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The Fulfillment of the Torah

Matthew 5:17-20 and Luke 16:17

Believers in the New Covenant should also love **the Torah**. At the festival of Shavu'ot **about three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41)**. And, about thirty years later **tens of thousands of believers were still zealous for the Torah (Acts 21:20 CJB)**. As a result, **the Torah** is not merely for the righteous of the TaNaKh, but for all believers. Rabbi Sha'ul teaches us that **the Torah is holy (Romans 7:12), perfect, and gives freedom, provided one uses it in the way the Torah itself intends (First Timothy 1:8; James 1:25 CJB)**.

Messiah is the model disciple, the perfect **Son** who fulfilled all **righteousness** by completely obeying **the Father's will (Matthew 4:4 and 10)**. That same obedience should characterize believers today. Obedience to **ADONAI** was to be a priority in the life of a disciple (**Matthew 6:33**), and complete devotion to **God the Father** was the goal (**Matthew 5:48**). As a result, this same **righteousness** and faithfulness to **God the Father** and **His** commandments are seen here in the words of **Christ. Matthew 5:17-20** not only speaks to the true nature of **the Torah**, but also its relationship to **Ha'Meshiach**.



Yeshua confirmed **His Torah** observance when **He** said: **Do not think I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to complete (Mt 5:17)**. These words *must* be understood in their context. **Yeshua** is still alive today and **the Torah** is still in effect, not for salvation - but for godly living. The Dispensation of **the Torah** did not end with **Messiah's** coming, it ended with **His** death. Until **He** died, all 613

commandments were obligatory. In the context of pharisaic Judaism (which this sermon was given), the point **Jesus** was making is that while **the Pharisees** had destroyed **the Torah** by their reinterpretation of it with **the Oral Law** (see [Ei - The Oral Law](#)), **His** purpose in coming was to fulfill **the Torah** alone as it was written.

These verses give us the critical clarification of **Yeshua's** interpretation of **the Torah**. No doubt, the strong message of **His** early ministry would cause some to question **His** ultimate objective. **He** already perceived that some, especially the rabbis, were seeing **His** message as a theological threat to Judaism, or even the TaNaKh itself. Consequently, as **the Messiah** reveals **His** interpretation of **the Torah**, **He** feels the need to clarify **His** position in regard to the earlier revelations given to Isra'el.⁵¹⁸

By **His** own words, **Jesus** did not come to bring a new teaching or new **Torah** to **His** people. Unfortunately, some Christian theologies and theologians have tended to devalue **the Torah**. In light of these verses, I am sure that grieves the heart of **God**. Although it must be used in the proper way, once we understand that **the Lord did not come to abolish the Torah, but to complete** it, then our view of **the Torah** becomes even more beautiful when we find the completion of the picture in **the Messiah**.

As if to emphasize the importance of this teaching, **Yeshua** elaborates even further. **Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah - not until everything that must happen has happened (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17 CJB)**. The **yud** is the smallest letter in the Hebrew Alef-Bet, and the **stroke** refers to the tiny artistic marks on the tops of Hebrew letters. In Hebrew, the difference of **a stroke** (Hebrew *tag*) can change the whole meaning of a word, as in the case of a *dalet* or a *resh* in **Deuteronomy 6:4** for example. By saying this, **Jesus** reminded **His** listeners that neither the smallest letter nor the tiniest part of a letter of **the Torah** would ever be done away with. Even the smallest, seemingly insignificant of the 613 commandments must be kept for perfect righteousness (not salvation). **He** could not have emphasized **His** regard for **the Torah** in stronger terms.⁵¹⁹

The rabbis teach that when ADONAI gave the Torah to Isra'el, He inserted both positive and negative commandments and gave commands, saying: The king must not acquire a great number of horses for himself. . . neither shall he take many wives or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). But Solomon arose and studied the reason for God's decree, and said, "Why did ADONAI command this? Well, I will acquire great number of horses, take many wives, and still my heart will not be led astray.

Because **God** granted him a **wise and discerning heart (First Kings 3:12)**, **Solomon** thought that he could marry as **many wives** as he wanted.

At that time the **yud**, the first letter of the Hebrew phrase *yarbeh* (that means **the king must not take too many wives**), went up on high and prostrated itself before **ADONAI** and said, “Master of the Universe! Have you not said that no letter shall ever be abolished from **the Torah**? Behold, Solomon has now arisen and abolished one. Who knows? Today one, tomorrow another, until the whole **Torah** will be nullified.” And **God** responded by saying, “Solomon and a thousand like him will pass away, but the smallest letter will not be cancelled from you.”

Thus, it is interesting to see that **Messiah** agreed with this teaching, and as believers, we should strive to obey **God** and all of **His** commands. For as **Christ** said: **If you love Me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15)**.

He goes on to uphold the relevance of **the Torah** by warning that **whoever disobeys the least of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19 CJB)**. The concept of heavier and lighter commandments is a common theme in the rabbinic understanding of **the Torah**. For example, a lighter commandment would be freeing a mother bird in nature, whereas a heavier commandment would be to honor one’s parents (Tractate Kiddushin 61b).

Since the Jewish people were asking, “Is Pharisaic righteousness sufficient for entering the Kingdom?” the single most important statement in the Sermon on the Mount is when Jesus said: **For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:20 CJB)**. Here the term **far greater** can best be translated as **far exceeds**. Like a river overflowing its banks, it is something that **far exceeds** the norm. In this context, **Jesus** is teaching us that the **righteousness** that **He** requires is one of genuine holiness, which far exceeds the hypocritical standards of **the Pharisees** and Sadducees of **His** day, and the world in general.⁵²⁰

This was their dagger in the heart. They thought to themselves, “How can I do that? I can’t!” The point was - they weren’t supposed to be able to do it on their own. That is why Rabbi Sha’ul tells us that **the Torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful. But now that the time for this trusting faithfulness has come, we are no**

longer under a custodian (Galatians 3:24 CJB). When the Jews saw that perfect **righteousness** was humanly impossible, they should have turned to **Jesus**, who offered **grace through faith** alone (**Ephesians 2:8**). But, **the Pharisees** had pulled **God's** high, perfect standard down into the gutter with the Oral Law, to make it something **they** thought they *could* do! **They** made **God's** impossible standard very achievable, and in the process, eliminated the need for **the Savior of sinners**.

In fact, not only does **ADONAI** require genuine holiness, **He** requires perfect **righteousness**. To be qualified for **God's Kingdom** we must be as holy as **the King Himself**. But of course, this is a standard we can never obtain by our own efforts. We are spiritually dead in our sinfulness (**Romans 3:23**). But, as Rabbi Sha'ul would say: **He delivered us . . . not on the ground of any righteous deeds we have done, but on the ground of His own mercy (Titus 3:5 CJB).** When we trust/have faith/believe in **Him**, all **His righteousness** is imputed, or transferred to our spiritual bank account. What **Christ** is saying here in this passage, is that **the Torah** is not abolished in this process - but completed. The true path of the true believer is demonstrated through obedience to **ADONAI** and **His** commands, not for salvation, but as a blueprint for living (see the commentary on **Exodus Dh - Moses and the Torah**).

*During **the Torah** procession in messianic synagogues today, believers in **Messiah** kiss their bibles and then touch **the Torah** as it passes by. They believe that **the Torah** points us to **the Meshiach**, and represents the holiness and purity of **God**. This custom is taken from **the Psalms**, where **Ruach ha-Kodesh** instructs us to **kiss the Son (Psalm 2:12)**.*

Thus, **Christ**, as the perfect expression of obedience to **God the Father**, did not come to **abolish the Torah or the Prophets**, but instead, **He** completes our understanding of **the Torah** by calling us to live lives in obedience to **His commandments**. We can appreciate the special place of **the Torah** as a guide, while relying on the blood of **Christ** for our spiritual salvation. Ultimately, **Yeshua** is the only hope for Jew or Gentile alike.