

Torah Study for Christians
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Introduction

1. Why should Christians study Torah? What reasons might you have to do so?
2. How is Torah different from “the Old Testament”?
3. How have Jews traditionally studied Torah over the ages? How does that compare to Christian engagement with Scripture?
4. What aids are available for Torah study?

Exodus, Chapter 12:1-20

- א ויאמר יהוה אל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַל-אַהֲרֹן, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר.
- 1 And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying:
- ב הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, ראש חֲדָשִׁים: ראשון הוא לָכֶם, לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
- 2 'This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.
- ג דַּבְּרוּ, אֶל-כָּל-עֵדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר, בְּעֶשֶׂר, לְחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה: וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם, אִישׁ יֵשָׁה לְבַיִת-אָבֹת--יֵשָׁה לְבַיִת.
- 3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household;
- ד וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבַּיִת, מִהְיוֹת מִשָּׁה--וַיִּלְקַח הוּא וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ הַקָּרֵב אֵל-בֵּיתוֹ, בְּמִקְוֵת נַפְשׁוֹ: אִישׁ לְכִי אֹכְלוֹ, תִּכְסֹּו עַל-הַשָּׂה.
- 4 and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb.
- ה שָׂה תָּמִים וְזָכָר בֶּן-שָׁנָה, יִהְיֶה לָכֶם; מִן-הַכֹּבֶשִׂים וּמִן-הָעִזִּים, תִּקְחוּ.
- 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats;
- ו יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת, עַד אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לְחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה; וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ, כָּל קְהַל עֵדַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בֵּין הָעֶרְבָּיִם.
- 6 and ye shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk.
- ז וַיִּלְקְחוּ, מִן-הַדָּם, וַנִּתְּנוּ עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת, וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף--עַל, הַבָּתִּים, אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ, בָּהֶם.
- 7 And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it.
- ח וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר, בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה: צְלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת, עַל-מַרְרִים יֹאכְלוּ.
- 8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

- ט** אל-תאכלו ממנו נא, ובשל מבשל במים: כי אם-צל-אש, ראשו על-כרעיו ועל-קרבו.
- 9** Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof.
- י** ולא-תותרו ממנו, עד-בקר; והנותר ממנו עד-בקר, באש תשרפו.
- 10** And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.
- יא** וככה, תאכלו אתו--מתניכם חגרים, נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם; ואכלתם אתו בחפזון, פסח הוא ליהנה.
- 11** And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste--it is the LORD'S passover.
- יב** ועברתי בארץ-מצרים, בלילה הזה, והכיתי כל-בכור בארץ מצרים, מאדם ועד-בהמה; ובכל-אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים, אני יהוה.
- 12** For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.
- יג** והיה הדם לכם לאת, על הבתים אשר אתם שם, וראיתי את-הדם, ופסחתי עלכם; ולא-יהיה בכם נגף למשחית, בהכתי בארץ מצרים.
- 13** And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.
- יד** והיה היום הזה לכם לזכרון, וחתתם אתו חג ליהוה: לדורותיכם, חקת עולם תתגהו.
- 14** And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.
- טו** שבעת ימים, מצות תאכלו--אף ביום הראשון, תשביתו שאר מבתים: כי כל-אכל חמץ, ונקרתה הנפש ההוא מישראל--מיום הראשון, עד-יום השביעי.
- 15** Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; howbeit the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.
- טז** וביום הראשון, מקרא-קדש, וביום השביעי, מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם: כל-מלאכה, לא-יעשה בהם--אף אשר יאכל לכל-נפש, הוא לבדו יעשה לכם.
- 16** And in the first day there shall be to you a holy convocation, and in the seventh day a holy convocation; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you.
- יז** ושמרתם, את-המצות, כי בעצם היום הזה, הוצאתי את-צבאותיכם מארץ מצרים; ושמרתם את-היום הזה, לדורותיכם--חקת עולם.
- 17** And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore shall ye observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance forever.

18 In the first [month], on the fourteenth day [of the month] at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

יח בראשון בארבעה עשר יום לחודש, בערב, תאכלו, מצות: עד יום האחד ועשרים, לחודש--בערב.

19 Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses; for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a sojourner, or one that is born in the land.

יט שבועת ימים--שאר, לא ימצא בכתיכם: כי כל-אכל מתמצת, ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעדת ישראל--בגור, ובאזרח הארץ.

20 Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.'

כ כל-מתמצת, לא תאכלו; בכל, מושבתיכם, תאכלו, מצות.

QUESTIONS:

1. First of all, what questions arose for you in reading this text? What surprised you – that is, what had you never noticed? How many of you are reading this text for the first time?
2. A close reading of the text involves not only looking at the overall meaning of the words but even examining the number of times words are used. For instance in the passage above, which Jews read from the second scroll this coming Sabbath in morning services, the word *month* is used seven times (I've highlighted the occurrences). The “Seven Code” in expositing Torah texts says that it is very significant when a word (in any of its forms – that is, singular or plural, with prefixes, suffixes, etc.) appears seven (or multiples of seven) times in a passage; sometimes the repetition seems to emphasize the main theme of the passage, while at other times it seems to be for aesthetic reasons. This coming Sabbath is called *Shabbat HaChodesh*, the Sabbath of **The Month**, because on it begins the month of Nisan, when Passover occurs. How is the month referred to here? Why must it be considered “the first month”?
3. How much of this instruction was meant to be observed only on that first Passover and how much was intended to be an observance for all time? How can you tell? (See verses 14 through 17 – how can you tell that they are a single unit?)
4. Why could there be no “leftovers” from the sacrificed lamb? Why must what remained be burnt?
5. What would be the punishment for someone who did not observe this commandment of refraining from leavened bread? (Note that this included “resident aliens” as well as Israelites.) Why would “deleting that soul from the database” (by G-d) be a fitting punishment?
6. What emerges from the text as the most dominant reason for observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread?
7. *Matzah*, therefore, remains the most recognizable part of the observance of Passover, but many Jews will no longer have lamb at the *seder*. Why do you think that is?
8. Refraining from work is an important part of the commandments concerning Passover – why do you think that is? What kind of work is excluded from that prohibition? Why?

INTRODUCTORY NOTES:

1. First ask the first question from page 1- Why should Christians study Torah? What might your personal reasons be?
2. Our theological differences might point to how our study has been different over the millennia, and how it has led to significant contrasts in attitudes toward study of the Bible. Jewish emphasis on literacy and on wrestling with the text from multivariate points of view and not only on the homiletical values of the text – i.e., the moral lessons – has led to a diversity in meanings, an understanding that the text is limitless, and that it is our duty to constantly engage with it.
3. While quiet, solitary contemplation has its merits, Torah study is done in community, typically with one student facing another, each with the shared text in front of them. This style of learning is called *hevrutah*, from the word *haver* meaning friend, neighbor, or, in this case, study partner.
4. Commentators, interpreters, and translators throughout our history have served as teachers for learning and understanding texts. These include such medieval scholars as Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), Gersonides (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon), Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, and many others. The tradition of Torah commentary continues into our day, adding many excellent scholars and rabbis of both genders into the mix.
5. How you view Revelation might well affect how you study Torah (i.e., the Hebrew Bible) – was the Torah given on Mount Sinai to Moses, as related in Exodus, or was it Divinely revealed to **many** individual writers over a long period of time, as many have come to believe? Or was it simply the imaginative, although clearly inspired, writing of many wise people? Wherever you stand on that issue, we might all agree that the Torah has wisdom and insights that might provide all of us guidance in a world of constant fluctuation.