

Torah Teachings

Biblical Definitions: “Freedom”

Source: “*Messiah – Volume 1 – Understanding His Life and Teachings In Hebraic Context*” by Avi Ben Mordechai. This book is no longer available from [Millennium 7000 Communications](#).

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

If there is one word that echoes the cry of today’s Christian church, it is ‘freedom.’ I hear it over and over again from pastors, teachers, Bible students, common folk: “We *are freed from the Law*.” But are we really? For nearly two millennia, freedom has been incorrectly defined as emancipation from the Jewish Laws of Mount Sinai. If you believe this, you have not been taught correctly, but you can change if you desire.

Returning to our example of the Israelites in Egypt, we see that they were freed from spiritual and physical slavery only to be redeemed by G-d and 50 days later to be placed under the protective custody of G-d’s wisdom, the Torah. They were not liberated only to make up their own rules for life. The Israelites tried that with the worship of the golden calf, resulting in the death of 3,000 people. Again, let us return to our biblical dictionary, and search out the true definition of freedom. We begin with the words of HaMelech David:

I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.
(Mizmor [Psalm] 119:32, NW)

I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.
(Mizmor [Psalm] 119:45)

The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad (Mizmor [Psalm] 119:95-96, KJV)

In the *B’rit Chadashah* we get this Hebraic definition of true freedom:

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. (Ya’acov [James] 1:25)

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

And again, what is “truth”?

Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Thy law (Torah) is truth. (Mizmor [Psalm] 119:142)

Thou art near, O Lord, and all Thy commandments are truth. (Mizmor [Psalm] 119:151)

Again, in the timeless rabbinic writings of the *Midrash Rabbah*, salvation is connected to servitude under Torah and thus is understood to be liberation from the law of sin and death to the Law of life and liberty:

It can be compared to a king who brought his son out of prison and who commanded: "Celebrate for all time as a day of rejoicing the day on which my son went forth from darkness to light, from an iron yoke to life, from servitude to freedom, and from bondage to redemption." Similarly, God brought Israel out of captivity, for it says: "He bringeth out the prisoners into prosperity" (Ps. LXVIII, 7). From darkness and the shadow of death, as it says: "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death" (ib. CVII, 14). "From a yoke of iron to the yoke of the Torah." From slavery to freedom, as it says: "Ye are the children of the Lord your God" (Deut. XIV, 1). From servitude to redemption, as it says, "Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name" (Jer. L, 34)¹

When is a land considered happy? When the king studies the Torah;² as it says,³ and the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven (haruth) upon the tables (Ex. XXXII, 16). Do not read "haruth" (graven) but "beruth" (freedom), for you find no man free save one who is engaged in the study of Torah.⁴

In Jewish thought, freedom and the commandments of the Torah are inseparable; they impart life to the soul:

...[You] admonished them in order to turn them back to Thy law (Torah). Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Thy commandments but sinned against Thine ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. (Nechemyab [Neh.] 9:29)

May Thy compassion come to me that I may live, for Thy law is my delight. (Mizmor [Psalm] 119:77)

(Moshe speaking) . . .he said to them, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an

¹ Midrash Rabbah Exodus 15.11.

² Rabbinic footnote #6: This is the only kind of freedom that can be intended, as a king is presumably free in other respects.

³ Rabbinic footnote #7: In support of the contention that the study of the Torah is synonymous with freedom.

⁴ Midrash Rabbah Numbers 10.8.

idle word for you; indeed it is your life.” (D’varim [Deuteronomy] 32:46-47)

If “Jesus” was sent to relieve us of the supposedly insufferable Mosaic Laws of G-d, it is not evident in the above quotations nor in His response to this question, “*Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?*”

...but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mattityahu [Matthew] 19:16-17)

The principle of His response was not to discourage the keeping of G-d’s Laws. Rather, it was to show that keeping G-d’s Laws is more than just outward observance; it also requires heart.

In short, freedom is an old Hebraic concept that is permanently linked to the keeping of G-d’s commandments. The Word of G-d encompasses a continual teaching and retelling of the redemption story of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt to their freedom at Mount Sinai. If we throw off the yoke of the Torah we, perhaps unwittingly, put on the yoke of bondage. This is the basis of Sha’ul’s [Paul’s] words in Galatians 5:1:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

In Jewish thought, the concepts of freedom and slavery are plain and simple: freedom is a life connected to the Mosaic Law; slavery is a life void of the Law, which again by default, puts us under the law of sin and death.