



TORAH CLUB

WHERE DISCIPLES LEARN



JESUS, My Rabbi

The Life and Teachings
of the Jewish Jesus

LESSON

32/33

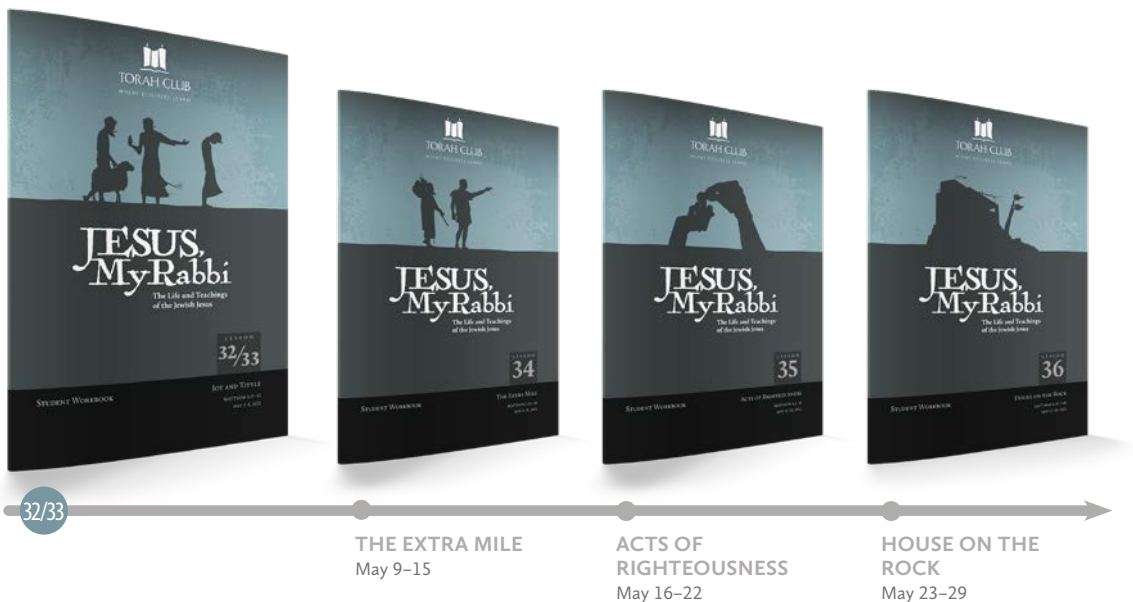
STUDENT WORKBOOK

JOT AND TITTLE

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MATTHEW 5:17-30

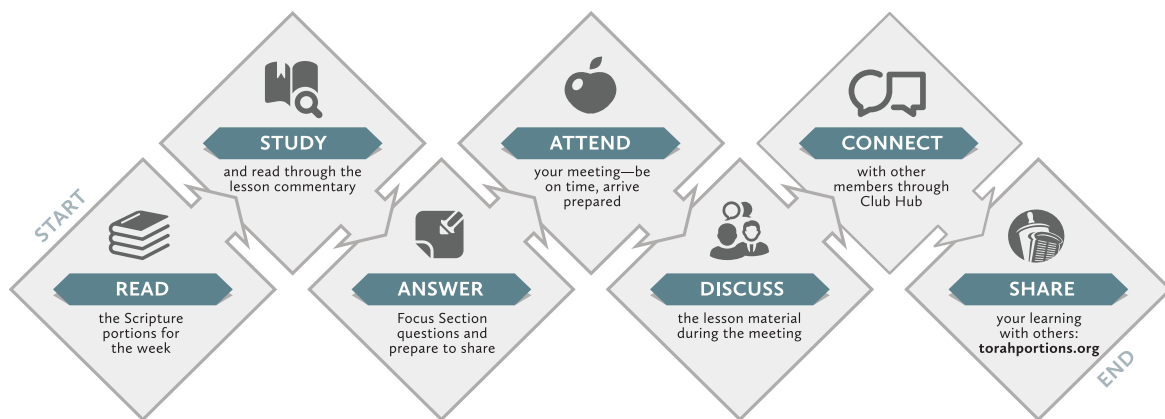
MAY 2-8, 2021



JOT AND TITTLE

ON THIS JOURNEY: Still atop the hill overlooking Lake Galilee, Yeshua remains seated with a circle of twelve disciples around Him while He continues His discourse. The Church of the Beatitudes preserves the traditional location of the site where Yeshua delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Today, even if we have never been to the Galilee or stood upon that hill, we are fortunate to be able to number ourselves among His disciples.

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LESSON 32/33: JOT AND TITTLE



READING: MATTHEW 5:17–30

LESSON OVERVIEW

THIS WEEK we continue with our second lesson on the Sermon on the Mount. Yeshua teaches His disciples how to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world through their good deeds. He wants them to become a catalyst for change that can lead the nation to repentance and avert the looming hour of judgment: the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of a new exile. Yeshua warns His disciples not to imagine that His teaching in some way cancels the Torah or that He in any way abrogates the authority of God's Law. On the contrary, He intends to get to the heart of the Torah's commandments and teach His disciples how to internalize them. Whoever keeps God's commandments and teaches others to do so as well will be considered great in the kingdom, but this high calling requires more than just a pretense of religious piety. His disciples must keep God's commandments in thought and speech as well as deed. For example, it's insufficient to merely abstain from murder while harboring hatred in the heart or acting out with unkind words, slander, and insult. That type of lip-service piety is insufficient to merit the Messianic Era. Likewise, the prohibition on adultery goes beyond merely abstaining from breaches of marital fidelity. It calls upon us to control our eyes and thoughts lest they lead our hands and feet into sin. With teachings like this, Yeshua did not abolish the Torah. Instead, He fulfilled the Torah by revealing its inner intention.

This lesson of *Jesus, My Rabbi* corresponds to Book 2, pages 469–482 of *Chronicles of the Messiah*.

FOCUS SECTIONS

FOCUS SECTIONS combine mechanical, text derived questions ensuring familiarity with the lesson content and more in-depth group discussion topics.

1	Torah and Prophets	4	5	The Meaning of the Sermon.	11
2	Abolishing the Torah	5	6	Sacrifice and Reconciliation	15
3	Fulfilling the Torah.	6	7	Adultery of the Heart.	17
4	More Righteous Than the Pharisees.	10			

PRAYER (HAREINI MEKASHER: I HEREBY JOIN)

I HEREBY JOIN Myself to the Master, Yeshua the Messiah, the righteous one, who is the bread of life, and the true light, the source of eternal salvation for all those who hear Him.

Like a branch that remains in a vine, so may I remain in Him, just as He also remains in the Father and the Father in Him, in order that they may remain in us.

May the grace of the Master, Yeshua the Messiah, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit abound to us.

JOT AND TITTLE

FOCUS
SECTION

1

TORAH AND PROPHETS

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17)

The Torah is the Law of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It consists of God’s commandments to His people Israel. Any prophet or would-be Messiah who breaks the Torah and teaches others to do so as well disqualifies himself. The Torah says, “You shall not listen to the words of that prophet ... he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God ... to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk” (Deuteronomy 13:3–5). This explains why the Master’s opponents were so eager to label Him as a Sabbath-breaker or heretic.

Yeshua forbade His disciples from even thinking that He came to abolish the Torah. How much more so should we be forbidden to teach the abolishment of the Torah as a theological pillar of doctrine? The Torah is God’s unchanging revelation and standard of law until the end of time—until heaven and earth pass away, and “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

When the Master said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah,” the expression “I came to” functions idiomatically in Hebrew to express purpose or intention. He was speaking about the purpose of His teaching: “Do not think that my teaching is intended to diminish the Torah. My intention is not to abolish the Torah of Moses, but to establish it.”

STUDY QUESTIONS

FOCUS
SECTION

1

1. What were the people of Israel supposed to do with a prophet who counseled them to break the Torah?
2. Why did Yeshua’s opponents try to label Him as a Sabbath-breaker?

3. Is the expression “I came to” meant to be taken literally? If not, what is the idiomatic meaning?

GROUP DISCUSSION: When Yeshua’s followers teach that He abolished the Torah, are they guilty of breaking Yeshua’s commandments? If so, how might this have impacted the ability of the church to carry out its mission?

ABOLISHING THE TORAH



Why would anyone assume that the rabbi from Nazareth intended to abolish the Law or the Prophets in the first place? There are a few possibilities.

Perhaps some of His critics charged that the healings He performed on the Sabbath undermined the Torah’s authority. If Yeshua’s opponents could prove Him to be a Torah-breaker, they could discredit His ministry and His claims. If they could prove that His teaching diminished the Torah’s authority, they could dismiss Him as a heretic. To counter their charges, the Master declared the validity of the Torah and the Prophets—i.e., the whole Tanach (Old Testament).

Another explanation might have to do with messianic expectations. Some people assumed that when the Messiah comes, He would establish Himself as a new lawgiver and replace the Torah of Moses with the new Torah of Messiah, as it says in Isaiah, “The coastlands will wait expectantly for His law” (Isaiah 42:4). According to this belief, the Torah that goes forth from Zion in the Messianic Era will be a new Torah that makes the old one obsolete. The sages explain that the Messiah will reveal a new Torah but that the new Torah of Messiah will not abolish the Torah of Moses. Instead, the Messiah will elucidate the inner meaning of the Law of Moses, explain its obscurities, dispel misinterpretations, clarify its intentions, and resolve all uncertainties.

Another explanation might be inferred from Yeshua’s teaching about the kingdom. He taught that the kingdom brings a complete reversal of the value systems of the world. The first become last, and the last become first. The hungry are well-fed; the well-fed go hungry. Mourners are comforted while those who laugh now will mourn. The poor receive the kingdom; the rich enter only with difficulty. The least in this age will be great in the kingdom. Will the Torah be overturned as well? Yeshua explains that the Torah is an exception to the rule of reversals. Those who keep the least of the Torah’s commandments in this age will be great in the kingdom.

STUDY QUESTIONS



1. Which prophet foretold that the Messiah would be a lawgiver?
2. Was the Messiah prophesied to institute a brand-new law that would replace the Torah? If not, what would He bring?
3. Give several examples of “reversals” in Yeshua’s teaching about the kingdom of heaven.

GROUP DISCUSSION: The Torah is an exception to the rule of reversals in Yeshua’s teaching. Especially in light of Exodus 22:21–23, why might this be the case?



FULFILLING THE TORAH

Yeshua said that He did not come to “abolish the Torah or the Prophets ... but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Sometimes Yeshua’s words about fulfilling the Torah are misunderstood by modern readers to mean that Christ fulfilled the Law by living a sinless life so that others after Him would no longer need to observe the commandments in the Law. According to this idea, Christ abolishes the Law by fulfilling it. It’s a self-contradictory explanation based upon several faulty premises.

The meaning of the word “abolish” should be obvious. To abolish is to destroy, discard, or overturn something. The meaning of “fulfill” is a little more ambiguous. How do you fulfill the Torah? In this context, “fulfill” does not mean to add to the Torah, replace the old Torah with a new higher law, replace the Torah with a new law of love, or even to fulfill the prophetic

content of the Torah. Instead, fulfill must be understood as the opposite of abolish.

Rabbinic literature reveals hundreds of parallels in which the term “fulfill the Torah” refers expressly to “obeying the Torah” or demonstrating how the Torah is to be properly obeyed. For example, in the *Sayings of the Fathers* (*Pirkei Avot*), one adage says, “Whoever fulfills the Torah in poverty, will fulfill it later on in wealth; and whoever abolishes the Torah in wealth, will abolish it later in poverty.”

The sages often argued about how to interpret the commandments properly. A rabbi who misinterpreted the Torah was said to be abolishing it. A rabbi who properly interpreted the Torah was said to be fulfilling it. By using the terms “abolish” and “fulfill,” Yeshua told His disciples that He interprets the Torah correctly.

In Matthew 5:17, Yeshua endorsed the ongoing, unchanging authority and validity of the Torah of Moses in the strongest possible language. He endorsed the whole Torah, not just the Ten Commandments. The rest of the Gospels and Epistles should be interpreted in light of His emphatic statement, and the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount should be understood as His interpretation of the unchanging and enduring Torah.

Yeshua taught that He did not come to abolish the Torah. “One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law” (Matthew 5:18 KJV). The smallest Hebrew letter, the letter *yod* (י), is only the size of an apostrophe. The “tittle” probably refers to the strokes of a single letter, which distinguish similar-looking letters from one another. Yeshua’s words allude to the careful scribal tradition of Judaism. The scribal tradition considers a Torah scroll with a single defective letter invalid.

According to an old Jewish story, King Solomon tried to change the Torah by editing the text of Deuteronomy. He erased a single letter *yod* from the scroll to change the meaning of one word. By changing that single jot, Solomon canceled the prohibition on multiplying wives (Deuteronomy 17:17):

At that time, the little *yod* (י) from the word “multiply (*yarbeh*, ירבה)” in Deuteronomy 17:17 ascended on high and prostrated itself before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said: “Master of the Universe! Did you not say that no letter shall ever be abolished from the Torah? Behold, now Solomon has arisen and abolished me. Who knows? Today he has abolished one letter, tomorrow he will abolish another until the whole Torah will be abolished!” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Solomon and a thousand like him will pass away, but the smallest tittle will not be erased from you.” (*Midrash Rabbah*)

Yeshua told His disciples that not even the smallest jot or tittle would “pass from the Torah until all is accomplished.” At what point does that happen? When will all be accomplished?

Teachers sometimes try to reverse Yeshua’s teaching about the ongoing authority of the Torah. Some say that the words “until all is accomplished” indicate that the Torah endured “until” Yeshua accomplished all things by His death on the cross. Others explain it to refer to the Torah’s ongoing validity “until” Yeshua accomplished all things by His perfect obedience to it. Still others suggest the Torah remained “until” the destruction of the Temple. These interpretations create smoke and mirrors to obscure the clear meaning. The phrase “until all is accomplished” stands parallel to the phrase “until heaven and earth pass away.” In other words, the validity, authority, and unchanging revelation of the Torah will continue until this present world is swallowed up into the new heavens and new earth of the World to Come—that day when everything will have been accomplished.

STUDY QUESTIONS



1. How should the word “fulfill” be understood in the context of Yeshua’s fulfillment of the Torah?
2. In which Scripture verse does Yeshua unequivocally endorse the ongoing, unchanging validity of the Torah?
3. What is the prohibition of Deuteronomy 17:17?
4. In the legend, why did King Solomon erase a letter from the Torah? What was God’s response?
5. What does the phrase “until all is accomplished” mean in Matthew 5:18?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Explain how conventional interpretations of the Gospels and Epistles might change if they were to interpret them in light of Yeshua's emphatic statements about the Torah.

LEAST IN THE KINGDOM

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Yeshua said that He did not come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets but to fulfill them—that is, to observe them and correctly interpret them. Moreover, He warned His disciples not to annul a commandment or to dissuade others from observing them.

Keep in mind that He was speaking exclusively to Jews, so there was no need for Him to add any caveats about commandments that do not pertain directly to Gentiles. He did not need to distinguish between Jewish obligations to the covenant and the universal obligations to God's ethical and moral standards because there were no Gentiles present for the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, almost all of Yeshua's words were addressed directly to Jewish people: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Therefore, Matthew 5:19 should not be used to coerce Gentile disciples to adopt specifically Jewish obligations such as the Jewish dietary laws, the biblical calendar, or Jewish identity markers like ritual garb. For example, a Gentile disciple who disregards the Torah's prohibition on wearing garments made of "two types of material mixed together" (Leviticus 19:19) need not fear being relegated to the status of "least in the kingdom of heaven."

The Master told His disciples that they were to be scrupulous in keeping both the smaller commandments and the greater commandments, even the seemingly inconsequential ones. For example, the Master praises the Pharisees for tithing even their mint, dill, and cumin (Matthew 23:23). The Talmud compares one of the greatest commandments, "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12) with one of the least of the commandments, "you shall not take the mother with the young" (Deuteronomy 22:6), and points out that the reward for both commandments is identical: "that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days." Perhaps this is

why rabbis say, “Be as scrupulous observing a small commandment as you are observing a great one, for you do not know what the reward of each is” (*Pirkei Avot*).

FOCUS
SECTION

4

MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN THE PHARISEES

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:20)

The Master said that unless the righteousness of His disciples exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, they could not “enter the kingdom of heaven.” To enter the kingdom of heaven means to enter the Messianic Era. This needs to be understood in conjunction with Yeshua’s good news message, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” If the nation repented, they could enter the Messianic Era.

The disciples must have wondered how the Master could expect them to reach a level of righteousness higher than Pharisees. The Pharisees were scrupulously careful to observe even the smallest of the commandments.

The Master went on to explain exactly what He meant with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). He takes a well-known commandment such as “do not murder” or “do not commit adultery,” and He reveals the deeper moral and ethical core behind the commandment. He gives specific examples by internalizing the prohibition against murder with a prohibition against anger, slander, and insult. He internalizes the prohibition against adultery with a prohibition against lust. He heightens the sanctity of marriage with a prohibition on divorce for the sake of remarriage. He heightens the prohibition on taking God’s name in vain by prohibiting oaths.

The Talmud warns that it is possible to be a reprobate with the permission of Torah. This means that it is possible to keep all the commandments (externally) and still be a nasty, vile person. On some level, that may be true, but it is not possible to be a reprobate with the permission of the Sermon on the Mount. Yeshua’s teachings reveal the moral, ethical intention behind the commandments and expose the internal deviancy of the heart of man. He cuts past external appearances and plants the inner meaning of the Torah deep in the heart.

The Sermon on the Mount does not mean that a disciple never becomes angry with his brother or on occasion speaks words of insult like, “you fool.” Unfortunately, we do, and the Master knows that we do, but He calls us to live out a higher standard of righteousness.

STUDY QUESTIONS



1. Yeshua instructed His disciples to be “more righteous than the Pharisees.” Is this a difficult task or a relatively easy one? Why?
2. How does Yeshua make observing the Torah more difficult than it might seem on the surface?
3. Do Yeshua’s teachings indicate that His followers will never violate His commandments?

GROUP DISCUSSION: How does Matthew 5:20, properly understood, help followers of Yeshua reevaluate traditional opinions of the moral character of the Pharisees?

THE MEANING OF THE SERMON

Yeshua sets the standard so high that some theologians and wishful thinkers have concluded that His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were only meant to reveal human sin and inadequacy, demonstrating our inability to earn salvation based on our righteousness. According to this belief, Yeshua taught the Sermon on the Mount only to convict His disciples of their depravity and to convince them of their need for God’s grace and forgiveness; therefore, the Sermon on the Mount was meant to contradict the ideas of the Pharisees who taught that a man must earn his salvation through his works.

Is that what the Sermon on the Mount really means? Did Yeshua simply intend to prove to His disciples that their good works could never merit eternal life?

This interpretation is problematic because it reverses the teaching of Yeshua, reducing it to a moral beating designed only to persuade us that we cannot possibly live up to God’s standards. It encourages a person to



actually disregard Yeshua's high standards while saying, "Thank God I'm saved by grace and not by works."

Besides, it's based on false assumptions about Judaism. The Pharisees also taught that all men are sinful and that human beings need God's grace and forgiveness. Judaism does not teach that man must earn his salvation through the perfect performance of good works. Instead, Judaism teaches that human beings are sinful and must rely on God's forgiveness and mercy for salvation. According to Jewish teaching, a person should repent, confess sins, and trust in the mercy of our heavenly Father.

Yeshua was not morally brow-beating His disciples to impress upon them their human depravity. He warned that the disciple who hears His words but does not do them is like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand.

Yeshua never intended the Sermon on the Mount to answer the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life." It's not about going to heaven when you die.

Instead, the real intention behind Yeshua's teaching is an urgent call to repentance. He wanted to inspire people to change how they conducted themselves and how they fulfilled their religious obligations. He wanted His teachings to inspire a repentance-movement that could ripple out from His disciples to the rest of the Jewish nation, thereby reversing the evil decree that hung over the generation and averting a looming national catastrophe. He had the same goal as that of John the Immerser, who warned, "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). The Messianic Era was at hand, but Yeshua knew that His generation would forfeit the opportunity to enter the kingdom if they did not change course through repentance.

A single text from the Torah summarizes the Master's approach to kingdom-living: "You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to give your fathers" (Deuteronomy 6:18). In apostolic teaching, the words "go in and possess the good land" allude to entering the Messianic Era (the kingdom of heaven) in the final redemption.

STUDY QUESTIONS



1. How does Judaism answer the question of how people are saved?

2. What is the intention behind Yeshua's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?

3. What is a common false assumption about Judaism's view of salvation?

4. What was going to happen if Yeshua's audience ignored His teachings?

GROUP DISCUSSION: The Sermon on the Mount is Yeshua's teaching about the Torah. Contrast the idea of relegating the Sermon on the Mount to an unobtainable standard of perfection only intended to reveal human depravity with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11–16.

ANTITHESIS STATEMENTS

You have heard that the ancients were told ... but I say to you ...
(Matthew 5:21–22)

Matthew 5:21–48 contains six short expositions in which Yeshua introduces a commandment of Torah, saying, "You have heard that it was said," after which He adds, "But I say to you." Theologians refer to them as the six antithesis statements, implying that the Master gave these teachings in antithesis to the Torah of Moses. That is to say that Yeshua introduced an old, obsolete commandment of the Torah and then contradicted it with His new teaching. According to this interpretation, Yeshua replaced the Torah with His own, new revelation.

Yeshua did not offer antitheses to the commandments in the Torah; He offered interpretations. He expounded upon the text of the Torah like any rabbi of His day by revealing the Torah's intentions and working out its implications. Far from contradicting the Torah or abolishing it, He fulfilled it by dispelling misconceptions and establishing its core principles all the more firmly.

MURDER, ANGER, AND INSULT

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, “You good-for-nothing,” shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, “You fool,” shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.
(Matthew 5:22)

The Torah says, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13), but the Master says that anger, hatred, insult, and public humiliation are tantamount to murder. He warned His disciples that murder begins with anger in the heart. The Apostle John explained the Master’s words as follows: “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). The *Didache* interprets the teaching as follows: “Be not prone to anger, for anger leads the way to murder; neither jealous, nor quarrelsome, nor of hot temper; for out of all these murders are engendered.”

The sages regarded publicly shaming or embarrassing a person as a grievous sin. In the no-longer-extant *Gospel of the Hebrews*, Yeshua says that one of the most serious sins a man can commit is that of vexing his brother:

In the Gospel which is according to the Hebrews which the Nazarenes are accustomed to read, among the worst crimes is set he who has distressed the spirit of his brother. (Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*)

Anger, quarreling, and public insults may be punished in a court of law on earth such as the local court (*beit din*) or even the high court (*sanhedrin*), but ultimately, if not in a court on earth, a person who publicly shames and insults another must pay the penalty of character assassination in the “fire of hell.” Rabbinic teaching contains similar sentiments:

He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed blood.
(*Talmud*)

Better that a man throw himself into a fiery furnace than publicly put his neighbor to shame. (*Talmud*)

Does Yeshua mean that anyone who insults his neighbor will go to hell? Not in the eternal-damnation sense. Jewish theology viewed Gehenna as a temporary place of punishment in which souls might suffer for their sins while they awaited the final judgment, which was to occur after the resurrection. In rabbinic teachings like the Master’s, however, the high standards of Torah and harsh sentences of the heavenly court are always

counterbalanced by the power of repentance and the scope of God's grace, forgiveness, kindness, and mercy.

SACRIFICE AND RECONCILIATION



Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:23–24)

According to the Talmud, the Temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people went into exile for the sin of baseless hatred against one another. Yeshua foresaw that inevitable outcome and tried to avert the disaster. His gospel message urged the generation to repent. He warned His disciples that anger and insult were lesser forms of murder—hatred in the heart. He called upon the people to prioritize love for one another.

The Master offered a practical application to His teaching about anger and insult. He told His disciples that before they go to the Temple to make a sacrifice, they should first make peace with an offended brother.

A person should not attempt to approach God until seeking forgiveness from one's neighbor for any wrongdoing. This is in keeping with the rabbinic maxim that God forgives sins committed against Him but cannot forgive sins committed against others on behalf of the victims:

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. (Matthew 5:25–26)

Yeshua compared an offended brother to a creditor, and He compared the offender to a debtor facing the possibility of debtor's prison. The Gentile courts of the Roman world routinely imprisoned debtors until they could pay their creditors. If a creditor pressed the charge in a Gentile court of law, he could have the delinquent debtor thrown into a debtor's prison where he would remain until his debt was paid down to the last cent. The incarcerated debtors often died in prison. The wise debtor wanted to negotiate a settlement with his creditor before the matter reached such a court.

Yeshua advised that a man who had offended his neighbor go plead for forgiveness from the offended party like a delinquent debtor attempting to settle his debt: "On your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to

the officer, and the officer throw you into prison” (Luke 12:58). If the sinner does not settle the matter with the offended party, he will eventually have to settle it in the heavenly court of law.

The same principle applied to the whole generation and their baseless hatred for one another. If they did not learn to reconcile, they were sure to go into exile to pay the debt of sin against one another. This accords with what is written in the Talmud: "The Son of David will not come until the last cent is gone from the purse."

THE DEBTOR AND COURT (MATTHEW 5:25-26/LUKE 12:58-59)

Creditor/Adversary = an offended brother

Debt = a sin or slight committed against a brother

Settlement = reconciliation with the offended brother

Judge = God

Officer = angels of judgment

Prison = Gehenna or Exile

Last Penny = smallest offense committed against a brother

Meaning = Reconcile with those you have offended in this life so you do not have to pay the price in the exile (or the afterlife).

STUDY QUESTIONS

**FOCUS
SECTION**

6

1. According to the Talmud, why was the Temple destroyed?
2. Why is it more difficult for God to forgive our sins against each other than it is for Him to forgive our sins against Him alone?
3. Explain the extended analogy Yeshua employs in Matthew 5:25–26.

GROUP DISCUSSION: Since we do not offer sacrifices at the Temple, how should we seek to practically live out Yeshua's teaching in Matthew 5:23–24?

ADULTERY OF THE HEART



You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery”; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27–28)

Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, Yeshua proclaimed a gospel of repentance to His generation: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He warned them that if they did not repent, they would face a terrible judgment. He called upon the Jewish people of His day to turn from the sins of immorality and adultery.

The Master also warned His disciples about a different type of adultery—an adultery that takes place in the mind. “Do not follow after your own heart and your own eyes” (Numbers 15:39). If a man gazes lustfully on another man’s wife, he has already committed adultery in his heart—that is to say, in his thoughts and intentions. The concern lies with the secret violation of another’s marriage. The Torah says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). The Torah defines adultery as sexual relations with a betrothed or married woman. On the basis of the Torah’s words, a man shall “be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), Yeshua broadened the scope of the definition to include any breach of monogamous fidelity. He taught that even impure thoughts could constitute adultery of the heart, i.e., “mental sin.”

James, the brother of the Master, says, “When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (James 1:15). The apostles transmitted the same principle to the early Gentile disciples: “My child, be not a lustful one; for lust leads the way to sexual immorality” (*Didache* 3.3).

Yeshua’s warning is consistent with similar warnings in Jewish literature. The *Wisdom of Sirach* says, “Veil your eyes before a beautiful woman, look not at another one’s beauty that does not belong to you.” The second-century sage Reish Lakish seems to echo the words of Yeshua: “You must not suppose that only he who has committed the crime with his body is called an adulterer; if he commits adultery with his eyes, he is also called an adulterer” (*Midrash Rabbah*):

Sinful imagination leads to desire; desire to intent; intent to pursuit; pursuit to deed. This is to have you know how difficult it is for a person to turn back from one to the other. (*Kalla Rabbati*)

The punishment for committing adultery is death. Adultery of the heart is not the same as actual adultery. A Torah court of law on earth has no jurisdiction to try a man or sentence him for merely gazing on another man's wife. Instead, Yeshua warned that God would punish adultery of the heart:

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29–30)

An ancient explanation of the prohibition on adultery says that the Hebrew verb for “to commit adultery (*tin'af*)” in Exodus 20:14 consists of four letters, in order to warn “lest you commit adultery with the hand, or with the foot, or with the eye, or with the heart” (*Midrash HaGadol*). Likewise, Yeshua advised His disciples to cut off the offending hand, foot, or eye that leads them to commit adultery of the heart rather than suffer punishment for the transgression in Gehenna:

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:43–48)

In no sense should the Master's words be taken literally to imply that a person should maim himself or herself. Rabbi Yeshua employed rabbinic hyperbole typical of the sages of His day to express the severity of the sin. Adultery of the heart does spiritual damage to a man's soul on the same caliber as if he had physically maimed himself. Paul says, “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Yeshua's words regarding hand, foot, and eye have a close parallel in rabbinic literature:

The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught, “You shall not commit adultery” implies “You shall not practice masturbation either with hand or with foot” ... In the case of men, it ought to be cut off ... Come and hear what was taught. Rabbi Tarfon said, “If his hand fondled his private member, let his hand be cut off below his belly ... It is preferable that his [hand be cut off] than that he should go down into the pit of destruction.” (Talmud)

The sages of the Talmud argue about whether or not Rabbi Tarfon meant that a man’s hand (or member) should actually be cut off. They ask, “Is this rule about cutting off the offending hand meant literally, or is it merely an execration to indicate the severity of the sin?” The Talmud concludes, since maiming oneself is an even more serious sin, completely forbidden in Judaism, the saying must be understood merely as an execration to indicate the severity of the sin. So too, we should understand the words of both Rabbi Yeshua and Rabbi Tarfon in the same sense—rabbinic hyperbole intended to convey the gravity of a sin too easily excused or disregarded. In any case, Yeshua seemed to side with Judaism regarding the prohibition on masturbation—especially if executed as an act contributing to the adultery of the heart.

One should not misunderstand Him to mean that perpetrators are consigned to eternal damnation. Final judgment is not in view here whatsoever. Instead, Yeshua tried to impress upon His generation the weight of the secret sins of the heart—sins that a person ordinarily thinks no one knows and for which he or she anticipates no consequence. Yeshua warned us to think again. In rabbinic teachings like the Master’s, however, the high standards of Torah and harsh sentences of the heavenly court are always counterbalanced by the power of repentance and the scope of God’s grace, forgiveness, kindness, and mercy.

The Sermon on the Mount presents a mountain of righteousness too high to climb if we were to suppose that it must be fulfilled to merit eternal life. Fortunately, Yeshua was not teaching about how to go to heaven when you die. Instead, the Sermon on the Mount collects Yeshua’s words about the path of repentance. It’s the long version of His good news message, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He knew that His disciples needed more than just an external façade of piety and religious behavior if they were going to influence their generation for repentance, reverse the judgment against the nation, and usher in the Messianic Era. The job description has not changed. The Sermon on the Mount describes the standard of righteousness to which every true disciple of Yeshua should aspire. Perhaps the mountain is too high, and we will never reach its pinnacle, but that’s not an excuse to abandon the ascent.

STUDY QUESTIONS



1. Why is “adultery of the heart” such a dangerous sin?
2. What are some other Jewish sources that speak about “adultery of the heart,” and what do they say?
3. Why do the sages indicate that exhortations to maim oneself to avoid sin must be taken as hyperbole?
4. What impact is made to our final judgment if we fail to maintain a mind free of impure thoughts?

GROUP DISCUSSION: Contrast the person who believes the Sermon on the Mount is a list of requirements for salvation with the person who sees Yeshua’s teachings here as a standard of righteousness toward which to aspire. How might their reactions to the Sermon differ?

KEY WORDS AND TERMS



VOCABULARY

beit din	A local court.
Sanhedrin	The high court of Israel.
tin'af	To commit adultery.
Torah	Literally “instruction”; the five books of Moses; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
yarbeh	Multiply.
yod	The smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet.



PRIMARY SOURCES

Gospel of the Hebrews	One of three now-lost Jewish Christian gospels preserved in only fragments in the writing of the early church fathers.
Midrash HaGadol	Fourteenth-century anonymous anthology of Jewish teachings from the Talmud and early commentary.
Midrash Rabbah	Composition of commentary on the Torah and five Megillot finalized in the eleventh century.
Pirkei Avot	“Saying of the Fathers”; a compilation of the ethical teachings and maxims from Rabbinic Jewish tradition.
Talmud	Foundational collection of Jewish law arranged in sixty-three tractates. The Talmud contains two elements: the Mishnah and Gemara (commentary on the Mishnah). The Talmud was compiled in the early sixth century from long-remembered oral tradition.
Wisdom of Sirach	A Jewish work of ethical teachings originally in Hebrew, from approximately 200 to 175 BCE, written by the Jewish scribe Ben Sira of Jerusalem.



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TORAHPORTIONS

"Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

READ THE BIBLE JESUS READ. Torah Club Members should study the weekly Torah portion (parashah) in addition to the weekly gospel lesson. The lessons in *Jesus, My Rabbi* depict Jesus as a teacher of the Torah, so it's important to study the five books of Moses. TorahPortions.org provides the scriptures that are read every Sabbath in the synagogue (and a suggested gospel selection for Messianic Jewish synagogues). Accompanying online devotionals bring the Torah portion to life and connect you more closely with Jesus, your Rabbi.

#	PARASHAH	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
GENESIS / B'REISHEET				
1	B'reisheet	17 Oct. 2020	Gen. 1:1-6:8	1 Sam. 20:18-42
2	Noach	24 Oct. 2020	Gen. 6:9-11:32	Isa. 54:1-55:5
3	Lech Lecha	31 Oct. 2020	Gen. 12:1-17:27	Isa. 40:27-41:16
4	Vayera	7 Nov. 2020	Gen. 18:1-22:24	2 Kgs. 4:1-37
5	Chayei Sarah	14 Nov. 2020	Gen. 23:1-25:18	1 Kgs. 1:1-31
6	Toldot	21 Nov. 2020	Gen. 25:19-28:9	Mal. 1:1-2:7
7	Vayetze	28 Nov. 2020	Gen. 28:10-32:3(2)*	Hos. 12:13(12)-14:10(9)*
8	Vayishlach	5 Dec. 2020	Gen. 32:4(3)-36:43*	Oba. 1-21
9	Vayeshev	12 Dec. 2020	Gen. 37:1-40:23	Zec. 2:14-4:7
10	Miketz	19 Dec. 2020	Gen. 41:1-44:17	1 Kgs. 3:15-4:1
11	Vayigash	26 Dec. 2020	Gen. 44:18-47:27	Eze. 37:15-28
12	Vayechi	2 Jan. 2021	Gen. 47:28-50:26	1 Kgs. 2:1-12
EXODUS / SHEMOT				
13	Shemot	9 Jan. 2021	Exo. 1:1-6:1	Isa. 27:6-28:13, 29:22-23
14	Va'era	16 Jan. 2021	Exo. 6:2-9:35	Eze. 28:25-29:21
15	Bo	23 Jan. 2021	Exo. 10:1-13:16	Jer. 46:13-28
16	Beshalach	30 Jan. 2021	Exo. 13:17-17:16	Jdg. 4:4-5:31
17	Yitro	6 Feb. 2021	Exo. 18:1-20:23	Isa. 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6(6-7)*
18	Mishpatim	13 Feb. 2021	Exo. 21:1-24:18	2 Kgs. 12:1(11:21)-17(16)*
19	Terumah	20 Feb. 2021	Exo. 25:1-27:19	1 Sam. 15:2-15:34
20	Tetzaveh	27 Feb. 2021	Exo. 27:20-30:10	Eze. 43:10-43:27
21	Ki Tisa	6 Mar. 2021	Exo. 30:11-34:35	Eze. 36:16-38
22/ 23	Vayak'hel / Pekudei	13 Mar. 2021	Exo. 35:1-40:38	Eze. 45:16-46:18
LEVITICUS / VAYIKRA				
24	Vayikra	20 Mar. 2021	Lev. 1:1-5:26(6:7)*	Isa. 43:21-44:23
25	Tzav	27 Mar. 2021	Lev. 6:1(8)-8:36*	Mal. 3:4-3:24
	Pesach i	28 Mar. 2021*	Exo. 12:21-51; Num. 28:16-25	Josh. 5:2-6:1
	Pesach vii	3 Apr. 2021*	Exo. 13:17-15:26; Num. 28:19-25	2 Sam. 22:1-51
26	Sh'mini	10 Apr. 2021	Lev. 9:1-11:47	2 Sam. 6:1-7:17
27/ 28	Tazria / Metzora	17 Apr. 2021	Lev. 12:1-15:33	2 Kgs. 7:3-20
29/ 30	Acharei Mot / Kedoshim	24 Apr. 2021	Lev. 16:1-20:27	Amos 9:7-15
31	Emor	1 May 2021	Lev. 21:1-24:23	Eze. 44:15-31
32/ 33	Behar / Bechukotai	8 May 2021	Lev. 25:1-27:34	Jer. 16:19-17:14

#	PARASHAH	DATE	TORAH	HAFTARAH
NUMBERS / BAMIDBAR				
34	Bamidbar	15 May 2021	Num. 1:1-4:20	Hos. 2:1-2:22
	Shavu'ot	17 May 2021*	Exo. 19:1-20:23; Num. 28:26-31	Eze. 1:1-28, 3:12
35	Nasso	22 May 2021	Num. 4:21-7:89	Jdg. 13:2-25
36	Beha'alotcha	29 May 2021	Num. 8:1-12:16	Zec. 2:14(10)-4:7*
37	Shelach	5 Jun. 2021	Num. 13:1-15:41	Josh. 2:1-24
38	Korach	12 Jun. 2021	Num. 16:1-18:32	1 Sam. 11:14-12:22
39	Chukat	19 Jun. 2021	Num. 19:1-22:1	Jdg. 11:1-11:33
40	Balak	26 Jun. 2021	Num. 22:2-25:9	Mic. 5:6(7)-6:8*
41	Pinchas	3 Jul. 2021	Num. 25:10-30:1(29:40)*	Jer. 1:1-2:3
42/ 43	Mattot / Massei	10 Jul. 2021	Num. 30:2(1)-36:13*	Isa. 66:1-66:24
DEUTERONOMY / DEVARIM				
44	Devarim	17 Jul. 2021	Deut. 1:1-3:22	Isa. 1:1-27
45	Va'etchanan	24 Jul. 2021	Deut. 3:23-7:11	Isa. 40:1-26
46	Ekev	31 Jul. 2021	Deut. 7:12-11:25	Isa. 49:14-51:3
47	Re'eh	7 Aug. 2021	Deut. 11:26-16:17	1 Sam. 20:18-20:42
48	Shoftim	14 Aug. 2021	Deut. 16:18-21:9	Isa. 51:12-52:12
49	Ki Tetze	21 Aug. 2021	Deut. 21:10-25:19	Isa. 54:1-10
50	Ki Tavo	28 Aug. 2021	Deut. 26:1-29:8(9)*	Isa. 60:1-22
51	Nitzavim	4 Sep. 2021	Deut. 29:9(10)-30:20*	Isa. 61:10-63:9
	Rosh HaShanah	7 Sep. 2021*	Gen. 21:1-34; Num. 29:1-6	1 Sam. 1:1-2:10
52	Vayelech	11 Sep. 2021	Deut. 31:1-30	Hos. 14:2(1)-10(9)*; Mic. 7:18-20; Joel 2:15-27
	Yom Kippur	16 Sep. 2021	Lev. 16:1-34; Num. 29:7-11	Isa. 57:14-58:14
53	Ha'azinu	18 Sep. 2021	Deut. 32:1-52	2 Sam. 22:1-22:51
	Sukkot i	21 Sep. 2021	Lev. 22:26-23:44; Num. 29:12-16	Zec. 14:1-21
	Shemini Atzeret / Simchat Torah*	28 Sep. 2021 (29 Sep. 2021)*	Deut. 14:22-16:17; Num. 29:35-30:1(29:40)*	1 Kgs. 8:54-66
54	Vezot ha'Bracha	29 Sep. 2021	Deut. 33:1-34:12	Josh. 1:1-18

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