

5 minute TORAH

Short on time? We've got you covered.

Messianic insights into the weekly Torah portion

EMET HATORAH



DARREN N. HUCKEY

5 Minute Torah

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Kaleb, Kai, Boaz, Einya, & Miryam—
May you, your children, and your children's children bring tikkun
to this broken world through a life of Torah strengthened by the
merits of our Master Yeshua.

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Introduction

Introduction

Welcome to the *5 Minute Torah*! Whether you're short on time or just want a quick thought to help you dig deep into the weekly Torah portions, we've got you covered. Each chapter of this book is a brief commentary on the weekly Torah portion that is designed to give you a thought-provoking insight in just five minutes or less every week. Whether you are looking for quick inspiration, a personal challenge, or a brief nugget you can chew on for the week, the *5 Minute Torah* is for you. We want to help you change your life five minutes at a time. We invite you to enter this journey with us to probe the beauty and depth of the Word of God through the weekly Torah portions. Study along with us and use these weekly thoughts to invoke inspiration and imagination in your faith journey.

A Few Notes About This Work

Although this book can be read from cover to cover in a single sitting, it is specifically designed to be a companion for weekly Torah study, whether on an individual basis or in a group setting. It can be used similar to a devotional, or it can be used around the weekly Sabbath table to promote dialogue about the current Torah portion. And although familiarity with the text from the weekly Torah readings is assumed, it is not necessarily required in order for the reader to benefit from the commentaries. However, to get the most understanding out of the commentaries, a thorough review of the weekly Scripture readings is highly recommended. If you are unsure of the current Torah portion, go to www.torahportions.org and click on the "This Week" tab in the menu. This will get you started studying the text and

give you the foundation needed to enrich the weekly commentaries.

Below I have addressed a few particular issues for those new to the weekly Torah cycle and studying from a Messianic Jewish perspective. If you are already familiar with the weekly Torah portions, then feel free to skip ahead and jump right into this week's Torah commentary. However, I have also addressed a few things that are specific to this commentary for those who may be conversant with the Torah and its various interpretations, but may wonder about my particular insights or choices of terms. (If you would like to learn about these, they appear toward the end of this introduction.) Having said that, I will now address questions for those who may be new to Torah study.

Why Study Torah?

Many people may ask, "Why should I keep up with the weekly study of the Torah portions?" The Hebrew Bible is comprised of three parts: The Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Torah tells the story of Israel. It begins with the creation of the world and makes its way through the calling of Abraham and the subsequent history of his offspring. The Torah gives us the background material to understand the rest of Scripture. But the Torah isn't just a story. It is also a legal code that documents the terms of Israel's covenant with the Creator. It contains instructions for communal living—including civil laws and ethical principles that are still the backbone of our Judaeo-Christian value system today—and well-known passages like the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). It also includes ritual laws about sacrifices, holy days, dietary restrictions, and various other ceremonies.

Since the days of Moses, the Torah has been the rule of life and standard of godliness for God's chosen people, Israel. Unlike other

legal documents, its legislation touches on every aspect of human existence. Rather than being concerned merely with civil and ritual interactions, the Torah is also concerned with the condition of the heart. The Shema, the foundational declaration of Jewish faith, declares, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Yeshua desires to connect with the heart of man. The study and application of the principles of Torah work toward this goal of transforming us as a person and connecting our hearts with the heart of God.

Studying the Torah on a continual basis also creates a solid foundation upon which our understanding of the rest of the Scriptures can rest. It creates a means by which we can discern fraudulent or careless interpretations of Scripture. By knowing the original revelation upon which all subsequent Scripture rests, we can more confidently navigate the Prophets, the Writings, and the Apostolic Scriptures to arrive at understandings that are in agreement with Scripture as a whole, rather than developing theological constructs independent from the greater Scriptural context. In short, studying Torah helps us to develop a proper orientation to the rest of the Scriptures.

What Is A Torah Portion?

The weekly study of the Torah—the five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy—has been a part of Jewish religious life since antiquity. According to tradition, the prophet Ezra began the systematic study of the Torah after the return of the Israelite exiles from Babylon. This practice persists even today. Every year, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people across the world undertake a reading of the entire Torah. You can visit any synagogue in the

world on any Sabbath and hear the weekly Torah portion being read, studied, and expounded upon.

The weekly readings are integrally tied to the Hebrew calendar, ensuring that the cycle will begin anew at the same time each fall during the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles). We celebrate this renewal through a mini-festival called Simchat Torah (the Rejoicing of the Torah).

The Torah has been broken down into 54 portions called parashot (parashah, singular). The parashot are divided so that each parashah covers a particular theme, but is small enough to be digestible. You can find these readings online. We recommend a couple of sources. The first is one I mentioned earlier: www.torahportions.org. This site was created by our friends at First Fruits of Zion and includes weekly readings of the Gospels arranged in chronological order, along with their own weekly commentaries. The second is www.Hebcal.com. Here you can view the weekly readings and actually download a calendar to your computer or mobile device. It does not have any New Testament readings.

Why Are There Sometimes Double Portions?

Sometimes two portions are read together for a particular week. This is because the Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar that uses a solar correction to calculate the months of the year. Because it is primarily based on the cycles of the moon, the Jewish calendar is generally about eleven days shorter than the solar year. Every two to three years is a leap year, and an additional month is added to the calendar to keep it in sync with the solar year. The readings are therefore broken down to accommodate for the additional weeks added to the year. Therefore, during a non-leap year, some of the weekly readings are combined. Other factors also come into play, but

this is the basic reason behind the double Torah portions.

What About Haftarah and Apostolic Readings?

In addition to the weekly Torah portion, a passage from one of the books of the prophets is read. This reading is called the haftarah. These passages have been chosen because of some type of thematic connection to the weekly parashah, even though the connection may sometimes not be understood by a casual reading.

In the last few decades, some have attempted to introduce an accepted system of readings pulling from the Apostolic Scriptures (i.e., the New Testament). Two systems in particular have gained popularity. The first system, devised by Dr. David Stern (author of *The Complete Jewish Bible*), draws on a theme from the weekly parashah and attempts to connect a passage from the Apostolic Scriptures to it. These readings are generally brief and are designed for inclusion in a liturgical setting.

The second system, created by First Fruits of Zion, serves a similar purpose. This system primarily uses passages from the Gospels, which are thematically linked to the parashah, except during the three weeks between Tzom Tammuz and Tisha B'Av and the seven weeks of comfort following Tisha B'Av. On these weeks, the Gospel sections tie into the haftarah portion.

Notes On The Commentary

I do not claim originality in my interpretations. Many of the *5 Minute Torah* commentaries are drawn from insights of classic commentators such as Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, etc.,. Many insights have been gleaned from chassidic interpretation as well. However, since my perspective is through the lens of the teachings of Yeshua of Nazareth and his Apostles, my insights may take a different dimension

than the original interpretation. I will often use traditional interpretations as a springboard for additional insights that have relevant meaning to followers of Yeshua.

Even though I am a Messianic Gentile and not Jewish, I have intentionally chosen to use certain phrases that reflect an orientation that places Messianic Judaism within greater Judaism. For example, I chose to use the phrase “our sages” when referring to the sages of Israel, in order to show the continuity between Judaism and Messianic Judaism. When a non-Jew comes to Yeshua and adopts Messianic Judaism as his religious practice, his religion is a sect within Judaism rather than an opposing religion apart from it. This is the reason behind the term Messianic Judaism. It is a branch of Judaism, albeit with Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel at the center. By continuing to use exclusionary phrases that position Messianic Judaism, and Messianic Gentiles in particular, outside the scope of Judaism, we will never find identity and take ownership within the scope of greater Judaism. It will continue to be a dichotomy of “us” and “them,” rather than one religion with multiple expressions. Do Gentiles have different obligations than the native-born? Yes. However, we must keep in mind that Gentiles who have adopted Messianic Judaism practice a form of Judaism that is appropriate for non-Jews and congruent with historical Judaism.

Also, at the end of the commentaries for the last portions of each book—for instance, Parashat Vayechi is the last portion for the book of Genesis—I have included the traditional words, “*Chazak! Chazak! V'nitchazeik!* Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!” This tradition is a reminder that although we have completed a book of the Torah, there is still more to learn. In the modern era we might say something like, “You’re doing great! There are even better things ahead!” I have chosen to include this phrase at the end of these partic-

ular portions as both a reminder that these portions conclude a book of the Torah, and as an encouragement to continue learning with zeal.

Lastly, the Jewish-published Bible and the Christian-published Bible at times differ in how chapters and verses are numbered. Whenever there is a discrepancy between the chapter and verse in a referenced passage, I have made the Jewish numbering the default but added the Christian numbering in brackets (e.g. Genesis 28:10-32:3[2]).

May the words of Ben Bag-Bag and Ben Heh-Heh remind us that we must continually labor over the Torah to search out its treasures, and that the rewards we gain from it will be commensurate with our effort:

Ben Bag-Bag used to say of the Torah: Turn it and turn it again, for everything is in it. Pore over it, and wax gray and old over it. Stir not from it for you can have no better rule than it. Ben Heh-Heh used to say: According to the effort is the reward. (Avot 6:26)

May the Holy One of Israel bless you as you engage His Holy Word and find application to live a life of righteousness before Him and before others. May the prayer of our hearts continually be in agreement with King David's words: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your Torah" (Psalm 119:18). And may our lives bear the fruit of righteousness so that we may fulfill the desire of our Master, that those around us may see our good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Darren Huckey
27 Elul 5777
September 18, 2017

Commentary

Parashat B'reisheet

GENESIS 1:1-6:8

First Light

Parashat B'reisheet is an intriguing Torah portion. This parashah contains so many facets of the Creation account to explore that it would take a lifetime to unravel it. For instance, on the first day of Creation, we read about the creation of light:

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)

Although light was created on the first day, the sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day. If these luminaries were not created until the fourth day, then what was the light that illuminated the first three days? Fortunately, we have the insights of our sages from the last two millennia to help us peer into the deep mysteries of these events. Rashi, the famous medieval commentator, says this passage cannot be properly understood without outside commentary, particularly the midrash.

What does the midrash have to say about this passage? More

than we have time to cover here. But the main concept we need to understand is that the light that was first spoken into existence is unique and distinct from the light produced by the luminaries. It was a special, pure light that radiated from God himself. The Torah gives us a clue about the quality of this light when it says, "And God saw that the light was good." It was the first of all Creation to have this special designation of "good." According to Rabbi Elazar, in a midrash called Yalkut Shimoni, the light that God created on the first day was used by Adam to look from one end of the universe to the other. It was something extremely special.

Because of its uniqueness, its sanctity was more than a soon-to-be fallen world could handle. Therefore, the Torah tells us that "God separated the light from the darkness." The midrash explains that this separation was not merely an untangling of light from darkness, but its complete removal. Where did this light go? The midrash tells us this:

It is stored up for the righteous in the Messianic future, as it says (Isaiah 30:26), "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days." (Genesis Rabbah 3:6)

For now, that light continues to be hidden away "until the time of reformation" (Hebrews 9:10). When this light is returned to the earth, the New Jerusalem will shine it forth to all of creation, as it is said, "The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23). Darkness will be vanquished and the supernal light of Creation will return to illuminate the world forever, as it says, "And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for

the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

As we longingly await the arrival of that Holy Eternal Light, let us continue to shine forth the light of the Torah and of our Messiah so that the world will see our good deeds—a glimpse of this supernatural light—and glorify our Father in Heaven. One day the True Light will be revealed in all of its glory. Until then, may our actions be a reflection of its splendor.

Parashat Noach

GENESIS 6:9-11:32

Leaving A Legacy

Parashat Noach opens with the words, “These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). In this passage, “generations” is the Hebrew word *toldot* (תולדות). The word *toldot* is most often used in the Scriptures in relationship to genealogy, since its primary meaning is “descendants” or “offspring.” For instance, toward the end of this week’s parashah we read, “These are the generations of Shem” (Genesis 11:10). Immediately following is a list of Shem’s descendants. The pattern repeats with Terah, the father of Abraham, saying, “Now these are the generations of Terah” (Genesis 11:27), followed by a list of his children. The same goes for the lists of the sons of Ishmael in Genesis 25, etc.

However, in the case of the Bible’s description of Noah (and a few other select individuals), rather than listing his children, his character traits are listed. The Scriptures appear to be emphasizing that, more than his literal offspring—the very ones that would repopulate the world after the flood—Noah’s legacy was to be found in his character. The Scriptures list three “offspring” of Noah: his righteousness, his blamelessness, and his relationship with God. Let’s briefly explore these concepts.

Noah was righteous. What does this mean? Righteousness is a legal status by which one person is declared to be in right relationship with another. This means that Noah held to the standard that the LORD had given him, as it is written, “The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. ... For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.” (Psalm 11:5, 7). When the LORD told Noah to enter into the ark, He reminded Noah of his righteousness by saying, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

Noah was blameless. What does this mean? A person is blameless when they avoid the things that displease God. For instance, when the Children of Israel were about to enter into the Promised Land, the LORD commanded them saying, “You shall be blameless before the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 18:13). He desired that they not follow the abominations of the nations they were about to dispossess. The LORD qualifies what it means to be blameless by saying, “For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this” (Deuteronomy 18:14). Although there was wickedness all around him, Noah stood firm and did not succumb to the temptation to reduce his religious observance to the lowest common denominator of his environment.

Noah walked with God. What does this mean? God desires that His children walk with him. The prophet Micah tells us, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Walking with God is an idiom for faithfulness, as the Scriptures tell us, “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with

God and is faithful to the Holy One” (Hosea 11:12).

Although Noah lived in a wicked generation, he was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and he walked with God. What can we say of ourselves? Are we righteous, blameless, and walking with God? How will our toldot be remembered?

Parashat Lech Lecha

GENESIS 12:1-17:27

Partnering With God

In Parashat Lech Lecha we begin learning about a character by the name of Abram. As we know, his name will eventually be changed to Abraham, and our knowledge of his life is pivotal to our understanding of God's plan for humanity. In fact, the entire Scriptures hinge around this one person. When we read this week's portion, Abraham's courageous faith immediately becomes apparent when he leaves everything behind and moves to the land of Canaan in order to obey God's command. This is the first of several of Abraham's trials we read about in this small section of Genesis.

The next trial we learn about is his encounter with Pharaoh and how he attempts to protect his family from the Egyptians. Then we read of the dispute between his nephew Lot's shepherds and his own, and the trial of dividing the land between his nephew and himself. We also read about his trial of rescuing Lot when he and his household were captured by invading armies. The next trial is overcoming the pain of being childless and results in the taking of his wife's servant Hagar as an additional wife through which his son Ishmael is born. The last trial in this portion is the commandment for Abraham to circumcise himself and all the males of his household. But there is something unique about how this particular trial

is introduced.

When the LORD instructed Abraham in regard to circumcision, He first said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be perfect, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly” (Genesis 17:1–2). When God made His covenant of circumcision with Abraham, the intention was to make Abraham something greater than what he was. Somehow this act of obedience through altering his physical nature would produce in Abraham a partnership with God that could not be achieved otherwise. This concept is difficult to grasp, but it’s one that deserves our attention.

Circumcision is a volatile topic these days. The secular world sees it as a barbaric and cruel practice. Many Christians view it negatively as well, due to Paul’s statement that in regard to salvation it is a “mutilat[ion] of the flesh” (Philippians 3:2). But we have to remember that the God of the universe is the one who instructed Abraham and all future generations of his descendants to undergo this transformation. But why would God want man to do such a thing if He created us *uncircumcised* to begin with? The answer connects us back to the introduction of His covenant of circumcision: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be perfect.” Our sages said that, before his circumcision, Abraham was not whole (i.e. “perfect”). Once he was circumcised, however, he became whole (Midrash Tanchuma on Genesis 17:1).

God desires to partner with man in order to bless him and to do great things in this world. When man partners with God to accomplish wonderful things—even in seemingly minute things—we are fulfilling our calling to walk before Him, striving toward perfection just as Abraham did. For instance, God did not create trees that produce bread (though that would be nice, wouldn’t it?). Instead, God provides only the grain for the bread. Man must do the rest. We

must harvest the grain, thresh and winnow it, grind it, mix it with other ingredients, and then bake it before we have a delicious loaf of bread. By doing so, man partners with God to create something beautiful and beneficial for humanity.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. Although we may be born a certain way, we must realize that we are not supposed to remain that way. We should never be satisfied with “the way we are,” but should always strive to become something more than how we were created. Just as we work together with God to create bread, and just as Abraham worked with God to circumcise all the males of his house, so should we work with God to alter ourselves in ways that make us more like our Creator. It’s not an easy task, but through much patience and diligence, we can partner with the LORD to become the person He envisioned when He created us.

Parashat Vayeira

GENESIS 18:1-22:24

Our Father Abraham

Many people are familiar with the children’s song, “Father Abraham.” It begins, “Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you. So, let’s just praise the Lord.” Through repetition and a series of choreographed movements, this song ingrains the concept into a child that Vayeira, this week’s Torah portion, is indeed true. Abraham did become the father of many nations and is affectionately called *Avraham Avinu*, Our Father Abraham. Paul says that Abraham is “the father of all who believe” (Romans 4:12). We who have put our trust in Yeshua have become the spiritual offspring of Abraham, the father of our faith.

According to our Torah portion, the LORD chose Abraham as the father of many nations for specific reasons:

The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that

the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” (Genesis 18:17–19)

Abraham was chosen in order “that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness (*tzedakah*) and justice (*mishpat*).” In Hebrew, doing righteousness is a synonym for taking care of those in need. And when native Hebrew speakers use the word *tzedakah*, righteousness, most often they mean charity. By Yeshua’s day this concept was in full force. In Matthew 6, Yeshua uses the word in this manner when he says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people” (Matthew 6:1). Justice, *mishpat*, on the other hand, often connotes strictness. The midrash tells a story to explain one way that Abraham did righteousness and justice.

Abraham and Sarah were known for their hospitality. According to the midrash, they used to take in travelers and give them food and lodging. Once they had enjoyed a wonderful meal, Abraham would ask them to give thanks to Hashem. If they refused, then he would demand payment for the food they had consumed. Because he demanded such a high rate for the food, they would be happy to bless his God. Abraham began with *tzedakah* (charity), but would add to it *mishpat* (strictness).

According to a more literal reading of the text, however, the righteousness and justice Abraham would teach to his children would be in relationship to the basic principles of Torah ethics. Even though the Torah had not yet been given to Israel, Abraham would live out its very basic principles and teach his children to do likewise. His example would set the pattern for his descendants after him, as it is said, “The deeds of the fathers are the portents for the children.” Therefore, to be a child of Abraham is to follow in his footsteps.

How can we follow in our father Abraham's footsteps? Hospitality is an obvious way. Obedience is another. We could list a host of others. May we look to Avraham Avinu as an example of our faith, following his lead at living a life that is pleasing to Hashem and passing that life down to the next generation.