

James 2:1-13 What Is The Royal Law?

In the opening of this chapter, James, in Hebrew Ya'akov (Jacob), is dealing with the sin of partiality, discrimination, or respect of persons. Our God and Savior shows no partiality (Deut. 10:17, Acts 10:34), and therefore as followers of Yeshua, discrimination in any form should not be found amongst those who put their trust in Him. The Apostle James goes on to give examples of discrimination that was or could have been taking place amongst the believers of his day.

In verses 2:8 -9, we read the outcome of those who discriminate against others and it is pretty serious,

“If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.” (KJV)

Several points need to be made here. First, the word fulfill means that you interpret the scriptures correctly and keep them as required. Second, one must understand what the “scriptures” were. Most people call the scriptures the New Testament, but since the New Testament had not been compiled yet that is a wrong assumption. James here tells you what scripture he is talking about because he quotes from it. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is a direct quote from Leviticus 19:18. Yeshua Himself states that this is one of the greatest commandments. (Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31) So, those who break this command sin and are considered guilty. That is very serious since discrimination is rampant amongst most believers, in some form or fashion, to this very day.

Next, James goes on by reminding his readers that the same “scriptures” that say “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” are also the same “scriptures” that say “thou shalt not commit adultery” and “thou shalt not murder.” He reminds them that all of the “scriptures” must be kept and that a person cannot pick and choose from God's commands. If he is guilty of breaking one of His commands then he is guilty of breaking them all. Pretty serious, huh? Granted, this requires a little more teaching here on, “is guilty of breaking them all,” but that will be for another lesson.

If we are to be living by the “scriptures” and want to make sure that we obey them then we best know what the scriptures, or commands, of God are.

Some people would argue that the commandments of Yahweh were the 10 Commandments, and that is all that we are required to keep. While it is true that Yahweh spoke those words, in Hebrew called the 10 Words, that is not all that was spoken by Him. The previously referenced scripture would

reveal this. "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself", is not one of the 10 Commandments, yet here James and also Yeshua Himself quotes this verse from Leviticus and calls it a commandment and scripture. So, what gives?

What is the "royal law" mentioned in James 2:8? Some argue that here James is making a distinction between the commands of Yahweh and the commands of Moses. They argue that the 10 Commandments are from Yahweh and are considered "royal" and the rest of the Torah is from Moses and is therefore of lesser importance. Well, first of all, as I've already mentioned, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," is not one of the 10 Commandments so then it must not be part of the "royal law" if one uses that reasoning. Then Yeshua would have been making a mistake by saying that it was one of the greatest commandments if it indeed only came by Moses and was of lesser importance.

Something must be missing here! Yes, several things are missing here. First, the word "royal" must be understood in its correct Jewish context. According to Strongs Concordance (G937), the word "royal" means in Greek, regal, belonging to the sovereign or preeminent - king's, nobleman, royal. In Hebrew, it is the word Nadiya which according to BDB means: inclined, noble, princely in rank, noble in character. So, from this, we should see that the "royal Torah (law)" is above all, ranked the highest, coming from the highest and it is preeminent above all else. After all, it came from a King! The highest King!

This word is used only once in the New Testament and it is found here. One should wonder from where James would have gotten the idea to call the Torah "royal"? Well, I think it makes sense that he would have chosen it from his Jewish heritage. After all, he was a Jewish man!

Interestingly, ancient Jewish literature could teach a person a lot about the mindset of Jewish thought if they would take the time to read a little of it.

Anciently, Jews frequently ascribe royalty to the Torah and often speak of the "crown of the Torah". Accordingly, they say that the Israelites had crowns on their heads when the Torah was given to them on Mt. Sinai. They believe that they were stripped of their crowns of royalty when they made the golden calf. Those who plan to be a "kingdom of priests" need to make sure that they submit and obey this "royal" Torah.

Below is a picture of a Torah Scroll showing a crown at the top. This is quite a common finding on Torah Scrolls and fits in nicely with this teaching showing the ancient Hebrew understanding that the entire Torah (first five books) was considered to be royal. With this understanding, it should be easy to realize why James would refer to the Torah (law) as "royal".

David H. Stern in the Jewish New Testament Commentary states that the Royal law mentioned in James means “Kingdom Torah” and it is the “princely” goal of those who follow Yeshua and that it is none other than the “Torah of Moses”.

One other thing that should be understood here is that the 10 Commandments are only 10 categories under which all the other “teachings and instructions” (which is what Torah means) of Yahweh are arranged. For example, the first 4 commandments fall under the category of “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.” (Mark 12:29-30) Yeshua is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-6. That's interesting because Yeshua says it is the first commandment and it is not part of the 10 Commandments.

All of the teachings and instructions in the Torah of Moses that have to do with how Yahweh commands that we serve Him and how He commands that we are not to serve Him, ie idolatry, etc, are included in the first 4 commandments.

The last 6 Commandments are summed up by “love thy neighbor as thyself” because the last 6 Commandments have to do with how we treat our fellow man. We cannot be right with God if our relationship is not right with God and man. All of the teachings and instructions that have to do with how we treat someone else fall under these commandments. For example, all of the sexual sins fall under the category of “thou shalt not commit adultery”.

Now, I know that some would inquire about all of the ceremonial teachings and instructions are given in the Torah. Here is where the scriptures must be correctly divided and understood for this age (for example we are presently living without a temple so those laws don't apply to us right now).

So, the Torah of Moses and the Torah of Yahweh are the same. Yahweh did not inscribe the first 5 books on stone, but He inscribed the 10 Words, or categories, under which all the others fell. He then relayed His Words, His Scripture, to Moses (The Mediator) to give to the people. It is all the “Royal Torah (Law)” just as Jews have always called it.