

Loving God's Instructions

✘ In Psalm 119, the writer expresses his devotion and love for God by seeking to obey the Word. He says, "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!" (Ps. 119:10). When we were children we might have rebelled against our parents' instructions, not realizing the purpose for their rules. But once we became adults and parents ourselves, we learned that boundaries are necessary to keep children safe from harm.

The Hebrew translation of the word "law" is "Torah." But the word "law" doesn't capture the true essence of Torah, which actually means "instruction as from a father to a son."

Torah is the term given to represent the five books of Moses, which include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Jewish sages have concluded that there are 613 commandments in these five books. The books are divided into various headings such as "Developing Good Relationships with God and Each Other," "Integrity and Ethics in Running a Business" and "How to Govern a Home."

The Torah is the 'how-to' manual for living life. In fact, much medical advancement is a result of instructions given in the Torah.

It is the foundation for every other book in the Bible. The prophets were sent to lead the people back to the Torah. The Bereans searched the Torah when they wanted to confirm that what Paul taught was true. The Torah is what Paul referred to when he reminded Timothy to continue in what he has learned through "... the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15).

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 explains the blessings that follow one who knows God's commandments and does them, while Deuteronomy

28:15:68 explains the curses that will fall upon the person who does not follow God's instructions.

It is similar to the law of gravity. God never said that if a person does his commandments, he would be saved. That has been a distortion to His Word. Israel was told to give a sacrifice on Yom Kippur for their sins, and Jesus is that final atoning sacrifice for our sins. Now that that is done, we can learn how to live a long, healthy life, and how to be blessed and to prosper by following His instructions.

Israel was also appointed by God to be a 'light to the nations.' As Paul Johnson states in his book *A History of the Jews*: "The Jews always knew that Jewish society was appointed to be a pilot-project for the entire human race."

Some say the law is no longer valid and some say that it contains life itself for the one who understands it. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

'To fulfill them' is actually a Hebrew idiom that means 'to make clear'. The Jewish Sages have always said that when the Messiah comes he will 'make clear' all of the instructions given in the Torah.

The Sages also knew that if God gave an instruction for our benefit, then it is possible for us to be able to do what he asks of us. What father would give instructions to his children and then make them so hard that they could not do them? That would be cruel. So the issue is then, how do we study, interpret and understand all of God's instructions? How do we learn to love God's Torah just as the writer of Psalm 119?

Ezra and Nehemiah devised a system to encourage Torah study amongst the people so they would not fall into idolatry again. This system divided the five books of Moses into portions to

be studied on a weekly basis and the entire Torah could be read through in a one or three year cycle. (Writings from the Prophets are read as well as the New Covenant for Messianic Jews.)

Jews all over the world study the same portion at the same time. Jesus also studied these weekly portions with his disciples and his teachings were geared towards 'making clear' God's instructions.

The paragraphs that we have today in our English Bibles are not necessarily the way the paragraphs are written in the original Hebrew. The Torah portions that Ezra and Nehemiah followed divide the Scriptures into the original groupings that indicate a specific topic that God wants to communicate to his people.

An example is how two seemingly unrelated stories are written in the Hebrew as one paragraph: the messengers telling Abraham that he was going to have a son by whom all nations would be blessed and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These are two different stories, aren't they? No. God was telling Abraham that unless he followed God's instructions to be a light to the nations, then the nations would become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

The annual Torah cycle of reading is scheduled to end soon and start over again. To see the schedule and learn more about interpreting God's commandments, go to