

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 04/01/2014



sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-4-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Gen 18	Judges 12-13	Ps 36-37	Mat 22:23 – 23:39
---------------	---------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

A Lesson in Service (Genesis 18)

The sins of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain were great, and the cry against them had come to the ears of God. Now God “comes down” to deal with the matter. The story of God’s visit to Abraham also reveals much about the character of Abraham.

While Abraham sat in the shade of his tent, he saw three men approaching. Subsequent events show them to be the preincarnate Christ and two angels. It was the custom in those days that one had an obligation to treat well any visitor who happened upon one’s camp. Indeed, this custom prevails to this day among the nomadic Bedouin of the Middle East and was much in evidence in the early decades of the 20th century. To neglect to welcome and provide for a visitor was esteemed a great insult and a mark of a man of worthless character. So when Abraham, a 99-year old man, saw the men, “he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (verse 2).

In the opinion of one source: “The writer of Hebrews used this account to encourage hospitality to strangers, ‘for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels’ (Heb. 13:2). Abraham’s words My Lord suggest that he suspected the identity of the visitors, but perhaps he was not sure until later of the full significance of the event” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Genesis 18:2-3).

In fulfilling his social duty, though he may have been going above and beyond if he recognized his guests, it is, in any case, interesting to note what Abraham said as compared to what he actually provided. He said: “Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring [you] a morsel of bread” (verses 4-5). But notice what Abraham actually told Sarah to prepare: not just a little water and a morsel of bread but three measures of fine meal kneaded into dough and baked into cakes, a dressed young calf, butter and milk. That was a very sizable quantity of food—indeed, a veritable feast! From this the rabbis derive a simple lesson: promise little but deliver much.

Abraham Reasons with God (Genesis 18)

The account of Abraham reasoning with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals much about both God and Abraham. As mentioned before, the phrase “come down” often indicates the serious nature of a personal intervention by God, usually in judgment. That God Himself would leave heaven and personally come to make an inspection shows His diligence in administering justice, as well as His close involvement with the affairs of man. And

the fact that He was ready to repeal the sentence if He found only 10 righteous inhabitants shows His great mercy. Furthermore, that God would reveal His intentions to Abraham demonstrates that God desires interaction with His people. God is interested in our opinions and He is willing to reason with us. We too can talk to God in prayer. Yeshua said, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). God hears and answers our prayers. He even changes His plans at times in response to our prayers. Interestingly, God disclosing His business to Abraham, who will later be called a prophet (Genesis 20:7), brings to mind Amos 3:7, which states, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servant the prophets.”

We also see reflected in the account something of the nature and character of Abraham—that he could be bold toward God, generous to his guests and merciful toward even the sinful inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The War Between Ephraim and Gilead (Judges 12)

The Gileadites were a clan within Manasseh, dwelling east of the Jordan and north of the Dead Sea. They appear to have been very independent of their tribe, and this independence irked the men of Ephraim, who generally headed the House of Joseph. Hence their accusation that the Gileadites were fugitives among Ephraim and Manasseh (verse 4).

Now that the war with Ammon was over, the men of Ephraim suddenly showed courage. They accused Jephthah of deliberately failing to summon them to the battle as a means of humiliating the leading tribe in Joseph, and they intended to wage war against him. Led by Jephthah, the Gileadites steadfastly held their ground, taking the strategic byways and heights.

They recognized Ephraimite infiltrators by their distinctive accent (showing that even in a small geographical region like Israel there were sharp delineations between—and sometimes bitter divisions among—the Israelite tribes and clans). However, the battle went entirely in favor of Jephthah and the Gileadites, and Gilead remained independent of their larger tribal units.

Jephthah judged only six years. After him a long series of judges followed: Ibzan of Bethlehem, seven years; Elon the Zebulonite, ten years; Abdon the Pirathonite (Ephraimite), eight years. Thus Israel enjoyed a total of 31 years of peace.

The Birth of Samson (Judges 13)

At this point in the Judges narrative you may have noticed something interesting about Israel’s periods of liberty—they approach about 40 years, or one generation. It seems that Israel would remain faithful to God only when a generation of Israelites experienced oppression. But the next generation would speedily go into idolatry, only to be oppressed. How true this remains! One generation seldom learns from the errors of its predecessor, and every generation feels it must “push the boundaries” set by the previous generation.

After about a generation of peace, Israel again sinned, so God delivered them into the hands of the Philistines, who dwelt on the lowland coasts of Israel’s southwest. For 40 years the Philistines had oppressed Israel. Now God raised up a deliverer, Samson of the tribe of Dan.

Samson was the son of Manoah, whose wife had been barren. Throughout the Scriptures we see that God sometimes caused barren women to bear the one through whom He would work. This was done as a sign of God’s involvement with the child from the start, and that any glory of accomplishment was to go to God. And it brought added respect to the chosen servant, which could help him accomplish the task God gave him to do. Manoah’s wife was visited by the Angel of the Lord—whom they later understood to be God Himself, i.e., the preincarnate Christ, which this may have been (verse 22; compare Genesis 16:10-13). This divine messenger told her that she would

conceive a child and instructed her to avoid all wine, products of the vine and unclean foods, for her son would be a Nazirite from birth, consecrated to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

Manoah recognized the seriousness of the news and asked God how to raise the child. Manoah and his wife instinctively knew that if they were to raise a son who would do the works of God they would need divine assistance in their parenting. This is certainly the case of believing parents today, because we live in a world that is largely lacking in godly values.

Those who have children today need to ask God for wisdom in the process of rearing children. They also need to actively pursue knowledge of proper child rearing.

Again the Angel appeared and reiterated the need to avoid wine, products of the vine and anything unclean. Manoah and his wife then offered God a burnt offering and a grain offering. And as the offerings were consumed upon the altar, the Angel of the Lord ascended to heaven, whereupon they came to the conclusion regarding the Messenger's identity.

A major theme of this chapter is consecration to holiness. The child was to be a Nazirite from birth for the entirety of his life. The Nazirite (Numbers 6) was consecrated to God for a stipulated period, during which he was forbidden to cut his hair, to partake of wine or any other grape products, or to defile himself. Wine is often used as a symbol of spiritual stupefaction, and so the lesson is that separation to God requires absolute avoidance of anything that will dull one's spiritual senses. The dietary laws, moreover, are also explicitly connected with the requirement of holiness (Deuteronomy 14:1-3). Thus, the lesson is that the raising of holy children is only possible through holy parents doing all they reasonably can to remove sources of spiritual defilement from their children. Of course, even this will not guarantee the child's persistence in holiness—as it certainly did not in the case of Samson.

Surprisingly, however, for those readers interested in biblical typology, the story of Samson appears to offer, to a limited degree, a type of Christ. Samson, whose name means "Like the Sun," was Israel's deliverer and strong man. Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), a "sun and shield" (Psalm 84:11), is Israel's Deliverer and Strong Man (compare Luke 11:21-22). Samson had miraculous physical strength; Christ had miraculous spiritual strength. Samson's conception was announced by a spirit messenger from God, as was Christ's. Both Manoah's wife and Mary conceived as a result of divine intervention. Samson was separated to God from conception and for the entirety of His life, as was Christ (though Christ was not a Nazirite as some argue). Moreover, as the story will unfold, Samson's greatest victory came at the hour of his death, as did Christ's. There are marked differences between them, of course. The type breaks down when we see Samson unwilling to submit to God for so much of his life, unlike Christ who obeyed His Father perfectly. Still, there are some parallels. And Samson's name was, in the end, recorded in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11:32).

"Those Blessed by Him Shall Inherit the Earth, But Those Cursed by Him Shall Be Cut Off" (Psalms 36-37)

Psalm 35 concluded with reference to the prosperity of God's servant—i.e., David (verse 27). Now, the superscription of Psalm 36 refers to David as "the servant of the LORD." The psalm begins by addressing the nature of wickedness, but this is soon contrasted with God's faithfulness and righteousness and His rewarding of His servants such as David with an abundance of true prosperity.

The word "oracle" in verse 1 can simply mean "utterance." The actual order of the verse is "An oracle of transgression of the wicked within my heart." Some see "of the wicked" as actually meaning "to the wicked." However, the psalm's focus on God rewarding the righteous and the request for the righteous to be kept from wickedness goes against that being the aim of the psalm. Some translations give "within my heart" as "within his

heart,” thinking the wicked person is intended. However, the Hebrew *lebi* in the Masoretic Text does mean “my heart.” Simply put, David is expressing his deep thoughts about the sinful way of the wicked.

David’s consideration of the sinful course of the wicked (verses 2-4) is followed by contemplation of God’s mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, justice and unfailing love (verses 57). “The contrast of these verses with the previous ones is extreme. Just as the revelation of the depravity in vv. 1-4 is awful, the revelation of the Lord’s love is even more wonderful... The contrasts continue with David ranging from the highest mountains to the depths of the sea to describe the perfect character of God. The height of the great mountains can be compared to how great God’s righteousness is; the depths of the seas can be compared with how mysterious and inaccessible God’s true judgments are” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 56).

Like nestlings seeking shelter and nourishment from a mother bird, so may people find protection and provision from God (verse 7). If the wicked would only cease from their headlong pursuit of fleeting self-gratification through sin and turn to God, they would find true and abundant satisfaction through the fullness of life in His family (verse 8). For the righteous “drink from the river of [God’s] pleasures.” What a beautiful word picture this is-of an endless, flowing supply of joyful experience forevermore! This river flows from the “fountain of life” God’s Holy Spirit bringing eternal salvation and all its rewards (see also Isaiah 12:3; 55:1-2; Jeremiah 2:13; John 7:37-39).

It is only in God’s “light” that we “see light” (Psalm 36:9). In context, this may mean that we don’t even really know what it means to live and be happy until we experience life in the way God intended. Rather than groping in the blindness of human plotting to find our way, the truth of God reveals the path to ultimate and lasting bliss. On the other hand, the idea here could be that it is through God shining on us (favoring and guiding us) that we will live to see a bright outcome for our lives (compare 37:3-6; see also Isaiah 60:19-20).

In closing, David prays that God’s loyal love will continue for those who “know” Him and are thereby “upright in heart” (Psalm 36:10). Indeed, truly knowing God implies more than knowing about Him. It means having a relationship with Him, which is based on obedience to His laws (see 1 John 2:3-4; John 15:14). To have a relationship, we have to spend quality time with God through prayer, Bible study and contemplative meditation. Even fellowship with likeminded believers is an important way to fellowship with the Father and Christ (1 John 1:3)- as the Father and Christ dwell in faithful believers through the Holy Spirit.

David further asks for protection from the wicked who refuse to submit to God’s way (Psalm 36:11)-perhaps thinking of some who were scheming to overthrow him. And he concludes with a final consideration (or prophetic glimpse) of the doom of the wicked (verse 12), which we see more about in the next psalm.

Psalm 37 ends an apparent grouping of four related psalms (34-37). Like Psalm 34, this one is an alphabetic acrostic, though in this case two verses are usually devoted to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Because the acrostic style makes it easier to memorize the songs that use it, some see these as “classroom” or “teaching” psalms. This is particularly the case with Psalm 37, as it is essentially a series of related proverbs or wise sayings. (Observe that verse

1 is nearly identical to Proverbs 24:19.)

David’s message in the proverbs of Psalm 37 is rather similar to what he said in Psalm 36. The Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes in its introduction to Psalm 37: “This psalm’s dominant theme is related to the contrast between the wicked and the righteous reflected in Ps 36. The central issue addressed is: Who will ‘inherit the land’ (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29), i.e., live on to enjoy the blessings of the Lord in the promised land? Will the wicked, who plot (v. 12), scheme (vv. 7, 32), [intentionally] default on debts (v. 21), use raw power to gain advantage (v. 14) and seem thereby to flourish (vv. 7, 16, 35)? Or will the righteous, who trust in the Lord (vv. 3, 5, 7, 34) and are humble (v. 11), blameless

(vv. 18, 37), generous (vv. 21, 26), upright (v. 37) and peaceable (v. 37), and from whose mouth is heard the moral wisdom that reflects meditation on God's law (vv. 30-31)?"

Where the NIV has the "land" as the inheritance (verses 9, 11, 22, 29, 34), the KJV and NKJV have "earth" (except in verses 29 and 34, though the Hebrew is the same). Either is correct, especially when we realize that the Promised Land of God's Kingdom will encompass the entire earth, not just the land of Israel. Note that the inheritance will be dwelt in "forever" (verses 18, 29). Through these verses we see that the eternal inheritors will be "those who wait on the LORD" (hoping and trusting in Him), "the meek" (those who are humble and teachable), "those blessed by Him" (those who are faithful in their dealings, as implied by the previous verse) and "the righteous" (verse 29). These are of course all the same people-who with their inheritance will receive eternal life, deliverance from enemies, salvation and peace.

Yeshua Messiah quoted from verse 11 in His famous Sermon on the Mount. Giving what are referred to as the Beatitudes, Yeshua in Matthew 5:5 said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Some may be surprised to learn that this is not an exclusively New Testament teaching. Once again we see that, far from inventing a new religion as many now think, Yeshua was building on the teachings of the Old Testament.

The phrase "the LORD knows the days of the upright" (Psalm 37:18) has "several meanings: (1) God knows our circumstances and provides for us; (2) God knows how long we will live and will sustain us to the end (90:12); (3) God knows that our days on earth [in this age] are only the beginning of our days with Him in eternity" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 37:18).

Psalm 37 also sets forth what lies in store for those who do not serve God and live according to His teachings. An individual has only two choices when it comes to directing his life-the way of blessing and life or the way of cursing and death (see Deuteronomy 30:15-20). The way of righteousness, of obeying God through outflowing love to Him and others (summarized as the way of give), is the one that leads to blessings and life (Psalm 37:3-6). The other choice, the selfish way of disobedience or wickedness (summarized as the way of get), leads to misery and death (verses 10, 34-36). The wicked will be cut off-to perish and be forgotten. David uses the metaphor of grass to describe man's brief life on earth. Grass flourishes for a while, then is cut down and withers. So, too, will evil men perish as surely as mown grass withers (verse 2). In His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua also spoke about "the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Matthew 6:30).

Another idea David expresses here is that fretting about life is harmful (Psalm 37:1, 7-8). He warns against worry, being overly anxious or succumbing to envy and anger. A righteous person looks to God instead. The literal rendering of verse 5 instructs us to roll our lives over onto God. He will direct a righteous man's steps, picking him up when he falls (verses 23-24) and taking care of his needs (verses 25-26). We see, then, that the righteous at times will fall; they aren't guaranteed trouble-free lives. Yet, "though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand" (verse 24). With wisdom and love, God shapes a person through trials. In that light, verse 25 should not be misunderstood to mean that God's people never suffer physical deficiency-but that God will always provide for them. Though they may at times have to ask others for help, as David himself did on occasion, they are not destitute beggars in a hopeless sense (and certainly not over the long haul of life). Trusting God, they "feed on His faithfulness" (verse 3). Indeed, even if they lack, the righteous are far better off than the wicked (verse 16)-and are even generous givers of whatever they do have (verse 26).

Yeshua observed in the Sermon on the Mount that it is futile to worry. A man can't change his circumstances by worrying. God knows our needs and will take care of them if we remain committed to Him (Matthew 6:25-33). Indeed, Yeshua said in this context that one's focus should be on God's Kingdom and righteousness (verse 33)-which is, not coincidentally, also the focus of Psalm 37.

Trusting God, as Psalm 37 instructs, requires one to wait on Him and to do good (verses 3-5, 7; compare 1 Peter 5:6-7). As we wait for resolution to problems, as we wait for the return of Yeshua Christ, we have work to do: "For we are His workmanship, created in Yeshua Messiah for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). If we remain faithful to Him and continue to trust Him, God will remain faithful to us-to provide help for today and to save us in the end (Psalm 37:39-40).

Mat 22:23 – 23:39

23 The same day came to him the Sadducees

We have very little information on the teachings of the Saducees. The Talmud and subsequent Jewish texts reflect the Pharisaic position on issues, as they came to complete power (and the Saducees to extinction) not long after Yeshua's time with the destruction of the Temple. One thing we do know as that the Saducees did not share the same views about the afterlife as their Pharisee opponents. This is also seen in Acts chapter 23, where Paul, who was a Pharisee, made clever use of this point to escape a difficult situation.

24 ... his brother shall marry his wife

The Saducees are referring to the laws of Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), which say that a man should marry his brother's widow in order to care for her and her children.

30 For in the resurrection ...

Yeshua supports a Pharisaic teaching from the Talmud: There will be no

marital union in the world to come. 37 Thou shalt love the Lord thy God

with all thy heart ...

39 ... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Yeshua is quoting from the Shema (Deuteronomy 6), the fundamental "statement of faith". Note the means that God gives for how we are to love Him, as found in the verses surrounding Shema.

Love for God is directly tied to following His Torah:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 – Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

The entire Torah presents itself in commandments toward God and toward fellow man. The latter are of equal importance as our fellow man is made in the image of God.

“Love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) is an interpretation of and commentary on “Love the Lord, your God” (Deuteronomy 6:5). He who loves a fellow man loves God, because the man has within himself a “part of God Above” (Job 31:2). When one loves a fellow man, he loves the man’s inner essence, and thereby loves God.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This teaching (verses 37-40), is reflective of the thought of Paul:

What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.

Romans 13:8-10 – Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Neither Yeshua or Paul taught that the “law of Moses” is “done away with,” and replaced by some emotional concept of “love.” However, Christianity, in the name of the Messiah, says that “the law of Moses” is done away and all we need now is this type of “love.”

As previously mentioned in our study of the sermon of Matthew chapters 5-7, there will be those who did great things, even miracles, in Messiah’s name, yet He will not recognize them as they did not have proper regard for the will of the Father (Torah, the “law of Moses”). The book of Revelation also makes it clear that those who follow the commandments (Torah, the “law of Moses”) are the ones who enter New Jerusalem.

Matthew 23

2 The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works ...

It would appear that Yeshua is telling the people to obey the Pharisees, while at the same time telling them not to follow them. In order to understand this passage, it is important to recall that much of Yeshua’s criticism of the Pharisees was because they taught commandments of men that made void the commandments of God (Matthew 15:13). Hence, the problem is not with the Pharisees teaching Torah, but with anything that contradicts Torah.

The human ordinances of the Pharisees placed emphasis on outside observance and not on what would change the inner man (see verses 24-28 below). Yeshua considered these teachings to be as “leaven,” (Matthew 16:11-12), which if left unchallenged, would corrupt all the people.

Certain manuscripts of the Hebrew Shem Tob¹ book of Matthew offer a different translation to this section, making a distinction between what Moses said and what the Pharisees taught:

Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and Sages sit, and now, all which he (Moses) will say unto you-keep and do; but their ordinances and deeds do not do, because they say and do not.

The key thing to note here, is that even though the Pharisees were teaching Torah, they were also promoting “lawlessness” as their teachings were not based in a humble faith in God but in self-righteousness that misused the Torah and often negated it.

Verses 7-12

The key to this section is verse 12: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

Yeshua is teaching not to seek leadership (as many are often too eager to do), as this places a person under greater responsibility. As He points out in verse 14, there is a “greater condemnation” for such leaders who err.

This is consistent with the teachings of “James”:

James 3:1 – My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

15 ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves

The Pharisees were not shy about evangelizing. However, as Yeshua points out, many of them interpreted the Scriptures in their own (self-righteous) way, that was not in accordance to the truth of Torah. Not much has changed to this day, with countless church denominations sending missionaries all around the world, teaching people to follow a Messiah who tells them that “they are not under the Law” – a message alien to the true gospel message.

17 whether is greater, the gold, or the temple ...? 19 whether is greater, the gift, or the altar ...

This is a continuation of the rebuke of the Pharisees who had their priorities out of order, following the traditions of men over the Torah of God.

23 these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone

Again Yeshua throws His support behind Torah, in this case telling the Pharisees that they should have continued giving the tithes they chose to give, but not at the expense of judgment, mercy and faith, which are the “three pillars” of the godhead that the Torah directs us toward.² 30 If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers

Here is yet another verse with a worrisome lesson for today. These religious leaders were condemned, as future generations would be, for not having a proper regard for God’s Torah. If the Pharisees had been following Torah in its proper context, they would have recognized Yeshua as the Messiah.

35 Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Here is one of those cases that causes a problem for those who insist that the “New Testament” texts, as we have them, are absolutely free from any scribal error. According to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, it was another Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada that was slain as such, not Zacharias the son of Barchias. (See the comments on this verse in the, Jewish New Testament Commentary, by David Stern, for possible reasons for this error. Also see the footnote to this verse in the DuTillet Hebrew Matthew, translation by James Trimm, www.nazarene.net.)

37 even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,

It is easy to overlook the fact that Yeshua uses a feminine analogy here. The “feminine” aspect of God is something we discuss fully in our Revelation study. Yeshua’s sad words relate back to the previous parables, which though spoken more directly to the Pharisees, were also a condemnation of the people who blindly followed them.

It is interesting to note that Yeshua, who says he broods like a hen in this verse, was instrumental in creation. (John 1:3). The language of the Genesis account similarly states that the Spirit of God also “brooded” over the waters at creation.

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

A final rebuke, tying back to the metaphor of the fig tree in 21:19.