

mishpacha beit midrash

Part One of Five Introductory Articles

From

Mishpachah Beit Midrash

(The Family House of Study)

These five articles were written to prepare you to study the Torah—the first five books of the Scriptures. The Torah study of Mishpachah Beit Midrash is based on the following premise. The Torah, given by Adonai to Moses, is the foundation for all subsequent revelation from the prophets. Therefore, it is our goal to understand the Torah’s prophetic message. Through understanding the Torah, we build the proper foundation for understanding the rest of the Tanakh, and the New Covenant Scriptures. Furthermore, our Torah foundation will lead us to...

The Goal of the Torah...

The Revelation of Yeshua HaMashiach

I invite you to study the Parashat HaShavuah (Weekly Torah Portion) with Mishpachah Beit Midrash as we use Thematic Analysis to understand the Torah, its prophetic message for all ages and the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah.

The complete set of introductory articles *and* the Parashat HaShavuah Studies can be found at...

www.restorationoftorah.org

For information on fellowship times or if you have questions or comments concerning the content of these teachings send an email to...

torahteacher@restorationoftorah.org

Part One of Five Introductory Articles

Understanding the Parashat HaShavuah

Introduction

What is the Parashat HaShavuah? Since the time of the second temple period, the Jewish people have studied the Torah in such a manner that they read it in its entirety every year.¹ The Torah cycle includes selected portions of Scripture which are read each week beginning on the Shabbat. The Torah portions are usually a few chapters every week. The words *Parashat HaShavuah* have come to mean the weekly Torah portion. A section of Scriptures from the prophets or writings is also included along with the Torah portion. These are called the Haftarah readings. These Haftarah readings are thematically connected to the Torah portions such that the main message of the Haftarah portion reinforces the main message of the Torah portion.

How are the Torah portions divided? During the Babylonian exile, the sages of Israel divided the Torah into 54 Torah portions. Technically speaking, the Hebrew word for portion is Sidra, not Parashat. I will discuss the definition of a Parashat later. The sages of Israel gave names to the 54 divisions of the Torah. For example, here are the first three Torah portions:

1. B'reishit—Genesis 1:1 - 6:8
2. Noach—Genesis 6:9 - 11:32
3. Lekh L'kha—Genesis 12:1 - 17:27

The names of the Torah portions are always a significant word or phrase from the first sentence of that portion. Obviously, these divisions are man-made. They weren't inspired, but they are useful. Similarly, the chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles are man-made—helpful, but not inspired.

What is a Parsha (Parashat)

Before answering that question, let's do some thinking about the Torah, those first five books in every Bible. Do you believe that those words were actually breathed by Adonai? Some of you will give a qualified, yes. You will say yes; however, that *yes* only applies to the original words given to Moses, the author of the Torah. Okay, that's a good starting point. I also believe that the Torah, originally given to Moses on Mount Sinai, is actually the inspired Word of Adonai. That leads us to another question. How was it written? Well, we know it was originally written in Hebrew. This leads me to my final set of questions. What did the words actually look like? Where were there punctuation marks? Where were there actually five different books? Did all of the words run together, or were there some type of natural divisions? These are important questions because they will affect how we approach interpretation of the Scripture.

We know how the original Torah scroll given to Moses looked because the Jewish people have faithfully preserved its form by copying them exactly as they were originally given. Highly trained scribes called Soferim, who follow extremely meticulous guidelines, have preserved the

original form of the Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The RAMBAM, or Maimonides, who wrote the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith, devoted two principles that perfectly convey the assertions I've made.

Principle #8—I believe with complete faith that the entire Torah now in our hands is the same one that was given to Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him.

Principle #9—I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be exchanged, nor will there be another Torah from the Creator, Blessed is His Name.

I'd like to share with you three extremely important characteristics of the Torah.

1. The Torah was written in Hebrew, which is written from right to left.
2. The Torah was written as five separate books.
3. Each book of the Torah has two types of paragraph-like divisions that separate the stories within it.

I also believe in perfect faith that genuine, kosher Torah scrolls are recorded exactly as Adonai had given the Torah to Moses. Therefore, I believe that Moses wrote the Torah as five *separate* books as the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) inspired him. Since Adonai had him separate those words into five separate books, we surmise that each book has a unique message or theme. In other words, Adonai separated his words into five books for a reason. The most obvious reason should be that the different books contain a unique message that is separate from, yet part of the overall message of the five books together. I think most people would agree that each of the five books carries its own unique theme or purpose, so I won't try to prove that fact.

Taking my reasoning one step further, *within each book* the words are written with two paragraph-like divisions interrupting the flow of the words. This paragraph-like division is called a Parsha.² Now if Adonai has separated His eternal word into five books, each of which carries a unique theme, wouldn't it be logical to assume that the divisions within each book have a similar purpose? Wouldn't it be logical to assume that the Parshiot (plural of Parsha) are important? Wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that Adonai divided each book into Parshiot for a reason? Otherwise, why would they be necessary?

We all know the function of chapters and paragraphs. They are added to aid the reader in understanding the flow from topic to topic. Since Adonai commanded Moshe to separate the individual books into smaller paragraph-like sections or Parshiot, I surmise that each Parsha was written as a separate unit because each of those Parshiot is trying to convey a unique thought, theme, concept or understanding.

Therefore, since Adonai inspired these divisions I think they are VERY important.

It is fine to use the chapter and verse designations of man. They are extremely helpful. However, shouldn't we be more concerned with divisions that Adonai has INSPIRED? Shouldn't we be more concerned with understanding how He wanted us to understand the flow of topics in His Torah?

Well, this is how the Jewish people have always thought about the Parshiot. Let me quote to you from RASHI, the most revered Torah scholar in all of Judaism:

These short breaks were given [together with the Torah by God] to allow Moshe Rabeinu the opportunity to contemplate from one "parshiya" to the next, [in order] to understand the flow from one topic to the next, **[and if this was necessary for Moshe Rabeinu] then even more so - we who study Chumash must pay attention to these breaks!**³ (emphasis mine)

The word Parashat⁴ is used synonymously with the word portion, hence, the Parashat HaShavuah means the weekly [Torah] portion. However, this usage of the word Parashat differs in meaning from the word Parsha, which is a paragraph-like division within the Torah Scroll.

There are two types of Parshiot. A Parsha Stumah and a Parsha P'tuchah. Here is an example of what the Parsha divisions look like ...

◦—Parsha Stumah (plural, stumot)—A paragraph-like break inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh, still preserved on kosher Torah Scrolls, where there are at least nine blank spaces between a word and the next word, all on the same line of text.

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◻—Parsha P'tuchah (plural, p'tuchot)—A paragraph-like break inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh, still preserved on kosher Torah Scrolls, where there are blank spaces extending to the end of a line of text and the subsequent text does not begin until the next line. (Hebrew is read from right to left)

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I have defined a Parsha as a *paragraph-like* division because they aren't paragraphs in the strictest sense of the word. Some Parshiot can last for two or three chapters without a break, while others may last only one sentence! We should not try to force them to function exactly as paragraph markers. We need to use them as Adonai intended them to be used. They are thematic dividers inspired by Adonai. The sentences within each Parsha contain a unique theme or topic. In lesson three you will learn how the sages of Israel use these inspired divisions to help properly interpret the Torah.

As a believer in the Messiah of Israel, I have discovered the richness of the wisdom of the Sages of Israel. These men, who devoted themselves to the study of the Torah, have left us a rich heritage. I hope that you will benefit from their wisdom as I have.

¹ You can obtain a Torah schedule at either of the following two sites: <http://www.lionlamb.net/> [click on Torah Cycle] or <http://www.ffoz.org/> [click on Torah Readings for 5963 (PDF)].

² You can order a copy of the Torah which contains the Hebrew and English translation, the parsha markings, and the commentary from the Sages of Israel. It is called a chumash. See <http://www.artscroll.com/stonechumash.html>

³ Rashi', Commentary to Vayikra,1:1.

⁴ Sometimes spelled parashah, parashas, parshia, parshiya.