

Fulfilling Torah:

A number of posts and conversations recently have returned to how we understand and interpret Yeshua's statement that he 'fulfilled' Torah and, in turn, the significance and meaning of the words in the Book of James where James (Ya'acov) states that he '... will show you my faith by my actions', a statement is almost total opposition to the common misunderstanding of today's Hellenistic Christian community.

So what did Yeshua really mean when he stated 'I Am Fulfilling Torah'?

Sadly, so many have absolutely no idea he meant here!

Given that many Pharisees used the same phrase in their communal arguments and discussions, it can't possibly have the meaning many poorly informed Christians think it has.

Rather, when Yeshua said he came to 'fulfil the Torah' he meant to **correctly interpret and enact it**.

To 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret in incorrectly. Torah means 'God's Instructions' and the 10 Words are the very core of that Torah.

Matt 5:20, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," is illuminated by the insight that the halacha (the way); of the Pharisees had been reduced to almsgiving, and Yeshua was calling for a greater halacha; God's halacha (the way of righteousness).

Matt 5:17-18, "Do not think that I am come to destroy the Torah, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say to you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Torah till all be fulfilled," is explained by showing the typical Hebrew rabbinic phrases employed in this statement evidently aimed at other rabbis. The Hebrew idiom "I have come" obviously means "it is my purpose to," and the terms "destroy" and "fulfil" were commonly employed in Yeshua's day as technical terms in rabbinic argumentation. When a rabbi felt that his colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, 'You are destroying the Torah'.

Needless to say, in most cases his colleague strongly disagreed. What was 'destroying the Torah' for one rabbi, was 'fulfilling the Torah' (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another. Thus, it is Yeshua's method of interpretation that is under consideration here.

Hence, to paraphrase, he is saying "***never imagine for a moment that I intend to abrogate the Torah by misinterpreting it. My intent is not to weaken or negate the Torah, but by properly interpreting God's Written Word I aim to establish it, that is, make it even more lasting. I would never invalidate the Torah by effectively removing something from it through interpretation. Heaven and earth would sooner disappear than something from the Torah. Not the smallest letter in the (Hebrew) alphabet, the yod nor even its stroke or decorative spur, will ever disappear from the Torah***".

Paul uses the same terminology in Rom. 3:31:5 "Do we then make void the Torah through the faith? By no means! On the contrary, we establish (or fulfil) the Torah."

Two examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10. Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfil' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean:

Gal 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Torah of Messiah.

Romans 13:10 "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Torah."

This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfil' it).

And what is to me fascinating is that the Book of James (Ya'acov) actually, and most strongly, confirms this understanding. When we recognize that to heed the call of Yeshua we need to lead ethical and moral lives that align with the Ten Words (the Ten Commandments), we may begin to appreciate both the centrality of the words of Ya'acov, Yeshua's brother and why the 'church' has generally tried to follow Martin Luther's lead and tried to ignore it!

I have written at some length on the centrality of the words of Ya'acov – see

<https://circumcisedheart.info/James%20the%20Just%20%E2%80%93%20Reevaluating%20his%20legacy.pdf>

In this article I discuss how Ya'acov speaks out against:

- a superficial hearing of God's Word;
- pious speech on what the Jewish people should believe, but little practice of the same;
- the error of being dogmatic about both the Written and Oral Torah, yet not fully understanding proper practice – for example, the healing of a man on the Sabbath¹;
- a failure to fulfill the most foundational requirements of Torah, while at the same time getting pedantic about the more minor requirements (the narrative in Matthew 23 is a great example of this where Yeshua finishes (see v23) his condemnation with a reference to the great Micah 6:8 passage. See James 1:26 for just one example of how Ya'acov addresses this;
- the pursuing of wealth which leads to divided loyalties between riches and YHVH;
- the futility of the exercise of prayer without faith in God;
- the slandering and cursing of their neighbours, and;
- the taking of oaths too lightly (perhaps indicative of a lack of commitment to the path of holiness).

¹ Luke 13:14 "but the President of the synagogue, indignant that Yeshua had healed on Shabbat, spoke up and said to the congregation, "there are six days in the week for working; so come during those days to be healed, not on Shabbat!" Yeshua was falsely accused. He is both condoning a practice that had developed (Oral Torah), and expanding it in an intriguing way. The practice had been developed that if a boy's 8th day from birth was the Sabbath, the person (a 'mohel') performing the circumcision was allowed to break the Sabbath by carrying the tools required through the village and performing the ritual. It was considered that when this conflict between the requirements of observing the Sabbath and of circumcising a male child on the 8th day were in conflict the circumcision took precedence. If however the child was ill on his 8th day since birth (which say was the Wednesday) and he was not well until the Saturday, the Sabbath, the ruling was that now, the Sabbath took precedence and so the circumcision would not be performed until a later day. Yeshua by his comments appears to condone this approach to the potential conflict between these mitzvot (commandments). However, Yeshua also argues that, given this ruling, why should he be condemned for healing the whole man on the Sabbath. The clear understanding being that circumcision was a form of healing (not only a token, or marker but a positive commandment), perhaps primarily because it was a mark of entry into the family/tribe of Israel.