



Parasha Re'eh

August 31, 2019

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

Isaiah 55:11-55:5

1John 4:1-6

In Jewish tradition, today is a special day. It is called *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh*. In some months, the tradition is that the last day of the current month and the first day of the next month, are both *rosh chodeshim*, both are the heads of, that is, both are the beginnings of a new Hebrew month. In fact, today is the *Shabbat* before the beginning of a very special month in Judaism. Today is the 30th day of the Month of *Av* and tomorrow, in addition to being September 1st on the Gregorian calendar, it is also the 1st day of the month of *Elul* on the Hebrew calendar.

This special month, just one of several very important Hebrew months, is *Elul*. I want to tell you more about it and why it is special, but first, we have to distinguish between what is tradition and what is authoritative, commanded for us. A question for us is, what Jewish traditions do we as Messianic followers of Yeshua observe because they are good traditions and what do we observe because ADONAI has commanded us to observe?

This is really a very important subject for us and a portion of today's message will deal with it. This is an important subject because the traditions from rabbinic Judaism which we observe also dictate in part how we as Yeshua's followers live. We have to be able to distinguish the difference between what observant rabbinic Jews do and what we as Yeshua's disciples should do. Sometimes it's the same and sometimes it's not the same. The word, *halacha*, as it is used in rabbinic Judaism will help us to understand the difference. This is just a review of a subject with which you are already familiar.

Rabbinic Judaism is the traditional Judaism which replaced Temple Judaism a few years after the Temple was destroyed in the year 70CE. Without the Temple and no possibility of making the sacrifices which ADONAI set up in *Torah*, no way of shedding the atonement blood, the rabbis of that day set up their own system. We, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles today understand that Yeshua's blood shed on the stake replaced the sacrifices of the Temple. And, Yeshua's blood is a permanent sacrifice for our sins and is the provision of our personal relationship with Him leading to eternal life. But, the Jews in that day who did not believe in Yeshua, set up their own new belief system. *Halachah*, from the word *halakh* meaning "walk," means "the way we walk." This refers to commands required to be followed and established the behavior required for those Jews who follow this system. Very briefly, this new system, the rabbinic system, the one which was set up by the rabbis after the year 70, is based upon the three "T"s. These three new things replaced the three daily sacrifices in the Temple. In Hebrew, they are: *Torah*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedakah*; Scripture study, prayer and charitable giving. In their belief system, if a person does these things, they are living a righteous life.

But, it's more complicated than that and although complicated, it is essential that we all understand these things. By understanding them, we are better able to understand what we believe. And, unfortunately, everyone does not believe the same way. We must be secure in

our own understanding of Scripture and particularly with regard to Yeshua our Messiah. But, sometimes what we see in the movement around us is not what we should believe. We have recently talked about the book, *The Non-Torah*, which was written by some of our rabbis within our own IAMCS. And, a number of you have read it. When we refer to the non-*torah*, we are usually referring to what is called “the oral *torah*. According to the rabbis, this lengthy list of descriptions, writings and commands was handed down orally, from mouth to ear down through the generations beginning with Moses. The rabbis call it “*Torah She’b’al-Peh*,” the oral *torah*. The word *peh* means “mouth.” In Yeshua’s day, it was still oral and was a major belief among the Pharisees of that time, including *Sha’ul*, Paul, before he became a follower of Yeshua. This was commented on in our recent study of the Book of Galatians with the oral *torah* being a part of the system that *Sha’ul* had turned away from and specifically warned the Galatians not to follow. The oral *torah* was the “yoke that neither we nor our fathers could bear” that *Shimon Kefa*, Simon Peter, spoke of in Acts 15. This oral group of laws was written down about the year 200 CE by a rabbi known as “Judah the Prince.” The written form is called The *Mishnah*, its name meaning “to study by repetition.” As years went on, rabbis wrote commentaries on the *Mishnah* and the group of commentaries later became what is called the *Gemara*. It comes from a word meaning “study” and is the writings of the ancient rabbis who analyzed and commented on the *Mishnah*. When the *Mishnah* and the writings about it, its *Gemara*, are combined, the totality is called a *Talmud*, taken from a word meaning “to learn.” But, there are actually two *Talmuds*, the earliest one is called *Talmud Yerushalmi* because it was written in Jerusalem. The other, the one considered the most important, was written in Babylon and is called *Talmud Bavli*. That’s a very quick look at what observant Jews following rabbinic Judaism follow. They consider all of these parts, the oral *torah* which later was written down as the *mishnah*, the *gemarot*, the *gemara’s*, and the two *talmuds*, to be authoritative for them. To them, both these and the written *Torah* are equal in authority.

But, there is another *Torah*. It is called “*Torah She’Biktav*,” and it is the “written *Torah*,” the *Torah* which ADONAI really gave to Moses beginning at Mount Sinai and later as Israel progressed through their journey in the wilderness. It means “the law which was written.” It’s the same *Torah* which is written in Hebrew in our *sefer Torah*, our congregational *Torah* Scroll. That’s our reason for raising it during our *Torah* Service; to testify that “this is the *Torah* which ADONAI gave to Moses.” Sinai was where *Torah* began for us. It was given by ADONAI to Moses and it became the five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. But for Yeshua’s followers today, *Torah*, meaning teaching and instruction, includes all Scripture, Genesis through Revelation.

Our *parasha* today is *Parasha Re’eh*, *re’eh* meaning “see.” <8> It begins with these words: 26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse— 27 the blessing, if you listen to the mitzvot of Adonai your God that I am commanding you today, 28 but the curse, if you do not listen to the mitzvot of Adonai your God, but turn from the way I am commanding you today, to go after other gods you have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28 TLV). ADONAI offered a choice to a people to whom He had given free will. Receive either the blessing or receive the curses. It was the offer of a loving G-d to a people whom He had chosen. Israel, the people of the twelve tribes, the sons of Jacob, was given promises by ADONAI, the Creator of heaven and earth, promises which would become curses if they were disobedient. Hundreds of years later, as a result of Israel’s falling away, they were scattered among the nations where they suffered persecution, famine and death. But, ADONAI has not abandoned them. Speaking of the future, “the latter days,” Moses said: 29 “But from there (where they are scattered among the nations) you will seek Adonai your God and you will find Him, when you seek Him

*with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in distress and all these things have come on you, in the latter days you will return to Adonai your God and listen to His voice. 31 For Adonai your God is a merciful God. He will not abandon you or destroy you, or forget the covenant with your fathers that He swore to them” (Deuteronomy 4:29-31 TLV). We are now in the latter of the “latter days” and we are nearing the promised time when all Israel will “return to ADONAI spiritually, and as the *Torah* said, listen to His voice.” What we just read from Deuteronomy 4 is the same event called “the salvation of all Israel” by *Sha’ul* in Romans 11. Today, Israel is back in the land and we know that both the salvation of all Israel and *Yeshua’s* return as King is near.*

In today’s *parasha*, Israel was instructed to read the blessings and the curses after they entered the Promised Land. Moving forward to that time, we see that they had already been in the Land for a while and had conquered several groups of people. *30 Then Joshua built an altar to Adonai, God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, 31 as Moses the servant of Adonai had commanded Bnei-Yisrael, as written in the scroll of the Torah of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded any iron tool. They offered on it burnt offerings to Adonai and sacrificed fellowship offerings* (Joshua 8:30-31 TLV). *Har Eval*, Mount Ebal, is in what later became known as Samaria. Looking toward the west, Mount Ebal is on the right. Joshua did as he had been commanded and built an altar there, an altar which has been discovered in recent years. *32 There on the stones he wrote a copy of the Torah of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of Bnei-Yisrael* (Joshua 8:32 TLV). With the Israelites looking on, Joshua wrote a copy of the *Torah* on the stones of the altar, the *Torah* which Moses had himself written. *33 Then all Israel, with their elders and officials, and their judges, were standing on both sides of the ark facing the Levitical kohanim carrying the ark of the covenant of Adonai—the outsider as well as the native-born. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal—just as Moses the servant of Adonai had commanded before—in order to bless the people of Israel* (Joshua 8:33 TLV). Visualize the two mountains. All Israel was assembled somewhere in between them. The ark and the *kohanim* carrying it were in the center. The rest of the people were arranged according to the specified order which we will see in next week’s *parasha*, *Parasha Shoftim*. All of the people were looking at and focused on the ark. Six of the tribes were standing with their backs to Mount Gerizim and six tribes were standing with their backs toward Mount Ebal. Everyone was there, all Israel, which included the second generation descendants of the Gentiles who had come out of Egypt with them. *34 Then afterward he read all the words of the Torah—the blessing and the curse—according to all that is written in the book of the Torah. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, including the women and the little ones and the outsiders walking among them* (Joshua 8 34-35 TLV). This clearly shows that Moses did not give an oral *torah*. Verse 35 says: *There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel.* All that which Moses commanded was written and not oral. And, it was the *Torah She’Biktav*, the Scripture which is written in *torot* everywhere including in our own *sefer Torah*.

We need to be able to distinguish the difference between tradition and command. There are things found in the *Talmuds* which we receive as tradition because they are meaningful for us and are in agreement with Scripture. But, there are many things which we do not receive from them because we know and understand that there is only one *Torah* which is authoritative for us, the *Torah* given to Moses and which he wrote down.

As a congregation, we are continuing our tradition of making the month of *Elul* a month of introspection, a month of looking into our own hearts, along with our Jewish brothers and

sisters in rabbinic Judaism who are doing the same. Our approach to the month of *Elul* is a good thing, but it is not something which we have to do. Our salvation and our walk with Yeshua does not depend on it. For us it is not something which we have to do, but something which we get to do.

This year we again have a daily devotional guide for the month of *Elul*. The title is: **Elul 5779: Preparation For Covenant Renewal 5780**; A devotional walk through the month of *Elul* leading to *Rosh Hashanah*, September 30, 2019 which is 1 *Tishrei*, 5780: "A Time To Focus On Repentance, Renewal, and Return." Covenant renewal is something which can be a group event or just as an individual event. A Covenant Renewal Service is something which many people do at various times and in various ways and a number of churches have covenant renewal ceremonies. Some choose to have them on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. What we have just read about which Israel did between the two mountains could also be considered covenant renewal. In Judaism, some have decided that the day of *Shavuot* is a good time for this. Some look at *Rosh Hashanah* as covenant renewal, and we do as well, joining our hearts with the greater Jewish community during this time. I hope you will use this guide daily. As followers of Yeshua, we are encouraged to make our renewal and our repentance daily. That is Yeshua's wish for us. We can do this daily as we use the guide. But, as Messianic followers of Yeshua and as a part of Messianic Judaism, we also are a part of the greater Jewish community. And, part of our purpose is to join with them as they search their hearts and prepare for covenant renewal on *Rosh Hashanah* and then *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Whether or not you choose to individually make a statement of renewal to Yeshua on *Rosh Hashanah* is up to you. We will have no ceremony for it. But, recommitment of our lives to Yeshua is always a good thing, no matter when we do it.

If you decide that you want to have your own personal covenant renewal service, you might consider this one. **Introduction:** "Yield yourselves now to the L-rd. As His servants, give up the rule and government of yourselves to Messiah. Do not yield the parts of your bodies as tools of unrighteousness and continue in sin. Instead yield yourselves fully to G-d, as those who have been made alive from the dead. And yield every part of your whole body as instruments of righteousness to G-d. Don't you know that you make yourself a slave to obey whoever or whatever you yield yourself? You are G-d's servants; obey Him! Yield yourselves so fully and so finally to the L-rd that you may from here on, be only the L-rd's. Those who yield themselves to sin and the world really say in their hearts, "Sin, I am yours; World, I am yours; Riches, I am yours; Pleasures, I am yours. But, rather, with the Psalmist, let us say to the L-rd:" **Individual:** "I am Yours, My G-d; I reverence You. I dedicate myself to Your service." This is an updated version of a portion of a "Covenant Renewal Service" which was written by John Wesley. The values which Wesley taught are still relevant for us today.

Shabbat Shalom!