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Should Christians Study the Torah?



Often Christians think that the "Old Testament" is virtually irrelevant today, since the doctrines of the Church are made explicit in the New Testament writings. However, this is a serious mistake, as the following facts will demonstrate:

1. **Yeshua** and all **His apostles** were **Torah**-observant **Jews**. The Scriptures that **they** studied, loved, and quoted were **the Torah**, **the Prophets**, and **the Writings**, in other words, the **Jewish** TaNaKh. Indeed, **Messiah** quoted from the scroll of **Deuteronomy** (from **the Torah**) more than any other book in the Scriptures. As a child**, Yeshua** would have studied **the Torah** and memorized it with other **Jewish** children. In addition, **each morning God the Father** taught **God the Son**. **Adonai ELOHIM had given Me the ability to speak as a man well taught, so that I, with My words, know now to sustain the weary. Each morning He awakens My ear to hear like those who are taught (Isaiah 50:4).**

When asked what was the greatest commandment of **YHVH, Yeshua** quoted the Shema: **Love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (6:5),** and then **He** added the commandment: **Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).** Both of these mitzvot come directly from **the Torah**.

Indeed, **Yeshua** said that **He** did not come to abolish **the Torah** or **the Prophets**, but to fulfill **them** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Dg – The Completion of the Torah**). When **He** was further asked which ones, **He**

replied by citing **the Ten Words** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bk – The Ten Words**) and appealed to the man to follow **Him (Matthew 19:18-21)**.

2. **Messiah** said that the TaNaKh plainly testifies of **Him (John 5:39).** As **His** followers, we should understand what this means and how we indeed bear witness of **Him (Matthew 2:2** and **27:11)**. In addition, studying **the Torah**, we can more fully appreciate the glory and grace as revealed in **the Person** and Ministry of our **Lord**. For example, we can more fully savor the role of the sacrificial system and how **Yeshua** fulfilled all of **ADONAI's** holy requirements on our behalf as our **Great High Priest** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ay – Messiah's Qualifications as our Great High Priest**) of the B'rit Chadashah.

3. When **two disciples** were on **their** way to the town of **Emmaus** discussing the implications of the crucifixion of **Yeshua** three days earlier, who but **the Master Himself** appeared alongside them and taught them from the TaNaKh? **Then, starting with Moshe and all the prophets, He explained to them the things that can be found throughout the TaNaKh concerning Himself** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mh – On the Road to Emmaus**). Again, as **His** followers, we should likewise be able to recount how **Yeshua** is revealed in the TaNaKh.

4. The "Church" was born on the **Jewish** holiday of Shavu'ot (Pentecost) among the **Jewish** people in **Jerusalem**. **Peter's** sermon during the festival (see the commentary on **Acts An – Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd**) was entirely **Jewish**, quoting from **the Prophets** and **David**, which would have meant little to any Gentiles if they were present at all. It is likely, therefore, that **the 3,000 people** who were **saved** that day would have all been **Jewish**. The earliest members of the new messianic community met regularly in **the Temple**. Note that **Peter** and **John** are recorded to have gone to **the Temple** for prayer during the time of the afternoon sacrifices **(Acts 3:1)**. Even after they were imprisoned for preaching the Good News, and miraculously escaped, an angel told them to **go, stand in the Temple court and keep telling the people all about this new life (Acts 5:20)!** This produced much spiritual fruit, and twenty-five years later, **tens-of-thousands** (or a minimum of twenty-thousand **Jewish believers** in **Jerusalem** alone not counting the rest of the country) **Jewish people were believers – and were zealous for the Torah. They** saw no contradiction in **their** faith in **Yeshua** and **their zealousness for the Torah (Acts 21:17-20)**.

5. Later, when **the Jerusalem Council** wrote **their letter** to **the Gentiles**

regarding **their** relationship to **the Torah** (see the commentary on **Acts Bt – The Council's Letter to the Gentile Believes**), **they** advised **them** to at first abstain from those things that would make **them** abhorrent to **the Jews**, with the assumption that **they** would later go on to study **the Torah of Moses** and other scrolls (books) in the TaNaKh.

6. **Paul** was raised a **Torah** observant **Jew** who studied under **the famous Rabbi Gamaliel** in **Jerusalem (Acts 22:3)**. **Rabbi Sha'ul** (see the commentary on **Acts Bm – Paul's First Missionary Journey**) was well established in the **Jewish** leadership of **his** day, and even had a relationship with the Sanhedrin High Priest of **Isra'el (Acts 9:1-2)**. But even after **his** conversion on **the Damascus Road** (see the commentary on **Acts Bc – Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), **he** still identified **himself** as **a Jew**. In **Acts 23:6**, **he** confessed: **I am** (not was) **a Pharisee. He** even declared that concerning the observance of **the Torah he** was **blameless**, which indicates that **he** took the Nazarite vow **(Acts 18:18)**, lived **in observance of the Torah (Acts 21:23-24)**, and actually offered sacrifices in **the Temple (Acts 21:26)**. Notice that **Paul** not only paid for **his** own sacrifices in order to be released from **his** Nazarite vow, but also paid for the sacrifices of four other **Jewish** believers! Notice also that this was performed at the explicit request of **James**, the head of the Messianic community in **Jerusalem**, and the half-brother of **Yeshua**.

Paul regularly attended synagogue: **After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Sha'ul and Sila came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue. According to his usual practice, Sha'ul went in; and on three Shabbats he gave them drashes from the Tanakh (Acts 17:1-2).** And when **Paul** later wrote to the **Gentile** churches: **All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living (Second Timothy 3:16), he** was referring to the **Jewish** Scriptures, since the B'rit Chadashah had not yet been compiled for the Church.

Indeed, to understand **Paul's** writings, we need to remember **his** training as a rabbi when **he** quotes the Scriptures in **his** writings. For example, when **he** wrote: **And they all drank the same drink from the Spirit – for they drank from a Spirit-sent Rock which followed them, and that Rock was the Messiah (First Corinthians 10:4), he** was quoting from a story later written in **the Talmud** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**), **that from the time that Moshe struck the rock at Horeb and brought forth water until the**

death of Miriam (Numbers 20:1), this water-giving rock "followed the children of Isra'el through the desert and provided water for them each day" (Taanit, 9a Nava Metizia, 86b).

7. Many Christian denominations profess to believe in the authority of both the "Old Testament" and the New Testament Scriptures, while, in reality, relegating the study of the 39 books (or the TaNaKh) to the dustheap of history. Ask yourself, "When was the last time my pastor taught through any of these 39 books?" If the TaNaKh is taken seriously at all, it assumes the intent of the text is also applicable to the **Gentile** Church.

This is both shortsighted and inconsistent, since it is impossible to understand the B'rit Chadashah writings while ignoring the cultural and theological context of which it is a part. Not only that, it must be remembered that the Greek text and the B'rit Chadashah derives its authority and reliability from the **Jewish** Scriptures, and not the other way around. Too many Christian theologians go at this backwards, reading the B'rit Chadashah (and especially ideas credited to **Paul**) as the interpretative filter for the study of the Hebrew text. Theologians of the Western traditions must consciously remember that there are three rules when interpreting Scripture: Context, context, context. Replacement theology and implicit anti-Semitism have no place in biblical interpretation.

So yes, for these and many other reasons, it is important, *even vital*, for Christians to study **the Torah** as part of **the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).**[15]