

The Torah and the Messiah

Messiah in Torah

by Rick Spurlock

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.¹

For Messiah is the goal of the Torah for righteousness to everyone who believes.

It is remarkable how a slight change in perspective can unlock or distort the meaning of passages of Scripture. We have all seen how slight variances in translating can entirely change how a passage reads and is understood, and when we read passages like the one above from Romans 10:4, we are often exposed to the biases of the translator. The translator who chose the first rendition would likely embrace the thought that the purpose of the Torah was to reveal Messiah. This has been the traditional Christian perspective since the emergence of the Christian church in the Second and Third Centuries. Interestingly, traditional Judaism, which claims the Torah as its own, has an entirely different perspective on its purpose. They have seen it as a way to live. Could it be that there is something to both views?

Traditional Christianity believes that the Messiah, namely the person of "Jesus," should be seen as the focal point of faith. Traditional Judaism, on the other hand, has seen Messiah as a part of the promises made to the Fathers, and a future fulfillment.

So what *is* the purpose of Torah? How does it relate to Messiah? And what relationship does Messiah have to Torah? Keeping in mind the limitations of generalization, it might be helpful to

use it for a moment in order to more easily see the differences in perspective between traditional Christianity and traditional Judaism.

Traditional Christianity and the Purpose of the "Old Testament"

Since its separation from Judaism in the Second and Third Centuries, traditional Christianity has treated the TaNaKh [aka the "Old Testament"] as a glossary of sorts for what they call the "New Testament." The Apostolic Scriptures [aka "New Testament"] serve as the primary source for information about "Jesus" and how to live the Christian life. In large part, they reject the Torah (and TaNaKh) as a source for information on how to live. It is with considerable discomfort that they see nearly a third of the Apostolic Scriptures quote or indirectly allude to the TaNaKh. In reading the Gospels and the Epistles, they have taken those quotes as information about "Jesus" as the Messiah, and assumed that this was the only intended purpose of the "Old Testament" in the life of a believer. They appreciate the "Wisdom Literature" such as the Psalms and Proverbs as having life application as long as they are understood in a general sense.

Theological excursions into the "Old Testament" can be fraught with peril from this traditional Christian perspective, which approaches Scripture with a sort of schizophrenic pitting of the last third against the first two thirds. Even a casual observer must be confused by traditional Christianity's proposition of "Grace versus Law," and how it oddly

seeks to refute the first part of Scripture with the last.

Another purpose that traditional Christianity finds in the TaNaKh is the storytelling. Christians use the life stories of the patriarchs, judges, kings, and prophets from which to draw some life experience. However the fact that the righteous ones in those stories used Torah as a source for how to live is largely rejected. In some ways they see these Bible heroes as "retroactive Christians," instead of as the Torah-submissive believers that they were.

In every way, the traditional Christian approach to the TaNaKh is information based. Because of this, it is not seen as necessary for the life of the believer. To traditional Christianity, all that is needed for knowing how to live is the "Holy Spirit," and the Apostolic Scriptures are seen as a secondary source. Certainly, Christians see the Apostolic Scriptures as a balance to being "led by the Spirit," in the sense that the "Spirit" will not contradict the Apostolic Scriptures. However, Christians have no real problem with the fact that the Apostolic Scriptures apparently (according to the traditional Christian view) contradict the TaNaKh.

Seeking information about Messiah in TaNaKh seems to be the focus of traditional Christianity even when it reads passages like Luke 24:27,

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Y'shua] expounded to them [disciples] in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

This passage is often read with the thought that they (the disciples) needed to hear how "Jesus" was foreshadowed in the "Old Testament" - but that is no longer needed because now we have the complete picture. A closer look at this passage in Luke shows that Y'shua was not simply passing on information - He was revealing His character and enhancing the relationship He was establishing with His disciples. So it is no wonder that afterward those same disciples proclaimed,

"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32b)

Traditional Christianity treats the Gospel accounts in a similar way to the TaNaKh, namely as a source of information about “Jesus,” but not as an example of how to live. In some regards, the Gospels pose a more difficult problem on the issue of “how to live” than does the “Old Testament,” because the literal words of Y’shua are quite difficult. Hence, the Gospel accounts are often allegorized to some measure, as are Y’shua’s own words. Particularly targeted by this approach are Y’shua’s parables.

In large part, the traditional Christian approach to TaNaKh being information-centered shows a “Greek” or philosophical type of thinking – absent relationship.

Traditional Judaism and the Purpose of the TaNaKh

Traditional Judaism sees Torah as the “Tree of Life.” When they speak of Torah, they often are including far more than simply the books of Moses, which they see as foundational to all that follows, including the entire TaNaKh as well as their own traditions. Seeing Torah as a source for how to live has some obvious difficulties, namely in specifics. There are many very specific commands in Torah, but there are also a lot of “gray areas.” From this, traditional Judaism has assumed the need to draw heavily from sources outside of TaNaKh to fill in the gaps. Primary in that role, of course, is “Oral Torah” (the oral traditions of the Jews), which traditional Judaism would not separate from the written TaNaKh completely. One might explain that the written Torah gives a command, and the Oral Torah gives the details on how one might perform it.

In principle, traditional Judaism uses Torah and then all of TaNaKh as the starting place for decisions on how to live. In principle, they hold it up as the source of life, and yet in practice, they depend much more upon the explanations in Mishnah, Talmud, and various *midrashim* in explaining how Torah is to be lived out.

In principle, traditional Judaism sees TaNaKh as an ongoing living relationship with HaShem. Practically speaking, traditional Judaism needs much more in addition to TaNaKh to know how to

live. Herein lies the difficulty. Traditional Judaism, though seeing the need for a relationship, is pressed with the difficulty of relating to the Infinite One.

Traditional Judaism has seen TaNaKh as revealing Messiah in a future sense, but in no way does it see that as the primary purpose. Like traditional Christianity, they have treated TaNaKh as only a source of information **about** Messiah, and in no way as a means of relationship **with** Messiah.

Traditional Christianity and Messiah

Traditional Christianity has at its core an appreciation for the centrality of the Person of Messiah, namely “Jesus.” They are less concerned with the title “Messiah” and its ramifications. This is seen in the fact that they have often taken the title of “Christ” [*Christos* = “anointed one” or Messiah] and treated it more as a name than a title. By doing this, they focus upon the *person* of Messiah, although at times outside the context of the titular *role* of Messiah in the life of the believer and in the leadership in the assembly of believers. This “personalizing” of the Person of Messiah does have some very positive results in that they see relationship as supreme; however in deemphasizing His title as Messiah, they in some ways minimize His rulership in the present lifestyle of the believer.

By examining the TaNaKh, we can see that the title of “messiah” [anointed one] was given to three offices: Prophet, Priest, and King. We see those roles being played out by various personalities in TaNaKh. We see Moses as Prophet. We see Aaron as Priest. We see David as King. Each of these men were “anointed ones” and provide a model or type of “messiah.” In the cases of Moses and David, we see them both fulfilling all three roles. Traditional Christianity has had little difficulty seeing “Jesus” in the role of Priest. Where they have more difficulty is in seeing Him as Prophet and King. Emphasizing any single role over the others will pervert our view of Messiah.

We can look at the three-part role of Messiah in this way:

- 1 **Prophet:** facing the people (speaking for HaShem)

- 2 **Priest:** facing HaShem (representing the people)
- 3 **King:** facing HaShem and the people (acting as HaShem’s representative in ruling)

When traditional Christianity does not adequately emphasize the prophetic and royal aspects, the perspective becomes the “servanthood” of Y’shua – at the expense of obedience to Him as Prophet and King.

Traditional Judaism and Messiah

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. How long it takes, I will await His coming every day.

–from Judaism’s Principles of Faith as stated by Rambam

Although accepting this as a principle of faith, traditional Judaism treats the subject of “Messiah” in a somewhat abstract sense. In large part, they are focused upon the titular aspects of a “coming Messiah.” They see “Messiah” as a promised redeemer and restorer, always in a future sense. They see “Messiah” in military terms (defeating the enemies of Israel) and in spiritual terms (restoring Torah as a guide for living).

Not having a name or Person to associate with the title “Messiah” has made it difficult for traditional Judaism to personalize Messiah. Though belief in the Messiah is a tenant of Judaism, the traditional Jew sees no need for Messiah in order to live by Torah – recognizing only that in some regards it will be easier when Messiah rules. In other words, Messiah is not necessary for living, and belief in Messiah is only required because He was promised by HaShem to the Fathers.

Of the three-part role of Messiah, traditional Judaism finds the royal and prophetic roles the most appealing – but at the expense of His priestly function. In any regard, a relationship with Messiah apart from His rather distant role as Warrior King is of little concern.

The lack of a need for relationship with Messiah in traditional Judaism is partly born from the way that traditional Ju-

daism sees their relationship with HaShem Himself. Beginning with the time of the translating of the Septuagint (circa 270 BCE), Judaism began to adopt some of the Greek thinking regarding the separation of “spirit and matter.” In later years, traditional Judaism removed man further and further from the Person of HaShem. Although Torah was explicit in its statements regarding the “dwelling Presence” of HaShem, and His intent to dwell with them, they were less and less convinced that it was literally possible. Now traditional Judaism even regards the Shekinah as something of an emanation of HaShem, and not HaShem Himself.

Although earlier Judaism understood that the promise of the Messiah was a promise for the return to the “Garden” and HaShem dwelling with man, as time progressed the Gnosticism that would plague Christianity would take a toll on Judaism as well. The concept of “HaShem dwelling among us” has become somewhat vague in modern traditional Judaism, which views as impossible the idea of a divine Messiah directly interacting with men.

Living in Y’shua, Living out Torah

Remember the two questions we started with? We asked about the purpose of Torah, and how it relates to Messiah. Also, we wanted to know what Messiah has to do with Torah. The answer to both of those questions comes down to one word: **relationship**.

What we see is that traditional Christianity believes in the necessity of a relationship with Messiah, but that there is no need for Torah as a part of that. Traditional Judaism believes in the necessity of Torah, but has no need for a relationship with Messiah.

For those who approach Scripture as a unified whole, the obvious answer to the traditional Christian and the traditional Judaic views of Torah and Messiah is simple: both have it right in some measure – albeit disconnected. You see, the direct connection of the Person of Messiah to Torah is the answer to the disparity.

Both traditional Christianity and traditional Judaism treat Torah as a source of information about Messiah, but not as a

way to live out a relationship with Messiah. Both traditional Christianity and traditional Judaism treat Messiah as a future King. Although Christianity acknowledges a personal relationship to “Jesus,” with regard to the role of “Messiah” they act as though they reserve the title for a yet future time. Both traditional Christianity and traditional Judaism see Messiah as a fulfillment to the Promises to the patriarchs – but they both treat this as information, not as directly involving relationship.

Relationship is More Than Identity

When a man and women become married, they assume a new identity. They are the “husband of...” and the “wife of...” – they are “Mr. and Mrs.” They have a piece of paper that says that they are “man and wife.” This identity makes it possible for them to act out their respective roles as husband and wife – but it is not the equivalent to the actual relationship that a man and wife experience. The relationship is acted out on many levels, and over the years should become even stronger. In a similar way, a relationship with the Person of Messiah Y’shua should not simply be defined as “getting saved” and going to heaven. That in and of itself is not a relationship. We see all the way through Scripture that HaShem is calling men and women into relationship with Him. He promised the Messiah through Scripture as a means to that relationship, as well as a goal of that relationship. From this we see that we can gain greatly from traditional Judaism’s perspective of Torah, namely that it is the “Tree of Life” – a way to live out the relationship HaShem is calling us to. We can gain greatly from traditional Christianity’s perspective as to the personal aspect of the Person of Messiah, Y’shua. In this we see the unified message: **Y’shua in the Torah, and the Torah in Y’shua.**

Messiah Y’shua Goal of Torah

Let’s go back to where we started – in Romans 10:4,

For Christ [Messiah] is the end [goal] of the law [Torah] for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The key word that changes the perspec-

tive of course is the English word “end”. The Greek here is the word *telos*. It is from the primary verb *tello* which means “to set out for a definite point or goal.” In the Apostolic Scriptures it is used a number of different ways, including a terminating point. The usage of *telos* in order to indicate purpose, or a goal, is best seen in these other passages:

Now the purpose [telos] of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. 1Timothy 1:5

[Y’shua Messiah] whom having not seen, you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the goal [telos] of your faith – the salvation of your souls. 1Peter 1-8-9

We see the goal of Torah (and all Scripture) is to point to Y’shua. He is the Promised One – and His revelation is found from B’reshit [Genesis] through Revelation. Y’shua’s own words speak to this in John 5:39-40:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me [Y’shua]. But you are not willing to come to Me [Y’shua] that you may have life.

Even though they may have missed some relationship hints in this and other passages, there is something that we see traditional Christianity has done well – identifying that the “Scriptures” [TaNaKh] testify of Y’shua. Stopping there is where there is difficulty – “life” is often seen simply as “eternal life.” There is no question of the eternal aspect of a life in Y’shua – but there is a problem with the traditional Christian view. What about now, and what about the relationship now? Sure, we have a relationship to Y’shua now, but do we have a relationship with Him in His role as Prophet and King now? What “life” do we have now?

Relating to Messiah Y’shua by Living a Torah Life

After Romans 10:4 tells us that the goal of Torah is Messiah – it goes on in verse 5 to tell us that a means of relating to the

Messiah in fact is found in Torah as well.

For Moses describes the righteousness which is of the Torah this way: "The man who does those things shall live by them."²

Traditional Christianity of course has taken this verse to speak in a negative way regarding Torah, but that simply exposes their biases. Romans 10:5 is speaking of Torah in a positive way – showing that Torah is more than *doing* – it is *living*³. It is not the mere following of laws or even instructions – it is a life that is lived as guided by the Master.

Here is where we see “Torah in Messiah.” It is here that traditional Christianity, with their Greek view of Scripture, has often failed to see what HaShem intends for His people. HaShem’s Word is supposed to be our food today. Traditional Judaism understands this full well to mean that it is HaShem’s Word by which we live out what we believe of HaShem by faith. The concept of food is that it keeps us alive. In the same way, we see that, in order to “live out” what we believe, we are given a model. We see that Torah is our food – it is a source of life and a model for living. This is seen in Deuteronomy 32:45-47,

And Moses finished speaking these words to all Israel by saying, "Set your hearts upon all the words I am testifying among you this day—all the words of this Torah which you shall command your children to be careful to do. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life, and through this you shall prolong your days in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."⁴

Y’shua’s “good news” message is repeated throughout the Gospels, “Repent, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” This message bears with it a call to return to HaShem’s Word as the “how to live” instructions. It bears with it the reality of the rule of Messiah now – not simply in the future, where both Judaism and Christianity traditionally place it. **This message is a call for relationship.** It is a call to return to a life that is lived out as an expression of faith in the Holy One of Israel. It is where we

make the word “relationship” mean more than an identity. Where some might say, “I’m a Christian” or “I’m a follower of Y’shua,” we instead show that we do indeed follow the Master by how we live.

Seeing “Torah in Messiah” means more than simply seeing that He lived such a lifestyle. It is also an identification with Him through imitation. In that imitation of His Torah life, we learn how to relate to Him, to place our feet along side His as we “dance the dance of life.” From this, we do not merely gain more knowledge about Him, we learn to **live with Him**, as a bride learns how to live with her husband.

Some ways that we can experience these “dance steps” of life with Y’shua the Messiah are in the *moedim* [the “appointed times” of Torah]. Who has not seen the enormous benefits of living Pesach out as Torah has prescribed? In the Passover, we reflect upon what Y’shua has done for us, and how He has freed us, and proven His love for us – and we learn how it is related to His atoning work at Golgotha. At Sukkot, we learn to anticipate His dwelling among us. It is the focus of our being for eight days – and we are “dancing with Him” in that. Each Shabbat, we experience the grace of His presence, like a gentle lover’s whisper upon our cheeks. These appointed times are all about relating to, and living with, our Messiah Y’shua.

Other “dance steps” of life in Y’shua seen in Torah are found in some of the less conventional instructions (from a human perspective)—for instance, the Numbers 15:37-40 instruction to make “fringes” or *tzit-tzit* for the corners of our garments. Their very purpose, outlined there, is to be a continual reminder of our gracious Master, and His purposes for us. When we see the *tzit-tzit*, we are reminded that it is He, and He alone, who has “signed our dance card.” We are His, and His life is ours.

These things speak of relationship. Surely, they can be “done” without relationship – but to negate them, as traditional Christianity has, undoes their relational purposes. Like so many of faith before us, we have the distinct privilege to know the One of whom these things speak – we know Y’shua. Torah is no longer just something to “do” or not to

“do” – it is the revelation of **Someone** – and an invitation to dance...

We know that Torah serves as a foundation for knowing about Messiah Y’shua. But to stop there is to stop where both traditional Judaism and traditional Christianity have stopped. To stop there is to be content with information about a title, or even a Person, but not to relate to the Person who has that title in the way life is lived. It is time for all of us to see Y’shua in Torah. It is time for all of us to live Torah by faith in Y’shua. Don’t be content with mere identity – seek the life of relationship – live His Torah life.

Notes

¹Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Ro 10:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²Adapted from the King James Version

³A careful reading of Leviticus 18:5, which Romans 10:5 quotes, quickly shows that this is not a negative. It is saying: this is more than “things to do” -- it is for living out!

⁴Adapted from the King James Version

Hashem,
I have longed
for Your
yeshu`ah.
Your Torah
is my
delight.

Psa 119:174