

The Torah and the Spirit

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There is a connection between the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Spirit on Mt. Zion. Both are associated with Pentecost, or the biblical Feast called Shavu'ot or Weeks (e.g., Deut 16:9-10).

In studying the Scriptures, the Jewish Sages of old concluded that the Torah (Law) was given to Israel seven weeks (shavu'ot) or the fiftieth day (pentecostos) following the Exodus from Egypt. At Sinai, Israel's Redeemer became Israel's Teacher. Through His servant Moses, the Almighty conveyed divine instruction to His beloved children when the fiery radiance of His Spirit came down on the mountain and wrote upon Tablets of Stone.

Ancient Jewish commentary suggests that the Divine Voice at Sinai separated into tongues of flame that went throughout the earth, so that all nations could hear: "I am the LORD your God ... you shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:2-3).

Not surprisingly, echoes of Sinai reverberate behind the Acts account of the historic events on Mt. Zion "when the day of Pentecost had fully come" (Ac 2:1ff).

Fifty days after the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, the disciples of Yeshua, along with the people of Israel and Jewish pilgrims from the nations, assembled at the House of the Lord to commemorate the Festival of Shavu'ot. Once again, to a newly redeemed people, the Almighty came to rest upon a mountain by the fire of His Spirit.

This time He wrote the Torah upon the tablets of the believers' hearts – in accord with Jeremiah's promise of a "new covenant" (31:33). As tongues of flame came to rest upon them, the Divine Voice once again gave utterance to the nations. Many heard the good news. Even as three thousand perished at Sinai due to rebellion, at Zion three thousand were added due to faith (Ex 32:28; Ac 2:41).

CHRISTIANS WHO WANT to develop the Hebraic mind of the Messiah will find it helpful to rethink the Torah (Law) in the light of the Spirit. We tend to overlook the baseline biblical truth that "the Torah

(Law) is spiritual” (Romans 7:14); that our true selves delight in it (7:22); and that when we walk by the Spirit we will fulfill its righteous requirements (8:4), as did our Lord.

Historically, Christian polemics against Judaism have stressed negative aspects of the Law as that which identifies and condemns sin and brings curse instead of blessing upon the rebellious and disobedient. Here are some Hebraic principles that will help you develop a more positive attitude toward the Torah (Law).

The Torah is a loving Father’s teaching. The Hebrew word torah fundamentally connotes guidance and instruction – that which aims you so that you hit the mark. And the mark for the Torah always is life. The English word Law (from the Greek nomos) seldom has such a positive connotation; so you may find it helpful instead to use the Hebrew term that Jesus used, Torah.

The Torah is a treasure. Only in light of the above can we appreciate the Psalmist’s attitude: “O how I love your Torah!” (Ps 119:97). Psalm 119 consists of 8 verses for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and every one of the 176 verses extols the wisdom and will of God found in the multifaceted Torah.

The Torah is a gift of the Spirit. The Torah was written by “the finger of God” (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10). This Hebrew idiom is found also in Luke 11:20 and explained in the parallel of Matthew 12:28. It means “the Spirit of God”. Truly the Torah – the foundational “Scripture” to which the Apostle Paul alludes in 2 Timothy 3:16 – is “inspired”, i.e., in-Spirited. It is God breathed.

The Torah is guidance for a redeemed people. The Law was given to Israel after they had been saved out of Egypt, not as the basis or means of their salvation. It was meant to guide the covenant people in paths of righteousness that would bring them to the appointed place of promise and productivity. As followers of Jesus of Nazareth, it is good to be reminded that these things “were written for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11) as well.

God’s Word is truth (Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17), and Yeshua reminds us that the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of Truth (Jn 15:26). We would do well this Pentecost season to study the spiritual connection between Sinai and Zion.