

# Triennial Torah Study – 5<sup>th</sup> Year 11/10/2014

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at [https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon\\_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf](https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf)

Ex 9	1 Kings 17-18	Ps 118	Luke 23:1-49
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## Exodus 9

- Boils:** Once again, the false deities of Egypt are of no help, including Sakhmet, a guardian goddess against disease (besides her major role as war goddess), Imhotep, the god of medicine, and Isis, goddess of life and healing. Pharaoh's magicians are now too afflicted to be present; yet Pharaoh's heart is still hardened. Interestingly, the narrative for the first time states that *God* actually hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:12)—an intent God had earlier stated (4:21; 7:3). Yet before this, Pharaoh is seen as hardening his *own* heart (8:15, 32). God, then, is now reinforcing Pharaoh's stubborn inclination—for the purpose described in verse 16 (see Romans 9:14-24). To better understand this, please refer to the article "Twist of Fate" at [www.ucg.org/brp/materials](http://www.ucg.org/brp/materials).
- Hail:** This plague killed servants, animals and cattle if they were not under shelter. Plants and trees were also destroyed, including crops in the field. That this was an extremely severe thunderstorm of icy hail and that the "fire" darting to the ground was lightning is apparent from Psalm 78: "He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning" (verses 47-48). These destructive elements, of course, had a devastating impact on the nation's food supply. And still the gods of Egypt were shown to be powerless: the sky goddesses Nut and Hathor; the sky god Horus; Shu, the god of air and bearer of heaven; Seth, the god of storms and protector of crops; Neper, the god of grain crops; Osiris, the ruler of life and vegetation; Isis, the goddess of life; and all the cow and ram deities mentioned above proved impotent before the true God. Pharaoh now relents—for the time being. Of course, once the plague subsides, he again changes his mind.

## Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 17)

The great prophet Elijah is now introduced. *Halley's Bible Handbook* states: "Six chapters are given to Ahab's reign, while most of the kings have only a part of one chapter. The reason: it is largely the story of Elijah.... Elijah's 'rare, sudden and brief appearances, his undaunted courage and fiery zeal, the brilliance of his triumphs, the pathos of his despondency, the glory of his departure, and the calm beauty of his reappearance [in a vision] on the Mt. of Transfiguration, make him one of the grandest characters Israel ever produced'" (1965, note on 1 Kings 17). It is noteworthy that only two prophets appeared in the vision with Yeshua in the transfiguration—Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-9).

Elijah's ministry would be the pattern for later important ministries. Elijah's successor, Elisha, received Elijah's mantle with a mandate to carry on the same type of ministry—even completing some of the tasks given to Elijah. John the Baptist went "before in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). The rest of Luke 1:17 adds

further understanding of the overall perspective of the original ministry of Elijah. And in Malachi 4:5, God says: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Apparently, John the Baptist was the forerunner of an end-time Elijah figure, who would preach in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ’s second coming (compare Matthew 17:10-12).

In marrying Jezebel and accommodating her religion, Ahab allowed Baal worship to be reintroduced in a big way into Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33). Prior to this time, the Kingdom of Israel’s apostasy had apparently been confined to the sin of Jereboam son of Nebat, who built the golden calves and established new worship centers in Dan and Bethel. Near the end of the wilderness wanderings under Moses, there had been a brief encounter with Baal of Peor in connection with the Balaam incident (Numbers 25:3-9; compare Revelation 2:14). And some Baal and Ashtoreth worship had taken place in the rather disorganized period of the judges (Judges 2:11-19; 3:7; 6:25-32; 8:33; 10:6-16; 1 Samuel 7:3-4; 12:9-11). Solomon had built altars to various pagan deities, some of which were equated at times with Baal (1 Kings 11:1-8). But since the days of Samuel, through the period of the kings up until Ahab (about 200 years), there is no specific mention of Israelite Baal worship taking place.

Now, however, Jezebel not only brings in Baal worship but attempts to destroy all of the prophets of God, 100 of whom are protected by the God-fearing governor of Ahab’s house, as we will see in our next reading (1 Kings 18:3-4). So God sends one of the most famous prophets of the Bible, Elijah, to pronounce judgment on Ahab, beginning with a three-and-a-half-year drought (Luke 4:25; James 5:17-18) and its resulting famine. The drought was apparently a forerunner and type of a future drought referred to in the book of Revelation (11:3, 6). However, the end-time drought will be much greater in scope—as the dire events preceding Christ’s return will be worse than any that have ever happened (Matthew 24:21).

Amazingly, in the growing sparseness of the land, God wonderfully provides for His servant via special delivery from the birds of the air!

Ironically, Zarephath—Elijah’s place of refuge during the latter years of the drought, where God miraculously provides for the widow and her son who take him in—was in the region of Sidon (see Luke 4:26), the same territory that Jezebel came from (1 Kings 16:31).

God’s provision through the multiple miracles we see here should encourage our faith. He can take care of our needs even when it looks like it’s impossible to meet them (see Matthew 6:25-34).

## The Contest With the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-40)

First, we should take inspiration from the godly and heroic example of Obadiah (not the same as the author of the biblical book by that name). Next, Elijah extends an invitation to a grand test to show who is the true God and who are His servants. Elijah told the people that it was time for them to stop sitting on the fence—flinching between two opinions by the syncretism of intermingling the worship of the true God with the worship of Baal. The same message applies today to the participants of modern Christendom, who, however unwittingly, mix elements of pagan worship—such as crosses, Christmas trees, Sunday observance, Easter eggs and Easter bunnies—with the worship of the God of the Bible.

The contest Elijah arranges was designed to apparently give every advantage to the Baal worshipers. Mount Carmel, near the modern city of Haifa on the Mediterranean coast, was considered sacred to Baal. The answering by fire apparently referred to lightning—and Baal was considered to be the god of storm, with lightning in his divine arsenal. Moreover, Elijah calls for his own sacrifice to the true God, and even the firewood it was to be burned upon, to be thoroughly and completely soaked with water—an ironic touch considering the kingdom had been plagued by a three-and-a-half-year drought that had started at Elijah’s command.

Moreover Elijah is just one against 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:22). It does not appear that the 400 prophets of Asherah answered the challenge (compare verse 19). Incidentally, we should consider Elijah’s statement that he alone is left a prophet of the Lord (verse 22). Why would he say this, since Obadiah had just

reported his hiding of 100 of God's prophets? (Verses 4, 13.) Perhaps they had been killed after Obadiah hid them, though it seems unlikely that this would have gone unmentioned in context. More likely Elijah was referring in verse 22 to himself being the only true prophet still carrying on a public ministry. The others had all gone underground.

The prophets of Baal probably begin calling on their gods by the time of the morning sacrifice. To evoke some sort of response from their god, they leap about and chant. By noon, the supposed height of the power of their sun god, there was still no answer—and Elijah begins his taunting. "Busy" in verse 27 is a euphemism. Notice the verse in the Contemporary English Version: "At noon, Elijah began making fun of them. 'Pray louder!' he said. 'Baal must be a god. Maybe he's daydreaming or using the toilet or traveling somewhere. Or maybe he's asleep, and you have to wake him up.'"

And rather than give up, they do cry out louder, leaping more earnestly—and they even "cut themselves, as was their custom"(verse 28). So, as bizarre as it may seem, such uncontrolled frenzy and self-mutilation were actually normal elements in their worship. This illustrates how pagan religion is often quite harmful to its participants. By contrast, the true religion God gave through Moses forbade such cuttings in the flesh (Leviticus 21:5; 19:28).

All of this continues until the time of the evening sacrifice, when Elijah finally takes his turn, beginning with the construction of God's altar and the soaking of the sacrifice. In the end, God showed Himself to be the true God over storms, with real power to control the elements—indeed, the true God over *all*, while Baal was proven to be nothing.

## "I Will Praise You, for You Have Answered Me, and Have Become My Salvation"

**Psalm 118** is a psalm of thanksgiving and prayer for deliverance from enemies. Though the particular circumstances of its composition are unidentified, we do see that it concerns confidence in victory after apparent near loss in a battle against a group of enemy nations (see verses 10-13). The last of the Egyptian Hallel ("praise") collection (113-118), Psalm 118 was traditionally sung or recited at the end of the Passover evening liturgy—though Psalm 136 was later added to the end, as it expands on the opening and closing words of Psalm 118, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [*hesed*, loyal lovingkindness] endures forever." These words, taken from the psalm David composed for the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:34), were also used to open Psalms 106 and 107. We should recall that the Egyptian Hallel psalms were also sung at all the annual festivals. Indeed, Psalm 118 was an important part of the temple liturgy at the Feast of Tabernacles, as we will see.

Building from the call to thanks and praise in the first verse, verses 2-4 direct the call to three groups—the nation of Israel, the Aaronic priesthood and, in general, all those who fear God—the same groupings found in Psalm 115:9-13 (compare 135:19-20, which also mentions the house of Levi). The call here is to proclaim the repeated refrain "His mercy endures forever."

Many maintain that the "I" speaking throughout the remainder of Psalm 118 is the Davidic king leading the battle against the enemy, given his declaration about destroying the enemies (compare verses 10-12). Others contend that the psalmist wrote this song to be sung by all Israelites from a first person perspective—in both a collective and personal sense. Of course, a righteous king could have written it with that broader intention as well. In the time of Yeshua, the "I" who acts "in the name of the LORD" (verses 10-12, 26) was understood to refer to the king of Israel—indeed, the Messiah (see John 12:13). The psalm is certainly messianic, as we will later see from explicit New Testament references.

Verses 5-7 of Psalm 118 recall God's past deliverance and express confidence in His ongoing faithfulness. As the all-powerful God is on the side of His people, there is no reason to fear anything from anyone (verse 6; compare Romans 8:31).

Psalm 118:8-9 acknowledges the crucial understanding that ultimate trust must be in God alone-not in oneself or other people, no matter what their position or power may be. Interestingly, it has been pointed out that these two verses form the central verses in the Bible as we have it-that is, according to the book arrangement and chapter and verse divisions found in most modern Bibles (James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: An Expository Commentary*, Vol. 3: Psalms 107-150, 2005). Of course, the modern arrangement is actually not the original one-and chapter and verse divisions came centuries after the canonization of Scripture and are sometimes poorly determined. Nevertheless, the message of the particular verses here is indeed a central theme of Scripture. Man, at his best, is limited, mortal, unreliable. As God says in Jeremiah 17:5-7: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.... [But] blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD."

We then come in Psalm 118:10-18 to the actual circumstances of the battle. The King James and New King James translators, and the translators of many other modern versions, consider that the battle here is to be understood in the past tense, as having already been won-thus explaining the psalm's focus on thanksgiving and God having answered prayer (verse 21). Yet notice in the KJV and NKJV the problem in saying that the enemies "surrounded me" and "were quenched" (past tense) and that "I *will* destroy them" (future tense). Notice furthermore the confidence in a future outcome-"I shall not die, but live" (verse 17)-and, more striking, the prayer for God's intervention: "Save now, I pray, O LORD" (verse 25). Thus the battle is ongoing-the thanks and praise being for past deliverance and blessings and for intervention that will surely yet come.

This being so, the word translated "surrounded" in verses 10-12 is probably better translated as "*have* surrounded" or, as in Green's Literal Translation, "surround." The psalm expresses the dire gravity of the situation by using this term four times. The psalmist compares the enemies to a swarm of bees (verse 12). Yet they "are quenched" (GLT)-that is, they are *to be* quenched-as quickly as burning thorns. For Israel, with God's help, will prevail (same verse).

Going back to the Greek Septuagint translators, many have seen a need to emend the text of verse 13 to say that "I was pushed" (NIV) rather than follow the Masoretic Text: "Pushing, *you pushed me* to fall" (GLT). In the Masoretic Text, the words seem addressed to God, yet the *next* words are "But the LORD [has] helped me" (same verse). This, however, is not as contradictory as might at first seem. For it would actually fit what is clearly stated a few verses later: "The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death" (verse 18). Evidently the enemy invasion and initial losses constitute punishment from God for some unnamed sin. But the psalmist is nonetheless confident that God will turn things around, so there must already have been repentance, particularly as he sees himself-or God's people collectively-as righteous (compare verses 15, 19-20). The passage could also be applied to the Messiah, who, though innocent Himself, would initially suffer adversity and death for the sins of all nations but would later return victorious over all enemies. Verse 14 is taken from the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:2, invoking the imagery of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt-perhaps helping to give the psalm its place within the Egyptian Hallel collection. Repetition concerning God's right hand (verses 15-16) may also be taken from the Song of Moses (see Exodus 15:6-7). Just as God powerfully intervened for Israel in the Exodus, so would He intervene on this later occasion-and so will He intervene for His people today. The same words from Exodus 15:2 are also quoted in Isaiah 12:2, meaning that they are found in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings-the three major sections that make up the Old Testament.

Isaiah 12, it should be mentioned, is a prophecy of Israel's future repentance when God delivers His people from national enemies-and Psalm 118, beyond its application to the circumstances in which it was written, should likewise be seen as prophetic of the future. Indeed, we elsewhere see God's people at that time singing the Song of Moses (compare Revelation 15:2-3). Isaiah 12:3 speaks of drawing water with joy from the wells of salvation-which became related to the Feast of Tabernacles, during which a special water-drawing and water-pouring ceremony was instituted. In Psalm 118:15, the mention of rejoicing and salvation in the tents of the righteous also helped to connect this psalm with the Feast of Tabernacles in the worship services of the temple.

Verses 19-20, calling for the opening of the "gates of righteousness" so as to pass through-also called here "the gate of the LORD through which the righteous shall enter"-is often seen as picturing a festival procession coming through the gates of Jerusalem or the gates of the temple. The imagery seems related to what David wrote in Psalm 24, which many see as descriptive of the Ark of the Covenant being brought into the city or tabernacle gates after military victory. "There is only One who can enter the gates of the Lord of His own accord-the perfect King of glory" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 118:19-21). And this would seem to point to Yeshua as ultimately fulfilling these verses.

The idea of a procession is also found in an alternative translation of Psalm 118:27, as we will later see—all of this adding to the connection of Psalm 118 to the annual festivals.

Yet others suggest a more figurative meaning for the gates of righteousness—that the only way into the presence of the Lord, to salvation (verse 21), is through righteousness. Thus, verses 19–20 may be part of an expression of repentance—of determination to do what God says as He empowers. Probably both ideas are intended, as in Isaiah 26:2: “Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.” While Yeshua alone lived a perfectly righteous life, others can receive righteousness through Him. Yeshua mentioned the narrow gate that leads to life (Matthew 7:13–14) and said that He Himself is the gate or door leading to salvation (John 10:9).

The next verse (Psalm 118:21) declares intention to praise God for having answered His people’s prayer and having become their salvation. The latter phrase about God having become salvation is a refrain, repeated—in a slightly reworded form—from the verse taken from the Song of Moses (verse 14). It is worth noting that the word in both places translated salvation, occurring 78 times in the Old Testament, is *yeshu’ah*, which is very close to the name *Yeshua*—that is, Yeshua. (The name *Yeshua* is probably a contraction of the longer form *Yehoshua*, meaning “Yahweh Is Salvation.”)

Again, there is a powerful messianic aspect to this psalm. The ultimate deliverance sought would come through the Messiah. Note particularly verses 22–23 about the rejected stone becoming the “chief cornerstone.” The NIV has “capstone.” The literal meaning, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out in its note on verse 22, is “head of the corner”—either a capstone over a door (a large stone used as a lintel), or a large stone used to anchor and align the corner of a wall, or the keystone of an arch (see Zec 4:7; 10:4). By a wordplay (pun) the author hints at ‘chief ruler’ (the Hebrew word for ‘corner’ is sometimes used as a metaphor for leader/ruler; see Isa 19:13; see also Jdg 20:2; 1 Sa 14:38). This stone, disdained by the worldly powers, has become the most important stone in the structure of the new world order that God is bringing about through Israel. Yeshua applied this verse (and v. 23) to himself (see Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10–11; Lk 20:17; see also Ac 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pe 2:7). It is not clear what the psalmist himself had in mind when he wrote these words. Some suggest that Israel or its king was meant as the rejected stone—now saved and placed at the head of all others. Yet perhaps the psalmist directly foresaw the Messiah as bringing the salvation foretold in the psalm. In any case, the inspired words primarily refer to Yeshua, as the New Testament makes clear.

In verse 24, the day the psalm designates for rejoicing seems to refer to the time of victory—the day of salvation—though this of course also prefigures the ultimate time of God’s future intervention in the Day of the Lord. This would also fit the time of the Messiah’s crowning as King over all. However, the day of rejoicing and gladness became specifically associated with God’s festivals, further encouraging the use of this psalm as a festival song. Of course, verse 24 could on some level be a more general call to rejoicing in all that God does for His people—that is, every day is a day God has made, a fact to always find happiness in. But in context, the emphasis here is on the day of salvation—present and future.

With this focus, verse 25 appeals to God to “save *now*”—that is, to let today be the day of salvation by granting help and victory. The Hebrew phrase here, *hoshi’ah na’*, “is related to the noun *yeshu’ah* (‘salvation,’ ‘victory,’ vv. 14–15, 21)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 24–25). This phrase *hoshi’ah na’*, later contracted to *hoshana* and transliterated into Greek in the New Testament as *hosanna*, became an appeal for the messianic age foreshadowed in the Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, Psalm 118 became, as mentioned earlier, an important part of that feast’s temple liturgy. The binding of the sacrifice to the altar in verse 27 is thought by many to represent a thank offering, but some came to relate it to the sacrifices made during the annual festivals, particularly the Feast of Tabernacles. The Tabernacles link was made stronger by an alternate translation of this verse, as given in the NIV: “With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.” In Yeshua’s day, the Jewish people during the Feast of Tabernacles would sing Psalm 118, proclaiming Hoshana, while waving palm and other branches during the priestly procession along a path decorated with branches that culminated at the temple altar with the water-pouring ritual.

This provides a historical context for the crowd’s reception of Yeshua when He made His triumphal ride into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of another messianic prophecy. While this took place just prior to the Passover, the people responded with Tabernacles ritual—as they believed Yeshua had come to inaugurate the messianic age. Notice what happened: “And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those

who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-9). John 12:13 says they "took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: 'Hosanna! "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The King of Israel!" Mark 11:10 adds that they cried out "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!"

Of course, they did not understand that Yeshua had to first fulfill the Passover symbolism at that time by laying down His life as a sacrifice. Consider in this light that Psalm 118 was also part of the Passover liturgy in that day, highlighting a crossover in themes between the spring and fall festivals. It is interesting to note that Yeshua at His final Passover spoke to His disciples not only of His imminent sacrifice, but also of salvation in His future Kingdom-which is predominantly a fall-festival theme. It is also the foremost theme in this psalm. As Psalm 118 closed the traditional Jewish Passover service, many have suggested that it was the hymn that Yeshua and His disciples sang before leaving the upper room (see Matthew 26:30), though we cannot be sure.

Psalm 118 closes with a personal declaration of worshipping God with praise (verse 28) and the same opening call to thank God for His goodness and enduring lovingkindness (verse 29)-the basis for His salvation.

## **Luke 23:1-49**

The entire assembly of men (priests, elders, scribes, all of them) deliver Yeshua to Pilate with two accusations:

He is perverting the nation.

He is forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.

Pilate questions Him about His Sovereignty of the Yehudim and Yeshua responds, "you say it." Pilate finds no fault in Him. Just as the one year old lambs selected for Passover were inspected for defect, so our Messiah was inspected.

Once Pilate learned Yeshua was a Galilean, he saw an opportunity to "get out of" being involved in this matter with the Pharisees of Judaism. So Pilate sends Yeshua and them to Herodes. Notice that Yeshua at least responded to Pilate... but Herodes... not a word. There, Yeshua was accused intensely by the chief priests and scribes and heavily mocked by Herodes and his soldiers. He was then sent back to Pilate. Pilate, because none of their charges against Yeshua stood, pronounced Him innocent and was to release Him after a flogging. But the leaders of Judaism would have none of it. They cried out instead to have the murderer and agitator released at the festival – Barabba.

Pilate tried more times with the leaders of the people, to flog Him and release Him. But all the more they cried out, "impale Him!" and they excited the people into an emotional mob such that Pilate had no choice but to give the mob what it demanded: the crucifixion of Yeshua.

They impaled Him on Golgatha with two evil-doers, one on the right and one on the left. Many there were even still mocking Yeshua. The leaders of the Yehudim, one of the evil-doers beside Him, the soldiers, the crowd were all mocking Him that if He was the sovereign and Messiah then He should save Himself.

In the ninth hour, the sun was darkened and the veil of the Dwelling Place was torn in two and Yeshua breathed His last. The great display of this Man had effects of many people there that day. One was a Roman captain who proclaimed, "Truly, this Man was righteous!"