

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG24 – Love the Jewish Roots of Our Faith

I wish we could destroy forever the concept that Judaism is all about sacrifice and burnt offerings and legalism. Torah means “instruction.” We usually refer to Torah as the Law, and we define it as law. If you're going to think of Torah in terms of law, you must remember it's founded and built on love. So you should refer to it not in terms of legalism, but instead refer to it as the law of love. Its foundation is God's love for His chosen people Israel. And Israel then builds on that foundation of God's love, and they build on it a kingdom of love for God.

Let's look at this first step and that is in the law of love, we find God first loving His people. We recognize that God is love, and He must be the Creator and the beginning of everything. So if Torah is a law of love, and if Judaism is built as a faith and a religion on love, then it must begin with God and begin with His love. And yet many times we don't really think of it that way, that the initiation of all that we see surrounding the Jewish people and surrounding the faith of Judaism springs from God's love for them as a people. So I'm going to read Deuteronomy the fourth chapter, starting with verse 33. And there's a little bit to these verses but hang with me because this is an extremely important understanding that we as Christians must finally come to.

It says in verse 33, "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? Or has a god tried to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Out of the heavens, He let you hear his voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power" (Deuteronomy 4:33–37). This is really key for us because we're seeing that the Scripture here is talking about the time at Sinai, what they went through in the presenting of this Law. This is the nexus of God's law coming to His people. He comes down, steps down onto Mount Sinai. There's thunder; there's lightning; there's fire. There's all of these things that everybody's facing, but He's showing Himself to Israel, and He is making in them a people. They had not been a people unto God before this time, their fathers had, but they had not. And so God is making this covenant with them to bring them forth as His people now. Why does He do it? He's very clear in this. In verse 37 it says, "Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them." So it is this expression that we see of God's love that was being shown at Sinai.

So the very concept of the Law being given really was an expression. God is announcing to Israel, "I love you." He is reminding them that He loved their fathers, that He had chosen their fathers. Now He is choosing them and that same love that He had for their fathers, He is having for them and expressing to them. I'm now going to Deuteronomy the seventh chapter. And I'll start here with verse six. "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all of the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you are more in number than any of the peoples, for you are the fewest of

all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). So we're seeing this expression again of the love of God. Verse eight goes on to say, "But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand."

So God is saying, "Look, I've chosen you now as a people." In the first verses we read, God was emphasizing the love that He had had for their fathers. Now God is expressing and emphasizing the love that God has for Israel at this time standing here at Mount Sinai, making this covenant with Him. "The LORD set his love on you." God set His love on these people. God loved Israel. He loved Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all of the forefathers, and He loves Israel, the descendants of these that He had expressed His love to and made His oath with. So we see this really being emphasized to us. This is the first step. That's why we're talking about it.

The first step of Judaism, the law of love—the faith based on love and this walk with God in a relationship of love—is beginning right here, right here at Sinai where we as Christians tend to look back and say, "Oh, it was all about the Law. It was all about commandments. It was all about the unbearable things that they had to do and live by in trying to follow what God had told them to do in the Torah." This is a different perspective. We're seeing what is underlying that Torah, what's underlying those instructions. Remember again, Torah means "instruction." God is instructing them how to relate to Him. Because He loves them so deeply, He's bringing them into this faith and relationship with Him. When we go down to verse 13 of Deuteronomy 7, it says, "And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain" and all of these things. So why is God giving them these instructions? Because He's going to bless them. He is determined to bless them. They were the ones that He first loved, and He's encouraging them to listen to these instructions that He's given. "The LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers." That's verse 12. So He keeps emphasizing again the love, the lovingkindness. "I'm giving you these instructions," and what are those instructions really all about? And I, please, I encourage you go back and read in these verses because He talks about after verse 13 and within verse 13, "I'm going to bless you with the fruit of your womb, with the fruit of the ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil will increase and your herds."

And He goes verse after verse about all of the blessings that God is determined to bring upon Israel and it's because of this great love that He has for them. God loves them. God has set His affection upon them and that is something that will never change. In Deuteronomy 10, it goes on in verse 14 to say, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them" (Deuteronomy 10:14–15).

So again we are just reiterating this idea that God loved them. His choice of them was because of His great love. In Malachi we see God speaking and He starts in verse one of Malachi 1. It says, "The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. 'I have loved you,' says the LORD." Here's the word, "The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel: 'I have loved you. I do love you. And My love is set upon you.'" So we have the beginning then of this law of love. We have the beginning set in place of this relationship that we follow through. We call it Judaism, but it is the relationship of God with His people whom He has chosen, whom He loves, whom He has set His love upon, whom He has kept this lovingkindness with throughout all of these ages and generations. So God begins this process. It starts with God and His love.

We know that the next step then is the response of Israel, the response that Israel is to have to God. And we see that in Deuteronomy the sixth chapter. It's a Scripture that we should be very familiar with; it's called the Shema prayer. This is one of the most important prayers that we have in Judaism. It's something that observant Jews say at least twice a day. It is a prayer that is supposed to be made by every observant Jew on their deathbed before they pass away. This is key to Judaism, the Shema and the *V'ahavta* prayer. I'm going to read it to you in English. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your might." And He goes on to talk about these words that He's commanded them and how they should relate to them and with them as they walk with the Lord. But this is the response because God so loved Israel, Israel was to respond back with that deep love. They were to love Him with everything. When it says, "All of your might," it really means all of your means: all of your wealth, all of your assets, all of your possessions, all of your physical strength and ability; everything that you have you are to express back to God in a deep love. And so what I really like about this is it's taught in the New Testament by Yeshua, by Jesus.

We're going to go there in Mark the twelfth chapter starting at verse 28. It says, "And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognized that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all [or the first or the premier commandment]?' Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, "*Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad! V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha, b'chol l'vavcha uv'chol nafsh'cha uv'chol m'odecha.*"' Well, that's how He would have answered them because He was speaking Hebrew, not Aramaic. And He says to them this Shema and *V'ahavta* prayer, "HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; And you shall love the Lord, your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind, with all of your strength." The second Jesus said is like unto it. "'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Get that. "'There is no commandment greater than these.' And the scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM. AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL OF THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mark 12:28–34). And after that, no one wanted to question Yeshua anymore about His beliefs, trying to trap Him into some violation of a technical law.

So this is, I mean, amazing that here we have this idea that Judaism is a religion based and founded on love. It starts with God's love; it then is expressed back in Israel's love to God. And that's what it is all built upon. I love the fact that this lawyer who is at first trying to challenge Him then comes along and says, "Yes, You're right. These two commandments are the greatest thing. And they're greater than all offerings, all burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now think about that, with people's claims that Judaism is simply a law of legalism and sacrifice, but here is this man who's very studied in the Scriptures saying to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. In other words, there is nothing else in the Law or the commandments or the covenant. We picture these things all very much as physical level—non-spiritual, not expressing of love—but being forced to obey commandments. Yet here is this man speaking who's trained in the Law saying, "You are right, Teacher. There is no greater thing than to love one's neighbor as oneself and none of the burnt offerings and none of the sacrifices and none of the commandments that we have are greater than this." In fact, as he knew, they were all based on this love of God and this love of one's neighbors.

When we see the story told again in Matthew the twenty-second chapter, and I won't read it because we know it's quoting the Shema, *V'ahavta*, and quoting Leviticus 19 saying to love your neighbor. Oh by the way, did you realize that to love your neighbor as yourself is not originated in the New Testament? It's actually from the Torah. It's Leviticus 19 that says we should love our neighbor as ourselves. So Christ in voicing the Shema and the *V'ahavta*, He follows it up with Leviticus saying, "You love your neighbor as yourself." All of these love principles come out of the Torah. They come out as the foundation of the Torah and the teaching of God. So when it's repeated again in Matthew the twenty-second chapter, then Christ comes along and says on these two commandments depends the whole love, the Law, all of the Law and the Prophets, all the instruction, all of the Torah, all of the Prophets, everything about the Tanakh or the Hebrew Scriptures or as many call it the Old Testament, all of it is dependent upon. It depends upon. In other words, when something depends upon something else, it can't exist without it. So without this revelation of love and these expressions of God loving His people and His people loving God back, and His people loving one another as themselves, there is no Old Testament. There is no Tanakh. There is no Law. All of these things, there is no Prophets. All of these things are dependent on this idea of love and really it doesn't stop there.

When we go into Romans the thirteenth chapter, we find this repeated by Paul. He says in verse eight of Romans 13, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8–10). Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. It is the Law. We talk in Christianity about Christ being perfect. He was perfect because He loved—because love is the fulfillment of all of the Law. He kept the Law through His love. Galatians 5:14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" Again this is Paul. This is the Rabbi Paul. This is the one who was a Pharisee of Pharisees, who is trained in all of the Law. And what is he saying? He's saying that the whole Law is fulfilled in this one statement, in this one concept, that you should love your neighbor as yourself. Love is what it is summed up to be that Judaism is about. It is not a legalistic religion. It is a religion that was founded on love.

Torah means "instruction," and what it instructs us to do is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our strength, with all of our ability and all that we have, and to love our neighbor as ourself. I think that we should remember that Christianity is grafted into the root of Judaism. So if Judaism is legalism, then how can Christianity claim to be grown from God's love? It can't. It doesn't make sense. We are grafted in, and we are grown from. You can have Judaism without Christianity, but you cannot have Christianity without Judaism. We grow from that root. We are built on that foundation and thank God we understand today that that foundation is love because we believe Christianity to be a faith based on love. And so we find out here that it is.

Christ came into the earth sent by the Father because of God's great love for you. Christ expressed that love by teaching the fundamentals of Judaism: God's love for you, your love for God, and your need to love your neighbor as yourself. I pray that these Jewish roots of our faith will find fertile soil in our hearts, and that we will be able as Christ was to be an expression of the love of God and the love of a people towards God and the love of one man, woman, brother, sister, towards one another as he loves himself. God help us to walk in this great foundation that we have of Judaism, the roots of our faith that are rooted in love. Amen.