

Bet Midrash, Bet T'filah, Bet K'neset

by Michel Rudolph

Delivered to Ohev Yisrael April 28, 2007

When Yeshua needed to offer a sacrifice in compliance with the Law, He brought it to the *Bet Mikdash* – the Jerusalem Temple. When He met with his close disciples to teach and fellowship, he typically chose informal venues – often out of doors. When He retired to pray, he often did so alone. But when he prayed, taught, ministered, studied, and debated *Torah* with the men of the community, He went to the nearest *Bet K'neset* – the house of assembly known as the synagogue.

Mark 1:21-22 *Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

Mark 1:23-25 *Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Yeshua of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!" But Yeshua rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"*

Mark 3:1-3 *And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."*

We know the rest; Yeshua healed the man.

Mark 6:2 *And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!"*

One more example:

Luke 4:16-20 *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. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.*

So you can see from these examples, Yeshua was thoroughly involved with the synagogue which, by His time, had developed into a Jewish institution that operated in parallel with the Temple. While the Temple functioned mainly for sacrifice, the synagogue was the main *Bet*

T'filah (House of Prayer), and typically also served as a *Bet Midrash* or House of Study. In all of its functions together, the synagogue became known as a *Bet K'neset* or House of Meeting.

I have noticed that Ohev Yisrael has been reluctant to refer to its building as a synagogue – possibly because the word is so thoroughly associated with the part of the Jewish world that does not yet recognize Yeshua. I think that is a mistake. We may want to be clear for now by calling our building a Messianic Synagogue (as though that really makes things clear), but belief in Yeshua is the future for all Judaism, and when all Judaism comes to faith it will still be Judaism, but it will have joined us and all synagogues will have joined ours. There will no longer be a difference other than the diversity that has always characterized Judaism – Messianic and otherwise.

So let's look at the historic synagogue and compare Ohev to it. We are definitely a *Bet T'filah* – a house of prayer because our whole community comes together every *Shabbat* and on every biblical Holy Day to pray and worship God in music, in dance, in liturgy, and in personal expression. We are also a *Bet K'neset* – a house of meeting, because our building is the place of assembly for all of our functions that include our community's celebrations, *onegs*, *chavurot*, and occasions of prayer. But my question to you today is, are we also fulfilling our responsibility of being a *Bet Midrash*? A house of study?

While it is true that our services and *chavurot* incorporate brief teachings such as this one, those are not – by historic Jewish standards – studies. Studies are what happen on *Shabbat* afternoons after services; our *Torah* Study and our courses in Hebrew, in Jewish Concepts and Practices, and in Messianic Jewish Discipled Living. Studies are what occur in our *Shabbat* School and in our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* training. Studies involve not only a teacher lecturing, but students interactively engaged in questioning, analyzing, and in discussing with one another. It is hugely motivating and a blessing for those of us who participate, but as adults, relatively few of us do, and I ask myself why.

I concede that it is difficult for some families because of child care issues, and so far we are not able to help with that as a community. But what of the rest of us? What of our youth? Here is surely an appropriate opportunity for our youth and our older folks to come together in a valuable shared activity. And even among our older members – relatively few of us have taken advantage of the *Shabbat* afternoon studies which I can tell you from personal observation are well administered, well planned, and well taught by our own highly knowledgeable brothers and sisters. The breadth and quality of our *Shabbat* afternoon *Bet Midrash* is unique among Messianic Jewish congregations, and there is no tuition! No charge! It's free! Also, except for the Hebrew course, there is no week to week commitment of attendance or requirement to study at home. Study sessions do not build on one another; each session stands on its own, and so attending is as easy as dropping in.

So I ask why more of us do not participate in Ohev as a *Bet Midrash* – a house of study. Is it just the tiredness of the week that was, or could it be that some of us have come into Messianic Judaism falsely indoctrinated that knowledge is the opponent of faith? The opponent of the Holy Spirit? I am thinking that some of that thinking is possible because I have heard several misapplications of 1 Corinthians 8:1b-2 which states:

“... We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”

Without fail, those who quoted that Scripture in my hearing left out the contextual first half of verse 1 which reads:

“Now concerning things offered to idols:”

I have also heard reference to Adam eating of “the tree of knowledge” as being the source of our fallen world. Need I remind us that it was not a “tree of knowledge,” but the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” that Satan used to tempt Eve?

In preparation for this message, I copied from my Bible seven pages of Scriptures that prove beyond a doubt that God wants his people to receive significant instruction and have knowledge of the good kind – especially knowledge of God and God’s Law. So please indulge me while I read some of these to you:

First, Scriptures about learning and being learned (“learn-ed”):

Proverbs 1:5 *A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*

Proverbs 9:9-10 *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Proverbs 16:23 *The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, And adds learning to his lips.*

Isaiah 50:4 *The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.*

Acts 7:22 *And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.*

2 Timothy 3:14 *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,*

Now here are some Scriptures about teachers and teaching:

John 6:45 *It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.*

1 Corinthians 12:28 *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

Ephesians 4:11-12 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Messiah,*

Titus 2:1-3 *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things –*

Finally, a sampling of Scriptures that demonstrate God's value of knowledge. Please lean back and relax because I am going to take some time reading them to you in order to clearly make the point:

Exodus 31:1-3 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,.."*

Deuteronomy 1:13 *'Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.'*

1 Samuel 2:3 *Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, For the LORD is the God of knowledge; And by Him actions are weighed.*

2 Chronicles 1:9-12 *"Now, O LORD God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. "Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" And God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life -- but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king -- wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like."*

2 Chronicles 30:22a *And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD;*

Psalms 119:64-66 *The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; Teach me Your statutes. ⁶⁵ You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments.*

Proverbs 1:22 *How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge.*

Proverbs 10:14 *Wise people store up knowledge, But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.*

Proverbs 12:1 *Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid.*

Proverbs 18:15 *The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*

Proverbs 19:2 *Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, And he sins who hastens with his feet.*

Proverbs 21:11 *When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.*

Proverbs 24:5 *A wise man is strong, yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;*

Jeremiah 10:14 *Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; For his molded image is falsehood, And there is no breath in them.*

Daniel 1:17 *As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*

Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

Hosea 6:3 *Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.*

Malachi 2:7 *For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

Romans 15:13-14 *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Messiah Yeshua, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,*

Philippians 1:8-10 *For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Yeshua the Messiah. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in*

knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Messiah,

2 Peter 1:5-7 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

I hope these Scriptures have convinced you that the *Bet Midrash* – house of study for the acquisition of godly knowledge, is a biblical institution -- a vital part of the synagogue, and one in which Yeshua Himself participated. So why not you? Your membership in this congregation affords you the opportunity and privilege of pursuing knowledge in an enjoyable and historically authentic way – by attending Ohev Yisrael’s *Shabbat* afternoon *Bet Midrash*. This will not only help you, it will help this Messianic Jewish synagogue – your synagogue -- to fulfill its destiny of being home to a congregation of learners, and a unique educational resource for the greater Jewish community, and for the Christian churches of the Washington D.C. area.

Now in the few minutes remaining, let’s hear some testimonies from some of the faculty and participants of Ohev’s *Shabbat Bet Midrash*.