

Why we do the *Torah* portions (*parashot*)

When *Elohim* calls you out of *Babel* and you start on the road of obedience, The Way, as according to the followers of *Yeshua* we read of in *Ma`asei* 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22, many things start changing in your life and also your lifestyle. Some people fall from the frying pan into the fire and blindly follow all the non-Scriptural rules of Rabbinic Judaism, exactly what *Yeshua* was warning and teaching against – the teachings of men. Others, because of a lack of knowledge, keep to their familiar Christian ways and get totally confused by ‘new’ rules, to such an extent that they drop the entire ‘conversion’ and revert completely to their old ways.

Fortunately, for those who really *sh’ma יהוה קול*, the Voice of *Elohim*, we see and experience the result *Yeshua* came to teach us in the parable of the sower:

Mattityahu 13 ⁸“And others fell on good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”¹

These followers of *Yeshua* want to please our Creator-*Elohim* in every way. They learn certain basic traditions from our brother, *Yehuḏah*, but ensure that Scripture is the guideline. Therefore, whatever is not in Scripture, is not and should not be part of their lifestyle.

One of the positive customs that *Yehuḏah* can teach the *Netzar*, the true follower of *Yeshua*, is about the weekly *Torah* portions read and studied in synagogues and temples across the world, mainly on *Shabbat*. These portions were initiated as early as the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls and many sages and groups have had their share in putting together what we use today². We all know that learning comes by repetition. The *parashot*, plural of *parashah*, follow either a one-year or a three-year cycle, which ends after the last Scriptural festival and then starts anew from the beginning. Very few people actually follow the three-year cycle, causing the one-year cycle to be the more popular and dominant reading model.

The term *פְּרָשָׁה* (*pâ-râ-Shâh*), is literally a section from any book in Scripture, but has now become known as the weekly *Torah* portion. In some circles the *parashah* is also known as *סְדֵרָה* (*See-drâ*), derived from the word *סֵדֵר* (*Sê-dêr*), which simply translates as ‘order’. Some of you may already be familiar with the *Pěsah seder*, the order of the *Pěsah* celebration. These *parashah* sections are broken into topics, rather than chapters and verses, as the latter were only added much later. There are instances, though, where no specific discernment can be made by topic. In such a case subjective elements are used. This helps to explain why certain verses, which seem like introductions to a new topic, lack a section division or why some divisions sometimes appear where no topic seems to be indicated.

Parashot, is the plural of *parashah*, and the last syllable is pronounced similar to ‘hot’, not as ‘boat’. They are considered to have been started possibly as long ago as more than 400 years before the birth of *Yeshua*. Manuscripts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, confirm this, as mentioned earlier. The Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered in the *Qumran* caves between 1946 and 1947, then again some more during 1956. However, archaeologists are still excavating to this day, with regular new parchments and manuscripts found as recently as March 2021. These manuscripts were checked by palaeography, an analysis of letter forms, which dates them back as far as 225 before *Yeshua*, whereas radiocarbon dating estimates them as far back as 385 before *Yeshua*. These manuscripts clearly indicate *parashot* with divisions similar to that found in the Masoretic Text. This, once again, is a confirmation that our predecessors, long before *Yeshua*, were studying

1 All citations are from The Scriptures (2009): <https://isr-messianic.org/>

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parashah>

the Word in an orderly and regular manner, the same way we should be studying it diligently, as taught by *Sha'ul*:

Timotiyos Bēt 3 ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by *Elohim* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for setting straight, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of *Elohim* might be fitted, equipped for every good work.

Apart from the *Torah*, we see the following in the book of the prophets:

Yehoshua 1 ⁸“Do not let this Book of the *Torah* depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you guard to do according to all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and act wisely.

Notice the double promise in the last sentence. People tend to hold fast to the futile words of prosperity preachers for their blessing and salvation, but easily forget the blessings of *Elohim*, simply because they do not study *Elohim's* Character and Authority: His Word!

The greatest king, poet and composer ever to have walked this earth, king *Dawid*, put many instances out there to indicate our dependence on studying and living out the Word of *Elohim*:

🥂 *Mizmor 119* ⁹**Bēt** How would a young man cleanse his path? To guard it according to Your word.

🥂 *Mizmor 1* ²But his delight is in the *Torah* of יהוה, And he meditates in His *Torah* day and night.

🥂 *Mizmor 19* ⁷The *Torah* of יהוה is perfect, bringing back the being; The witness of יהוה is trustworthy, making wise the simple; ⁸The orders of יהוה are straight, rejoicing the heart; The command of יהוה is clear, enlightening the eyes; ⁹The fear of יהוה is clean, standing forever; The right-rulings of יהוה are true, They are righteous altogether ¹⁰More desirable than gold, Than much fine gold; And sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

🥂 *Mizmor 119* ¹⁰³How sweet to my taste has Your word been, More than honey to my mouth!

🥂 *Mizmor 119* ¹¹I have treasured up Your word in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

These are but a few examples from only one man on how important *Elohim's* Word was for him – a man after *YAH's* own heart. If you really love someone, you want to know all about that person in order to completely satisfy him or her in every way possible. The same, even more, should be true to serve the only Creator-*Elohim*. We need to really know Him, understand His Character and Authority, and the only way to achieve that is to read and study His *curriculum vitae* – Scripture.

Most of the work has already been done for us, as we pointed out earlier. The entire *Torah* was divided into 54 *parashot* or weekly portions, to allow for regular and Hebrew leap years. One *parashah* is fixed: the final *parashah*, *V'zot HaBrachah*, which is read on *Simchat Torah*, “rejoicing in *Torah*”, the final day of the week-long festival of *Sucot*³. Some people pronounce this as ‘sue-cote’, which is incorrect. The last syllable is pronounced to rhyme with ‘hot’, as in *parashot*. The name of this last *parashah* translates to “and this is the blessing”, the words that *Mosheh* spoke over the people of *Yisra'el* just before his death. The first day after *Simchat Torah* marks the start of the new reading cycle, obviously starting again at *Berëshith 1* and the reading of that particular portion is then completed on the following weekly *Shabbat*. During Hebrew leap years there are normally enough weeks to read every *parashah* separately, but during regular years some portions are combined by two to ensure that all *parashot* are read and studied. Please note that there are big differences between secular and Scriptural leap years. Should you not know the difference and want more information on this, please contact us at the e-mail address at the end of this article.

3 Many people would spell this “*Sukkot*”. We prefer to use phonetic spelling, where the original character and its shape is taken into consideration, as opposed to aural spelling, where only the sound of a letter is important. This also corresponds with the guidelines set out by the [Zionism and Israel information Center](#).

Ordinarily a *parashah* is not numbered, but simply takes its name from the first significant Hebrew word of the particular portion in question. This can take the form of “and he appeared”, “at the end”, “when you count”, ‘generations’ and fifty more. A complete list of all *parashot* and their sections of text is available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weekly_Torah_portion and many other websites as well. Please note that the text numbers given in this list are taken from the original Hebrew bible and do not always correspond with some translations. For various reasons the verse numbers change and even some chapters are broken differently. A short article⁴ explains some of these anomalies, but there are many other sources to be researched.

Although the actual word *parashah* or any of its derivatives are not found in Scripture, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't or can't use it. We see it being referenced in the book of *Neḥemyah*. A man called *Ezra* was born in captivity in *Babel* to a priestly family. Having studied under *Baruch ben Neriah*⁵, he dedicated himself to studying *Torah* and was a scribe by trade. In the book of *Ezra*, we read in chapter 2 of 42 360 people returning to *Yerushalayim*. They would rebuild the temple and restore it to its former esteem. Already in chapter 3 we read of the altar being set up and offerings being reinstated. They celebrated the festival of *Sucot* “as written, with all the daily offerings prescribed for each day”. However, their joy was short-lived. We read in *Ezra* 4 that building is halted indefinitely by king *Artahshashta*.

Shortly afterwards *Dareyawesh* became king of Persia. Being incited by the prophets *Haggai* and *Zekaryah*, *Zerubbabel ben She'alti'el* and *Yeshua ben Yotsadaq* began rebuilding the temple once again and they were supported by *Dareyawesh*. All of this can be confirmed in chapters 5 and 6 of *Ezra*. Only four years later the rebuilding of the temple was completed. In the meanwhile *Ezra* had begun the process of identifying lineages, searching genealogies and forming detailed family lists. He was now ready to leave *Babel*, having processed the ancestry of every family living there, identifying tribal lineages and illegitimate children, as seen in chapter 8.

In the seventh year of the reign of king *Artahshashta* a small group of about 1 500 people, which now includes *Ezra*, journey to *Yerushalayim*. Items also include gold and silver to complete the construction of the temple, as well as ample amounts of wheat, wine, oil and salt. This journey takes them four months and they reach their destination on the start of the fifth Hebrew month. We read:

Ezra 8 ³⁵The sons of the exile, who had come from the captivity, brought ascending offerings to the Elohim of Yisra'el: twelve bulls for all Yisra'el, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering – all as an ascending offering to יהוה.

Ezra was devastated after learning of the spiritual state of his people. He tore his clothes and sat in mourning for an entire day until evening. We read in chapter 9 that he got up after the evening sacrifice and began praying loudly to *Elohim*, weeping for forgiveness for the sins of his people. Slowly a crowd started gathering, moved to tears by *Ezra's* pleas, and cried along with him, lamenting their sins. The entire final chapter of the book of *Ezra* is a narration and description of groups being set up to reform strange marriages, which most people heeded. Within three months all strange marriages had been annulled, except for *Yonathan* the son of *Asah'el* and *Yahzeyah* the son of *Tiqwah*, who opposed this. They were supported by *Meshullam* and *Shabbethai* the *Lewite*.

Although *Ezra* was a strong spiritual leader, he lacked helping reform the economic and military state. Over the next 12 years the situation worsened, to such an extent that the walls of *Yerushalayim* crumbled, while enemies were constantly looting the area. Most inhabitants seemed to accept this way of life and did nothing to change it, until a Jewish government official entered stage right.

4 <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/12/where-do-verse-and-chapter-numbers-come-from/>

5 *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:5

Neḥemyah was the cupbearer for the Persian king, *Artahshashta*. Through his friend, *Ḥanani*, he heard about the situation in *Yerushalayim* and was extremely saddened by this news. He fasted and prayed for many days and eventually obtained permission from the king to return to *Yerushalayim*. He was now on a mission to repair all the damage. He inspired the people to rebuild the walls and defend themselves. It didn't take long for *Neḥemyah* to be appointed as governor over the area of *Yehuḏah* (cf. *Neḥemyah* 5:14), tending to their physical needs, while *Ezra* cared for their spiritual needs.

According to some sources *Ezra* instituted 10 major enactments. Since these are not all provable from Scripture, we will discuss the one that is relevant to the subject at hand: the *Torah* is to be read aloud publicly during the afternoon service on *Shabbat*. *Neḥemyah* 8 teaches us that the *Torah* was brought before the assembly and read aloud on the first day of the seventh month – one of the appointed times instituted by יהוה and the day we know as *Yom T'ruah*. Let us take up the reading at the end of the previous chapter:

Neḥemyah:

7⁷³ So the priests, and the *Lěwites*, and the gatekeepers, and the singers, and some of the people, and the *Nethinim*, and all *Yisra'el* dwelt in their cities. 8¹ And when the seventh new moon came, the children of *Yisra'el* were in their cities. And all the people gathered together as one man in the open space that was in front of the Water Gate. And they spoke to *Ezra* the scribe to bring the Book of the *Torah* of *Mosheh*, which יהוה had commanded *Yisra'el*.² And *Ezra* the priest brought the *Torah* before the assembly of both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh new moon.³ And he read from it in the open space in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people listened to the Book of the *Torah*. [coloured italics from original text]

As we continue reading to the end of chapter 8, we also see them honouring and celebrating the festival of *Sucot*. This is also the time when *Torah* was being divided into sections to be read every *Shabbat*, by various people, as we see:

Divrei HaYamim Bet 17⁷ And in the third year of his reign he sent his leaders, *Ben-Ḥayil*, and *Obadyah*, and *Zekaryah*, and *Nethan'el*, and *Mikayahu*, to teach in the cities of *Yehuḏah*.⁸ And with them he sent *Lěwites*: *Shemayahu*, and *Nethanyahu*, and *Zebadyahu*, and *Asah'el*, and *Shemiramoth*, and *Yehonathan*, and *Aḏoniyahu*, and *Tobiyahu*, and *Tobaḏoniyah*, the *Lěwites*, and with them *Elishama* and *Yehoram*, the priests.⁹ And they taught in *Yehuḏah*, and with them was the Book of the *Torah* of יהוה. And they went around into all the cities of *Yehuḏah* and taught the people.

Obviously there were various segments, probably overlapping each other, but sections and division nonetheless. The modern-day *Torah* division is accredited to *Rambam*, with the original name *Moses ben Maimon*, but commonly known by the Greek name, *Maimonides*, which also translates to “son of *Maimon*”, as does the Hebrew. He was a Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential *Torah* scholars of the Middle Ages. He was born on the eve of *Pěsaḥ*, either 6 April 1135, but most likely 28 March 1138 and died on 12 December 1204. His *magnum opus* was the *Mishneh Torah*, “Repetition of the *Torah*”, in which he provides a systematic list of all *parashot* based on the Aleppo Codex. However, long before these were documented, every person familiar with *Torah* was accustomed to read portions from the *Torah* and the Prophets every *Shabbat*.

Although it was never completed in printed Hebrew bibles and handwritten scrolls, every *Torah* portion also has a corresponding section from the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) in *TaNakh*. It is called הפטרה (*Hâf-tâ-râh* or *Hâf-tô-râh* depending on the dialect) and translates to ‘parting’ or “taking leave”. This reading follows the reading of the *Torah* on *Shabbat* as well as festivals and fast days. It is thematically linked to each *parashah*

and is sung in a chant (cantillation). Although the origin is lost, many scholars have suggested that it arose in response to the persecution of the Jews under *Antiochus IV Epiphanus*, the ruler under which the Jews were prohibited to read *Torah*. This was prior to the Maccabean Revolt which lasted from 170-167 before *Yeshua*. Other theories also do the rounds, but since they are only that, it is not worth pursuing them at this time. It is unfortunate that, as with so many other matters among Jews, no consensus could ever be reached between the two mainline Jewish groups, the *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. In most cases the *haftarah* differs for every *parashah* and is indicated by either 'A' or 'S'. However, we know that both *Torah* and the *Prophets* were read on *Shabbat*, as we see:

Ma'asei 13 ¹³ And having put out from *Paphos, Sha'ul* and those with him came to *Perge* in *Pamphulia*. And *Yohanan*, having left them, returned to *Yerushalayim*. ¹⁴ But passing through from *Perge*, they came to *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, and went into the congregation on the Sabbath day and sat down. ¹⁵ And after the reading of the *Torah* and the *Prophets*, the rulers of the congregation sent to them, saying, "Men, brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak."

We also read in *Mattithyahu* 22:33-40 that *Yeshua* explained the *Torah* and *Prophets* to be dependent on the two greater *mitzvot*, commandments: love for *Elohim* and love for your neighbour. So then, what is good for *Yeshua*, is certainly good for us. The doctor captured it as follows:

Luqas 4 ¹⁴ And יהושע returned in the power of the Spirit to *Galil*, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And He was teaching in their congregations, being praised by all. ¹⁶ And He came to *Natsareth*, where He had been brought up. And according to His practice, He went into the congregation on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet *Yeshayahu* was handed to Him. And having unrolled the scroll, He found the place where it was written:

Then, from the oldest of texts, we see:

- ☞ *Debarim 4* ⁹ "Only, guard yourself, and guard your life diligently, lest you forget the Words your eyes have seen, and lest they turn aside from your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children and your grandchildren. ¹⁰ "The day when you stood before יהוה your *Elohim* in *Hor'eb*, יהוה said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me and I make them hear My Words, so that they learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth and teach *them to their children*.' [coloured italics from original text]
- ☞ *Debarim 17* ¹⁹ "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he learns to fear יהוה his *Elohim* and guard all the Words of this *Torah* and these laws, to do them,
- ☞ *Debarim 31* ¹¹ when all *Yisra'el* comes to appear before יהוה your *Elohim* in the place which He chooses, read this *Torah* before all *Yisra'el* in their hearing.

While certain rules were made for public reading of the *Torah*, they are not confirmed by Scripture, as are the *Torah* portions, seen in the above texts. One specific rule, though, although not Scriptural itself, is to break the entire *Torah* section into seven portions, of which a portion is read daily. These allude to the ascent or "going up" to the *bimah* for a reading and are therefore called עֲלִיָּה (aliyah), which literally means to go up. Being a word of the feminine gender, as most of the words discussed here, the plural is עֲלִיּוֹת (aliyot). Every *parashah* is therefore divided into seven sections, *aliyot*, with one *aliyah* being read every day. This alludes to "going up to YAH once a day". Once again, because of different factions, there are two trains of thought: the *Ashkenazim* have their way of breaking up the *parashah*, which sometimes differ from the *Sephardic* tradition. In most modern printed books, such as the *Torah* or the *Chumash*, each *aliyah* is indicated in the extreme right margin by the standard (feminine) counting form as one would count days.

Very few translations actually have these defined as such, but the CJB⁶ indicates the start and end of every *parashah*, with the *aliyot* indicated by lowercase characters in brackets, prefixed by either A: or S:.

Surely this is enough to convince every *Torah*-obedient, *Yeshua*-following believer that the *Torah* portions, as we currently have them, have been in existence for a long time and are not only for one specific group of people, but for all nations. If Scripture was given to all mankind, then *parashot*, devised by the original acceptors of *Torah*, should be for all mankind as well. Not only do we get a much better understanding of the origins of our spiritual heritage, but we really get to know the Author of Scripture and consequently the best way to follow His rules in absolute obedience. After all, that is all He requires of us – nothing more, nothing less.

Most people, especially believers, will be familiar with the phrase: “If *Elohim* brings you to it, He will bring you through it”. Even though the origin is unknown and not necessarily directly from Scripture, we can stand on the promises we read on almost every page. *Elohim* brought *Noah* to a world flood, and brought him through it; He brought *Yisra’el* to the Sea of Reeds, and brought them through it; He sent *Yeshua* to earth to teach us The Way; *Yeshua* offered himself on an execution stake, and *YAH* brought him through the ordeal. You and I can and should make *Torah* our own, simply by studying the Word of *Elohim* daily, undiluted, sometimes with the help of human resources, but preferably by spending time with *Elohim* and His Word. The *parashah* is a great help, especially when the daily *aliyot* are used correctly.

Next time you get confronted by a Christian pastor or even a “Messianic” person who doesn’t follow the *parashah* cycle, simply show them the texts mentioned above. It may persuade them to follow in The Way *Yeshua* came to teach us.

We trust that this short article was informative and refreshing. It also provides for solid proof why *Elohim*’s Word is not only to be read in short, non-committal and impersonal sections once a week, followed by similar and meaningless, extended philosophical nonsense from a pulpit, which nobody remembers in any case and with no firm foundation to follow.

For those who are interested, we have a complete reading plan, starting at the first *parashah* and ending a year later with the last. Each day starts with the relevant *aliyah*, followed by a section from the *Nevi’im* and also the *K’tuvim* (Writings). A fourth section provides reading from the Apostolic Writings (incorrectly called “new testament”) to conclude the readings for the day. This allows for the entire Scripture to be read, compared and studied within one year. It is then up to every *talmid*, student, to connect the dots between all the sections read. Sometimes the similarities are conspicuous, whereas other times you really need to employ all the brainpower you have to find any parallels. However, Scripture always interprets Scripture and even only one conformity or parallel will still be mind-blowing!

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6 Complete Jewish Bible, translated by David Stern: <https://www.messianicjewish.net/products/complete-jewish-study-bible>