

The Eternal Torah ~ Part 1

Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

In this post, we will continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount as we examine a critical passage of Yeshua's teachings in Matthew 5. Certainly after the crowd heard our Lord's description of the kind of person God blesses, they said to themselves, *"But we could never attain that kind of character. How can we have this righteousness? Where does it come from?"* They wondered how His teaching related to what they had been taught all their lives. What about Moshe and the Torah?

In the Torah, God certainly revealed His standards for holy living. The P'rushim (Pharisees) defended the Torah and sought to obey it. But Yeshua said that the true righteousness that pleases God must *exceed* that of the Torah-teachers and the P'rushim - and to the common people, the Torah-teachers and the P'rushim were the holiest men in the community! If *they* had not attained true righteousness, what hope was there for anybody else?

Many people believe that Yeshua was opposed to the Torah and taught that it no longer applies to us today. Why do you think this is? The answer is simple. They have either not carefully studied the whole of scripture themselves or they have not listened to teachers who understand the importance of a Godly observant lifestyle. Over the next several posts, we will take a closer look at what Yeshua himself says about the Torah ~ a series I call the Eternal Torah.

"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes, indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah — not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!" ~ Matthew 5:17-20 (CJB)

At a first glance it might be said that this is the most astonishing statement that Yeshua made in the whole Sermon on the Mount. In this statement Yeshua lays down the eternal character of the Torah.

Again and again, Yeshua is accused of breaking what the Jewish leaders called the Torah. He did not observe the hand washings that the Torah laid down; he healed sick people on Shabbat; He was in fact condemned and executed as a Torah-breaker; and yet here He seems to speak of the Torah with a veneration and a reverence that no Rabbi or P'rushim could exceed.

We need to begin our understanding of this passage with a short history lesson as background. The "**Torah and the prophets**" always refers to the Tanakh, not to rabbinical oral law. The word "**Torah**" is used by the Jewish leaders to refer to four things:

1. the Ten Commandments;
2. the first five books - Pentateuch - "**Torah of Moshe;**"
3. the entire Tanakh as we know it; and,
4. the rabbinical oral interpretations and *traditions*.

The P'rushim thought Yeshua was attempting to destroy their Torah – their oral interpretations and *traditions*. To begin with, His *authority* did not come from any of the recognized leaders or rabbinical schools. Instead of teaching "from authorities" as did the Torah-teachers and the P'rushim, Yeshua taught ***with authority***. Not only in His authority, but also in His *activity*, Yeshua seemed to defy the Torah. He deliberately paid no attention to the *traditions* of the P'rushim. Yeshua's *associations* also seemed contrary to the Torah, for He was the friend of social outcasts and sinners.

In the Tanakh, we find very few rules and regulations; what we do find are great, broad principles which we must take and interpret under God's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. In the Ten Commandments we find no rules and regulations at all; they are each one of them great principles out of which we must find our own rules for life. In our civil law, this would be similar to the United States Constitution.

The Jewish leaders held that the Torah was divine, and that in it God had said his last word, and that therefore everything must be in it. If a thing was not in the Torah explicitly it must be there implicitly. They therefore argued that out of the Torah it must be possible to deduce a rule and a regulation for every possible situation in life. So there arose respected men called the Torah-teachers who made it the business of their lives to reduce the great principles of the Torah to literally thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations.

Yet, it was the P'rushim who were destroying the Torah! By their *traditions*, they robbed the people of the Word of God; and by their hypocritical lives, they disobeyed the very Torah that they claimed to protect. The P'rushim thought they were *conserving* God's Word, when in reality they were *preserving* God's Word: embalming it so that it no longer had life! Their rejection of Yeshua when He came to earth proved that the inner truth of the Torah had not penetrated their hearts.

For many generations this Oral Torah was never written down. It was handed down in the memory of generations of Torah-teachers. Three hundred years after Yeshua's execution, a summary of the oral Torah was made and codified. That summary is known as the **Mishnah**; it contains sixty-three tractates (short essays) on various subjects of the Torah, and in English makes a book of almost eight hundred pages. Later Jewish scholarship developed commentaries to explain the Mishnah. These commentaries are known as the **Talmud**. Of the Jerusalem Talmud there are twelve printed volumes; and of the Babylonian Talmud there are sixty printed volumes.

To the strict orthodox Jew, in the time of Yeshua, serving God was a matter of keeping thousands of legalistic rules and regulations; they regarded these intricate rules and regulations as literally matters of life and death and eternal destiny. Clearly Yeshua did not mean that not one of these rules and regulations was to pass away; repeatedly he broke them himself; and repeatedly he condemned them; that is certainly not what Yeshua meant by the Torah, for that is the kind of Torah that both Yeshua and Rabbi Sha'ul condemned.

Yeshua made it clear that He had come to honor the Torah and help God's people learn it, love it, and live it. He would not accept the artificial righteousness of the religious leaders. Their righteousness was only an external masquerade. Their religion was a dead ritual, not a living relationship. It was artificial; it did not reproduce itself in others in a living way. It made them proud, not humble; it led to bondage, not liberty.

In my next several posts, we will begin to unpack this passage phrase by phrase.