

YITRO { יִתְרוֹ } (Jethro - Abundance)

Exodus 18:1-20:23, Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:6-7 (5-6), Matthew 5:8-20

A Messianic Jewish Commentary on the weekly Parashah & Haftarah

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“Now Yitro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 18:1)

Shalom from Israel! Welcome to our Torah study from Parashat Yitro. This name, Yitro

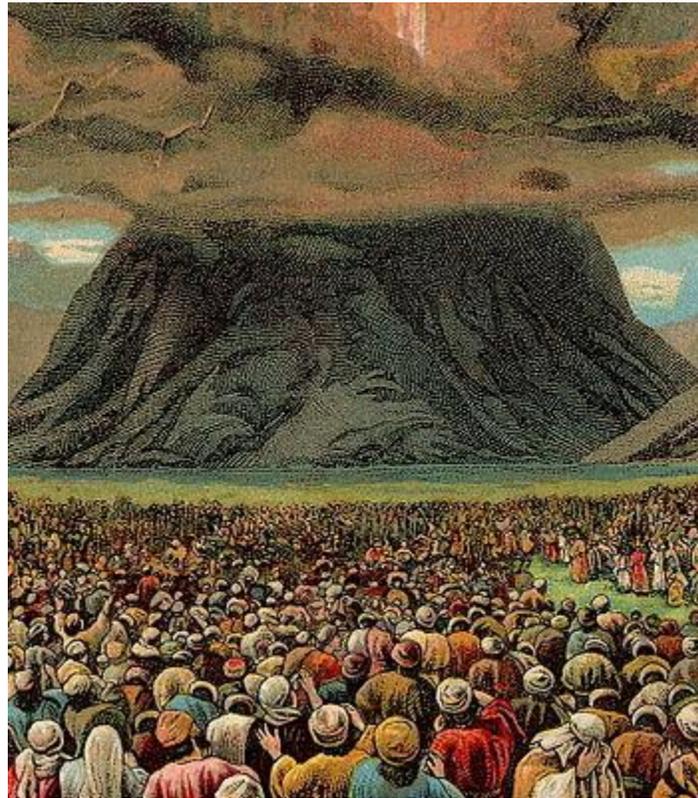
יִתְרוֹ (Jethro in English), comes from the Hebrew root, *‘yeter’*

יָתַר, meaning *‘more, abundant or exceedingly abundant’*.

Yeshua came to give us life and life more abundantly! (John 10:10)

“Our God is able to do exceedingly abundantly (yeter), more than we could ever ask or think or imagine! (Ephesians 3:20)

Because this parashah includes the revelation of the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, it is also read on the first day of Shavuot (Feast of Weeks) when it is traditionally believed that the Israelites received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.



The Ten Commandments (illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company)

Last week we studied the first Passover, with God’s dramatic rescue of the children of Israel from Egypt, the land of bondage and slavery. God parted the Red Sea to save them from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Then God provided for the needs of His people in the wilderness by raining down manna from heaven and bringing forth water from a rock.

God's intention, however, was not just to bring His people out of misery and give them just enough food and water to survive; but to lead and guide them into their final destination – The Promised Land – a land flowing with milk and honey.

God wants to do the same for us; He wants us to grow beyond 'survival mode'. It is time for us to move out of the 'land of lack', through the wilderness of 'just barely getting by' and into that broad place of 'yeter' – abundance.

DELEGATION OR EXHAUSTION

When Yitro (Moses' father-in-law) heard of all the great and wonderful things God had done for Moses and Israel, he rejoiced.

“Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 18:1)



Moses takes his leave of Jethro by Jan Victors, c. 1635

So, too, must we look for opportunities, as did Moses, to testify of the marvelous works of the Lord in our lives, in order that people may also know that Yehovah is greater than all other false gods.

This week's parashah is named after Yitro (Jethro), who was not only Moses' father-in-law, but also a pagan high priest. Yitro was the first one to offer Moses hospitality, safety, friendship and eventually even a wife when he found himself in the desert, fleeing for his life after killing an Egyptian slave driver.

And yet, as a Midianite, Yitro was in an alliance with Amalek, a sworn enemy of Israel; so why would a Torah portion be named after this man?

Rabbi Hayyim Ben Alter, an 18th century Jewish mystic, offered an interesting answer: naming this parashah after a Gentile, pagan high priest, shows us that we need to consider the wisdom of other kinds of people in our lives – even those who are very different from ourselves.

Judaism has traditionally been a closed community, ever since God forbade intermarriage with those of the Gentile nations.

"Do not intermarry with them.... for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods.... " (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

God wanted to keep His people pure from paganism. It was for this reason that Peter was so shocked when the Spirit instructed him to go with the men Cornelius has sent. Peter knew the prohibition against mixing with the ‘*goyim*’ (Gentiles).

He said, **“You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn’t done, and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean....”** (Acts 10:28)

Peter’s vision was not about food (as is so commonly misunderstood) but about people – specifically non-Jews.

God had shown Peter something so radical that it would forever change the nature of the Commonwealth of Israel – it would now include anyone of any tongue, tribe, ethnic or racial group who would choose by faith to follow the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua.

Peter said, **“I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”** (Acts 10:34-35)

Yeshua also spoke of bringing others into the sheepfold: **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** (John 10:16)

We are now one family – Jew and Gentile – one flock under one shepherd – Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah). Halleluyah!

Yitro, even though he was from a different religious and racial background, still had good advice for Moses, which he did well to heed. Moses was taking upon himself too much of a burden, trying to handle all the people’s complaints and issues by himself. He needed to delegate – a skill that many of us (myself included) also need to learn.

If God could use even a donkey to speak some sense into Balaam, certainly He can use people of different backgrounds to speak into our lives. In this instance, Moses listened to his father-in-law and found it to be wise counsel. Only a fool ignores good advice.

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.”
(Proverbs 12:15)

Yitro also brought Zipporah (Moses’ wife) and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to see Moses. Names are significant in meaning in Hebrew. We have previously discussed the meaning of Gershom (‘*stranger there*’) but what is the meaning of his second son’s name, Eliezer אֱלִיעֶזֶר ? ‘*Eli*’ אֱלִי means ‘*my God*’ and ‘*Ezer*’ עֶזֶר means *helper*. Chava (Eve) was called an ‘*ezer k’negdo*’ for Adam. Literally translated this means a ‘*helper against him*’. I wonder how many wives fit this Biblical description? ☺

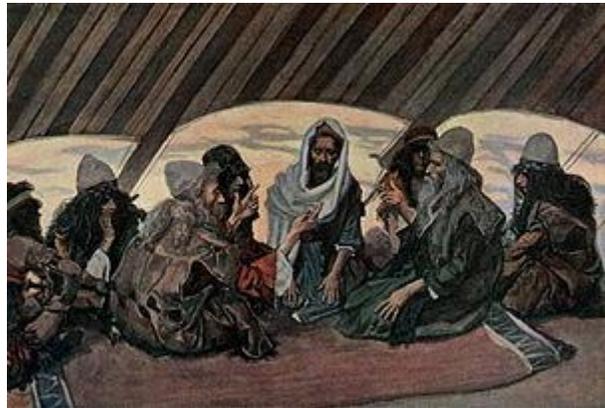
Moses named this son Eli-ezer because throughout all of his life's trials and ordeals God was his faithful helper. We may sometimes lament, "*I have no one to help me*"; but this is simply not true. God is ever ready to help us in our time of need; He is "**a very present help in time of trouble.**" (Psalm 46:1)

Yeshua also promised not to leave us as orphans but that He would send us a '*helper*' – the Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit) – who would be with us always to lead and guide us into all truth. "**I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.**"(John 14:16)

One of the ways God helps us, as He did here for Moses, is through wise counsel. We may find the help we so desperately need if only we would listen and heed good advice.

When Yitro saw Moses spending long hours judging the people, he was concerned and asked about it. "**So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"**" (Exodus 18:14)

Moses' father-in-law wisely advised him to appoint other men to occupy positions of leadership to help carry the burden, lest Moses wear himself out. We must also be careful not to allow our work, no matter how demanding, to occupy so much of our time that our well-being and relationships suffer as a result.



We must find others to which we can delegate some of our duties in order to give more balance to our life. The Word of God tells us which qualities to look for in choosing potential leaders: capable, God-fearing, honest people of integrity. *Jethro and Moses (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)*

"Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." (Exodus 18:21)

Thankfully, Moses listened to his father-in-law, which again shows us Moses' beautiful character trait of humility. We can be grateful, and not defensive, when God sends someone into our life to give us necessary correction for our own good.

It seems to me that Yitro gave his son-in-law, Moses, good advice that many of us could use. So many people today feel stressed out, overwhelmed by responsibilities and overburdened by the conflicting demands of others. The sheer information overload we experience today through internet and technology is enough to make anyone frazzled.

And yet, we can see from this parashah that the threat of burnout is not a new phenomenon (even Moses was in danger of succumbing to it); but rather an issue of how we manage our time. Instead of allowing ourselves to become worn out, we need to learn how to delegate.

We need to pray that we could find the right person or people to help us; that we may be able to delegate some of the lighter matters to others. Otherwise, we will never be able to get to the most important things in life.

We often feel that we are the only one who can handle something; but if we delegate, we not only relieve some of the stress in our lives; we give others the opportunity to learn and grow in the process.

This life is not designed to be a ‘quick sprint’; but rather a marathon race. If we are to endure it to the end, then just as Jethro advised Moses, we must not overwork ourselves.

“Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.” (Proverbs 23:4-5)

On Eagles’ Wings

After Jethro departed for home, and three months after the Israelites had been rescued from Egypt, they camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Moses went up to God and He said,

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”
(Exodus 19:4)



The eagle (called a **Nesher** נֶשֶׁר in Hebrew), is often used as a biblical metaphor because of its strong, noble, and courageous qualities. The eagle mates for life and carries its young on its wings; and when necessary would willingly offer up its own body as a shield for its young ones from an archer’s deadly arrows.

The above mentioned character of the eagle symbolizes the strong tenderness and protectiveness of God’s love towards His children. He bore the children of Israel up on His wings to take them out of danger’s way in Egypt. God’s promise is also for us today, that those who hope in Him will renew their strength; we shall rise up on wings as an eagle: **“Those who wait (hope)¹ upon the Lord shall rise up on wings as an eagle (nesher).”** (Isaiah 40:31)

¹ The Hebrew word, kaveh, is closer to the meaning of ‘hope’ than ‘wait’ as it is often translated in English

Yeshua wept when he looked out over the city of Jerusalem, knowing the impending destruction that was sure to come upon her. He said,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34)

Although this photo is not an eagle (obviously), it is a beautiful picture of the tender and fierce protectiveness of a bird for its young. So too does God keep us safe under the shelter of His wings if we are willing to come to Him for refuge. **"He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge."** (Psalm 91:4)



Operation Magic Carpet (Messiah is Coming) – Exodus from Yemen

When the Israelis caught word of the supernatural mass exodus of the Jews from Yemen, Israel organized an airlift called On Wings of Eagles (nicknamed *Operation Magic Carpet*), between June 1949 and September 1950 to transport them to the new land of Israel. This secret rescue effort (also called *Operation Messiah's Coming*) was not made public until several months after its successful completion.



Yemenite Jews *en route* to Israel from Aden

Most of these Yemenite Jews were very primitive; they had never seen such a thing as an airplane or even an automobile in their lives and were afraid to board the planes. Therefore, the pilots were worried about what they may do on board. Instead of panicking; however, they sat calmly and quietly after their rabbi explained God's promise in His word from today's parashah - that one day God would carry them on the wings of an eagle back to their land. Therefore they believed - and here were the 'Eagles' wings' that had come to carry them back to Zion! Halleluyah!

A total of 48,000 Jews were flown from Yemen to Israel. By September 1950, Yemen was empty of Jews. The eagles could rest. A street in Jerusalem and another in Hertzliyah has been named '*Kanfei Nesharim*' (Wings of Eagles) in honor of this daring Israeli rescue operation.

A Special Treasure (Segulah)

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession (segulah). Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5-6)

God gave Israel a promise that if she would keep His covenant, then she would be His own special treasure from among all the nations. The Hebrew word used here is **segulah סגולה**. It is a word used for a precious object – ‘one’s special possession or a chosen instrument for a peculiar purpose’.

Often, the purpose is greater than the instrument itself; and so too is the case with Israel. They were chosen as God’s instrument; but His purpose - for Israel to be a light unto the nations and a channel of blessing to all humanity - is much greater.



Enameled gold, amethyst and pearl pendant, about 1880, Pasquale Novissimo (1844–1914), V&A Museum

Israel was called, not to privilege, but to service. Although the nation of Israel may have failed to a large extent with regards to their divine mission; it was also through this nation that the Messiah would arise, as the Savior of all Mankind.

This is God’s doing and therefore it cannot and did not fail. Each of us, Jew or Gentile, is God’s own special ‘*segulah*’ through faith in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. The dividing wall has been broken down through His blood and we may all consider ourselves God’s own special treasures.

Grasshoppers, Dead Dogs and Noodnicks – Treasures in Disguise

Some of us, however, have difficulty seeing ourselves as a ‘*treasure*’; we perhaps see ourselves rather as a ‘*noodnick*’ (Yiddish expression for a nuisance). Or maybe we think of ourselves as a tiny ‘grasshopper’, like the Israeli spies, hoping we don’t get squished under someone’s boot.

Or could it be that we would call ourselves a ‘*dead dog*’ like Mephiboshet², son of Jonathan? OK, it may not be quite this bad, but if we have never really had the experience of being ‘*cherished*’ in the natural, it may be difficult to believe in our heart that we truly are a treasure – a *segulah*.

² 2 Samuel 9

But the truth is that this is how God sees us, despite our weaknesses, faults and failures. We have been created in the image of God and each of us contains seeds of greatness within – but much of it remains hidden – like buried treasure.

It is our mandate from the Lord to reveal to the world the treasure house of talents and abilities He has gifted us with and not allow them to remain buried in the dirt out of fear, insecurity and self doubt. I have heard it said that the richest places in all the earth are in cemeteries, because so many people die with the rich treasures God has given them still buried and never expressed. I don't want to be one of them, by God's grace and with His help and guidance.

I heard of a golden statue that had been covered up by clay and dirt so that no one even knew of the gold inside until one day, it cracked open and someone noticed the gold shining forth through the crack. It seems to me that we are much like that golden statue. Much of the brilliance of the treasure within us has been covered up by hardened clay and dirt – the impurities of our flesh that need to be refined from our character.

Thank God He is the Potter and we are the clay.³ He is faithfully completing the good work He has started in us.⁴ He has us safely in the palm of His hands and it is He who controls the heat of the fire. Sometimes we feel that the heat and pressure of our current trial is too great for us to withstand, but God knows exactly what we need to refine us so that we will come out as gold!⁵ Halleluyah!

May we allow the Potter to have His way in our lives, to mold us into vessels that can shine forth the brilliance and beauty of the treasures He created us to be in Him. We will then walk in the exceedingly abundant life that Yeshua promised us.

A Kingdom of Priests (Mamlechet Cohanim)

Israel was also first called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (*mamlechet cohanim v'goy kadosh*). Interestingly enough, the word *segulah* סגולה shares a root with the Hebrew word סגול – purple, which is the color of royalty.

The promise of the royal priesthood, a kingdom of cohanim (plural for cohen), was also extended to non-Jews in the Messiah.

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (mamlechet coham, v'goy kadosh). His own special people (segulah is the Hebrew word used here again), that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1Peter 2:9-10)

³ Isaiah 64:8

⁴ Phil. 1:6

⁵ Zech. 13:9

We are all sons and daughters of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; therefore we are all royalty – kings and priests unto the Lord. “... **and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-- to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**” (Revelation 1:6)

What does it mean to live as a kingdom of cohanim, fellow citizens with Israel, a holy nation? With privilege comes responsibility. Those grafted into the covenant through the blood of Yeshua are truly joining themselves with the children of Judah, forming one new man, or as Psalm 47:9 words it, “*People of the God of Abraham*”.

Our genealogy should be irrelevant in light of this truth. What counts is our unity, and that we all live by God’s standards for a holy nation, a kingdom of cohanim.

The Cloud (Chuppah – Wedding Canopy)

“And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.” (Exodus 19:9)

God came to speak to His people in a *thick cloud*. God also led the people with a *pillar of cloud by day* and a pillar of fire by night when leading them out of Egypt. The cloud is the symbol of God’s divine presence and guidance. (Exodus 13:21)

When Yeshua returns, He will be seen *coming with clouds*, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him and all families of the land will mourn because of Him. (Revelation 1:7)



The chuppah at a Jewish wedding in Jerusalem

The encounter between God and His people at Mount Sinai had many of the elements of a Jewish wedding. The cloud may also symbolize the covering of the chuppah, the marriage canopy, into which the Jewish bride enters into the covenantal relationship of marriage with her bridegroom.

The Ketubah – Marriage Contract

In a Jewish wedding ceremony, the terms of the marriage contract are clearly written in a contract called a ketubah. This document is often beautifully and ornately decorated.

When my eldest daughter, Courtney, married her beloved Emanuel, they also needed to sign a ketubah, the marriage



contract, which was witnessed by the rabbi and is even now (hopefully) kept in a safe place. Our parents' ketubah is used to prove our Jewishness when making aliyah⁶.

Rabbis witnessing the signing of the ketubah



The ketubah states what the husband is responsible for in the marriage and also the wife's duties, as well as what each may expect from the other. At Mt. Sinai, the conditions of the covenant were clearly specified between God and His people. God clearly stated His expectations of His bride (fidelity and obedience) as well as what He was prepared to offer (to be their God). Israel, His bride, responded by vowing: “*I do!*”

“**And all the people answered together, and said: ‘All that the Lord hath spoken we will do’.**” (Exodus 19:8) When Israel said, “*I do*” to their Bridegroom, YHVH God, they basically sealed their marriage contract with the Lord.

The Sign of Betrothal - Shabbat

Every bride is given a token, usually in the form of a ring, as a sign that she is betrothed. What is the sign of betrothal God gave to Israel? It is the Shabbat. God said it will be ‘a sign’ between Him and the people of Israel; it is the wedding ring.



When I was a young teenager, I received a ring from the young man I was ‘going with’. When we broke up, I threw the ring back at him. Unfortunately, it dropped down into the heat register of his car, never to be seen again. Oye – the follies of youth! ☺ When we refuse to keep the Shabbat, however, it is a serious matter - as if we are throwing our wedding ring back at God.

⁶ Aliyah – immigration to the land of Israel under the law of return

The Wedding Gift – The Land of Israel

I believe that the bridegroom also gave His bride a beautiful and generous wedding gift. What is the gift that God gave to His people? It is the Land of Israel, given as a promise to this special nation. Can we even imagine the rage of the bridegroom towards those who attempt to take away His Bride's wedding gift?

The Sound of the Shofar

God also came to His people with the voice of the shofar which became exceedingly loud. (Exodus 19:16) It is also with the voice of a shofar that the Lord will return. (1Thess 4:16)



A shofar made from the horn of a kudu, in the Yemenite Jewish style

The shofar has many uses⁷: one is to signal an important public event; another is to proclaim a king. At Sinai, the kingdom of God was inaugurated by the loud voice of the shofar. It also proclaims freedom for the slaves (Lev. 25:9 &10). It is therefore sounded at the end of the Day of Atonement so announce Israel's emancipation from sin.

As Believers in Yeshua, we know that only the blood of the Lamb of God can set us free and provide atonement for our sins. The shofar is also sounded at the Feast of Trumpets to proclaim God's sovereignty. When the Messiah returns, the voice of the shofar will proclaim that the King has come to take His eternal place on the throne of David.

The haftorah (assigned portion of scripture from the prophetic word) contains this exact reference for this week's shabbat reading. Isaiah 9:6-7 prophesies that a child will be born, a son given to us, who is not only a child, but also carries the titles of Almighty God and Everlasting father. He will carry the government upon his shoulders and establish the throne of David in justice and righteousness forever and ever. Obviously this speaks of the reign of Messiah.

One Jewish man that I showed this scripture to in Hebrew insisted that I had somehow tampered with the Bible, so shocked was he at the clarity of this Word. The haftorah for this week leaves out the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, that a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and call him Immanu-El (God with us).

Why is it omitted? These portions of scripture were standardized by the rabbis long ago. As to why certain prophecies were included and other excluded, we can only speculate. Isaiah 53 is also excluded in its entirety. We can then see that it would be difficult for most Jewish people, even those religious enough to attend synagogue each Shabbat, to learn about the Messiah from our own Hebrew scriptures. Please pray that their eyes will be supernaturally opened in spite of the difficulties. Nothing is impossible with God.

⁷ For more information see Messiah Revealed in the Fall Feasts book or Blow the Shofar in Zion DVD

Preparing to meet with God

Moses instructed the people as God had commanded to consecrate themselves for three days and prepare to meet with God to receive the Ten Commandments. This was the whole purpose of the exodus from Egypt – for Israel to receive God’s Torah. “When you will have brought the people out from Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.” (*Exodus 3:12*).



Moses Led Them Out of the Camp To Meet God (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

The Jewish sages believe that when God gave Israel the Torah, He told Moses to approach the women first. It is through the merit of righteous women of Israel that Messianic redemption would come, as written in the oral law, “*All generations are redeemed by virtue of the pious women of their generation*” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth: 606*).

Interestingly, the ancient Jewish sages also believe that it would be the women who would first receive the teachings of the Messiah. We see this fulfilled in the gospels, as it was a woman who first saw Yeshua raised from the dead.

“Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.” (Mark 16:9)

Standing trembling at the foot of the mountain on the third day, the people of Israel met with God as He descended with thunders, lightning, thick clouds, and the loud sound of the shofar (ram’s horn). The whole mountain was covered with smoke, as God came with fire; as it is written, “**The Lord is a consuming fire.**” (Deuteronomy 4:24).

God had instructed Moses to warn the people not to go up the mountain or touch its base, upon penalty of death! “You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.’” (*Exodus 19:12*) Thankfully, we have not come to such a mountain of darkness and fire and deafening fearful noise; but to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the angels – to Yeshua. We are therefore receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken.



Moses Forbids the People to Follow Him (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a shofar ...

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels... to Yeshua the Mediator of the new covenant...” (Hebrews 12:18-24, 29).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (Exodus 20: 1-14)

We come now to the Ten Commandments, called ‘*Eser Dibrot*’ (‘*Ten Words*’) in Hebrew, written by the very finger (etzbah) of God, and revealed to the nation of Israel amid thunder and lightning and the sounding of the shofar.



Moses on Mount Sinai, painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme

While flames of fire enveloped the smoking mountain of Sinai, a majestic voice pronounced the words that even today make up the guide of conduct for all of humankind. According to Jewish tradition, this momentous event took place on Shavuot (Feast of Weeks/Pentecost), which is the exact same time that the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples as tongues of fire! ⁸

⁸ For more information, I recommend my book, *A Messianic Jewish view of Shavuot (Pentecost/Weeks)*, available by post or through our website.

While the Ten Commandments are the truth, (“The entirety of Your Word is truth...”)⁹ it takes the Spirit of the living God to have the ability to walk them out in our daily lives. We are called to be ‘*living epistles*’ - walking, breathing Torahs.

Something that a woman said one day really challenged me about ‘*walking the talk*’. She was temporarily staying in my home while she had nowhere else to stay. I could see that she was searching for the truth, so I asked her if she would like me to e-mail her my Torah commentaries, to which she replied, “*You are my Torah commentary for now.*”

What a privilege but also what a responsibility! We cannot possibly manage to keep God’s commandments in a way that brings honor and glory to Him without the Holy Spirit. Yeshua said that in the last days, people will worship God in Spirit and in Truth.¹⁰ It seems to me that these last days have come – as more and more people worship God in the Spirit, but also according to the Truth of the Torah.



These ‘Ten Words’ are to be in our hearts according to the promise of the New Covenant¹¹. We are to carefully observe them, so that we may have long life, and that it may go well with us. We are commanded to teach them to our children in our daily living; they are to be written on the doorposts of our homes. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

This 1768 parchment (612×502 mm) by Jekuthiel Sofer emulated the 1675 Ten Commandments at the Amsterdam Esnoga synagogue

Several years ago, my middle son, Timothy, took this literally, and had me scribe the Ten Commandments onto cardboard tablets that he had constructed. He then pasted these to the door of our apartment, along with red strips of paper on the doorposts, representing the blood of the lamb. This created quite a conversation piece for anyone who came to our door!

Where the Torah fits into the life of a non-Jewish Believer remains a controversial issue within the Christian community. On one occasion, a Christian expressed her disapproval of my (then) husband’s wearing of the tzitzit, the fringes on his garments. She claimed that, according to the New Covenant, the commandments are now to be in our hearts and in our minds; therefore, these physical reminders of God and His commandments are no longer necessary.

⁹ Psalm 119:160

¹⁰ John 4:23-24

¹¹ Jeremiah 31:33

But the commandments, according to the Word of God, were always to be contained in our hearts. What does this mean to be in our hearts? The Lord illustrated this to me one day in a word picture (as He often does).

My then youngest son was leaving the house to go to school. As usual, I prayed for his protection and the blessing of the Lord upon him. As he walked up the long flight of stairs, I blew him kisses, each of which he captured, holding them tightly in his little fists and then patting them down into his chest. Thus, having my kisses safely stowed away in his heart, he would blow me a few in return before heading off on his own. I also caught each one of his kisses and firmly planted them in my own heart as I watched him walk away.

Now we both felt secure. We each had planted each other's love in our hearts and knew that the kisses would remain there until we could be together again. What a beautiful picture of how we are to snatch up God's commandments and plant them deeply and securely in our hearts. **"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."** (Psalm 119:11)

The Church and Anti-Torah Attitudes

I was in a large, evangelical, charismatic church once, when the pastor began his sermon on teaching our children the commandments (from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy). *"So far so good"*, I thought. Then, as he got more and more worked up, he began quoting out of the book of Galatians, and ended up calling the 'law' *'crap and refuse'*! He said if we didn't like what he said, not to take it up with him but with God. This I did. Several months later, his church split. The elders who had been with him through thick and thin for over twenty years, suddenly left the church. God will not be mocked. His Word stands forever.

Daniel Botkin, of Gates of Eden, has written an excellent pamphlet called *The Ghost of Marcion*¹² which explains the origin and development of this anti-torah attitude in the Church. Basically, a second-century heretic called Marcion taught that the entire Old Testament should be rejected because it belonged to an evil, inferior God, and not to the God revealed as Jesus of Nazareth."

This may sound far-fetched to us now, but is it really? Isn't there a strong notion in mainstream Christianity that the Old Testament is all about law and wrath, while Jesus and the New Testament are all about grace? Since the Old and the New are not seen in harmony, and since grace is certainly preferable over wrath, Christianity often de-emphasizes the Old Testament and puts a disproportionate amount of emphasis on Paul's epistles. By volume, Paul's letters make up only five percent of what we commonly consider 'the Bible'.

¹² Gates of Eden, PO Box 2257, East Peoria IL 61611-0257. See Dr. Botkin's other booklet on Inspiration, Authority and Canonicity.

Marcion was also anti-Jewish. Therefore, we hear a remnant of this contempt for anything Jewish when people claim, “We don’t *have* to keep all those *Jewish* laws.” By assigning ‘a *Jewish label*’ to certain commandments, Gentile Christians may therefore dismiss them as being irrelevant to non-Jews.

God’s laws, however, are not ‘*Jewish laws*’; they were simply given to the nation of Israel first, as a model for the other nations to eventually follow. The covenants and even the Messiah were given first to the nation of Israel also, but this does not make them ‘exclusively Jewish’. **“Behold, the days are coming that I will make a new Covenant with the House of Judah and the House of Israel...”** (Jeremiah 31:31)

Where does it say that the covenant was made with the Gentiles? And yet, it was later revealed by the Holy Spirit that non-Jews can fully enter into the covenant and be equal heirs through the blood of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, by being grafted into the olive tree (Romans 11:13-17).

It is also this way with the Torah. It was first given to the house of Judah and Israel, but now non-Jewish followers of Yeshua may also feast upon the goodness and wisdom and blessings that come from following the Torah.

We must always keep in mind that we do not follow the Torah in order to earn our salvation. Neither did Israel. They were saved by grace through the blood of the Passover lamb. Even though they were helpless slaves, they were first redeemed by the mighty hand and outstretched arm of God. After their salvation experience, they were brought to Mt. Sinai to learn how to live in a way pleasing to God according to the Torah.

Many people, freed from slavery to sin, redeemed by the blood of the lamb, want to enter the Promised Land without ever making that essential pit stop at Mt. Sinai. This is what Ray Comfort wrote in his book, ‘How to Bring Your Children to Christ’ (& keep them there):

“By removing God’s law from its message, modern Christianity has minimized the exceedingly offensive nature of sin. Sin has merely become something that separates, rather than what it is – a super magnetized anvil for the steel justice of a holy God. They have removed the very elements that produce the fear of the Lord.” (p.140)

Imagine if, in our households, we spent much time coming up with a set of rules to help us all live together in peace and harmony. We even took the time to write them down and made sure everyone agreed. Everyone in the family says, “*We will agree to do all it says here.*”

But then we tell the children one more thing: there will be no consequences for any infraction of the rules. How long do we think the rules will be kept if there is no fear of consequences? How much law and order would be expected in society if we removed all penalties for criminal acts? It is the same if we remove the ‘law’ (Torah) from the Christian faith.

Just as the Israelites made themselves a ‘god’ out of gold in the image of a calf, it is possible to make ourselves a ‘god’ in an image that we prefer - a ‘kinder, gentler’ image of God who tolerates sin.

Most people recognize that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God¹³ – the God who would command Joshua to kill everything that breathed when he brought Israel into the Promised Land. This is the God who immediately executed a man for simply touching the ark of the covenant to keep it from falling off the cart¹⁴; who struck down a husband and his wife for one little lie;¹⁵ who gave a man a heart attack just for being so mean and ornery (Nabal)¹⁶; who killed two sons of the High Priest for their evil ways and two others for offering ‘strange incense’ and who made kings die painful, horrible deaths for not giving the glory to God.

Isn’t it easier, safer, somehow to believe that our God is now a nice, humble, little lamb who forgives anyone anything anytime? The fear of the Lord is not something to be avoided. It is the ‘beginning of wisdom’ (Proverbs 9:10). It is the only thing that, if kept before our eyes, will keep us from evil. (Proverb 16:6)

We hear of terrible acts of violence in the news. Why would a youth murder his own parents and siblings? Why would a man rape an innocent woman or scour the internet to feast his eyes on sexual perversions such as child pornography? Why do people kill, steal, or commit adultery? **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** (Romans 3:18)

Yeshua tells us Whom to fear: **“But I will show you whom you shall fear; fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, fear Him!”** (Luke 12:5)

Therefore, even though we are under the grace of the new covenant, the Word of God is truth for all peoples. Keeping His commandments is how we show our love for God. **“For this is love for God, to keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.”** (1John 5:3)

God’s commandments provide a guide for a healthy, happy, productive and harmonious life in relationship with God and with other people.

The totality of Psalm 119 is dedicated to extolling the virtues and benefits of living a life obedient to God’s commandments, which are to be our delight. **“Make me walk in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.”** (Psalm 119:35)

The Word of God even warns that our prayers are an abomination if we are walking in blatant disobedience to God’s laws. **“One who turns away his ear from hearing the Torah, even his prayer is an abomination.”** (Proverbs 28:9)

¹³ Hebrews 10:31

¹⁴ 2 Samuel 6:6-7

¹⁵ Acts 5:1-10

¹⁶ 1 Samuel 25:37-38

Tablets of Stone

The first tablet containing the first five of the Ten Commandments, deals with our relationship to God. The second set of five commandments deals with our relations with our neighbor.

Yeshua said that these two make up the most important commandments in the entire Torah: love God and love our fellow man.



“Yeshua said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

(1) “I יהוה am your God...”

The first of the Ten Commandments is that YHVH יהוה is the one and only true God who brought us out of Egypt; we are to have no other gods besides Him. The God of Israel is not an impersonal ‘*force of consciousness*’, but a God of amazing love, complete power and infinite intelligence who becomes intimately involved with the affairs of mankind to save, rescue, redeem and deliver. This is the God who is worthy of our love and devotion and we are to serve none other. The first step towards the Kingdom of Heaven is to accept the existence of God and give Him first place in our heart.

(2) “You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.”



Exodus 20:1–5 in a manuscript from the British Library

The second commandment forbids the creation and worship of idols. Anything that we put in first place in our lives other than God is idolatry. God is, by His own admission, a jealous God.¹⁷ The Hebrew root for ‘*jealous*’ (*kanna*), means the ‘*just indignation of one*

¹⁷ Exodus 20 :5

injured.’ When we choose another over God, He is injured, as a husband or wife with an unfaithful spouse. God desires for us to know Him as our ‘all in all’.

Paul’s spirit was provoked when he saw that the city of Athens was given over to idols.¹⁸ In today’s world, we see different idols: wealth, fame, power, position, money, work, sex, celebrities, sports, even relationships. In our contemporary culture, just as in Paul’s day, idolatry abounds.

We so often tend to put our trust and confidence in other things or people, but only God is absolutely trustworthy. God’s prophetic word promises that one day, His people will no longer tolerate any idolatry in their lives. **“But the day will come when Ephraim shall say, “What have I to do anymore with idols?”** (Hosea 14:8)

A worship song is sung in the Church today, *“Give us clean hands, give us pure hearts, let us not lift our soul to another...”*¹⁹ May this truly be the generation that turns away from idols and seeks the God of Jacob.

Whether or not we walk in faithfulness and obedience towards God affects not only our own lives and our children’s but also future generations. God promises to show mercy unto the thousandth generation of those who love God and keep His commandments (Exodus 20:6)

The reverse, however, also holds true. The bad example of a father or mother can corrupt generations to come – the iniquity may be passed down to the third and fourth generations, just as we have seen even in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



The Ten Commandments on a glass plate

(3) “You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God.”

The third commandment is against taking His name in vain. We are not to use the name of God to swear or in any profane way, such as we hear so commonly with people, especially on television and in movies (OMG). We need to teach our children that God’s name is Holy and this is a wrong and sinful use of His name.

His name is a strong tower to which we can run to and be safe.²⁰ **“Our help is in the name of Adonai (יהוה), maker of heaven and earth.”** (Psalm 124:8) We need to respect His holy name.

¹⁸ Acts 17:16

¹⁹ "Give Us Clean Hands" was written by Charles Eugene Hall lii.

²⁰ Proverbs 18:10

(4) “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy...”

The fourth commandment is one of the most neglected and ignored of the Ten Commandments, to our own detriment: remember the Sabbath Day. The Hebrew word, Shabbat { **שבת** } comes from a root that means to sit or desist from work. It is the root of the word, Shvifah, **שבתה** which means a labor strike.

When we first came to Israel, there were so many workers and institutions on strike that ‘*shvifah*’ was one of my first new Hebrew vocabulary words. ☺ It seems to me that in order to keep Shabbat, we have to declare a holy strike on work. It doesn’t matter how much work is left undone, it will just have to wait for twenty four hours!

And it is amazing to find out that the universe actually manages to continue to function just fine without my help on Shabbat. I will admit that here in Israel it is easier to keep Shabbat as a holy day of rest, since the shops close early on Friday afternoon and even the public transportation stops running. People everywhere are expected to just sit down, rest, stop working and enjoy God and their families.

Another word connected with Shabbat is ‘*la’shevet*’, **לשבת** which means ‘*to sit*’. How often, do we have a chance to just ‘sit’ without feeling guilty that we are not being productive? And that is the whole point of Shabbat – we are to remember that we are human *beings*, not human *doings*.

Shabbat is a special sign between God and His people that we are no longer slaves in Egypt, but that God has set us free. **‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.’** (Exodus 31:13) Remembering Shabbat to keep it holy and desisting from work on this day is a declaration of our freedom in God!

It is also a declaration of faith that God is our ultimate source of provision – not our job or any person, but Yehovah Yireh is our Provider. When we continue to work on Shabbat, this is in effect saying that I must make it happen; it demonstrates a lack of trust in God to provide if we work only six days a week rather than seven.

I am not talking about keeping Shabbat in a Rabbinically Jewish way, full of man-made prohibitions, rules, and regulations; but rather simply stopping, resting, and not practicing anything to do with our profession or participating in economic transactions.

The word used in Hebrew is not ‘work’ (*avodah*) that we must avoid necessarily, but ‘*m’lachah*’, which refers rather to one’s vocation. Therefore, it is not ‘working’ that we are to avoid, as in ‘working in the garden’, but not doing that which brings us an income.

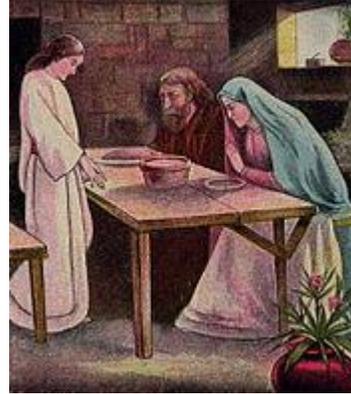
Just as the people who went out to ‘gather’ on the Sabbath day found nothing; so too will all our labors result in nothing good or lasting when we do it in violation of God’s Commandment to remember the Sabbath Day.

The Sabbath was instituted at creation. After creating the world, God rested on the seventh day and commanded us also to rest on this day. Therefore, in resting on the seventh day and keeping it holy (kadosh – set apart from other secular days), we are imitating God our Creator. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it indicate that God changed His mind on which day is the Sabbath. It is still the seventh day; and it is still one of the Ten Commandments. But now rather than being chiseled into a rock slate tablet, it is written in our hearts. I encourage you to pray about this issue and do further study.²¹

(5) “Honor your father and your mother

The fifth commandment is given with a promise, **“that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God has given thee.”** (Exodus 20:12).

In order to live a long, healthy life and so that it will go well with us, we must show honor to our mother and father who gave us life.



Honor Your Father and Your Mother (illustration from a Bible card published by the Providence Lithograph Company)

Many people struggle with their relationships with less than perfect parents; however, we are still to honor and respect them if we want to be blessed. I am reminded of the sons of Noah - when he passed out, drunk and naked, in his tent. One of his sons, Ham, saw his father in this deplorable state and ran to tell his other brothers. We can imagine the boy saying something like this, *“Come on, quick, you gotta see this! Dad is drunk and stark naked in his tent!”*

But the other two sons, Shem and Yafet, refused to even look upon their father in his shameful state; they walked in backwards carrying a garment to cover their father’s nakedness. Love covers a multitude of sins.²² Loving children cover their parents’ faults and weaknesses rather than announcing them to others.

When Noah awoke and found out what happened, he declared a curse on the lineage of Ham, while Shem and Yafet would pass on a blessing to their future generations. No child should gloat over a parents disgrace.

“The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.” (Prov. 30:17)

If our life is not going well, and we feel like we are living under a curse, perhaps we need to examine whether or not we are truly honoring and respecting our mother and father. Even if we have been guilty of dishonoring our parents, maybe even during a rebellious

²¹ I have written a book on the Sabbath which is available through: www.voiceforisrael.net

²² 1 Peter 4:8

teenage stage long ago, we can repent before them and before God and seek forgiveness and perhaps restitution. The honoring of one's parents will be rewarded with health, blessing and happiness.

The last five of the Ten Commandments are simple and straight-forward regarding our relationship towards our fellow man:

- (6) "You shall not murder."
- (7) "You shall not commit adultery."
- (8) "You shall not steal."
- (9) "You shall not bear false witness."
- (10) "You shall not covet . . . anything that is your neighbor's."

The Ten Commandments are for all people – of every tongue, tribe and race. Today, there is a great controversy over the U.S. court's decision to prohibit the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools and all public buildings in the name of '*religious tolerance*'. We all too clearly see the negative results.

Yeshua did not come to abolish the Torah but to fulfill it.²³ Far from abolishing the Torah or commandments of God, Yeshua deepened our understanding of them to include even the intentions of our heart. It is not enough to simply refrain from murdering someone, for if we even hate someone in our heart, then we have in essence committed murder.²⁴ Not sufficient is it to keep ourselves from sexual immorality; for even if we lust after a person in our heart, then we have committed the sin of adultery.²⁵



Christian School in India displays Ten Commandments

Yeshua taught that our righteousness must exceed even that of the scribes and Pharisees in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁶ Incredible! Because God is not after our outward compliance to a set of written laws and regulations; He is after our heart!

In the flesh we can never possibly keep these commandments, but God promises to give us a new heart and a new spirit so that we can love and obey Him.²⁷ God desires that

²³ Matthew 5:17-19

²⁴ 1 John 3:15

²⁵ Matthew 5:28

²⁶ Matthew 5:20

²⁷ Ezekiel 11:19-20, Ezekiel 36:26-27

righteousness peace and joy in the Spirit will become the prevailing essence of our lives and the lives of our children and future generations - by His Grace.

Closing Prayer: Abba, Father, thank you for receiving us as Your very own children, for calling us Your special treasure, and for giving us the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Help us, Adonai, to walk in the Fear of the Lord, and hide Your word in our hearts that we might not sin against You.

Make our hearts tender towards you, and our consciences sensitive to know when we do or say or even think something that displeases You. And as we seek to walk in obedience to Your commandments and Your Spirit, guard us, O God from developing a self-righteous, prideful attitude towards those who are far from You.

Make us vessels equipped and anointed to shine forth Your glory as the ‘segulah’ treasure You have called us to be. Conform us more and more into Your image, that we may be a ‘Light unto the nations’, that many people may turn “from idols to serve the living and true God.” (1 Thessalonians 1:9) In Your Holy Name. Amen.

Yitro Study Questions

1. Do you feel that you are still in ‘*survival mode*’? Do you see Biblical evidence that God wants us to enjoy an abundant life? What strategies could you put into practice to move from the land of ‘*just barely getting by*’ to the ‘*land of abundance*’?
2. Have you ever received good advice from someone who comes from a different background than yourself? Explain.
3. Do you agree that Peter’s vision was about people and not food? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel like you’re wearing yourself out trying to do everything by yourself? What specific tasks or duties could you delegate and to whom?
5. Do you feel like a ‘*special treasure*’ to God? Or do you feel more like a ‘dead dog’, ‘noodnick’ or ‘grasshopper’? What could you do to help improve a negative self-image?
6. Do you feel that you have ‘hidden treasures’ that are not being expressed? How could you begin to share your unique gifts, talents and abilities with the world?
7. What elements of a Jewish wedding ceremony were present when God met with His people, Israel, at Mount Sinai?
8. Can you list all the Ten Commandments from memory?
9. What did Yeshua say was the most important commandment?
10. Do you believe that God’s commandments are still valid for followers of Yeshua under the New Covenant? (Give Biblical support for your answer).
11. Why do you think that the majority of the mainstream Christian church has adopted a negative attitude towards the Torah?
12. Which of the Ten Commandments do you see regularly broken in some Christian denominations? Discuss this issue.

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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