

Understanding the Torah of Yeshua

Genesis 49:10 is recognized in the targums as a Messianic prophecy indicating that He would arrive before Judah lost its right to govern itself, which precisely applies to Yeshua. The ancient Jewish sages also noticed that this verse refers to the *צִדְקָה* (*chaqqaq*), commonly translated as “ruler’s staff.” This is a word that is used elsewhere in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) as a reference to someone who is a lawgiver (Isa 10:1) and regarding Adonai as our ultimate lawgiver (Isa 33:22). This word is the root for the Hebrew word *צִוָּה* *chuq*, which is typically translated as “statute.”¹ This detail led to the conclusion that the Messiah would be a giver of Torah laws.

Those who studied the Scriptures made a similar determination regarding Isaiah 42. The targums once again identified this passage as being a Messianic prophecy:

“Behold, My servant the Messiah, whom I bring, My chosen one in whom one delights; as for My Word, I will put My Holy Spirit upon him. . .” (*Targum Yonatan, Isaiah 42:1*)

That means everything that follows in Isaiah 42 will likewise prophetically refer to the Messiah, including verse 4:

"He will not be disheartened or discouraged, until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His Torah (law)."

The word translated as “coastlands” (lit. “desirable places”) is a poetic reference to the nations of the world. So, the conclusion of the sages was that the Messiah would bring forth His own Torah, and people from all over the earth would want to receive it. They concluded that there were two possibilities for this description. Either the Messiah would come up with a new Torah (*Yalqut Isaiah 26, Siman 296*) or He would strip away all of the rabbinic additions and restore it to the purity of its original state (*Pesikhta Rabbati 89,6*). This issue is the background to Yeshua’s declaration in Mathew 5:17-18 as part of His Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

¹⁸ "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

The Greek term *kataluo*, translated as “abolish,” literally means “to throw down and smash into pieces.” It is a picture of rendering something useless. Clearly the intent of Yeshua was not to do the very thing that many people today claim He did. He did not smash the Torah to pieces and render it useless. Yeshua’s extensive teachings on the Torah demonstrate His validation that the commandments remained highly useful as a guide for righteous living.

Then, in keeping with the common Hebraic style of using repetition for the sake of emphasis, He said something similar in verse 18. “The smallest letter” (KJV “jot”) of the Greek alphabet is *iota*, which is equivalent to the English letter “i” and the Hebrew letter י (*yud*). The word translated as “stroke” (KJV “tittle”) is the Greek word *keraiia*, which literally means “horn.” That is a reference to horn-like extensions that are found on specific Hebrew letters of the alphabet that distinguish them from other similar letters.

¹ The *chuqim* are the commandments of the Torah that tested the obedience of the people, even when a rational basis wasn’t immediately apparent. The other two categories of the Torah are the *mishpatim*, which are laws of justice, and the *edot*, which include the atoning sacrifices of the Torah.

Yeshua was using these elements of the letters of the alphabet to show that since they are all important, the same is true for all of the commandments of the Torah. Yeshua was using a Hebraic way of reasoning called *kal v' homer*, meaning light and heavy, in which something that is true in a light or simple sense will also be true in a heavy or complex one. The *iota* and the horns are light, and the commandments themselves are heavy. Yeshua is making the point that, just as every letter and stroke is important, every aspect of the Torah is important and meaningful, not just those you pick and choose to uphold.

This raises two questions. First, how long is that true? In Matthew 5:18, Yeshua clearly affirmed the continuity of Torah principles “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all is accomplished.” The second question is—How did Yeshua’s arrival impact the on-going relevance of the Torah? In verse 17, He said that He came to fulfill it. The Greek word πληρόω (*pleroō*), translated as “fulfill,” does not mean bringing something to an end. The word picture for *pleroō* is a container that is filled to the top or is even overflowing. In that way, *pleroō*, describes something that establishes its full meaning.²

Not only was Yeshua opposed to abolishing the Torah, His purpose was to establish its full meaning for citizens of His kingdom. So, on that day when Yeshua gave this message on the hill above the Sea of Galilee, the people could understand that fulfilling the Torah meant He was establishing the full meaning of every commandment according to their purposes:

- Citizens of the kingdom should abide by the teachings of Yeshua and follow His example in regard to the aspects of Torah that are concerned with justice and righteousness.
- They should anticipate that He would satisfy the aspects of the Torah that are concerned with sin and sacrificial atonement, once for all, in a perfect way.
- Regarding the memorial aspects of the Torah that depict the great acts of God, they should expect each of the feasts to relate in some way to Yeshua’s role in God’s plan for this world.

This is Yeshua’s alternative to observing every facet of Torah, including the Levitical sacrifices, or abandoning every facet of Torah, including practices of personal righteousness. By maintaining the relevance of the commandments with a focus on Yeshua’s teachings and actions, they are not smashed to pieces and made meaningless, because they now reflect their overflowing meaning. And it does not require resorting to legalism to do so.

As Yeshua went on to declare in verse 20, our righteousness must surpass outwardly religious people. We need the righteousness that Yeshua gives to us when we believe in Him, transforming us from the inside out, giving us true godly motivation that arises from the heart. It is consistent with the prophecies of Jeremiah (31:33) and Ezekiel (36:26-27) that God would write His Law on the hearts of the redeemed. And, through the indwelling of the Spirit, we are given the ability to live out the principles found in the Torah in more spiritually mature ways than mere religious observance.

In the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, and throughout the gospels, Yeshua builds on this foundation in Matthew 5 by providing specific teachings on many of the commandments that demonstrate how their full meaning is established in Him.

² This understanding is further reinforced by Paul’s statement in Romans 10:4—“For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” The word translated as “end” is *telos*. This word does not mean “end” in the sense of “termination.” Instead, it refers to a “goal.” That understanding is shown in the greater context of Scripture (cf. (1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:9). Accordingly, in Romans 10:4, Paul is affirming that “Messiah is the goal of the Law, not the termination of the Law.”