

Torah

Introduction

Torah is the Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible. It consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Moses was the author of these books. The word 'Torah' in Hebrew is derived from the root word יָרָה which in the hif'il conjugation means to guide or to instruct. In Greek it is called Pentateuch(the five books).

In the Torah there are 613 commandments. These commandments were started to be compiled in the 3rd century AD. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon acronymed Rambam or Maimonides who was born in 1135AD compiled and categorized these 613 commandments and these are followed till today. There are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments in the 613.

There are 18 sections in these 613. They are 1. God 2. Torah 3. Temple and Priests 4. Sacrifices 5. Vows 6. Ritual purity 7. Donations to the temple 8. Sabbatical year 9. Concerning animals for consumption 10. Festivals 11. Community 12. Idolatry 13. War 14. Social 15. Family 16. Judicial 17. Slaves and 18. Torts.

In the section two that is Torah there are 10 positive commandments. They are 10.The Jew must recite the Shema each morning and evening (Deut 6:7) and 11. Study the Torah and teach it to others(Deut 6:7). 12.He should bind tefillin on his head(Deut 6:8) and 13. his arm(Deut 6:8). 14. He should take the tzitzit(Num 15:38) for his garments and 15.Fix a mezuzah(Deut 16:9) on the door. The people are to be 16.assembled every seventh year(Deut 31:12) to hear the Torah read and 17. the

king(Deut 17:18) must write a special copy of the Torah for himself. 18. Every Jew should have a Torah scroll(Deut 31:19). 19. One should(Deut 8:10)praise God after eating.

The positive commandment taken for this assignment is the 11th one : Study the Torah and teach it to others(Deut 6:7). Usually in a beit Knesset or the place of gathering the Torah is taught. All throughout the Bible we can see the Torah is the centre of the teachings.

As the 16th positive commandment says, every 7th year all the Israel assembled to hear the Torah read usually the book of Deuteronomy. During Ezra's time this reading called aliyah for the 54 weeks of a Jewish leap year was regularized.

A Jewish year has alternate 30/29 days which combine to make 354 days or 50 weeks following the lunar cycle. In order to compensate with our calendar an additional month Adar Sheni with 30 days is added to the twelfth month Adar 7 times every 19 years. This makes the leap year to have 54 weeks. So the Torah is divided into 54 portions one portion for every week. This is called parsha meaning Torah reading. Every parsha was given a Hebrew name with the centralized message of this portion.

During the 2nd century B.C. while the Hasmoneans were ruling, they did not allow the Jews to read the Torah. So a Rabbi suggested of reading from the prophetic books that contain the same message of that particular parsha. Thus the corresponding prophetic portion of a particular parsha was introduced and this is called Haftarah. Now we add the corresponding new testament portion also. These portions are meditated every week starting from Simchat Torah, the 23rd day of the month

Ethanim or Tishrei. The portions are first used in the Sabbath service and then gatherings even family dining table. So all the Jews learn the same portion every week.

Jesus was so keen in observing Torah. We can see how Jesus lived according to this law(Study the Torah and teach to others)

1. How Jesus fulfilled(strengthened) this law according to Matthew 5:17-18?

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Torah or Prophets, but to fulfill them(Matt 5:17-19). Jesus the Son of God also learned Torah and taught to others. Before Bar mitzvah as every Jewish child should thoroughly study Torah, Jesus should have learned Torah thoroughly from his parents. Also in the synagogues in every city, town and village of Israel, Torah was taught by priests and scribes. In Sabbath services Torah was taught by priests. So, Jesus must have learned keenly in these services.

When Jesus was twelve, Luke writes he learned so many Scriptural things for three days in Jerusalem temple from the priests and teachers of Torah. When Jesus was doing His ministry, John 7:15 says The Jews marveled at it saying,"How is that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So this shows Jesus was well versed in the Scriptures.

Jesus taught in the synagogues. Usually in the Sabbath services after the reading of the 7th aliyot and haftarah portions, the person who read those will go to the Moses' seat in the synagogue and taught from these portions. Luke 4:16-27 clearly shows that Jesus taught from the portions He read in Nazareth synagogue. Same way wherever He went, He preached in the synagogues.

2. How this law spoke of (described) Jesus according to John 5:39?

John 5:39 says, "You search the Scriptures, because you think in them you have Eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me". All throughout the times the Hebrews were looking for the Messiah to come. Moses said in Deut 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren-him you shall heed." So the Israelites were waiting for the Messiah to be revealed from among them. Stephen in his message to the Israelites says in Acts 7:37 "This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up".

John the Baptist was sent to run before Jesus Christ. He when found out how God anointed Jesus Christ when he saw how the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, he certainly knew Jesus was the Messiah because it was revealed to him earlier by the Holy Spirit that this is the manner that Messiah would be revealed. So he began to testify that Jesus is the Messiah.

Hearing his testimony Andrew the brother of Peter, asked Jesus for a stay with Him a night and during that stay he found out Jesus is the Messiah. He saw Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). Then Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

On the day Jesus rose from death, two disciples were travelling to Emmaus and they were discussing with each other the death and resurrection news of Jesus. At that time Jesus joined them in the walk and explained to them about His death and resurrection from

the Holy Scriptures. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:13-36). Their hearts burnt within them when Jesus explained from the Torah and the Prophets and their eyes were opened when He broke the bread with them (Luke 24:31, 32).

These two returned to Jerusalem immediately and joined the eleven apostles and those with them. Jesus appeared to them and told them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses (Torah), and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

So, all these instances tell us how Jesus taught Torah and explained from it to His disciples and people. More importantly Jesus lived according to Torah and one night stay of Andrew with Him revealed to him that He is the Messiah written in the Torah. Now anyone can follow Him in His footsteps.

3. What is the eternal principle in that law (Word) which shall never pass away according to Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31 and Luke 21:33?

Deut 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law.” So this law stands forever. All the words of the Torah came out of the mouth of our Lord. So when the words of Torah are taught to others they bring eternal salvation to them.

4. How did Jesus apply that law in other Gospel passages?

In the mount of beatitudes, in Matthew chapter 5 Jesus taught His disciples from the Ten commandments and gave a very deep meaning to those commandments. Most of

Jesus' teachings came from the book of Deuteronomy. Especially when Jesus was tempted by Satan He quoted all the three responses from the book of Deuteronomy.

He told a prospective follower of His, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Matt 19:17). When He was further asked which ones, Jesus replied by citing the Ten Commandments and appealed to the man to follow Him (Matt 19:18-21). So Jesus fulfilled this law in His life in many ways.

When asked what was the greatest commandment of the Lord, Jesus quoted *ve'ahavta* portion from the Shema: *ve'ahavta et Adonai eloheykha be'khol-levavkha u'vekhol me'odekha*, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5) and then He added the commandment, *ve'ahavta l're'akha kamokha – ani Adonai* "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Both of these commandments come directly from the Torah.

5. How did any Old Testament prophets "hang" on that law according to Matt 22:40? (i.e., how did any Old Testament prophet apply that law?)

Jewish traditions hold that the son of Noah, Shem established a school (bet ha midrash) in Jerusalem where Torah was taught. Later Eber joined him and the school was called in both of their names. Traditions also tell, Jacob before going to Laban spent 14 years of study of Torah here.

Acts 2:30 says David was a prophet. He had dedicated an entire psalm 119 to bring out the wonderful things of Torah. According to Torah the parents should teach their kids Torah. So learning from his father Hishai and his mother (the Jewish traditions hold her name to be Nitzevet) he understood the name of the Lord to be Lord of the Hosts. He was

well versed in the Torah that it became his thoughts always. In Psalm 119 he uses eight synonyms for Torah.

Eight Synonyms of God's Word in Psalm 119
⋄ Law (Torah, 25x)
⋄ Word (Davar, 23x)
⋄ Judgment (Mishpat, 23x)
⋄ Testimony (Edah, 23x)
⋄ Commandment (Mitzvah, 22x)
⋄ Statutes (Choq, 22x)
⋄ Precept (Piqqud, 21x)
⋄ Word (Imrah, 19x)

Even when he was condemned by Nathan with a parable in the matter of Bathsheba, his immediate response was the rich man should compensate the lamb with four which is a commandment, Exo 22:1 If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. Such was his passion for Torah, it was in his fingertips.

David also taught his children Torah and explained from Torah. His teachings to his children can be seen from Proverbs 4:4 to 9:18. His theme in these portions is they should obtain wisdom and understanding to get rid of so many sins. So only when God asked Solomon what his heart's desire, he replied he wanted wisdom to rule God's people. God granted him that.

Jeremiah 5:24, 26:19, Hosea 3:5 and Amos 3:8 say that these prophets taught the people how to fear the Lord which is a mitzvah. All the prophets of the Old Testament taught the people what goodness and blessings would come to people if they obeyed Torah and what curses would come if they disobeyed the Torah.

The books of Neviim give the history of people who obeyed and disobeyed Torah, the guidance of the prophets during those times and the results of it. The people of Israel learned Torah from parents, priests and levites and in turn taught them to others thus by obeying the 11th positive commandment.

6. How did the New Testament writers apply that law?

The Church was born on the day of the Jewish holiday of Shavu'ot (Pentecost) among the Jewish people in Jerusalem. The apostles Peter and John went to the Temple for prayer during the time of *minchah* (afternoon) sacrifices (Acts 3:1).

Peter's vision and visit to the house of Cornelius, a *ger tzeddek* ("God Fearer") who attended synagogue and observed Jewish customs and traditions (Acts 10), was subject to a crisis of conscience for him. First, in his vision Peter said that he would never eat of the "unkosher" animals shown to him, and second, he had qualms about even entering the house of a non-Jew. This indicates, among other things, how Peter was so steeped in the Torah.

The apostle Paul was raised a Torah observant Jew, who studied under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the son of Simeon ben Hillel, and grandson of the great Jewish teacher Hillel the Elder. Rabbi Sha'ul (as he would have been called) was well established in the Jewish leadership of his day, and even had a relationship with the Sanhedrin and High priest of Israel (Acts 9:1-2). But even after his conversion on the road of Damascus, he still identified himself as a Jew. In Acts 26, he said, "I am a Pharisee." He even declared that concerning the observance of Torah he was blameless

indicated that he observed a Jewish lifestyle till the day of his dying (Phil 3:6). Paul testified that he kept the Torah throughout his life (Acts 25:7, 8 and Acts 28:17).

Paul regularly attended the synagogues. “He came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures” (Acts 17:1, 2).

Acts 28:23 “When they had appointed a day for him(Paul), they came to him at his lodging in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets”. In Rome Paul spent this whole day teaching these people.

When Paul wrote to the gentile churches, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17), he was of course referring to the Jewish Scriptures, since the New Testament had not yet been compiled for the church.

7. In your opinion, why has Judaism missed seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of that Law?

Firstly in John 10:24 “So the Jews gathered round Him and said to Him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. 25. Jesus answered them, “I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me; 26. But you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.” The High priests, leaders and Pharisees did not believe Jesus Christ as the living Torah. That was one reason they missed Jesus as the Word of God.

Secondly in John 11:48 “If we let Him go on thus, everyone will believe Him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our place and our nation.” So these religious leaders when they thought like this, they did not think Jesus is the fulfillment of Moses’ word that the Lord will raise a prophet just like him.

Thirdly, Isaiah 6:9 says And he said, “Go and say to this people, ‘Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive. 10. Make the heart of this people fat, and their eyes heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” So Paul says in Acts 28:26,27 that they cannot understand the truth about Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

About Zechariah and Elizabeth Luke says, “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). “For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). So obeying Torah is the thing that shows we love God. In order to obey the commandments we must learn the Torah. When we teach it to others these words of God bless others also. So let Torah be a blessing to us and others. Shalom.

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