



Matthew Lesson 23

February 2, 2020

Scriptures from TLV

“The *Megillah* of Matthew”

18:1-20

When we ended our study last time, Yeshua had told *Kefa* to take a coin out of the first fish he caught and use it to pay the Temple tax for both of them.

We begin tonight in chapter 18. *1 At that hour the disciples came to Yeshua, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 And He called a child to Himself, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, “Amen, I tell you, unless you turn and become like children, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then shall humble himself like this child, this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:1-4 TLV).

We have previously identified “the Kingdom of Heaven” as Yeshua’s movement, those who had become His disciples. It included not only the twelve, but also *Miryam of Magdala* and the other women and who knows how many men. These twelve were not discussing whether or not they were the greatest in Israel, just the greatest within their group. It seemed to occupy their minds quite a bit. The similar discussion in Luke 9 seems to be about this same event because Yeshua also spoke there about coming as a little child. Their discussion about the greatest occurred two other times, one in Mark 9 and the other in Luke 22. That they had this argument three different times may have been because of their individual competitive nature or also possibly because of their spiritual immaturity.

In these verses in Matthew, it doesn’t tell us that they were arguing about who was the greatest. But, the implication is there in their question: “*Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” When Yeshua said: “*unless you turn and become like children, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven,*” He was referring to the simple trust of a little child. We usually think of “turning” as repentance, but that is not what it means here. Yeshua said that we must turn from our adult skepticism to the simple faith of a little child in order to truly accept Him. Little children are humble and are easily taught, but most adults are not this way. Whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, Yeshua’s body today. We can all be the greatest in Yeshua’s eyes by having a humble, child-like faith.

5 “And whoever welcomes one such child in My name, welcomes Me. 6 “But whoever causes one of these little ones who trust in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be sunk in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6 TLV)! Yeshua seems to be saying that those whom we invite to know Yeshua and they receive a saving knowledge of Him, those who hear the *Besora*, the Good News, and respond to it humbly with the faith of a little child, also has benefit for us. Our action welcomes Him to be a greater part of our own lives. But, one who attacks and damages the faith of one who has come to Yeshua humbly, would better die physical death than the spiritual death he might face for this sin.

7 *“Woe to the world because of snares! For snares must come, but woe to that man through whom the snare comes! 8 “And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away from you. It’s better for you to enter into life crippled or lame than, having two hands or two feet, to be thrown into fiery Gehenna. 9 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. It’s better for you to enter into life with one eye than, having two eyes, to be thrown into fiery Gehenna”* (Matthew 18:7-9 TLV). “Woe to the world” refers to the unbelieving world, those who may reject Yeshua and those who may try to turn us away from Him. Atheists, especially, seem to take delight in attacking the Word, the Scriptures, to try and point out things in the Bible they believe are untrue. I had this experience with one such person. It seemed to delight him to attack my faith. There are others who tempt Yeshua’s followers to various kinds of sin. But, they will be judged for it. For the follower of Yeshua, there indeed are snares in the world, snares which lead us away from following Him whole-heartedly. Yeshua doesn’t tell us to actually cut off our hand, foot or gouge out our eye. He is referring to the snares of the world, ungodly things we do using our hand, places we go with our feet or things we look at with our eyes. In other words, stop doing these things because they can lead us to separation from ADONAI and spiritual death.

10 *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father in heaven. 11 [footnote: Some manuscripts add verse 11: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost;]* (Matthew 18:10-11 TLV). This seems to be referring to anyone, believer or not, who would damage the faith of one who came to Yeshua in trusting faith. By saying “See that you do not,” it is clear that Yeshua was speaking to His disciples and likewise to us. We must not belittle the faith of anyone because they have been assigned angels who are directly in contact with ADONAI and will report our activities to the Father.

12 *“What do you think? If a certain man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, won’t he leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go looking for the one that is straying? 13 And if he finds it, amen I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t stray. 14 Even so, it’s not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost”* (Matthew 18:12-14 TLV). Yeshua now focuses on His followers who have gone astray, those who have known Him and now have turned back to the world. In this parable He shows how much He and the Father rejoice when a lost one returns. A shepherd rejoices over recovering one of his flock that had wandered more than over all those that were still in the fold. It is not that He didn’t love them as much, but that he knew they were secure and in no danger. Kefa wrote: 9 *“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you—not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance”* (2Peter 3:9 TLV). ADONAI rejoices that those whom ADONAI has given Him are restored and He wishes that not one should perish. The lesson for us is that if G-d loves and wishes to preserve them, then surely we should seek to love them as much.

15 *“Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you’re with him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.’ 17 But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah’s community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah’s community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector”* (Matthew 18:15-17 TLV).

How should we interpret Yeshua's words which describe how to respond when someone sins against you? Understanding how those of us in Messianic Judaism understand it is sometimes difficult for those coming from the Church because they usually already have been taught what these verses mean. Their understanding is based on "the Church's interpretation" of these verses. And, these verses in many Bibles seem to interpret themselves, implying that the understanding is right there in plain English. Here are these verses from the New International Version of the Bible: **15** *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'* **17** *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector"* (Matthew 18:15-17 NIV). How we interpret these verses has nothing to do with the way the Church interprets them. They have G-d-given authority and every right to interpret Scripture for themselves. In our area, many Christians understand a congregational type of church government, one in which the whole membership votes on issues. There are also elder-run churches and these individuals are the ones to whom the issue came. Then, there are those under the authority of a bishop. According to their own Church experience, those coming into Messianic Judaism will interpret these verses. Their understanding is that if steps 1 and 2 above fail, then the person is to be brought before the authority of their particular congregation for resolution and/or discipline.

You get a very similar understanding by just focusing on the English in what was just read from the TLV. **15** *"Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you're with him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.'* **17** *But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah's community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah's community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector"* (Matthew 18:15-17 TLV). Messiah's community sounds a lot like some Bibles which say "church." What was the community to which Yeshua was referring?" The Greek word underlying this word is *ekklesia*, meaning assembly or congregation, a reference to the people of the congregation. The translators of the TLV have added "Messianic" to further define the group. But, the word community does not necessarily define or explain the government of a congregation. And, that is the question which we must ask in regard to Matthew 18. In the 1st century, Yeshua's day, the assembly was a Jewish *synagogue*. It is their organizational structure which we must understand in order to be able to understand these verses.

To learn about the Messianic synagogue of the 1st century, we first need to examine traditional Jewish synagogues of the same period. But, in order to be able to understand them, we must first learn something about the judicial system within Israel. It began in the wilderness with Moses and by the 1st century it had undergone considerable modification. During the time in the wilderness, there was a way to address grievances, but it wasn't in synagogues because there were no *synagogues* in Israel before the return from Babylonian Captivity. Some think that Moses' implementation of his father in law Jethro's suggestion was the beginning of Israel's legal system. Essentially, he recommended that Moses assign men to be judges of smaller groups while leaving the most serious cases for himself (Exodus 18:21-22). ADONAI, Himself, also commanded a judicial system for Israel when He said: **18** *"Judges and officers you are to appoint within all your gates that Adonai your God is giving you, according to your tribes; and they are to judge the people with righteous judgment"* (Deuteronomy 16:18 TLV). He directed that Israel should be judged by judges and officers

and not by a jury of the people. This developed into the system which we find in Israel in the 1st century.

The Great *Sanhedrin*, *Sanhedrin ha-Gadol* (*Sanhedrin* means “sitting together”), was the “supreme court” of Israel and had 71 members. Its meeting place was a room in the 1st century Temple called “the chamber of hewn stones.” The leader was the *nasi*, a term meaning “prince.” Whether or not he was a *kohen* is not known. In the 1st century, members could either be *kohenim*, Levites, or ordinary Israelites.

There were also a number of “lesser” *sanhedrins* in Israel, known as a *Sanhedrin Ketana*, each of which had 23 members. There were even two of these known to be on or very near the Temple grounds in Jerusalem. Presumably, this was to give greater access for justice where most of the people were located. These lower *sanhedrins* could judge in things as serious as murder cases, but only the Great *Sanhedrin* could judge cases regarding the king. All of the larger towns of Israel also had a Lesser *Sanhedrin*.

The smallest towns of Israel had their own courts as well. They were called a *Beit Din*, or “house of judgment” and was found in communities of less than 120 people. The *Beit Din* consisted of 3 judges. These men, as well as, those in the Great *Sanhedrin* and the lesser *Sanhedrins*, were first qualified by training and then were given *s’micha*, ordination, by the laying on of hands. The *Beit Din* could have been located within a town or more frequently, in a *synagogue* in a town. The group of three was led by and included the *nasi*, the president of the *synagogue*. The *Beit Din* could judge cases concerning divorce, money, theft, immorality, admission of proselytes, laying on of hands and a number of other things. These three men were known as “rulers of the synagogue” because they were charged with the care of its function.

The 1st century Messianic congregations were very likely similar in structure. *Sha’ul* organized the congregations to whom he wrote letters and this would have included their congregational government. He lists the qualifications of two of the leaders for local congregations in 1Timothy 3. Speaking of the first of these two, he said: 1 “*Trustworthy is the saying: “If any man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work”* (1Timothy 3:1 TLV). The Greek word used here is *episcopē*, meaning overseer, or leader. This person is also understood to hold the office of *zakin*, elder, and possibly early on was also called the *nasi*, or president of the congregation. In the early Messianic congregation, there would also have been a *Beit Din* consisting of the Overseer (the *Nasi*) and two more elders (*zekenim*). *Sha’ul*, speaking to the Corinthian congregation about matters similar to what Matthew 18 describes, said: 1 “*Does any one of you, when he has a matter against his neighbor, dare to go to court before the unrighteous and not before the kedoshim*” (1Corinthians 6:1 TLV)? By referring to the *kedoshim*, meaning the holy ones, *Sha’ul* was speaking about the followers of Yeshua who were set apart to lead the *Beit Din*, the kind of small court found in *synagogues*.

It is also very possible that the mother congregation in Jerusalem which was led by Yeshua’s brother *Ya’akov*, Jacob, was the Messianic equivalent of the Great *Sanhedrin*. The leaders in Jerusalem ruled on matters which affected the whole Messianic body such as is described in Acts 15. Regarding the case before them about what to do with the Gentiles who were coming to faith in Yeshua, we see *Ya’akov*, the *Nasi*, giving the ruling: 19 “*Therefore, I judge not to trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God— 20 but to write to them to abstain from the contamination of idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what is strangled, and from blood*” (Acts 15:19-20 TLV). What we are able to gather from all the scattered evidence is that the early Messianic *synagogue* organizational structure was very

similar to what they already knew; that of the traditional *synagogue*. And, it very likely included the Jewish system of judgment within congregations, the *Beit Din*.

If Yeshua was referring to the *Beit Din*, how, then, are we to understand these three verses, 15-17 of Matthew 18? 15 “Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you’re with him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.’ 17 But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah’s community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah’s community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17 TLV). As we’ve learned, Messiah’s community was led by a man with various titles; Overseer, *Nasi*, President or Ruler. One such person whom Yeshua encountered was Jairus, whose daughter had died: 35 While Yeshua was still speaking, messengers come from the house of the synagogue leader, saying, “Your daughter is dead. Why do you still trouble the Teacher” (Mark 5:35 TLV)? Jairus, *Ya’ir* in Hebrew, was *nasi* of the *synagogue* at Capernaum, and along with two others, would have made up the *Beit Din*, the “House of Judgment” in that *synagogue*. Using the *synagogue* in Capernaum, here is an example of how a brother could sin against another in 1st century Israel, an illustration of the way which Matthew 18:15-17 would have worked. Suppose a person owed money to another and refused to pay. The person to whom the money was owed would go to the debtor and ask for repayment. If the debtor refused, he would take someone else with him and ask for payment. But, if this also failed, he would take his case to the *synagogue Beit Din*. *Ya’ir*, along with the other two *zekenim* would hear witnesses, examine the facts and make a ruling. If the money was proven to be owed, the debtor would be required to pay up under penalty of law and also possibly face exclusion from the *synagogue* which is what verse 17b means: 17...“And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah’s community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17b TLV). In a similar way, we understand *Sha’ul*’s words in 1Corinthians 6:1 to mean that those in the congregation at Corinth should take their grievances to the *Beit Din* of the congregation, rather than to the secular courts of Corinth which were composed of idolatrous pagans.

But, it must also be pointed out that Messianic *synagogues* of today do not have *Beit Dins*. They cannot rule on these kinds of grievances. But, they do have the authority to rule in congregational personal relationships according to Matthew 18. And, it is usually done by the rabbi or by the rabbi and elders, depending upon the bylaws of the individual congregation.

There is one more thing that we need to understand about Matthew 18. Immediately following Yeshua’s words in verses 15-17 about how someone is to deal with a person who sins against them, He gives further instruction. He said: 18 “Amen, I tell you, whatever you forbid on earth will have been forbidden in heaven and what you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” (Matthew 18:18-20 TLV). This is Yeshua’s continuation of the conversation about *synagogue* authority. Some treat these verses as a completely separate and completely different subject. This is because they consider verses 15-17 to be explaining how to deal with sin in the congregation and verses 18-20 to be the giving of authority to the believer to make binding proclamations. Some believe that this means that whatever a follower of Yeshua forbids (binds) on earth will be forbidden (bound) in heaven and what they permit (loose) in heaven will have been permitted (loosed) on the earth. Some also believe that anything asked for by a group of two or three

will be granted by ADONAI. These understandings reveal the danger of interpreting Scripture without understanding the underlying Hebraic meaning and especially, the context.

Verses 18-20 are an integral part of verses 15-17 and they should all be considered together. In verses 18-20, Yeshua is speaking to the leaders of the congregation, the *Beit Din*, telling them that they have the authority to make rulings (to bind) and that their rulings (bindings) will be upheld in Heaven (by ADONAI). Binding and loosing were rabbinic terms which were in use even before the 1st century. Binding referred then, as well as today, to legal rulings given by authorized authorities within Judaism. The same is also true for Yeshua's words, "where two or three are gathered." These verses refer to the authority given by Yeshua to the lawfully and Scripturally constituted bodies of worship and to their lawfully and Scripturally ordained leaders. Yeshua said: 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:19-20 TLV). This is referring to where two or three are gathered in Yeshua's name to make a legal ruling. Regarding that, He said:... "there I am in their midst," His authorization of their authority. A question which we must answer is: can we interpret the word "anything" in verse 19 to mean anything? The word translated "anything" in the TLV version is made up of two Greek words, *pantos* and *pragmatos*. *Pantos* is translated as "any" and that's easy enough to understand. But, how are we to understand *pragmatos*? It comes from *pragma* meaning "a deed" or "a matter." In usage, it can mean a thing done, a deed, an action; a matter, or an affair. It doesn't seem to mean "a request," as in a prayer. Our English word "pragmatic" comes from it and means: "dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical considerations." This, by definition, seems to rule out "anything" which a person might ask. In context, we understand that Yeshua was referring to His authority which was given within congregations. As individual followers of Yeshua, we cannot bind or loose anything nor can we by our agreement with two others expect that it will cause ADONAI to answer the request. That is not what these verses mean. But, this is not to say that we are not to pray in faith or to agree together in prayer. We are absolutely to do both! It is our Father's desire to answer us when we call upon Him in Yeshua's name.

What has just been illustrated shows us why study is so important for disciples of Yeshua. If we seek to understand the Hebraic foundations of Scripture in the *Tanakh* and in the writings of Yeshua's disciples, we will be much less likely to take things out of context. The discussion of these last five verses amplify our need to have Hebraic understanding of Scripture which our sub-title, "The Megillah of Matthew," the scroll of Matthew illustrates. Our goal should be to try and understand the original meaning of Scripture, what the speaker or writer intended. *Shalom aleichem!*