



Matthew Lesson 7

May 19, 2020

Scriptures from TLV
"The Megillah of Matthew"
5:13-20

Last week, we discussed the Beatitudes and suggested that if put back into Hebrew, they would read "happy," rather than "blessed." We also considered information from Dr. Robert Lindsey and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research in understanding what they would have meant based upon a Hebrew foundation. What we found was that tenses from the Greek tend to be future and past whereas the Hebrew is present. This makes a considerable difference in understanding. As Dr. Lindsey saw it, the different statements of Yeshua are here and now and not sometime in the future. And, it made a great difference to those listening to Him. They could be a part of ADONAI's kingdom right then and not wait until death. And, the same is true for us today. When we trust Yeshua, we enter His kingdom.

We continue tonight with Matthew chapter 5, verse 13. Yeshua said: *13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt should lose its flavor, how shall it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men"* (Matthew 5:13). This is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. Yeshua is seated on the mountain teaching His disciples and a crowd is gathered around trying to catch His words. The Greek word translated earth is *gēs* (ghays). The TLV translates it as "the earth," which is one of its meanings. The other meaning is "the land," a meaning which I believe better fits what Yeshua was saying. To those listening, earth had no real meaning and only extended to their small known world. It seems more likely that Yeshua said "salt of the land," meaning salt of *eretz Yisra'el*, the Land of Israel. His focus at that time was on His people and their land and their oppression under the Romans. They would not have understood that they were the salt of Lebanon, Syria and the other surrounding nations. They would have understood that Yeshua was speaking about their country, Israel. Today, a higher level of interpretation includes Yeshua's disciples everywhere being the salt of the whole earth. But, don't forget that when reading, we first consider the *p'shat*, the original meaning of a statement. What did it mean when it was originally spoken? We can then add further meaning as necessary.

I also believe that rather than "salt of the land," it would be better understood as "salt to or for the land. The Greek *tēn* (tain) can also mean to or for the." Here, Yeshua is calling his disciples "salt for the land." Just as salt adds flavor to food, Yeshua's disciples were initially to add flavor to the situation in Israel itself, and then after He sent them out in Matthew 28, to the whole earth. When we salt our food, it is not of the potatoes, but to or for the potatoes. That was Yeshua's intention; they

were to be salt for Israel, the members of the Kingdom of Heaven, those who were sharing their testimonies, their saltiness, to all those around them. They were to be a force for good and righteousness that balanced the bitterness and ugliness that was evil and wrong in Israel.

13 *if the salt should lose its flavor, how shall it be made salty again?*. Yeshua said flavor. Some see this phrase as relating to salt's preservative character and that is one way to look at it. In the 1st century, salt was used as a preservative. In the Temple the priests salted the meat sacrifices to prevent them from rotting and to keep off flies. Maybe, Yeshua's followers are to be those who preserve and correct the problems in the world as a secondary meaning. But, Yeshua said flavor. The Greek *mōranthē* (moranthay) translates as tasteless and that would support the meaning of loss of flavor. We are to be the salt in the soup, the flavor which changes and enhances a flavorless soup, a world which lacks Yeshua's message. There is a discussion about salt and saltiness found in the *Talmud* and can help us to understand what Yeshua was saying. There was a debate between *Rabbi Yehoshua* and a school of Greek philosophers from Athens. The philosophers attempted to stump him with a series of riddles. One of them was: "When salt becomes unsavory, how can it be made salty again?" *Rabbi Yeshoshua* answered their riddle with another riddle. He said: "Salt may be made salty again with the afterbirth of a mule." The philosophers objected saying, "Does a mule have an afterbirth?" We farm boys and farm girls know that mules are born sterile and that they don't reproduce or have afterbirth. That was *Rabbi Yeshoshua's* point. His reply to their question about the mule was this: "And can salt lose its saltiness?" Just as a mule cannot have afterbirth, the laws of chemistry make it impossible for salt to lose its saltiness. Yeshua himself was playing on this statement; that salt could lose its flavor. His point was not that salt can lose its saltiness, He knew that it could not. His point was that just as salt without saltiness serves no purpose, disciples who fail to live according to his teachings and *Torah* would not serve their purpose.

Just as Yeshua compared his disciples to salt, He also compared them to light. 14 *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on a lampstand so it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16). In this example, His disciples were an oil lamp. Just as salt without saltiness does not fulfill its purpose, a lamp placed under a bowl is also useless. The interior walls of first century houses had small niches in which an oil lamp could be placed. From that high point in the house, the small lamp gave light to the whole house. Yeshua pointed out that it was absurd to light a lamp and then cover it with a basket. The actual word used in the Greek is *modios* (mod'-ee-os), a measure equivalent to a peck, about ¼ of a bushel. If Yeshua had used Hebrew measurements, which He most certainly would have, the equivalent measure for *modios* would have been the *eifah*. The *eifah* basket was about ten times larger than the *omer*. In the wilderness, ADONAI told Israel to

gather an *omer* of *manna* for each person daily. An *omer* is equal to about 9.3 cups which would provide about 3 cups of *manna* per meal for each person. That means that one *omer* was equal to about 5 pints or 2 ½ quarts. Multiply that by ten, you will have the size of the *EIFAH*, about 25 quarts. It would have been a good-sized basket over a very small oil lamp. Yeshua was also speaking an absurdity here. Why have a lighted lamp and then cover it with a very large basket. Just salt without saltiness is absurd, so is the idea of placing a cover over a light. It defeats its whole purpose of giving light.

Just as a city on the top of a hill is visible from a distance, Yeshua's disciples should also be conspicuously obvious to everyone. These two qualities of Yeshua's disciples, salt and light, correspond to each other. If we keep our saltiness, we are letting our light shine before men. If we lose our saltiness, we are hiding our light under an *EIFAH*. Yeshua said: *16 let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" Our saltiness and our light are our good works. Our "good works" are how we carry out Yeshua's commands; how we follow *Torah*. He was telling his disciples that if they follow His teaching, they will retain their saltiness and their light will shine before men and bring honor to ADONAI.

Here are some other ways in which we can look at Yeshua's words about salt and light. The salt is the disciples; in this day, each of us. Saltiness is obedience to *Torah* and Yeshua's teaching- the result is good deeds. Salt without saltiness is disciples without good deeds. The lamp is disciples; today, each of us. Light is obedience to *Torah* and Yeshua's teaching which results in good deeds. The lamp hidden under an *EIFAH* is disciples without good deeds. The conclusion is that a disciple who does not practice good deeds as shown in *Torah* and the teachings of Yeshua, is not fulfilling his purpose and has become useless. If we are to be effective *talmidim* for Yeshua, we have to be salt and light according to these definitions. A secret believer is an ineffective believer, and according to what we just said- is useless. May we serve Yeshua in a way which will bring honor to ADONAI and cause others to want to serve Him in the same way.

The next two verses, 17 and 18, are some of the most misunderstood among Yeshua's body. If we use legal terminology, the way that the majority understand it is what lawyers would call the *prima facie* evidence not to obey *Torah*. To those who believe that, it is very clear. They believe that Jesus is telling them not to obey *Torah*, obey Law. The King James puts verse 17 this way: *17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil* (Matthew 5:17 KJV). The word destroy in the Greek is *kataluo* (kat-al-oo'-o). It means to destroy or overthrow. The word underlying fulfill is *pleroo* (play-ro'-o), and it means to make full, to complete. Their understanding is that by completing the Law, Jesus ended the Law.

But, as you Messianic followers of Yeshua know, there is a problem with using the word “law” in the writings of Yeshua’s followers, the *Ketuvim shli’chim*. The Greek underlying law is *nomos*, and it means anything established, anything received by usage, a custom, a law, or a command. Greek is a very expressive language, but unfortunately, it does not express the meaning of the word, *Torah*. But, *Torah* is what Yeshua, as a Hebrew speaker, would have said. Speaking so the crowds could understand him, he probably spoke Aramaic, the language Israel learned in their captivity in Babylon and then brought back to Israel. But, there is no question that the language of the synagogue and the Temple was Hebrew. Hebrew would not have necessarily have been used as an everyday language by the people, but was used every *Shabbat* in the synagogues. The people in the Galilee were spoken of derogatorily regarding their education by some of the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them the *am-haretz*. They especially said this about Yeshua’s disciples. It literally means, “people of the land,” but when they used it to refer to Yeshua’s disciples, they meant, simple and uneducated; country bumpkins. They didn’t think that these Galileans were capable of understanding the finer points of *Torah*. Regarding the word *Torah*, *mitzvot d’oraita* is the Aramaic phrase meaning, “from the Torah.” The meaning of *Torah* was very similar in both Hebrew and Aramaic. In English, the Hebrew word *Torah* literally means “teaching or instruction,” but in the *Ketuvim Shli’chim* in Greek, *nomos* is translated “Law” because that’s the only Greek word available to render it.

That’s a big problem when it comes to understanding. And it has conditioned many of Yeshua’s followers for hundreds of years to have a knee-jerk reaction every time they hear the word “Law.” In their minds, it almost comes down to this; law is bad. But that’s not what Yeshua, the author of *Torah* intended.

Torah is teaching and instruction for righteous living and it does contain laws. In John 1, Yeshua is spoken of as the *Logos*, the Word. *Logos* and Word are equivalent to *Torah*. When Yeshua said, “Do not think that I came to abolish *Torah*, abolish the Law, but to fulfill,” the general understanding is that by fulfilling it, he thereby abolished it. Regarding the Greek word *pleroo* (play-ro'-o), “fulfill,” the underlying Hebrew phrase is *kiyyem et haTorah* and it usually refers expressly to “obeying the Torah.” There is evidence in the *Mishnah* and other rabbinic writings that the opposite was true for the word “abolish.” A *rabbi* who misinterpreted the *Torah* was said to be “abolishing it.” A *rabbi* who properly interpreted it was said to be “fulfilling it.” By using the terms “abolish” and “fulfill,” Yeshua was using a Hebrew idiom to tell his disciples that he was sent to correctly interpret the *Torah*. It is impossible to understand their meaning just from the origin of either the Greek or English words alone. You must know that they are Hebrew idioms and what they mean. And, this is another bit of evidence that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew.

As we read these words, we must also understand that Yeshua was not just speaking about the Ten Commandments, but was speaking about and endorsing the ongoing, unchanging authority and validity of the *Torah* of Moses. And He said this in the strongest possible language. As followers of Yeshua, we have to keep this in mind when we interpret the Gospels and the epistles. The *Torah* is the eternal Word of ADONAI and we can't be going about picking and choosing which we are to keep and which we want to throw out.

The TLV translates verse 17 as: 17 “*Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill,*”.. (Matthew 5:17) meaning, “I have not come to incorrectly interpret *Torah*, but to correctly interpret it.” Most of what Yeshua said in the Gospels was based on what is found in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, which is composed of the *Torah*, the five books of Moses, the *Nevi'im*, the Prophets and the *Ketuwim*, the writings.

Verse 18 in the TLV is: 18 “*Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass*” (Matthew 5:1:18). The Greek underlying “smallest letter” is *iota*, a very small Greek letter, usually translated in English as “jot.” We know that Yeshua was referring to *Torah* because He also referred to the Prophets, *Torah* and *Nevi'im*, and because He referred to *Torah*, we know that he was speaking about the *yod*, the smallest Hebrew letter. He was making the point that because the *Torah* was so important, even the smallest letter in it would not be removed. But, He went even farther than that, to something even smaller. The Greek says that not even a *keraiá* (ker-ah'-yah), a “little horn” would be removed. This is sometimes rendered as a “stroke,” or a “tittle” in Christian Bibles. The underlying Hebrew is *kotz*, sometimes put into English as “thorn.” Yeshua's words may have been in reference to the care with which the *Sofer*, the Jewish scribe, would take in copying each letter of *Torah*. Even the smallest mistake would invalidate the whole sheet of animal skin and the *Sofer* would have to begin again. The same was true with the *kotz*, the very small decorative mark on some of the letters. If a *Sofer* smudged it, he would have to start over with a fresh sheet of parchment. Yeshua's meaning was that he upheld the correctness of the *Torah* and would not change even one small letter. He stressed to His disciples that not a *yod* or a *kotz* would pass from the *Torah*; not until everything that must happen has happened, or “until all things come to pass.” Christian interpretations have tried to find a way to make Yeshua's words fit into their theology. Some say that the words “until all things come to pass” meant that the *Torah* was coming to an end and that end came when Yeshua died on the stake and said “it is finished.” Others say that this had to do with Yeshua's perfect obedience being finished and thereby “all things had come to pass” when He had perfectly obeyed everything. Others would say that *Torah* remained until the destruction of the Temple. But, none of these ideas can be true, because in the sentence, the phrase “until all things come to pass” is parallel to the phrase “until heaven and earth pass away.” All things don't come to pass until heaven and earth pass away.

We can put this in simpler English by saying that the validity, the authority, and the unchanging revelation of the *Torah* will continue as long as we are standing on the earth and we can see the heavens. None of this is intended to criticize Yeshua's followers who understand this differently than we do. But, my hope and my prayer is that some will grasp this understanding because it is my sincere belief that this is what Yeshua meant.

To help us understand the usage of the word *Torah* in the Gospels and Epistles, I would like to bring in some information regarding some of the things which *Sha'ul* said. As the *Shaliach*, the Apostle to the Gentiles, it was very difficult for him to explain *Torah* to Greek speakers with only one Greek word available to do it. I'm certain that when he was speaking face to face, he found a way, but in his letters he was limited to just that one word, *nomos*. It was the only word in Greek which *Sha'ul* had to convey all of the different meanings of *Torah* in Hebrew and it is partly because of this difficulty that some have greatly misunderstood *Sha'ul's* teachings. Another other major difficulty in understanding the word *Torah* is the negativity of the word "Law" when substituted for it. "Law" as used in much of Christian understanding, implies *legalism* rather than the teaching aspect of *Torah*.

Sha'ul had to use the same word, law, in his letters to explain different usages of it, that is, when it didn't refer to *Torah*, teaching and instruction. Even though there was only one word, he did, in fact, refer at different times to different usages of *nomos*. Sometimes he said "it's good;" sometimes "it's bad." Here is an explanation. When *Sha'ul* speaks of *nomos*, the Law, in the "context of salvation," that is, justification or right standing before ADONAI, he very clearly states that *Torah* keeping, Law keeping, will do you no good. *20 For no human, on the basis of Torah observance (keeping the Law), will be set right in His sight (justified; saved)—for through the Torah (Law) comes awareness of sin (how sinful they are) (Romans 3:20).* At *Beit Shalom* we have never taught, nor do we believe, that we can be saved by keeping *Torah*. We fully understand and embrace the reality of ADONAI's salvation by grace through faith in Yeshua as our righteous sacrifice.

But when *Sha'ul* speaks of the Law in the "context of how a believer is to act," that is, sanctification, right living before ADONAI, in that regard, he affirms the value of *Torah*. *8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Torah. 9 For the commandments—"You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and any other commandment—are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fullness of the Torah (Romans 13:8-10).* *Sha'ul* didn't just say "keep the Ten Commandments," but included any other commandment. By keeping ADONAI's teaching and instruction, *Torah*, true love is shown both to ADONAI and to Yeshua and also to our fellow man. *Sha'ul* explained: *8 But we know that the Torah is*

good if one uses it legitimately,.. (1Timothy 1:8). We must use *Torah* in the way in which *Torah*, itself, intends. Its purpose is not to save us by keeping it, but by keeping it, it is a guide for our conduct.

This is what those of us in Messianic Judaism have to remember today; that we are to use *Torah* only in the way in which it is intended. We understand *Sha'ul* that the *Torah* is not intended for salvation, and so we don't use it for that. But we also understand his teaching that *Torah* is intended for the determination of our conduct, the way in which we act before our Messiah and our G-d. We want to be obedient to them so that our actions are pleasing to them. Obedience to *Torah* does not provide a means of salvation for anyone, but it is a way of life for those of us who are already redeemed.

There are two other ways in which *Sha'ul* uses the word law. In Romans 8:2 he speaks of ‘the law of sin and death.’ Even though some may think law brings death, this is not a reference to Yeshua’s use of the word *Torah*. *2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and death* (Romans 8:2). In this verse, *Sha'ul* contrasts the law of sin and death, that is, trying to obtain salvation by keeping laws with the Law of the Spirit which provides entry into life with Messiah Yeshua through faith. He is contrasting a works salvation with salvation by faith.

Matthew 5:19 is a verse that’s not often quoted by those who say that Yeshua fulfilled the Law and it’s no longer in effect. It says: *19 “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:19). Yeshua is saying to each of us that the very small commandments are just as important as the larger ones. Yeshua said: *23 “Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe mint and dill and cumin, yet you have neglected the weightier matters of Torah—justice and mercy and faithfulness. It is necessary to do these things without neglecting the others”* (Matthew 23:23). If we correctly interpret this, Yeshua was chastising some hypocritical Pharisees because they were neglecting the weightier measures of the *Torah*. At the same time He was saying that they were correctly keeping the least of the *mitzvot*, tithing even the smallest part of their income. We are all very familiar with the command to honor your father and mother. We have been taught that it is the first commandment with promise. If we honor our fathers and mothers in the way that we should, we are promised that we will live long in the land which ADONAI is giving us. Wouldn’t you consider this to be one of the weightier commandments? I think that we would. If we obey the weightier commandments, we should also obey the least.

Those who disobey the least of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called “least in the Kingdom of Heaven.” This doesn’t mean they are excluded from the Kingdom. Yeshua said that they are in the Kingdom. What it means is that they will rank low among those in Yeshua’s

body while those who keep the *Torah* commandments and teach others to do so will be considered great in His body (by his determination and not by our determination). As, we have said, “the Kingdom of Heaven” is an epithet for those who have chosen to follow Yeshua, His Movement. And in the sense that Heaven is also a epithet for ADONAI, this means that through Yeshua we have come into and are a part of ADONAI’s Kingdom.

Yeshua is a Jew and He spoke with the nuances of the Hebrew language. He also used various Hebrew methods such as *remez* and Hebrew idioms. We can better understand what He wishes for us to understand by going back to the source rather than by trying to interpret the Hebrew and Greek words after they have been brought into English. *Shalom aleichem.*