

Torah Teachings

Biblical Definitions: “Righteousness”

Source: “*Messiah – Volume 1 – Understanding His Life and Teachings In Hebraic Context*” by Avi Ben Mordechai

NOTE: I have added my comments in square brackets as such [].

In the *B’rit Chadashah* [Renewed/New Covenant/New Testament], we have the following words written by Sha’ul [Paul] to Titus:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

In the *Tanakh* [Old Covenant/Old Testament], we can wholeheartedly find agreement with this passage. (Remember, everything said in the *B’rit Chadashah* [*B’rit* means “covenant” and *Chadashah* means “new or renewed”. Like the *Tanakh*, it can be divided into three main parts: Gospels/Acts—correspond to *Torah*, Letters—correspond to *Ketuvim* (writings), and Revelation—corresponding to *Nevi’im*.¹ (Prophets)] **must have** a foundation in the *Tanakh*, otherwise anyone can come along and say that they have received special revelation from G-d [YHWH--Yahweh] and we cannot refute it.)

The word “*mercy*” in this verse is the Greek word *eleos* which translates as the Hebrew word *chesed*, meaning G-d’s [Yahweh’s] undeserved kindness.

This captures precisely what our Father in heaven has done for us. We have indeed received *chesed* from G-d [Yahweh] through a rebirth and change of status orchestrated by the Father Himself. But our eternal salvation and divine acceptance were **not** bestowed upon us on the basis of any good deeds that we have done. For if this were so, each human being would then have something to boast about. This issue of salvation, mercy, and good works can be seen in the Hebrew exodus.

The Israelites in Egypt had, over the course of two centuries, wandered away from the teachings of Avraham [Abraham], Yitzchak [Isaac], Ya’acov [Jacob], and Yoshef [Joseph]. In the expression of our wise Torah scholars, the Israelites were at nearly the lowest level of spiritual

¹ [Besorat HaGe’ulah (Gospels)—The four portions of the Messiah of Israel as given by His messengers (Luke/Acts may be considered as a unit). *Besotah* means “good news” and *Ge’ulah* means “redemption”. Iggerot (Letters)—Eight “general” letters to Messianic Jews communities and thirteen letters from Paul, the emissary to the Gentiles. The word *Iggeret* (pl. Iggerot) means “letter”. Hitgallut (Revelation)—The revelation of Yeshua the Messiah as given to His emissary Yochanan (John). Then word *Hitgallut* means “revelation” or “unveiling” (sometimes the word *Chazon* (“vision”) is used instead)].

contamination and idolatry,² and had G-d [Yahweh] waited even one more day to save them, their escape would have been hopeless. When L-rd [Yahweh] rescued (saved) His people from both physical and spiritual bondage in Egypt, it was an act of incredible, undeserved mercy. Why did G-d [Yahweh] save the Israelites? Because He was faithful to His promises given to Avraham³ [Abraham]. The people did absolutely nothing to deserve the deliverance (salvation) and the great mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He. It was not **by** works of righteousness that they were saved (redeemed from Egypt). Rather, they were saved **to do** works of righteousness. Hebraic beliefs on righteousness follow this line of thought: divine salvation is not gained by our works of righteousness; our righteousness is a natural byproduct of our salvation. G-d's [Yahweh's] undeserved mercy toward us results in salvation, which leads us to do good works which in Jewish thought are always defined as righteous living in the freedom of G-d's [Yahweh's] commandments.

When G-d [YHWH--Yahweh] rescued the Israelites, He saved them by His mercy; they did absolutely nothing to “earn” His mercy. Then He brought them to Mount Sinai where they received Laws and right living. These beautiful Laws of G-d [Yahweh] defined the terms “righteousness”, “unrighteousness”, “sin”, “lawlessness”, and “stumbling block”, among others. The giving of the Torah [Yahweh's Instructions] at Mount Sinai showed the Hebrews how to walk in a right relationship horizontally (between man and other men), and vertically (between man and G-d [Yahweh]).

In the same way today, those who will answer Y'shua's [Yeshua's/Jesus'] call to put their faith and hope in G-d's⁴ [Yahweh's] will be given a release from spiritual bondage and will be brought to spiritual freedom through the Law [Torah/Yahweh's Instructions]. We are freely saved through redemption from the law of sin and death and then escorted to the Law of liberty, life, and responsibility. Y'shua's [Yeshua's/Jesus'] words supported this:

...and you shall know the truth (the Mosaic Torah), and the truth (Torah) shall make you free. (Yochanan [John] 8:32)

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments [noted in the first 5 books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy], and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Mattityahu [Matthew] 5:19)

From literary and cultural context, we know that Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] is referring to all the Mosaic commandments of Sinai. Here, Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] says that the truth of G-d's [Yahweh's] commandments (Mizmor [Psalms] 119:142, 151) sets us free. Those who annul and

² Artscroll Machzor Shavuot, Prelude to Sinai, p. XIX. Out of 50 spiritual levels, the lowest being the 50th, the Israelites were at the 49th level, one short of complete and utter spiritual contamination. At this point, our scholars say, one is unable to return to the L-rd.

³ B'eresith (Genesis) 15:13-14. Also see B'eresith 28:15 and 46:3-4.

⁴ 1 Kefa (Peter) 1:20-21.

teach others to neglect the commandments of G-d [Yahweh] will be called least in the kingdom of heaven while those who keep and teach them will be called greatest in the kingdom. Sha'ul [Paul] writes on this premise:

*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling.** (Philippians 2:12) [Emphasis mine]*

In Hebraic context, Sha'ul [Paul] is referring to 1) the works of the Torah—G-d's [Yahweh's] teachings and revealed will and 2) an awesome respect for G-d [Yahweh] and His Torah [Yahweh's Teachings and Instructions], as it is written:

*Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, **“Assemble the people to me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.”** (D'varim [Deuteronomy] 4:9-10) [Emphasis mine]*

The Jews, if they intended to observe the covenant given them by G-d [Yahweh] at Sinai, were required to live by faith and faithfulness. And faithfulness is linked to righteous living. And righteous living in the context of G-d's [Yahweh's] Word is defined as living by the Torah.

From these principles, we learn that our works of righteousness do not “save us”. Rather, works of righteousness validate our “salvation”, just as Ya'acov [Jacob/James], Y'shua's [Yeshua's/Jesus'] brother, said concerning our father Avraham [Abraham]:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. (Ya'acov [Jacob/James] 2:21-22)

In the same way, Sha'ul [Paul] spoke to the Ephesians:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yahshua] unto good works, which God [Yahweh] hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10, KJV)

1 Yochanan [John] 3:7 echoes the same principles of righteousness:

*Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. **He who does what is right is righteous,** just as he is righteous. (1 Yochanan [John] 3:7, NIV) [Emphasis mine]*

So, how does one become righteous? First, by loving G-d [Yahweh] with all his heart, mind and soul; and then, by holding what is right (defined in Judaism as obeying His commandments). The following passages relate to this concept:

And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as he commanded us. (D'varim [Deuteronomy] 6:25) [Emphasis mine]

“...if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—**he is righteous and will surely live,**” declares the Lord God. (Yechezkiel [Ezekiel] 18:9) [Emphasis mine]

...**What great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law (Torah) which I am setting before you today?** Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. (D'varim [Deuteronomy] 4:6-9) [Emphasis mine]

So you will walk in the way of good men, and keep to the paths of the righteous. (Mishle [Proverbs] 2:20) [Emphasis mine]

Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner. (Mishle [Proverbs] 13:6, KJV) [Emphasis mine]

Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. **Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness,** and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 58:1-2) [Emphasis mine]

Open the gates, that **the righteous nation** may enter, the one that **remains faithful.** (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 26:2) [Emphasis mine]

(To Jeroboam) ...yet you have not been like My servant David, **who kept My commandments and who followed Me** with all his heart, **to do only that which was right in My sight;** (Melechim Alef [1 Kings] 14:8) [Emphasis mine]

In the *B'rit Chadashah*, the definition of righteousness or doing what is right in the sight of G-d [Yahweh] carries over from the *Tanakh* as we can see in this sampling of passages:

(Concerning Z'kharyah and Elisheva [Zacharias and Elisabeth]): **And they were both righteous in the sight of God,** walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. (Luke 1:6) [Emphasis mine]

For it is not those who bear the law who are righteous in God's sight, **but it is those who obey the law** [Torah/Yahweh's Instructions] **who will be declared righteous.** (Romans 2:13, NIV) [Emphasis mine]

(Sha'ul [Paul]): ...*as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; **as to the righteousness which is in the Law** [Torah/Yahweh's Instructions], found blameless.* (Philippians 3:6) [Emphasis mine]

*Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; **and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness**; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.* (Revelation 22:11-12) [Emphasis mine]

To be righteous is to follow the commandments of G-d [Yahweh] according to the letter **and** the spirit as they were taught to Moshe [Moses] and upheld by the Messiah. This is the eternal covenant of the L-rd [Yahweh]. One may speak of the love of G-d [Yahweh] and appear to put on a good display of righteousness, but if one has inward deceit, a lack of repentance, and uncircumcision of the heart (lack of sensitivity towards G-d [Yahweh] and His Word), then all the works of G-d's [Yahweh's] commandments are in vain. Yeshayahu [Isaiah], Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah], and Yechezk'el [Ezekiel] addressed this:

*Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, **but they remove their hearts far from Me**, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.... (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 29:13) [Emphasis mine]*

*"For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. But to this one I will look, **to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word**. (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 66:2) [Emphasis mine]*

*Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved. **How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?** (Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 4:14) [Emphasis mine]*

*For thus says the Lord God [Master Yahweh], "I will also do with you as you have done, you who have **despised the oath by breaking the covenant**. (Yechezk'el [Ezekiel] 16:59) [Emphasis mine]*

Where does Y'shua HaMashiach [Yeshua/Jesus The Messiah] fit into this picture of righteousness? If we are righteous by keeping the commandments of G-d [Yahweh], what do we need Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] for? There are numerous reasons why we need Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus]—explanations which will be addressed in the coming chapters. [You will need to buy the book "Messiah" Volume 1 to get the reset of the story.] However, concerning righteousness, one clear reason why we need Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] is that He is the embodiment of G-d's [Yahweh's] commandments; He is the living Word.⁵ Every commandment

⁵ Yochanan [John] 1:1 and 1:14.

of G-d [Yahweh] we keep has its fulfillment in Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus]. His own words prove this point:

*Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. **For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me.** (Yochanan [John] 5:43-46) [Emphasis mine]*

To obey the commandments of G-d [Yahweh] means to receive wholeheartedly His unique Anointed One who is our righteousness and thus makes us wholly righteous through our faithfulness. Torah [Yahweh's Instructions] and HaMashiach [The Messiah] are not separate things! They are two parts of one whole. It is Messiah **AND** Torah not Messiah **OR** Torah. The definition of righteousness comes down to this: practice the Mosaic commandments of G-d [Yahweh] **AND** live in the finished redemptive work of Y'shua HaMashiach [Yeshua/Jesus The Messiah]. **Do both**, not one or the other. Read the entire first epistle of Yochanan [John]! He makes this openly obvious:

*...but whoever **keeps His [Yahweh's] word**, in him the love of God [Yahweh] has truly been perfected. **By this we know that we are in Him**: the one who says he abides [does/keeps Yahweh's Instructions] in Him ought himself to **walk [do/keep Yahweh's Instructions] in the same manner as he [Yeshua/Jesus] walked.** (1 Yochanan [John] 2:5-6) [Emphasis mine]*

Think about this: What does it mean to keep His Word and to walk as Y'shua [Yeshua] walked? *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) 18:18-19 provides the answer:

(G-d [Yahweh] speaking to Moshe [Moses]) "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I commanded him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

Since Y'shua [Yeshua] was the prophet like unto Moshe [Moses] from *D'varim* [Deuteronomy] 18, then clearly we need to obey His voice (Yochanan [John] 10:27) and His teachings, which means we must keep G-d's [Yahweh's] commandments. This declares us righteous, a teaching of Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] confirmed in Yochanan [John] 14:24:

He who does not love Me does not keep My words [Commandments/Torah/Yahweh's Instructions]; and the word which you bear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (Yochanan [John] 14:24) [Emphasis mine]

Righteousness comes by keeping the commandments of G-d [Yahweh] **and** by listening to His Anointed One—the Messiah. This is precisely what defines persecution for righteousness' sake. If you are hated or persecuted for the sake of righteousness you are being hated for your

acceptance of Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] **and** for your lifestyle according to G-d's [Yahweh's] Mosaic Laws. A good place to see this is Revelation 12:17 and 14:12:

*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God **and** hold to the testimony of Jesus [Yeshua].*

*Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God **and** their faith in Jesus [Yeshua].*

I hope this sheds some light upon the Biblical definition of “Righteousness” compared to what man has defined “Righteousness” to be. It makes a big difference when we use the Bible as our dictionary. Especially the Old Covenant/Testament since the New Covenant/Testament did not exist at the time Yeshua/Jesus was here.

Shalom,

One Crying In The Wilderness



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