

## A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)



By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

### *Introduction to the Series*

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The Hebrew word שומר "shomer" means "keeper of," or "to be observant"; in the Qal stem, the root word שמר "shamar" suggests the idea of "safeguarding."<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word מצוות "mitzvot" is the plural form of the word מצוה "mitzvah," meaning, "command"; thus, שומר מצוות "shomer mitzvot" (say: show-mair meets-vote) means "keeper of the commands," or more generically "Torah observant."

Many believers—specifically Jewish believers without a formal background in Judaism, and Gentile ones who wish to identify with the Scriptures of Isra'el—have questions about what it means to be "Torah observant." Pursuing the Torah as the Master Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ) modeled it for his followers is sometimes referred to as הלכה "halakhah," coming from the Hebrew word הלך "halakh" for "walk."<sup>2</sup>

In Judaism, safeguarding and keeping the Torah is central to performing the will of HaShem.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as properly understood from HaShem's point of view, the whole of Torah was given to bring its followers to the "goal" of acquiring the kind of faith in HaShem that leads to placing one's trusting faithfulness in the One and only Son of HaShem, Yeshua HaMashiach.<sup>4</sup> To this end, the Torah has prophesied about him since

<sup>1</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), שמר.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, הלך.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 5:1.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:27, 44-47; Romans 10:4.

as early as the book of Genesis (3:15), and continues to speak of him until its conclusion in Revelation (22:20). In this capacity, the Torah תורה acts like its etymological counterpart ירה "yarah"<sup>5</sup> (an archery term) in that it "teaches" its adherents how to properly identify with HaShem by helping them to "reach the mark." To be sure, one of the most common Hebrew verbs used to identify "sin" חָטָא "chatah" literally means, "to miss the mark."<sup>6</sup>

Obedience to the Torah has long since been an oft-misunderstood subject, both in the Jewish community and the Christian one. To be sure, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms, the prevailing theology sincerely—albeit incorrectly—believed that genuine and lasting covenant status was granted to Isra'el and Isra'el alone. Tim Hegg captures this concept well in his book *The Letter Writer*:

If the extant Rabbinic literature contains at least some expression of the general viewpoints of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Pharisaism, then it is safe to say that the prevailing Pharisaic view of Paul's day was that every Israelite was secured a place in the world to come.<sup>7</sup>

All Isra'el have a portion in the world-to-come, for it is written, Your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.<sup>8</sup>

The verse referenced in the Talmud above ("for it is written") is taken from Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 60:21, which reads:

**Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (ASV).**

However, the literal Hebrew of **"Thy people also shall be all righteous"** is כָּלֵם צְדִיקִים וְעַמֶּךָ **"And your people all of them [are] righteous [ones]."** The translator's insert of **"shall be all"** is not in the text, however the future context of the passage lends to this choice of wording, of which I agree. Nevertheless, this statement of the prophet's lead the Sages to adopt a position similar to the one listed in the Talmud, viz, Isra'el exclusively shall be righteous. In this capacity the Sages imagined that Torah does not function to lead the individual to an imputed righteousness (the way the pedagogue leads the boy-student to the Teacher of Righteousness in Galatians 3:24), rather, the Torah is given to the person who is righteous either by birth or by conversion. We shall be examining this view in subsequent commentaries to this series, particularly my *"Exegeting Galatians"* paper.

It is my understanding that the errors surrounding one's relationship to Torah can be corrected once a person resolves the issues surrounding identity and legalism, begins to understand the intended nature and function of the Torah in the first place, and then

<sup>5</sup> BDB, ירה.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, חָטָא.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (FFOZ Publications, 2002), p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> m. *Sanhedrin* 10:1, the gemara is b. *Sanhedrin* 90a.

faithfully applies it to their own lives. Because the Messiah has already come, the Torah is now a document meant to be lived out in the life of a faithful follower of Yeshua, through the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, to the glory of HaShem the Father. It should not be presumed that it could be obeyed mechanically, automatically, legalistically, without having faith, without having trust in HaShem, without having love for HaShem or man, and without being empowered by the Ruach HaKodesh. To state it succinctly, Torah observance is a matter of the heart, always has been<sup>9</sup>, and always will be.

It is my desire that this continuing series of teachings will assist the average non-Jewish believer, or new Messianic Jewish believer in his desire to become a more mature child of God.

**"And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deuteronomy 10:12-16, NIV).**

***Because the Torah is written on the hearts of all who truly name the name of Yeshua as LORD and Savior, it is meant to be followed to the best of our ability. We have no reason for fear of condemnation, or the trappings of legalism!***

## **Our Relationship to the Covenants**

The following explanation is meant to serve as a primer to the individuals' search to become "Torah Observant." It is not meant to be an exhaustive definition on the subject, rather, it is simply an introduction to a series of teachings in this area. To be sure, this Torah Teacher is not the subject matter expert. But the following "midrash" (teaching example) should enlighten the average believer: (I'm pretty sure my friends at **First Fruits of Zion** have made me familiar with the following example. I have, however, modified it somewhat.)

'Most new automobiles come with two important pieces of literature: an owner's manual, and a set of registration papers. The first of these is free with the purchase of the car. The latter needs to be obtained legally by the purchaser. 'In the event of a traffic altercation (accident, speeding, etc.), the driver of the vehicle is required to produce the proof of registration (among other things) to the police man making the report. Failure to do so will have serious repercussions on the part of the driver, as this information

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<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6; 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Romans 7:22; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16.

vitality links the driver to the ownership of the car. Obviously the registration paper is very important.

‘On a similar vein, a long trip out and abroad on a hot summer day, without the use of the air conditioner, will prove to be uncomfortable, to say the least—especially, if the region is a humid one. A flat tire during this trip would spell “double disaster.” Because this is a new car, the driver is unfamiliar with the climate controls, so the heat is unbearable! Also, he or she may be ignorant when it comes to changing a flat tire! Where does the driver turn to for assistance? Fortunately the owner’s manual covers such topics as “climate controls, changing a flat, oil pressure, engine maintenance, and even radio features.” The owner’s manual proves to be a valuable tool in providing both comfort and peace of mind in this situation.’

The matter of Torah Observance is made clearer when one understands the relationship he or she has to the Covenants. The Torah spells out at least two very important Covenants in the life of a follower of HaShem (God). There is the **Avrahamic (with Abraham) Covenant** and the **Moshaic (with Moses) Covenant**. The Avrahamic Covenant serves to represent the registration papers, in our above drash. Prior to coming to faith, the Torah served as a reminder of sin (Romans 7:7-12). This is not the **only** function of Torah, but it is a primary one. After coming into a relationship with HaShem, through His Son Yeshua, the person underwent a change in relationship to the Torah. The Avrahamic Covenant became for him or her, a “promise of inheritance.” And what is this “inheritance”? “Eternal life,” through trusting faithfulness. It became their “**proof of ownership**” so-to-say. It still reminded him or her of their sin. However, because we now constitute the “**Righteousness of HaShem**” (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21), we are now free to pursue following HaShem without the threat of death for disobedience! To be sure, the Torah spelled certain death for some disobedient acts committed by the supposed covenant follower (see: Exodus 31:12-18 “Sabbath violation”). Even the **New Covenant** Scriptures (B’rit Chadashah) teach, “The wages (payment) of sin is death.” But now Yeshua’s atoning death has “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13, **KJV**). “Death” and “condemnation” are no longer our wages (Romans 6:23; 8:1).

The Moshaic Covenant was added for the “enjoyment of the promise” already available through our participation in the Avrahamic Covenant. The Moshaic Covenant became our “owner’s manual,” providing blessing, maintenance, and enjoyment of promise to our lives.

“For those who trust HaShem for the promises, the proper order for faith and obedience is set by the sequence in which the covenants were given. In other words, faith must precede obedience. But the kind of faith accepted by HaShem is one, which naturally flows into obedience. True obedience never comes before faith, nor is it an addition to faith. It is always the result of true biblical faith.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 32.

Torah Observance is a matter of the **heart**. It always has been and always will be. The Torah Proper (first Five Books of Moshe) instructed the people of Isra'el to “love ADONAI your God with all their heart, all your being and all your resources” (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is where “*Shomer Mitzvot*” begins—by loving HaShem, and accepting Him on His terms. By this, I mean accepting His means of covenant obedience. For today, this means acceptance of Yeshua, His only Son, for Jew and non-Jew alike.

Covenants require a response on the part of the follower. HaShem, for His part, has provided the “promise of inheritance” for all those who participate in the Avrahamic Covenant. The response to this covenant is “faith.” The nature of the Mosaic Covenant is “blessing, maintenance, and enjoyment of promise.” For all who wish to participate, the response to this covenant is “obedience.” It’s that “easy.”

*\*The Shomer Mitzvot series is ongoing, with content added as time permits.*

**Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy** [yeshua613@hotmail.com](mailto:yeshua613@hotmail.com)