

# Torah, Etz Chaim

## (Torah, the Tree of Life)

*A wake up call for gentiles and Jews*

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*"This situation is similar to one who thinks that he has achieved an understanding of the truth, in one moment, although he has very meager knowledge and made only feeble attempts (at penetrating analysis) and neglected all wisdoms and contented himself with the simple interpretation of the Scriptures ..."*

- Moses Maimonides, *Treatise on Resurrection*

*"Therefore, leaving behind the initial lessons about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity ..."*

- Hebrews 6:1a, *Jewish New Testament translation*

*"And the word of Hashem became to them like commandment by commandment and commandment by commandment, measuring line by measuring line and measuring line by measuring line, a bit here and a bit there, so that they would go and stumble backward and be broken, be tripped up and caught."*

- Tenakh, Isaiah 28:13

There is a similar theme in the above three quotations. Maimonides' words are directed to the person who has received an understanding of the very basics of Scripture, only to develop an arrogant attitude that he now "knows it all." The second statement, from the book of Hebrews, is directed at believers who know some things, encouraging them to not stagnate, but to learn more, as the former could lead to a falling away. The last one, from Isaiah, was directed at those who had strayed completely from the Torah they once knew, and had to be "spoon fed" its truth once again.

## **THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S TORAH - HISTORICALLY**

What we are seeing in recent times is an enactment of these principles. From a historical perspective, God has been restoring the truth of His Torah on a global scale for much of the past century. Groups such as the Christian Jew Foundation, Chosen People Ministries, Jews for Jesus, Zola Levitt, Jewish Voice and others, began introducing the concept of *bringing "Jewishness" back into Christianity*. The "early product" that evolved from this was the concept of the "Jewish Christian."

This was only the first step in God's process. Over the past couple of decades, a new phenomenon took root -- the development of *Messianic Judaism*. Rather than identifying themselves as Christians with Jewish nationality, Jews began to fully retain their "Jewishness," both culturally and religiously. These believers distanced themselves from the "Christian" and "Jesus" labels, calling themselves Jews who followed Yeshua. There was now a clear "choice" for Jews who wanted to follow the Messiah of the "New Testament" -- Jesus and Christianity or Yeshua and Judaism.

On a parallel path, another part of God's plan began to unfold -- many gentiles began to be attracted to this new view of the faith, calling themselves "Messianic believers" or "Messianics." Rather than considering themselves as "Christians," these gentiles, to one degree or another, viewed themselves as *coming into the faith of Israel*.

But God wasn't done with His work. Most recently, we have seen within the world of Messianic Judaism, a *return to "Torah observance."* This development has launched a great debate -- *what is the role of the Torah in the life of the believer?* In the lives of Conservative or Orthodox Jews, the Torah is very significant and to be followed to the best of one's ability. Just how much of the Torah was a Messianic Jew to follow? And what about "Messianic gentiles?" Were they to follow the Torah as well?

Torah is now once again a "stumbling block" for followers of the Messiah -- some saying it really isn't that important, some saying it is for Jewish believers but not gentile believers, and others saying it is for both Jew and gentile.

## **THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S TORAH - IN THE INDIVIDUAL**

The global resurgence of "Torah-observant Messianic Judaism" and the decades of "change" that led up to it, mirrors what is going on in the lives of individuals around the world today -- including gentile believers. Many of these gentiles are first attracted by the idea that "Christianity has Jewish roots," and begin to read their "Old Testaments" with a new desire to find out "what they are missing." Some progress to a point where they realize "Jesus was Jewish," and add new words to their vocabulary or show a greater respect for things Jewish. These people have begun to open their hearts and minds to more than what they are hearing from the pulpit every Sunday. They are the opposite of the person that Maimonides alluded to (above), not being satisfied with the "basic ideas" they learned in their religion.

Others, as the writer of Hebrews wrote, go beyond even these "basics." Many of these come to a realization that Yeshua actually promoted Torah, and that there is nothing wrong with them starting to do some of these "Jewish things." Some begin to hold Passover seders and others might even visit Messianic congregations on the Sabbath when they get a chance. They may even go as far as purchasing a "*Jewish New Testament*" to get more insight into what they are beginning to learn.

Then there are those who continue to let the God of Israel fully return them to the faith of Israel (Ephesians 2:10-12). They read what the latest Torah-observant Messianic authors

are writing. They learn that the "popular idea" that Paul preached against Torah in a believer's life, is untrue -- a product of centuries of the "Church's" anti-Torah bias in translation and interpretation. They see the Torah for what it always has been -- God's revelation and instruction. Out of love for God, and desire to know more of Him, they begin a journey to incorporate Torah into their lifestyles with the goal that it will become their lifestyle.

These people have come to learn that there has always been, and remains, one Torah for all the people of God - Jew or gentile. Hashem has not changed.

## **GOD'S PROCESS OF REDEMPTION**

The process God uses to bring people back to His Torah, is the same one He has always used in returning those who have gone astray. This process can be broken down as follows:

1. He reveals His truth to you ("as you are" -- and regardless of where you are)
2. He takes you away from the confined place you are in (where you cannot truly serve Him)
3. He replaces the error and fear of your previous way, instructing you in His Torah
4. He makes you acceptable to Himself

His process for achieving this can be seen in how He dealt with those coming out of Egypt with Moses:

**Exodus 6:6-7 - Therefore, say to the B'nei Yisra'el: "I am YHVH, and I WILL BRING YOU OUT (v'hotzeiti et'khem) from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I WILL FREE YOU (v'hitzalti et'khem) from being slaves to them, and I WILL REDEEM YOU (v'ga'alti et'khem) with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I WILL TAKE YOU AS MY OWN PEOPLE (v'lakachti et'khem li l'am), and I will be your God..."**

1. He made them "free" through His revelation, they stopped serving Egypt even though they physically remained a bit longer in the land
2. He physically took them out of Egypt (*Egypt = "Mizrayim" = confined place*)
3. He redeemed them by taking them through the waters and delivering the final crushing blow to the Egyptians when the waters annihilated them (thus giving them great confidence)
4. He took them as His people to the promised land where they would be free to serve Him through His Torah

When Israel came out of Egypt, they stopped for water at a place called Marah. (Exodus 15:22-27) The water there was bitter however. God instructed Moses to take a certain tree and cast it into the water. The water then became sweet. God immediately followed this up by giving them additional statutes and ordinances, and saying He would test their obedience.

There are several lessons here:

1. God was not "done" with Israel just because He revealed Himself to them and took them out of Egypt (though they may have had reason to believe He was, as the entire plan was not yet revealed). As soon as they get their new freedom, they immediately encounter a "problem."
2. God immediately showed them that He wanted their relationship to continue and grow (through the miracle).
3. The fact that a tree was used should not be overlooked, as it is a euphemism for the Torah.
4. God immediately gives them more of His Torah (statutes and ordinances) as their means for deepening their relationship.
5. He would then test and refine their faith/relationship to Him through their Torah obedience.

God is consistent. He uses the same process today for bringing people, including gentiles, to Torah:

1. He makes you free by revealing Himself and His Messiah (often within an imperfect setting, i.e., "a church")
2. He leads you away from where you cannot grow in His Torah (into Messianic Judaism)
3. He teaches you the deeper truths of His Torah (taking on more of the Torah to learn of Him)
4. He makes you acceptable to Himself

## **THWARTING GOD'S PLAN**

People, particularly in Christianity, often don't get beyond the first of the four stages outlines above. They are exposed to the elementary (yet critical) teachings of Torah, such as; *God is real, God loves you, God wants you to have your sins forgiven, etc.* This is all good, but coming to know of God and Messiah is not the end of the road - it is the beginning of a lifetime journey to, a) become conformed to the Image of God and, b) grow in intimacy with Him.

The ONLY means God has given to accomplish these two things, is His Torah. That is why He gave it to us.

As Maimonides wisely wrote:

*"There is an immense difference between guidance leading to a knowledge of the existence of a thing and an investigation of the true reality of the essence and substance of that thing."*

**Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Chapter 46**

There is no such thing as "perfect stagnation" with regard to your walk with God. If you don't grow, you will rot. The only thing that can thwart God's process is human beings. There are many who get the initial revelation of God through hearing His Torah and reject it outright. Others receive it but for various reasons, fall away. This is the Torah of the Kingdom that Yeshua spoke of in Matthew 13:4-9; 18-23.

Sadly, most of those who claim faith in the "Messiah" today, remain stagnant after they "come to Him." They choose to stay in their "personal Egypt," rather than let God move them out to where He wants them. This is prevalent in both Catholic and Protestant denominations, who like to think they are very different from each other -- but share a critical common theology; *the rejection of the place of God's Torah in the life of the believer*. They are blinded to the truth of the Scripture verses they so readily quote -- Scriptures that speak of, even warn of, the importance of Torah.

For instance, when Yeshua says that not one tiny part of the Torah is done away with and those who teach otherwise are wrong (Matthew 5:17-21) -- Christianity says He means something else.

When Paul writes that the Torah is not done away with by faith (Romans 3:30) and that those of the Spirit are to follow the Torah (Romans 8:5-9) -- it's all "spiritualized away."

When John in his epistles writes that those who say they know God but don't keep His commandments are sadly mistaken and that these are not new commandments (1 John 2:3-7), and of those entering their final reward being those who kept God's commandments, (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:14) -- well, Christians are taught that this too doesn't mean God's Torah commandments, but instead these are "Christ's commandments."

As if the Father and Yeshua "play by different rules!" Yeshua said they don't (Matthew 5:17-21, John 10:30).

These teachers and their followers are the likeness of which Maimonides spoke of in his *Treatise on Resurrection*. They receive a ray of truth -- that God is real, and "faith" not "works" saves you. Rather than accepting and growing in God's Torah, they get entangled in the thorns of their denominational doctrine. At some point they will wilfully reject the message of anyone coming into their lives preaching that God has not changed and that His Torah remains for today. They respond by reciting what their religion tells them to say, that "they are not under the Law," or have "freedom in Christ," not having the faintest notion of what either means, as they interpret all Scripture from the anti-Torah mindset in which they have been taught.

As one person who recently wrote in to YashaNet said, *"The Church is caught in a loop. They are blind because of the pagan worship and the pagan worship prevents them from seeing the truth."*

**THE END OF DAYS**

One could ask; ***Can such a person truly have the Spirit of God in them if they reject the truth of God's Torah?*** Or could they possess a counterfeit spirit -- one that even says, "Lord, Lord," (Matthew 7:15-23) and does great things in His name, only to mislead them, as it rejects the authority of the Torah commandments of God and practices ***lawlessness*** (anti-Torah doctrine).

This author's personal experience has shown him that there is indeed a spiritual conflict between Torah-based Messianic Judaism and Christianity. For instance, when a "mainstream Christian" is engaged in spiritual discussion with a Mormon, Jehovah Witness, Muslim, Hindu or Pagan, he will typically "keep his cool" as he speaks to the other person, even if they are antagonistic toward him. However, should a Torah-observant Messianic believer challenge this same Christian, the situation often gets very nasty, very quickly. In such situations, there are indeed spirits in conflict. Can both be of God? (This conflict has existed since the fourth century when Nazarene Jews [those who followed Yeshua] were criticized for having more in common with Judaism [i.e. Torah] than with Christianity.)

There is a great deception forecast for the "latter days." We are warned of things such as; the ***"mystery of iniquity,"*** and the error of the ***"Church of Laodicea,"*** and the doctrine of the ***"Whore of Babylon."*** The three of these share a common thread -- ***The rejection of God's Torah in the life of the believer-*** replacing it with something that looks "godly" (i.e., "freedom in Christ") but is in fact a very ancient lie.

"Iniquity" is defined in Scripture as a violation of Torah. The "Church" of Laodicea is chastised for its spiritual arrogance (going its own way and not following Torah), which the "Church" at Philadelphia was alternately praised for. The doctrine of the "Whore of Babylon" is an ancient one, with its origins in the rejection of the authority of Torah.

The doctrine these all share stems from haSatan, the father of all lies, and can be seen as far back as Gan Edan (Garden of Eden) when he challenged God's Torah (Genesis 3). It was manifested in man with Nimrod at Babel (Genesis 10), someone who once was close to God and could have been mighty in the Lord, but rejected His Torah and went his own way. It is later spoken of by Zechariah (5:6-10) who depicts it as going out into the world from the plains of Shinar in Babylon. Later, it rears its head among God's chosen people in the spirit of Ephraim, who rejected Torah and went into idolatry (1 Kings 12).

In more "recent" times, it resurrected itself in the years following Yeshua, with the development of the pagan Christianity of Constantine and the Council of Nicea -- which set the tone for hundreds of years of anti-Semitic theology, culminating in the Church of today and its anti-Torah "Jesus."

## **A SCENARIO NOT CONSIDERED**

The book of Revelation speaks of 144,000 Jews preaching to the world, with countless numbers accepting their message and many of the latter being executed for their faith. Could it be that this audience is to a great extent made up of "Christians," who now

receive and accept the whole truth -- that you cannot separate the Tree of Life, the Torah -- from the Giver of Life, Yeshua? Could the comfortable idea of "the Church" being "raptured up" prior to the tribulation be a lie from haSatan and part of the great deception to come?

Here's something even more frightening to ponder. Could it be that the real anti-Messiah will actually be at the forefront of telling everyone to be on the lookout for the "anti-Christ?" Do you think haSatan is not capable of such deception? Do you think fallable human beings can't be fooled by the father of all lies? -- particularly when they reject the truth of God's Torah?

Yet another consideration is this. Perhaps there will indeed be a "pre-tribulation rapture" - - but only those who respect Torah along with trusting Yeshua are taken up? (As a warning from God that it's time to "get right" with his Word -- *the Torah.*)

God can and does remove those who follow His ways, prior to His coming judgment, so that they do not have to go through "tribulation." The righteous men of Noah's day were allowed to die naturally, prior to the flood killing off the earth's inhabitants. (In the case of Enoch he was simply removed without facing death.) The congregation at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) seems to be promised that they will not go through the tribulation that is to come upon the earth as they are with the One who has the "Key of David."

Studying the Psalms (especially 118 and 119), it becomes evident that those who can enter through the gate are the righteous, and their righteousness is tied directly to the Torah. Those who are part of faithful Israel (including grafted-in gentiles - Romans 9-11) are included in the wedding of God to Israel and the great Shabbat to follow.

One thing is for certain according to God's Torah. **God does NOT marry "the Church."** This would be a violation of His Torah, as He has promised to marry Israel (again) after putting her away for a brief while due to her spiritual adultery. The idea that God marries "the Church" is replacement theology, a teaching founded in the same spiritual arrogance mentioned in Revelation 3:17, to which Paul warned gentiles in Romans 9-11.

The gate/door is open for these people in Revelation associated with this key of David through Yeshua. Those in Laodicea are told to knock that they might come in. (A verse often misused as one for "witnessing" when in fact it is addressed to those who are already part of the "Church" of Laodicea.) They knock late as they rejected the Torah when they had the chance. These are the foolish virgins in the parable Yeshua told -- Perhaps they have no *oil of Torah* in their lamps! They were indeed invited, but strayed from the truth.

However, these people are not "doomed," else why would Yeshua tell them to still knock? We know that Yeshua says that those who teach against Torah will be "least in the Kingdom" (Matthew 5:19). Perhaps these people who didn't "make it into the

wedding on time," need to be corrected (chastised through the tribulation) before they can take on the role they were supposed to play?

Scripture supports this idea. In Zechariah 2:14-4:7, the prophet has a vision that he was told applies to the latter days. There was a High Priest named Joshua (not the Joshua from Moses' time). Although he was destined to hold this office, he was not allowed to because he did not respect Torah and sinned. God allows him to be chastised, corrected of his error, and only then does he receive his white robe and is made a priest. In Revelation, we see that those who follow Torah are given the same white robes. (Rev. 7:9; 7:13-14; 12:17; 14:12; 22:14)

God has acted in this same fashion with Israel (and continues to do so.) They were and are His chosen. They are to be His "light to the world." When they fail to uphold His Torah, He does not terminate His promise -- however He does chastise them -- at times very harshly, as history has shown us, with the promise and goal that one day all of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26).

Today, a gentile who "comes to faith" in God, is also given promises regarding his role as a priest in the Messianic Kingdom and the World to Come.

The question regarding this person is:

***How can such a person hope to be a "priest in the Kingdom of God," if the Christian faith he is now part of, teaches that the Torah upon which this priesthood is entirely based in, has no role in his life?***

Joshua the appointed High Priest could not fulfill his role without respecting Torah, and had to go through his "tribulation" before he was "qualified." So does Israel. Has God changed? Or will the followers of anti-Torah Christianity who think they're about to be raptured off as the "Bride of Christ," be in for a rude shock, in the near future?

Scripture, as always, points to the answer ...

***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me: Because you have forgotten the law of your God ... - Hosea 4:6***

***For I am the Lord, I do not change ... Remember the Law of Moses my servant Malachi 3:6; 4:4***