

# Owning the Torah

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At the Bar Mitzvah of Joshua Harris

Joshua, in common parlance, we say that today is your Bar Mitzvah. That is not totally accurate; what IS accurate is to say that today YOU are a Bar Mitzvah – a son of commandment.

Now most people understand this as a day when the Jewish community and your congregation consider you, no longer a boy, but a man – a man who is responsible to God and to his community for obeying the commandments of the *Torah*. That is primarily where we get the term “son of commandment.” Well, all of that is correct but it’s not all there is to it, because, in Romans 3:2, the *shaliach* Paul might as well be speaking to you directly, saying:

*“Joshua, since you are a Jew, to you were committed the oracles of God.”*

What are these “oracles of God?” In Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary of 1913, (the one the apostle Paul undoubtedly consulted), we find, among others, this definition of “oracles”:

“The communications, revelations, or messages delivered by God to the prophets; also, the entire sacred Scriptures – usually in the plural.”

So, to you, Joshua, has been entrusted the whole counsel of God, from the words of the prophets, to the Commandments of the *Torah*. The word *Torah* means “God’s teachings,” and so *Torah* encompasses all of these things.

What this means is that for you, Joshua, obedience to *Torah* is only the beginning of what God wants from you. From you, God requires that you take custody of His *Torah*, protect it, and teach it to others! God is saying: “Joshua, I am giving you co-ownership of my *Torah* along with the rest of the Jewish people! Keep it safe, guard it against misuse, and be a light to the world by making sure that its truths are proclaimed to everyone who will receive them. In 1 Peter 4:11 we read:

*“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Messiah Yeshua, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.”*

To even begin doing that, Joshua, you must, yourself, be living *Torah*. To proclaim *Torah* to others without living it yourself would be hypocrisy. It would be quickly detected, and your witness would be rejected. Now to live *Torah* you have to know what is contained in *Torah*, and that means studying beyond the study you have done up to this point. Paul was critical of those who came to the age of *Bar Mitzvah* and stopped pursuing biblical understanding, for in Hebrews 5:12 we read:

*“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”*

So Joshua, think of your learning up to this point as your time of having received milk, but now it is time for you to join the world of adults and eat the solid food of advanced understanding that will make you, not only a student of *Torah*, but also a teacher – a conveyor of God’s Word to others.

Now after hearing this, your next question has to either be: “Where do I get this solid *Torah* food?” or else “How do I get un-*Bar Mitzva*’d and get out of here?” Well, since you can’t get un-*Bar Mitzva*’d, I’ll direct myself to the question you no doubt would have asked. The answer to it MUST be a closely guarded secret because so few people seem to know it! It shouldn’t be a secret, and God doesn’t want it to be a secret, so I’ll say it out loud where everyone can hear it. The secret of where you get solid *Torah* food is from consulting the *Ruach HaKodesh* – the Holy Spirit. Understanding and applying the commandments of *Torah* cannot be separated from experiencing and communicating with the Holy Spirit! It is the New Covenant truth prophesied by Jeremiah during the time of the Older Covenant:

Jeremiah 31:31-34: *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

Joshua, you are of the house of Israel, so the New Covenant was made with YOU. And our Messiah HAS come, so we are now living in the New Covenant time that was prophesied by Jeremiah. So let’s personalize this and take a look at what God is saying to you through Jeremiah:

“Joshua, I have put My law in your mind, and have written it on your heart; and I am your God, and you are one of My people. No more must your neighbor teach you (and you your neighbor) how to know Me, for you and your neighbor can now both know Me directly, through the Holy Spirit, whom I sent to you after Yeshua returned to be at my right hand.”

At this point you might ask “What has knowing God to do with understanding His commandments? Isn’t it the reverse? Don’t we get to know God THROUGH understanding His commandments?” Let me answer the second question first. We get to know ABOUT God through knowing and understanding His commandments, but we get to know God personally by conversing with Him. We speak to Him, and He to us through the Holy Spirit. And as to the first question, knowing God and listening to what He tells us is the key to understanding His commandments and their application in our lives.

Take, for example, Numbers 15:38-41:

*"Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God."*

This is the commandment that requires us to wear *tzitzit*, these fringes that are on the corners of our *tallitot*. Although the words of this commandment are plain enough, how we are to implement them is, by no means, a no-brainer. To illustrate this, let's look inside the minds of six people as they attempt to think this commandment through:

First Person: "I am a woman. Is this commandment applicable to me?"

Second Person: "I am a Gentile. Is this commandment applicable to me?"

Third Person: "Since the *tzitzit* are to remind me of the commandments of God, might I not just as well wear a *Torah* scroll pendant around my neck as a reminder of God's Law instead of the fringes? It would accomplish the same purpose."

Fourth Person: "Should I wear *tzitzit* only during synagogue prayers, or all day long?"

Fifth Person: "I heard that Orthodox Jews have not been putting the blue thread on their *tzitzit* because the original source of the blue dye can no longer be found. Should I follow suit, or should I color a strand of my fringe with a blue magic marker?"

Sixth Person: "If I wear *tzitzit*, won't I be mistaken for an Orthodox Jew? What if I am seen eating in a Chinese restaurant or driving a car on *Shabbat* while wearing *tzitzit*?"

Joshua, there is nothing in the Scriptures of *Torah* that answer any of these questions, yet all of them are reasonable. In fact, except for the "woman" question, I asked every one of them myself at one time or another, and was very unsure of what I should do about wearing *tzitzit* until I prayed, and God gave me peace about how I should proceed. This, Joshua, is an example of how studying *Torah* and hearing God through the *Ruach HaKodesh* go hand in hand.

Now getting back to Romans 3:2 that I personalized earlier; I'll now read it as it is written:

*"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."*

If these oracles of God (that is, knowledge of God through the *Torah* and the prophets) were committed to you, it is strongly implied that you are their custodian, and are to preserve them and pass them on to others. But it is not just implied – it is commanded in what Yeshua termed

the first of all the commandments, the one that all of Judaism has incorporated as its most foundational prayer; it is the *Sh'ma* that you read to us earlier:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Joshua, look at the part of the *Sh'ma* that tells you what you are to do with God's commandments. The first thing it tells you to do is to receive them into your own heart because that is how you preserve and protect them. This is your first duty as their custodian. They must become fully a part of your life, or they will not have been preserved. Next, the *Sh'ma* tells you to teach them to others. It starts by telling you to teach them to your children (looking forward to when you have children), but not only to your children – to everyone you encounter when you walk by the way. That doesn't mean to literally stop everyone you pass in the street and engage them in a discussion about God's commandments, but the Scripture goes on to tell you the primary ways you are to do it. You are to bind God's commandments on your hand (which means everything you do should testify to God's commandments). You are to wear them on your forehead (which means all of your thoughts and therefore what comes out of your mouth must also testify to who God is and what He stands for). And as for your house – whoever enters your house should sense there, the presence and *shalom* of the living God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So, Joshua, as a *Bar Mitzvah*, these are the ways that God wants you to preserve and pass on His “oracles,” which are His commandments, and knowledge of His prophets. But Joshua, you are not just any *Bar Mitzvah*, you are a Messianic Jew – a *Bar Mitzvah* who has received and professed faith in Messiah Yeshua. That means that the commandments of *Torah* are not the only ones for which you are responsible, for Yeshua said in John 14:15:

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”*

Yeshua not only gave commandments, but you might say His very person – His very existence – WAS a commandment, because John 1 refers to Him as the Word; in verses 1 & 2 we read:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.”*

And in verse 14 we read:

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Remember Joshua, you are a *Bar Mitzvah* under the New Covenant, and there is now a New Covenant law which Scripture calls “the Law of Messiah” (Galatians 6:2). This New Covenant

law does indeed have some new commandments, but what is most important about it is that it is the law by which you are to now interpret the original commandments that were given through Moses. And because you are in a New Covenant in which you have the New Covenant Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to assist you, you will not necessarily interpret and apply the various commandments of *Torah* in the same way as your forefathers did. This is a great responsibility that all believers in Yeshua share, but as a Jewish believer and a *Bar Mitzvah*, you have a special responsibility.

That's all I have to say right now. Please take my words seriously, because I sought the Lord before committing them to writing. May God bless you and your family on this joyous day when you have become a man in God's eyes, and a *Bar Mitzvah* in Yeshua.