

Triennial Torah Readings

Source: www.HebrewRoots.net, www.messianic.ws

Study to show thyself approved unto God, A workman that needeth not be ashamed, Rightly dividing the word of truth. **2 Timothy 2:15**

The Torah is the foundation of all Scripture. This being the case, an inadequate or erroneous understanding of the Torah makes it much more difficult to come to a proper understanding of the rest of the Scriptures. For this reason, the Jewish sages devised a system for studying the Torah so the average person could come to better know God's word.

In the first century there were two different reading cycles available for use in the synagogues. The Annual Cycle went through the entire Torah and Haftarah readings in just one year; beginning each year on Simchat Torah, at the end of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). The Triennial Cycle was a three year cycle that always began on the first Sabbath of Nisan (Aviv).

A Brief Torah Reading History

According to ancient records, the practice of Torah study was begun by Ezra (a Priest and Scribe) after the Jewish captives had returned from Babylon.

During the reign of Antiochus Epiphanies, the Jewish people were forbidden to read the Torah or to circumcise their children. Anyone caught doing so was put to death. Many were martyred because they continued to circumcise their children despite the ban. However, they managed to get around the prohibition concerning Torah reading in a very resourceful way. They set up a cycle of readings in the Nevi'im (The Prophets) that reminded them in some way of the Torah portion that was normally read on that particular Sabbath. The connection might be a reference to a story found in the Torah reading, or even a single word that reminded them of that week's Torah passage (called a parasha in Hebrew). After reading this Torah substitute, one of the men would say: "Oh, that reminds me of the story about..." and off they would go into a discussion about that week's Torah portion without ever breaking the civil law against reading Torah. These portions from the Nevi'im became known as the Haftarah, which means "other readings," or "completion of the Torah."

Yeshua Read the Haftarah

In Yeshua's day it was customary (as it is today in orthodox synagogues) for both the weekly Torah and Haftarah portions of Scripture to be read each Sabbath. This provided the basis for discussion by anyone who might want to comment upon them. It was also common to invite a

distinguished guest to participate in the Torah or Haftarah readings and make whatever comments they deemed appropriate.

This was the situation in which Yeshua found Himself when He visited his hometown of Nazareth, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom:

"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." **(Luke 4:16)**

The passage He was given to read (Isa. 61:1-2) is not found in the Haftarah readings of today which are based on the Annual Cycle. However, that passage would have been read during the Hebrew month of Sivan in the second year of the Triennial Cycle.

The Triennial Cycle

The enclosed Triennial Cycle is based upon the research efforts of Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach (Followers of Messiah) www.messianic.ws. For the benefit of the Body of Messiah, they have given us permission to share their work with you, our readers.

The members of Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach have spent untold hours combing various Jewish source materials in order to recreate the ancient Triennial Cycle. As a result of this study, they have discovered some unique features which are not found in the Annual Reading Cycle:

- The readings are much shorter than with the Annual Cycle; since it takes three years to read the entire Torah and Haftarah, rather than one year. This allows more time for in-depth study.
- The schedule calls for one of the Psalms to be sung by the congregation almost every week. This adds another meaningful dimension to the study. Amazingly, the 150 Psalms, when used in numerical order over the three years, always fit the subject of the Torah and Haftarah readings!
- When these readings are used according to this schedule, it will be noted that one is learning of major events at the time of their occurrence. For example, at Passover season, Passover will be the subject in each of the three years. There are also prescribed Scripture readings and Psalms to be sung for each of the Festivals.
- The Apostolic portions are suggested readings on the same subject. It is the goal of Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach to have the Apostolic portions encompass the whole of Apostolic Writ.

Thus, with the Triennial Torah Reading Schedule, all four of the major divisions of the Scriptures are represented; the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, plus the Apostolic Writings.

Getting Started With The Triennial Cycle

If you would like to coordinate your reading schedule with other Believers throughout the world who have already begun the cycle, you can do so by joining in where Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach is currently studying. The calendar date of the first Sabbath of each month is given in the second column of each year's readings. Just find the date previous to the Sabbath on which you plan to begin and count down the appropriate number of weeks from that point.

For those who would like to start at the beginning of the Triennial Cycle, the first reading for Year 1 occurred on the first Sabbath of Nisan in any year. For example, in the year 2002, the first Sabbath of Nisan (on the traditional Jewish calendar) occurred on March 16th. If you wish to begin on that date, simply start with the readings for week number one: Genesis 1:1 2:3, Isaiah 42:5 and 45:17, Psalm 1, and Colossians 1:1-23. Then continue with the next set of readings each succeeding week until all have been completed. There are a total of 152 sequential readings in the Triennial Cycle. When a thirteenth month (Adar II) occurs, four additional readings are inserted. These four readings are found at the end of the Year 2 list. In addition, special readings are included for each of the Festivals. These are found on the last page.

Commentaries

Study guides are being developed, by Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach, which can be used to aid groups that want to begin using the Triennial Cycle. For more information, contact: Doug Dolly, at Congregation Beikvot HaMashiach (Followers of Messiah), P.O. Box 24965, Seattle, Washington 98124, or log on to their website at: www.ahavta.org.

There are also many fine Jewish commentaries available which discuss the Torah portions, some of which include the Haftarah readings as well. However, all of these are divided up into parashot that follow the Annual Cycle rather than the Triennial Cycle, so when using one of them be mindful that they are covering a larger portion of Scripture each Sabbath.

Show Yourself Approved

In Jewish teaching, the study of the Scriptures (especially the Torah) is considered to be the highest form of worship. It is only through continuing study that we become familiar enough with the Word of God so that we are able to rightly divide the word of truth. Thus, when we become well grounded in the instructions of the Torah, we can more fully understand the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Yeshua HaMashiach.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." **(2 Tim. 3:15b-17)**

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." **(2 Tim. 2:15)**
Study and be blessed! DEW & SAW