

Setting Your Faith on a Firm Foundation

Consider how the answers to the following questions relate to various ways we may read the Bible. Consider how you have read the Bible up until now and how you may have considered applying, or not applying what it teaches to your life.

The best place to start a book is:

- a) At the beginning
- b) In the middle
- c) At the end

The best way to understand the true intent of a book is by:

- a) Letting others tell you what it said
- b) Reading part of it
- c) Reading all of it out of order
- d) Reading all of it in the author's intended order

You can get off track if you:

- a) Forget the rules if you are running a race
- b) Never learn the rules but are only concerned about getting to the finish line
- c) Disregard the rules because you think you know the course designer's mind
- d) Are running a race where the rules change half way through

Introduction to Our Study of the Gospels

When I was in high school, I used to read the Cliff's Notes to a book so I didn't have to spend so much time with the book itself. Other times I read parts of a book and skipped around to try and catch the high points and avoid all the dryer details. Cliff's Notes was an attempt to cover the highlights and the important details of the book it reviewed in about one tenth the number of pages. They were like a shortcut to getting all the necessary information. The problem with Cliff's Notes was that the booklet never gave you the context or the sense that you really knew what the book was about deep down. In fact, the publisher of Cliff's Notes pointed out in the front of each booklet that the Notes were not meant to replace a thorough personal reading of the book itself. I found that out personally when test time came. Worse yet, open discussion of the book was even more risky because specifics were brought up. When it came right down to it, nothing could replace a thorough and complete reading of the entire book.

In much the same way we have too often looked this way at Scriptures. We understand generalities, parts or basic topics without paying much attention to, or having any interest in, the details or greater context of what we read. In our upcoming Torah Club study of the Gospels and Acts there will be an attempt to be detailed and very comprehensive in our reading of the Scriptures. Beyond that, the series challenges us to connect and revere all parts of the Bible, connecting New and Old Testaments, rather than considering one part above the other. We will not be studying the Bible as detached portions or with Cliff's Notes. We will try to see all parts working together, and in doing so we will understand the Scriptures comprehensively.

In this three-week preparation to Torah Club, we will get ready to appreciate the Bible from a broad perspective. The general intent of Torah Club is to consider the books to the left of

Matthew as the foundation of both the Christian and Jewish faiths. Truths and directives in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are the foundation against which all the claims and directives of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) are based. We will consider the Bible as having been written from front to back, not from back to front. Things written in the New Testament will not trump things written in earlier portions of Scripture.

The Gospels as You Have Never Read Them Before

Torah Club's approach to the Gospels presumes that the foundation of Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) is set forever and established as a rule of life and conduct. It considers the books of History (Joshua, Judges, Kings, etc.) in the next section of the Bible are stories of what happened to the people of God as the Torah was followed or not in different periods of time. The Prophets were those who, in the next section of Scripture, called people back to following the same truths of Torah from which they had fallen away. Finally, Torah Club teaches the Gospels as a fulfillment of the prophecies predicted in Scripture with the coming of Messiah as savior and teacher who died for us because of our disobedience to the Torah. He showed us how to live a life obedient to Torah and calls us to follow in His footsteps. With this perspective, the Bible from beginning to end will be seen as one book given to all people, standing in complete harmony from beginning to end.

Laying a firm foundation to our faith and life is our goal in the next year. Setting our understanding of the New Testament upon the foundation of the Old is the order of our approach. Building our understanding of the Scriptures on the bedrock of the God's word rather than upon our own culture is our hope. In this way, we may read the Gospels as we have never read them before.

The Parts

Part One	October 4, 2008	Who is a Hebrew? If We Repent, How Do We Behave?
Part Two	October 11, 2008	What is the New Covenant in Jesus?
Part Three	October 18, 2008	A Wild Shoot or a Branch Grafted On?

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Lesson One – What Does it Mean to Be Saved

Main Points to learn:

- 1) Followers of Christ are “Hebrews”. So, what is a Hebrew?
- 2) Hebrews have always been called to repent in a particular direction.
- 3) The direction of repentance has always been to the Lord for forgiveness and to Torah as a guide for life.

Scripture Background

- 1) Hebrews by faith: Gen 15:6, Gen. 12:1-3, Gal 3:29, Hebrews 11
- 2) Repentance required: Isa. 30:15, Jer. 5:3, Eze. 18:30, Matthew 3:1-2 and 4:17
- 3) Added to the Kingdom: Eph 3:6, Gal 3:6-9, Num. 15:16 and 23:19
- 4) Called to Obey and Prosper: Deut 30:11-20, John 17:17 and 17:23

Step 1 - What’s a “Hebrew”?

You’re Going the Wrong Way!

First let’s consider what God asks of those who seek to have relationship with Him. Think back to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Jesus. What was the root or beginning of their message to those who wanted to come near to God?

- Abraham Crossed over the Euphrates
- Moses Cross the Red Sea and lead people into a wilderness
- Joshua Led the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land
- Jesus Provides a way for us to cross over from death to life

The common root here is to deliver a way for people to cross over to something new and better. To cross over from old ways to new ways is the desire of each of these leaders we revere. By definition, each one of them practiced this in their life and was committed to leading others to do the same.

The word “Hebrew” comes from the root word “eber” which means to “cross over”. Abraham was the first “Hebrew” because he was first to cross over and follow by faith the voice of God to what God had prepared for him. He crossed over the Euphrates on his way to God’s Promised Land. Moses, as a Hebrew, along with Joshua who led Israel after Moses’ death, led Israel as redeemer to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. According to Paul, we too are Hebrews by faith, just as Abraham was, by choosing to follow Jesus Christ and crossing over from death to life. In following Christ, you are a fellow Hebrew (Eph. 3:6, Gal. 3:6-9), called to go a different and specific direction and do things a specific way.

Hebrews 11 is an excellent practical guide for what type of “faith” we are called to take hold of as believers in Christ. Consider for yourself the type of faith Paul describes and consider how that compares to his description:

- 1) Verse 31 – Where do you put your trust? Rehab put her trust in God to save her rather than trusting in her own people or herself.
- 2) Verse 9, 10 and 25 – Do you seek joy mostly in the here and now, or do you, though faith, have joy in what is to come as Abraham and Moses did?
- 3) Verse 15 and 16 – Does your faith require you to turn away from any distraction from the ways of God and be most interested in His ways?
- 4) Verse 17 (and Luke 17:30-33) - To what extent will you obey the Lord and not turn back?

Step 2 – A Call to Directional Repentance

Turn from Your Way, Go My Way and Don't Look Back!

In Deuteronomy 30, God calls His people to go a certain direction. That call is equated to choosing life rather than death. A willingness to follow will bring "blessing" and rebellion will bring a "curse". He asks His people to "choose life", that is, "blessing" through following His ways rather than the "curse" of following any other way.

Abraham, the father of our faith, and Jesus, the object of our faith, both taught that, to follow the Lord and expect His blessing, repentance and new or renewed obedience to a specific way were required (Gen. 12: 1-4, 15:6, Matthew 3:1-2 and 4:17). The prophets were constantly calling people to the same solution to their wanderings away from the Lord and would warn them of additional tragedies in life and eventual eternal judgment if they did not turn away from their ways and back to those of the Lord (Isa. 30:15, Jer. 5:3, Eze. 18:30).

Unfortunately, God's initial call was not heard and followed by any of us. Therefore, rather than the guiding Law being a blessing for us by our following of it, it instead became a curse because it became a judgment upon us. To walk from this point in renewed blessing, we need to first seek forgiveness through Christ (Gal 3:10-14), who paid for our disobedience and then respond by following God's ways. By doing so, we have "spiritually crossed over" from running our own life and following the world's ways, to loving and following the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In crossing over, we choose life (obedience to His ways) in the same way that the fathers of our faith did.

Step 3 – The Family of God: One, Not Two

Consider Yourself, Part of the Family!

You may have thought of yourself as a Christian before and, as such, not related to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. The Bible corrects this misperception by defining people who are not Jewish as "fellow heirs", "grafted in", and "brought near" to the family of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. Knowing that we are considered sons and daughters of God through Christ, consisting of one family, is a wonderful comfort that Christians can personally enjoy. The part of the adoption we often argue against in Christian denominations is not whether or not we are one family per se. We tend to differ as to whether different rules apply to different family members.

It is important to point out that God doesn't repent or change the rules as He expands His family (Num. 23:19). He just doesn't change! His directives were not created when Christ came; Christ came because the directives were not followed, nor understood correctly. The expectations for the house of God have always been the same and will continue to be the same for as long as this universe exists (Matthew 5:17-19).

A second point to make is that God is not into divorce. Once He commits to build a house, or choosing a people and sets a certain standards of conduct, He does not change His mind or these ways He has set in order to try something new because the first model didn't work out the way He thought it might. We are thankful that He does not whimsically because it means that our Bibles can be trusted permanently as a way of defining for us both the way of salvation in Jesus Christ and also as a guide to life. He has not left us guessing as to whether His Word is for us or for someone else of a different culture. The Bible is one book for all people. Consider yourself part of the family, one family, following one Lord with one set of guiding principles (Numbers 15:16, Isaiah 56: 1-8, Romans 11, Ephesians 3:6).

Step 4 – How Now Shall We Live

Follow the House Rules!

There are two ways to consider house rules. Rules can be used as tests to limit entry into a family, or they may be ways of helping members of a family act in unity and effectively fulfill the purpose of that family in this world. The Scriptures assume people cannot behave perfectly to earn their status as family members in the house of God. Therefore, the rules are meant to unify and prosper the family of God.

Disunity kills and weakens a family. So does randomness and lawlessness. Christ taught this as He prayed for us in John 17 (verses 17 and 23). To Him, just as destructive as disunity (verse 23) was a lack of direction or rules (verse 17). So, what does this mean for the family of God we all claim to be a part of in Christ? We must have a standard to follow (the Law or Torah), and we need to be unified in representing it to each other and to the world (unity in love).

To drive this point home, consider your own family and imagine what it would be like to remove all unity and agreement. Pretty disastrous. Now consider an agreeable family that has no rules or standard of conduct. Equally bad as an example to others. The family of God in Christ remains a unified group under the unchanging standard of God's Torah. This will be the basis for our upcoming Torah Club Studies of the Gospels, and next week we hope to further understand how this concept relates to what is called the "New Covenant".

In summary, as Hebrew Christians we may list the following aspect to our faith. Please reflect on these this coming week with regard to your own life:

- 1) We have turned from our own thought and those of the world
- 2) We have come to Him for forgiveness and a new heart and understanding to have our eyes and ears opened to learn.
- 3) We have therefore been adopted by Him as sons and daughters.
- 4) There is one house of God and one family with one set of house rules. He did not knock down one house and begin a new foundation after seeing the one was not built on a salvageable foundation.
- 5) We have turned towards His ways and commandments and attempt to follow them with His Spirit's help and guidance.

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Lesson Two – What is the New Covenant?

Main Points to learn:

- 1) Why do Christian families experience worldly defeat?
- 2) What is the New Covenant and what's so New about it?
- 3) What is the gift Messiah brought and how is it properly applied to your life?
- 4) Words have power. They may clarify or misguide.
- 5) All Scripture is God-breathed. Ignoring any of it produces mistakes.
- 6) You were meant to prosper, but you must learn and follow in order to do so.

Scripture Background

- 1) Isaiah 42:5-9, 55:1-7
- 2) Jeremiah 31:31-34
- 3) Ezekiel 36:25-27
- 4) Luke 22:20
- 5) John 15:1-11
- 6) 1John 5: 1-4

Point 1 – Misusing the Gift of Salvation

We Struggle and Get Lost. We Need both a Compass and a Map.

How to find the way around trouble:

- 1) A man is in a featureless desert at night. The moon is not out. Someone hands him an illuminated compass and tells him to go home. Can he do it?
- 2) He is in the same desert. Someone takes his compass and hands him written directions. Can he make it home?
- 3) Someone hand him both a compass and a map. Describe how he would make it home.

The meaning of the parable:

Messiah is the illuminated compass. He gives us direction in the dark of this world. Without His gift of direction, understanding and context, we cannot apply the teachings of other Scripture successfully. The written directions represent the Law (Torah). The compass was given to illuminate the directions and allow us to effectively understand and follow what it says. The same teaching may be applied to the Apostles writings (NT) and the Law and the Prophets (OT). The writings of Moses are the directions and the Apostles writings are the illuminated compass.

Scripture does not call us to rely on one section over another nor to assume our salvation (the gift of an illuminated compass) is the end of our needs for this life. We are shown that the gift of Moses' Law was turned away from, applied wrongly and was used to achieve what it could not: our salvation. Messiah was sent, suffered and died because of these things. However, Messiah did not come to cancel the map and hand us new Scriptures while shucking the old. His gift has us to properly apply the Scriptures as we always should have.

The Christian church has, more than ever, turned away from the foundation of its faith. By being given an illuminated compass, we have been led to believe that we need no specific instructions to lead our lives. The evidence in the church is that this lawlessness has produced bad fruit. We must use the gift of salvation to its original intent: to rightly apply the whole Word of God to our lives. Torah Club will help us in this way.

Point #2 – Entering Into and Understanding the New Covenant

A New Heart Can Do You Wonders!

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. There are stipulations and conditions to every covenant and there are inherent blessings and curses within every covenant.

Begin, then, with this question: Is it easier to follow instructions successfully if you are told you must or if you personally desire to follow them because they are your heart's desire?

We are offered three gifts in life. Misunderstanding or misapplying any of these gifts has consequences.

- 1) Salvation through Christ
- 2) The Torah/Bible/Written Word of God
- 3) Guidance through the Holy Spirit

Salvation Through Christ – Your Entry Point to the New Covenant

As much as the New Covenant is an agreement, the writer of the Covenant determines what its terms are and how it must be signed. God chose to offer a New covenant through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, and the terms of the New Covenant, you may share in its benefits.

To begin with, salvation is the gift of God through which your hardened heart is replaced with a heart that desires God's ways. Previous sins are paid for, wrongs that separate you from God are erased and covered because of the punishment Jesus received on your behalf, and a new life is given to you (John 3). Just as much as salvation begets forgiveness, there is an expectation of a new desire to learn and apply God's ways to your life. His Law and a desire to follow it are placed in the heart of every believer who is truly saved (Jer. 31:31). A hunger for reading the Bible is seen, and a desire to commit to serving the people of God and seeing others saved through evangelism is evident. These are signs that a person is living in the New Covenant and that they have been "reborn from above".

So, salvation is the beginning of life in what is called the New Covenant. It is important to understand that this is the first step and is essential before life can truly improve. Consider the following: You dig a hole before you plant a tree. You bake the cake before you can ice it. You turn the car on before you can expect to drive it. In the Christian faith, you must first be "reborn" before you can expect to understand the Scriptures or to properly apply their teaching, because through salvation your eyes are opened and you are reborn from within. Apart from Christ you can do nothing (John 15:1-11). Any other step put before that of repentance and salvation, puts the cart before the horse. So, step one of the New Covenant is to come to Christ, the One through whom God makes available this New Covenant.

Life in the New Covenant – Sin is Lawlessness

Many churches claim to be "New Testament" churches. What does that really mean? Since the word "testament" is originally a Latin term that was the same as "covenant", what is really being said is that they are churches that live under the "New Covenant". To understand how to live a "New Testament" way, therefore, we must know what the Bible says the New Covenant is.

In Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, the New Covenant is predicted and defined. In Luke 22:20, Christ claims to initiate the New Covenant through His death and resurrection, allowing those who would find salvation through Him to enter into the covenant through Him.

So what happens in this New Covenant? What does it mean to be a New Testament Church? Are there Old Testament churches? Is there a need to know the Old Covenant as a New Testament Church? Do the New and Old Covenants relate at all to one another?

The Scriptures define the New Covenant in this way:

- 1) A new, softened teachable heart is given.

- 2) God's Torah (the ways of the first 5 books of the Bible) is put in a person's heart as their desire.
- 3) A person will know God and will not have to be ignorant or resistant to His ways.

We as believers in this time are the "first fruits" of this New Covenant. This means that to be a New Testament Church, we are to live as the New Covenant directs: in obedience to the ways of God, because it is our hearts desire (1John 5:3). Later, at Christ's return, He will be looked upon by Israel as Messiah and they will enter the New Covenant as well. This will be the final fulfillment of this portion of Scripture. Because the feasts we are celebrating are pictures of what is to come in the future concerning Christ, as we celebrate the feasts, we are reminded of this future fulfillment.

Summary of the First Two lessons:

- 1) Faith is historically the action of crossing over from an old place to a new place. It includes turning from old ways and going specifically in a new direction that God gives. This is what the word "Hebrew" means. Because of this, we are spiritual Hebrews in the tradition of Abraham.
- 2) Repentance is a call to give up a previous direction and go in a specific new direction rather than just in any new direction.
- 3) God did not cancel the Scriptures and begin a new Bible when Jesus came. He caused us, through our faith in Messiah, to have a new heart and begin to love the ways that he had previously directed us to live. Our sins were paid for. We understand the old covenant as meaning that God's guidelines were written on tablets of stone outside our hearts, whereas the new covenant comes as we trust in Christ and allow God to write his commandments on our hearts. This means that in the new covenant, we do not have to be commanded to follow his ways, but we desire to follow his ways.
- 4) We can misunderstand the meaning of a gift like salvation as being an end unto itself. Instead, salvation is a gift that allows us to live as we always should have lived prior to salvation. Through salvation, we live in joyful obedience to God's commands. Too often, salvation has come to mean that a person simply has a substitute to cover-up disobedience, which continues throughout life without remorse. It has become a directionless trump card. The Bible does not define any such agreement between God and man.
- 5) The Holy Spirit indwells believers in Christ, causing them to hunger for an understanding of God's direction. By the Holy Spirit living in us, we may understand and apply God's commandments properly to our life. We do not look to or use the Law "unlawfully" as a means to reach heaven but as a guide to live life the best we can.
- 6) The foundation of the Bible is the Torah (Law). And subsequent books show the consequences of disobedience to Torah. The Prophets call people back to obedience to Torah. Messiah came and initiated the new covenant where Torah would be put on the hearts of every believer, causing them to desire to follow God's commandments as written throughout the Scriptures.
- 7) We as the church are the first fruits of the new covenant. In the future, Christ's return will cause Israel to put faith in him, causing them to accept Him as Savior and to follow the Torah rightly. This will fulfill the final phase of the new covenant. The fall feasts that we currently are celebrating are pictures of what happened when Christ came the first time, and what will happen when Christ comes the second time.

Next week:

Is the church part of Israel as one people of God, or is it a separate entity or a replacement of Israel from the Bible's perspective?

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Lesson Three – Are You Part of Israel?

Main Points to learn:

1. Jews and gentiles are one in the body of Christ.
2. There is one Law for the Jew and gentile.
3. Salvation does not automatically come by being part of any church group or family.
4. “Israel” is a people of many backgrounds who look to God for salvation and seek to live by His Law.
5. Our mission as Christians is to preach Christ for salvation and the whole Bible, including the Torah, as the rule for life.

Scripture Background

1. All are called to the faith of Abraham: Genesis 12, Galatians 3:29, Hebrews 11
2. Israel is the Body of Messiah: Exodus 12:51, 19:8, Isaiah 14:1, Ephesians 2:11-17, 4:3-6.
3. There is one Body in Christ and One Law in Christ: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Numbers 15:14-31, Matthew 5:17-19, Hebrews 10:28-30, Romans 3:21-26.

Point 1 – What’s a Jew to Do??

Am I a Christian, Or Am I a Jew?

Recently, there has developed a movement within the Lord’s church. It is not new, as it is actually a redevelopment of a part of the body of Christ that was there in the beginning. The re-addition of a Jewish component is afoot. At first this seems imposing and concerning. Culturally, the Christian church has become quite different to its original form. The faith has been in exile from the land and the roots from which it originally developed for about 1900 years. The combination of the recent addition of Jews as believers in Jesus Christ as their messiah, and the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel have challenged the culture the church has been used for some time. This return to our roots is as much a fulfillment of prophecy as was the coming of Messiah Himself (Isaiah 14:1).

A dilemma in the teachings of traditional Christian faith arose with the beginning of the “Messianic” movement. This movement, which was the beginning of Jews coming to a belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior and King, only began about 30 short years ago. At the time it began, there were only about 2000 Jews worldwide who could be said to trust in Jesus as their messiah. With this small number, the only way new Jewish believers could practice their faith in Christ was to be assimilated into the traditional Christian church. So, as the time has come when Jews are being added to the body of Christ, the question arises to a Jewish believer: Do I forsake being a Jew and become a Christian, or can I continue being a Jew and still be a Christian? Likewise, the Jewish believer may ask: Do I have anything to contribute to the body of Christ, or has the body of Christ become so utterly anti-Jewish that I am simply here to forsake all the things I have been taught in following the “Old” ways (Sabbath, Feasts, Food, and reverence for the Hebrew Scriptures) and adopt a traditional Christian faith (Christmas, Easter, any food, Sunday worship, reverence for the New Testament over the Old)?

Consider also that the reverse of this situation existed in the book of Galatians at the start of the Christian church. When Christianity was very young, the early believers were almost exclusively coming out of Pharisaic traditional Judaism. There were practices and rules for “believers” in God in Judaism that were challenged by Paul in the book of Galatians. The challenge in adding people outside Judaism (Gentiles, like you and me) to the body of Christ back then was exactly the same as the dilemma we now face today in adding those coming out of Judaism to the modern body of Christ. Opposite direction (adding Jew to Gentile rather than Gentile to Jew), but the same basic problem. Both problems were present because of church traditions that were in place and were inflexible and often contrary to the teachings of Scripture itself. Back then the question was “Do gentiles need to adopt the traditions of Judaism to be real believers

in Christ?” Now the question is, “Do Jews need to adopt Christian traditions to be “real” believers in Christ?”

So, today we have a dilemma, and here it is: Since the Christian church has taught recently that the commandments of Moses do not apply to Christians, is a Jew who comes to faith in Christ supposed to forsake the commandments and teachings in the Hebrew Scriptures that are directed toward him? For example, should a Christian Jew worship on Sunday instead of the Sabbath, or should he celebrate Christmas and Easter and not expect to celebrate the Biblically commanded Feasts because Christ is said to have abolished these teachings? If we would answer that Jews can practice Christianity their own way, are we to then say that Jewish believers ought to have their own churches so that Gentiles do their thing and Jewish believers do their different thing? What is the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the Body of Christ? Do we all have the same status, the same responsibilities, the same obligations, privileges and guidelines to live a holy life? Or are we completely different and separate in God’s mind?

Because the church has, over the years, created so many practices and interpretations that depart from the Hebrew Scriptures, a division now is present between those who would want to follow the commandments and those who demand that it is wrong or strange to follow the commandments of God. It forces one to make a decision: “Am I a Christian or am I a Jew?” As we explore further, remember that a Jew wrote every book in the Bible, and that our Lord Jesus was a Jew who kept the commandments Himself.

Point 2 – Who Is “Israel”?

What do Jews say? What do Christians say? OK...What does the *Bible* say?

Jews say Israel consists of the genetic descendants of Jacob (a.k.a. “Israel”). Christians say that Israel is either the genetic descendants of Jacob, or that the church has become the “new Israel” and that God has abandoned the genetic descendants of Jacob forever in favor of the Christian church. The Mormon faith claims that their church is the new Israel and that all others are impostors. The Catholic faith claims to be the only real McCoy. Who is telling the truth here? Is there one group who is more credible than the others? Has God changed His mind (Romans 11:1)? How can we know? Thank goodness we have the Scriptures!

Ok, so enough of what everybody claims, let’s go back the Scriptures and pray that our hearts will be open to believing what They say. When the Scriptures are searched, it is important that we begin with as blank a slate of beliefs as possible. That is hard to do, but if we come to the Scriptures with a “theology” or a “cultural belief” that we are unwilling to reexamine, we will actually not learn what we could. So, if we are Baptist, we will tend to work the Scriptures to say what we wish to believe as Baptists. If Lutheran, Catholic, Mormon, Jewish, then we will work toward that perspective, because our culture and traditions are used to guide our thinking. Let’s hope that, in our study of the Bible, we are progressively able to read the Scriptures in a way where They may influence our beliefs. Can we muffle the noise of tradition long enough to hear the small voice of God?

So, what does the Bible say the term “Israel” means? Who is Israel? Discovering the truth to this question will influence how we see the Scriptures speaking to us, because many of the issues that seem to “call” Jewish people to live out their faith one way and for traditional Christianity to teach a life of faith a different way come from who God directs His comments towards in Scripture. Much of what He has commanded is directed toward “Israel”, and therefore the debate exists.

The Bible begins its call to “all peoples” with the covenant (agreement) that is made between God and anyone who would put faith in Him for salvation and guidance. This agreement is called the “Abrahamic Covenant” (Genesis 12), and we have learned that Christians are offered that same agreement: If you believe in God’s salvation and put your trust and faith in Him alone, you will be saved and He will lead you. We talked about this in Lesson 1 as we considered ourselves to be “spiritual Hebrews” as Paul taught in Galatians 3:29 and Hebrews 11.

So, Abraham sets off, and we are with him. Time goes by, and the grandparents of people who would become many nations, not just Israel, are following the God of Abraham as “one people”. Later, a descendent of Abraham, named Jacob (later renamed “Israel”), raises a family that is chosen by God to be delivered from slavery in Egypt. Of all the families of the original multitude of people that were offspring of Abraham, this family put their faith in God. They were not “genetically superior” or naturally religious, but God ADOPTED them as he adopted us, for a purpose. Of what people did that original nation of Israel consist? Was it just the natural sons and daughters of Jacob? In other words, were you just “born” an Israelite and otherwise had no chance of being in “God’s group”.

Exodus 12:51 defines the people of Israel: “a mixed multitude went up” from Egypt (Exodus 12:38). As the final plague was placed on the Egyptians, many Egyptians themselves attached their hopes to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and set out with the sons and daughters of Jacob as one people. So, Israel was defined as “people who set their hearts and hopes on following God for salvation and guidance”. It was more than just Jacob’s natural children and grandchildren who stood at the base of Mt. Sinai and said “yes” to following the commandments of the Lord (the “Torah”) along with Moses: native born and foreigner alike were called to enter into this “covenant of Moses” (Exodus 19:8).

So, as Israel is not just “people of Jewish descent”, but is a multitude of people who put their faith in God for salvation and guidance, what does that mean for the practice of our faith as Christians: people who have been “brought near” (Ephesians 2:11-13) into “one body” (Ephesians 2:15-17, 4:3-6), and who have been added to the “commonwealth of Israel” through our faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah?

Point #3 – “You Do it Your Way and We’ll Do it Our Way”

Two Peoples, Two Torahs, Two Tables, Two Purposes, Two Sets of Holidays, Two Different Days of Worship....Two Gods?....or ONE?

So, we have learned from the Scriptures that God has called people to salvation through faith in Him by the covenant He made with Abraham. This call was not just offered to one family (Jacob/Israel), but to any who would place their trust in God and look to Him for salvation. Further, this offer was made with a people of mixed heritage as Moses led them out of Egypt. This group received a further agreement (The Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses, together called the “Torah”) at Mount Sinai. The Law they received at Sinai would protect them in this world and would set them apart for a ministry God had for them to witness to the nations around them. Beyond the Torah, no other “law” has been given to those who wish to live God’s way. Man has added to, subtracted from and changed this Law in the churches and synagogues over time. But God has not added to or changed His mind on how His people should behave as they follow Him. We learned this previously in Lesson 2, which you may wish to review at this time. Recall that the “New Covenant” we have in Christ is not a new set of guidelines or a cancelling of the guidelines of the Torah. It is, instead, a promise by God to “write the Torah on our hearts”, that we would not have to be force to follow His commandments, but that we would desire to follow them (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27).

In the Scriptures, therefore, we gentiles are given the status of “sojourners” (fellow travelers) with the “native” descendants of Jacob as we both walk with God. We are not left outside the group, nor are we commanded anywhere to start a new group with new rules of conduct (Numbers 15:14-29, Matthew 5:17-19), nor to march to the beat of a different drummer. Likewise, Jews are not protected simply by virtue of being Jewish by birth. They do not belong to an exclusive insiders club. The Scriptures simply call and speak to those who would put their trust in God and turn from trusting in their own holiness for personal or corporate salvation. Those who do so, or who are intentionally disobedient to the commandments of God are warned of being “cut off” from the people of God despite the family, church or synagogue of which they are a part, whether Jew or Christian (Numbers 15:29-31, Hebrews 10:28-30, Matthew 5:13, Romans 3:21-26, Romans 6:1).

As “sojourners” with every believer in Jesus the Messiah, we are called to turn from our own thoughts and begin to learn and follow the ways of God (Isaiah 14:1, 56:6-8, Zech. 8:20-23, Acts 15: 19-21). These ways, as we see in the Scriptures, are not different for different peoples (Exodus 12:19, Leviticus

16:29, 17:15, 18:26, 24:16; Numbers 9:14, 15:16, 15:29-30). We must separate tradition from the Scriptures, making sure that we know the difference between the two. We are all one people, saved by one faith in Christ, following one Law. As we begin with what we know now of His commands, and learn to walk even more closely as His ways are progressively revealed to us, we may enjoy even closer fellowship with all those who have a heart that wishes to be led by the One who saved them.

Next week:

Torah Club begins. Please get your materials from Van Munro. We will begin with Matthew and end with the book of Acts.