

THE TEACHING OF YESHUA

As a student in the school of Yeshua's disciples, it's important to know the subject matter you are studying and to understand the lesson the teacher presents. In this lesson, we will touch on the essentials of Yeshua's teachings, and we will look at a path for continuing studies. We will consider how the early communities of Yeshua's disciples prepared new initiates for immersion. We'll also take a look at our main textbook: "The Bible." Think of this chapter as a syllabus for the coursework that you will be pursuing as a student in the school of Yeshua. It's not necessary to have read and mastered all the material recommended in this lesson before being immersed, but this chapter does point you toward the essentials for understanding Yeshua's teaching and continuing in your studies.

The Good News

What was the main message of the Master? The first job of a disciple is to learn his teacher's words, That's why it's critical to know what Yeshua was talking about. The main message of Yeshua is called "the gospel." The word "gospel" means "good news." Everyone thinking about becoming a disciple of Yeshua needs to understand and believe the good news. But this might be confusing because there are two different ways that we use the word *gospel*. We can use the word *gospel* to refer to a book about the life and teaching of Yeshua such as the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, or the Gospel of John. Or we can use the word *gospel* to refer to the good news message that Yeshua proclaimed and taught his disciples to proclaim. It's important for all of us to be familiar with both the written gospels and the gospel message itself.

Gospel

1. *A book of the life and teaching of Yeshua*
2. *The good news message Yeshua taught*

The Four Gospels

We call the first four books of the New Testament "gospels" because they contain the story of Yeshua of Nazareth and his presentation of the good news message. Each of the four gospels tells the story from a slightly different perspective, and each one transmits Yeshua's words in a unique way. To get the whole story, it's important to read all four gospels and even to compare and contrast them.

In the previous chapter, we learned that the disciples of a rabbi had four main jobs:

1. Memorize the teacher's words
2. Learn the teacher's interpretations
3. Imitate the teacher's actions
4. Raise up more disciples

The only way for disciples of Yeshua to accomplish the first three objectives today is through continual interaction with the four gospels. Yeshua is not physically present with us today, but

we encounter him in the gospels. They not only tell the life of Yeshua, they transmit his words, preserve his interpretations of the scriptures, and describe his character and his actions.

It's not enough for a disciple to just read through the gospels one time. Serious disciples keep coming back to them, reading them over and over again. Here's a good plan for staying in the gospels: read one chapter a day, every day. When you finish all four, start over. It only takes a few minutes to read a single chapter, but if you read one chapter of the gospels a day, you will read through all four of them four times a year.

In addition to the gospels, a disciple of Yeshua is eager to absorb the rest of the books of the New Testament. That's because the rest of the books were written by Yeshua's earliest disciples or by people who had direct contact with them. The New Testament writings preserve the authentic flavor and personality of the Master, transmitted to us by his closest followers.

The Good News Message

The gospels tell the story of Yeshua and preserve his teachings, but what was the actual content of the good news that Yeshua taught? What is the gospel message?

The good news message that Yeshua proclaimed is simple. He came declaring to a message to the Jewish people: "*Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" That's the same message that John the Immerser taught. And it's the message that Yeshua told his disciples to go out and proclaim:

John the Immerser came proclaiming in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:1–2)

From that time Yeshua began to proclaim, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

These twelve Yeshua sent out, instructing them ... "Proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 10:5–7)

All of Yeshua's other teachings about love, charity, integrity, mercy, humility, loyalty, and godliness relate directly to that one simple message. Before we go any further, we need to make sure that we understand the message and why it's "good news." What does "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,*" really mean? We can break it down by defining the terms.

Repent

"Repentance" is a translation of the Hebrew word *teshuvah* which means to "turn around." It carries the idea of turning away from sin and turning toward God. To repent means to stop sinning, confess our sins, turn away from sin and selfishness, turn to God, and to start obeying God's commandments. It's not something a person does just once. It's something that we need to do every day. Our minds and hearts continually wander from God. Our natural human impulses pursue selfishness and the temptations and vices of this world. It's natural to sin, but God calls us

to live “supernatural” lives. He asks us to rise above our human natures by repenting, asking him for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Yeshua, and resolving to improve ourselves and our commitment to his instructions for our life.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The term “Kingdom of Heaven” does not refer to “going to heaven when you die.” It’s just another name for the coming Messianic Era. In the Messianic Era, all the Bible’s prophecies about the restoration of Israel and the salvation of the nations will be fulfilled. When the Kingdom of Heaven comes, the world will enter a state of utopia under the reign and rule of King Messiah. The Bible says that the Kingdom will begin with the coming of the Messiah and the defeat of all God’s enemies. Even Satan will be bound in chains. During the kingdom, the exiles of the Jewish people will be returned to the land of Israel; the dead in Messiah will be resurrected to everlasting life; God’s house will be rebuilt in the holy city of Jerusalem; His Dwelling Presence will return to Jerusalem; the Messiah will rule on King David’s throne in Jerusalem; all nations will live in peace under his authority; there will be no more war; there will be no more oppression and tyranny, the poor will receive justice, the earth will experience miraculous fertility and agricultural abundance; there will be no more famine or scarcity; God will pour out his Holy Spirit on all people, and the knowledge of God will be universal. Everyone will know the LORD. The kingdom will last for 1,000 years, and then God will bring a new heaven and a new earth. The kingdom is the culmination of the Bible’s promises.

At Hand

The term “at hand” is a Hebrew idiom that means something is very close—right beside you. Yeshua taught that Kingdom of Heaven is so close to us that we could practically reach out and touch it, if only we would repent and have faith to take hold of God’s promises. During his lifetime among us, he was on a mission to bring the nation of Israel to repentance and usher the Jewish people (and the whole world) into the Messianic Era before God’s judgment fell on the nation. He told everyone to repent before it was too late. If the people repented, they could enter the Messianic Era and escape the doom that hung over them. Unfortunately, Yeshua’s generation did not listen to his warnings. Most of them did not repent. The stroke of judgment fell on the nation of Israel. The Romans came and burned the Temple, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, the message was true. The kingdom was right at hand, and it still is today. The kingdom is still close at hand for everyone who believes in Yeshua and heeds his message. Even though we have not entered the Messianic Era yet, the power and potent promises of the future kingdom are still within our reach—right at hand. A person only needs to repent in Yeshua’s name to begin to tap into the good things of the future kingdom right now. If a person takes hold of the future kingdom in this life by taking hold of King Messiah by faith, Yeshua will bring that disciple along with him into the kingdom when he comes again—even if he has to raise his disciples from the dead to do it.

The Torah

We repent by turning away from sin and turning to God's instructions. But what is sin, and what are God's instructions? The Bible says that sin is transgression of God's law. When we break God's commandments, we have committed a sin. For example, one of the commandments says, "Honor your father and mother." That means we commit a sin against God if we dishonor our parents. It's an offense against God, and spiritual wound to our souls. That's what sin is.

God's commandments are found in the Torah. In the Torah we find his instructions for life. In fact, the Hebrew word *Torah* means "instruction." You could think of the Torah as God's instruction manual for how to live a spiritually successful life. Some of its commandments apply only to certain people, such as Jews, priests, or Levites, but other commandments apply to all the disciples of Yeshua. (We'll look at the distinctions later.) All of the commandments teach us lessons and principles for godly living.

Sometimes we translate "*Torah*" as "Law" because it includes a legal code, but it's more than just laws. The Torah is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It contains the story of creation, the story of the patriarchs, the children of Israel in Egypt, the exodus through Moses, the giving of the Torah, and the journey to the promised land.

- Genesis (Bereishit)
- Exodus (Shemot)
- Leviticus (Vayikra)
- Numbers (Bamidbar)
- Deuteronomy (Devarim)

Every disciple of Yeshua should be familiar with the Torah. It's not just interesting background information, it's the foundation on which the whole Bible stands. All of the teachings of Yeshua are firmly based on the Torah, and all of his efforts at teaching were meant to interpret the Torah and reveal its inner-meaning. He was known as a teacher of Torah (that's what a rabbi is), and he taught his disciples about how to best observe it. Since Yeshua was a teacher of Torah, it doesn't make any sense at all to study his teachings without also studying the Torah. The prophets say that God's Spirit writes the Torah on our hearts. That's how important the Torah is, and that's why Messianic disciples study the Torah diligently. The best method of Torah study is to follow along with the annual reading cycle of Torah portions established by the Jewish community. It's a great way to study through the whole Torah once a year.

The Prophets and the Writings

In addition to studying the Torah, disciples of Yeshua should be familiar with the Prophets and Writings—the rest of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. If a disciple wants to learn, he or she will want to regularly spend time meditating on the words of the Prophets and the Writings. We find inspiration and instruction in the stories of the judges, the kings, and the prophets. We find wisdom and revelation in writings like Proverbs, Psalms, Job, and Song of Songs. If we look diligently, we find Messiah in those books of the Bible too. Yeshua said that the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings all testify about him. The Apostle Paul tells us that "all scripture is

inspired by God and useful for teaching, for discipline, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that the man [or woman] of God will be fit and fully-equipped for every good deed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Greatest Commandments

Yeshua taught his disciples to let their good deeds shine before men like a light illuminating a room. He said that “whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them [the least of the commandments] and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). If that’s the case with the “least of these commandments,” how much more so with the greatest of the commandments!

What are the greatest commandments? Yeshua says that the two greatest and most-important commandments in the Torah are to love God and to love your fellow human being as yourself. All the rest of the commandments in the Torah hang on these two, and these two commandments summarize the whole Torah and all the Prophets too.

The Master saw that love for God and love for one’s fellow human being is the antidote for the worst sin of all: baseless hatred. In those days, the Jewish people in the land of Israel had brought the judgment of God against them by committing the sin of baseless hatred. Yeshua brought correction in the form of his teachings about love for God and love for one’s fellow human being. If the people of his generation would have heeded him and repented, they could have been spared the destruction of Jerusalem, and they could have entered the Messianic Era. We would be living in a very different world today—quite literally.

He taught that the greatest commandment is the commandment of “the *Shma*.” The Hebrew word *shma* means, “Listen! Pay attention!” It’s the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4—the commandment to know that God is the only God and to love him with all your heart, soul, and strength (Mark 12:29-30):

The most important commandment is, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:29-30)

Hear (*Shma*), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

To make sure that we remember the greatest commandment, we recite it twice a day, morning and evening, just as the Bible says, “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart ... you shall talk of them ... when you lie down [to sleep] and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). It’s important to recite the *shma* because it’s a daily reminder of our love for God and our relationship with him.

The second greatest commandment is the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

The second [most important commandment] is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these two. (Mark 12:31)

You shall not take revenge or carry a grudge against your kinsmen, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18)

Who is your neighbor? Yeshua told the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to answer that question. Your “neighbor” is your fellow human being.

What does it mean to love your fellow human being as yourself? Yeshua summarized the concept with the principle of treating others “the way you would want them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12).

Yeshua taught that love for God and love for your fellow human being is the antidote to the sin of baseless hatred, and it’s the intention behind the whole Torah and all the Prophets. That’s why these two commandments are the greatest of all the commandments, and everything else hangs on them.

The Sermon on the Mount

How do you love God? And how do you love your neighbor as yourself? Yeshua’s teachings answer those questions. He taught us the principles behind sincere love of God and love of neighbor in his great Sermon on the Mount. Take the time to read through Matthew 5-7, and pay attention to how a disciple of Yeshua treats others and how the disciple behaves toward God. Some of the teachings deal with how we treat others: do not hate or harbor anger, be quick to forgive and quick to reconcile, don’t let lust take root in your heart, stay married, give to those who ask, don’t retaliate, keep your promises, and treat people impartially. Some of the teachings deal with how we treat God: don’t show off your righteous deeds, spend private time in prayer to God, address all your prayers only to him and address him directly as “Father,” petition him to bring his kingdom, spend time fasting privately to seek him, give generously, don’t try to serve both God and materialism, trust God to provide for you, seek his first his kingdom and his righteousness.

This collection of Yeshua’s teachings pertains directly to the gospel message about the Kingdom of Heaven. It answers the question of how a person can enter the Kingdom of Heaven and what kinds of things we can do to bring the kingdom closer. Yeshua says that it’s not enough to be religious or to look holy: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scholars and religious people, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Someone who wants to enter the kingdom needs to make that goal into priority number one. Yeshua tells his disciples, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things in life will be taken care of for you” (Matthew 6:33).

Before being immersed, take time to read the Sermon on the Mount. Meditate on the words. Every disciple of Yeshua should make it a goal to memorize the whole Sermon on the Mount. The instructions in Matthew 5-7 will teach you how to love God and how to love your fellow human being as yourself.

Yeshua promises that any disciple who hears the words of his teaching and implements them will be like a man who built a solid house on a firm foundation, but anyone who hears those instructions but does not do them is like a man who built a flimsy house on sand. The house on a firm foundation withstands storms and floods, but the house built on sand collapses. The disciple who heeds Yeshua's teaching withstands life's trials and temptations, but the disciple who does not do what Yeshua says suffers spiritual collapse.

The Didache and The Two Ways

In the days of the apostles, the early believers created a collection of Yeshua's teachings for new disciples. They boiled down the teachings they had received from the apostles into a book called the *Didache* (i.e. "The Teaching"). It's like a crash course in Yeshua's lessons for how to live a godly life as a disciple written especially for non-Jewish disciples who are unfamiliar with the Torah. Before being immersed to become a disciple of Yeshua, the candidates studied the *Didache* to learn how to apply the commandments of the Torah and the teachings of Yeshua to their lives. The *Didache* spells out the rules for how one is to conduct himself or herself as a disciple. Think of it as the most basic instructions for new disciples. Before being immersed, it's a good idea for a disciple to read and agree to the instructions in the *Didache*, especially the first six chapters, a section called "The Two Ways."

There are two ways: one of life and one of death; however, there is a great difference between the two ways. (*Didache* 1:1)

The first six chapters are called "The Two Ways" because the Bible puts a choice in front of us. We can choose one of two possible roads to go down: Life or Death.

Behold, Today I have placed in front of you a choice of life and good or death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days (Deuteronomy 30:20)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua describes two possible roads we might walk through life. There is a broad road on which most people travel through life, but they don't realize that they are headed toward the wide gates that lead to destruction. Then there is the narrow path that only a few people find. The narrow path leads to eternal life.

The narrow path is the path of the gospel message: Repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your fellow human being as yourself. The Sermon on the Mount describes what it is like to walk on the narrow path. There will be many religious people who thought that they were Yeshua's disciples and that they were in good standing with him. When they come to the kingdom, saying, "Master, Master, did we not

preach in your name and do miracles in your name,” he will say to them, “Away from me you lawless ones. I never knew you.” He says that only those who do the will of His Father in heaven will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Way of Life

The *Didache* presents the path of discipleship as “the way of life.” It defines the way of life with the two greatest commandments:

Now the Way of Life is this: first, you shall love God who made you; second, you shall love your fellow as yourself. Whatever you do not want to happen to you, do not do to one another. (*Didache* 1:1-2)

Then the *Didache* goes on to summarize the commandments that pertain to loving your neighbor as yourself. It paints a picture of what it’s like to be a disciple of Yeshua. As disciples, we speak well of those who speak ill of us. We fast and pray for our enemies, and we return hatred with love. We don’t lose our tempers, and we don’t retaliate. We go beyond the minimum that is asked of us, and we surpass expectations. We give generously to everyone who asks of us, but we avoid accepting charity unless we truly need it.

We treat others the way we would want them to treat us, and we don’t do to them anything we would not want done to us. The *Didache* spells it out in the form of the Torah’s prohibitions and our Master’s instructions:

Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not practice pederasty. Do not commit sexual immorality. Do not steal. Do not practice magic. Do not use potions. Do not murder children through abortion nor kill them after they have been born. Do not covet the things that belong to your fellow. Do not swear falsely. Do not bear false witness. Do not slander anyone. Do not hold grudges. Do not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double tongue is a deadly trap. Do not let your word be false or empty, but let it be fulfilled in action. Do not be greedy, or predatory, or hypocritical, or malicious, or arrogant. Do not plot evil against your fellow. Do not hate any human being; but some you are to rebuke, and some you are to pray for, yet some you are to love even more than your own life. (*Didache* 2:2-7)

The *Didache* instructs us to avoid even the appearance of evil. Disciples of Yeshua go beyond the minimum. We are commanded not to murder, but neither should we be angry, envious, quarrelsome, or hot-tempered because these things lead to murder in the heart. We are commanded not to commit sexual immorality (i.e. any and all sexual activity outside of a monogamous heterosexual marriage), but neither should we harbor lust in our hearts, speak immodestly about sexuality, desire after other people’s bodies, or feast our eyes on sexually provocative images because these things lead to sexual immorality. We are commanded not to commit idolatry, but neither should we dabble with the occult, consult horoscopes, use astrology, visit fortunetellers, conduct seances, participate in magic, or any occult rituals because all these things are related to idolatry.

The new disciple needs to be familiar with the teachings presented in the *Didache* because those are the terms and conditions to which he or she is agreeing by becoming a disciple. When you enter the water, you agree to conduct your life according to those standards to the best of your ability. No one is perfect, and that's why there is forgiveness, grace, and mercy in the name of Yeshua. But we are expected to make the sincere effort to walk according to his teachings. Therefore, before being immersed, a new disciple will do well to study through and mediate upon the first six chapters of the *Didache*. Those chapters are intended to prepare us for the life of discipleship.

The Teaching before Immersion

In addition to the study of *The Didache*, the early communities of Yeshua proposed a series of topics on which the new disciple should be instructed before immersion. Being a disciple of Yeshua is not just about the way we behave and conduct ourselves. Disciples of Yeshua also have specific beliefs and convictions about the nature of God, the Messiah, the Spirit, salvation, the nature of humanity, the universe, eternal destinies, and the future destiny of the world. An important early Christian document called the *Apostolic Constitutions* proposes a list of basic essentials that every disciple of Yeshua should be familiar with. Unlike the *Didache*, in which the instruction before immersion consist primarily of the Master's practical teaching for how to conduct ourselves, *Apostolic Constitutions* has the new disciple taking a crash course in biblical literacy and apostolic theology. For the remainder of these chapters, we will be working through the list of study topics proposed by *Apostolic Constitutions*:

Let the man be instructed regarding the teaching of piety before his baptism: knowledge about the unbegotten God, understanding about the only begotten Son, and full assurance about the Holy Spirit. Let him learn the order of distinctions of creation, the sequence of God's providence, the jurisdiction of different laws, why the world came to be and why God made man to be a citizen of the world. Let him understand his own nature, of what sort it is. Let him learn how God punished the wicked by water and fire and glorified the righteous in each generation: I mean Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and his descendants, Melchizedek, Job, Moses, both Joshua and Caleb, Phinehas the priest, and the holy ones in each generation. [Let him learn] how God, though he foresaw [Adam's sin and the fall of humanity], did not abandon the human race but summoned them at various times from error and folly into an understanding of truth, leading them from slavery and wickedness into freedom and piety, from iniquity into righteousness, from eternal death into everlasting life. Let the one who offers himself [for baptism] learn during his instruction all these things and those that are related to them. (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7.39.2–4)

Don't let the amount of material introduced in this chapter overwhelm you. You aren't expected to master it all, you are only expected to keep working at it. After all, you are becoming a disciple. That means you are becoming a student. This chapter has given you a brief overview of some basic courses of study to pursue in your new vocation as a student of Yeshua. You can look forward with joy to learning the teachings of our Master for the rest of your life.

Beth Immanuel Messianic Synagogue

May 1, 2019 / Nisan 26, 5779

A Messianic Jewish Introduction to Discipleship, Part Two: The Teaching of Yeshua

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