship", A. Guilding

"The New Testament and Jewish Lectionaries", Leon Morris

"Contributions to the Scientific Study of Jewish Liturgy", ed. Jakob Petuchowski

"The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue", Jacob Mann

"A New Commentary on Holy Scripture", ed. C. Gore, H.L. Goudge, and A. Guillaume