

Today's broad Messianic movement is of the conviction that the Torah or Law of Moses is relevant instruction for God's people in the post-resurrection era. This is a conviction firmly rooted within the teaching of Yeshua the Messiah, who explicitly said that He did not come to abolish or eliminate the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19). Yet throughout much of Christian history, and even more so today, many theologians and examiners have argued that Moses' Teaching has been rendered inoperative, and/or that it was only to be followed by those in the pre-resurrection era. Many of today's Messianic people, while having a witness of the Spirit that God's commandments are to be written on their hearts and minds via the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), are not equipped well enough to answer common arguments delivered by evangelical Protestant family members, friends, acquaintances, or even various pastors or teachers that they know—when they quote verses to them from the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), in support of the premise that the Torah of Moses has been abolished.

*The New Testament Validates Torah* is a massive resource that all of today's Messianic Believers need, especially in the current season of growth, development, and expansion in which our faith community finds itself. This publication is an extensive compilation of data across the wide range of books and commentaries available from Messianic Apologetics. The core of this resource is an examination of fifty passages, which are commonly used as proof texts to claim that the Torah is not to be followed by God's people today. Statements such as not being "under the Law" (Romans 6:14-15), "Christ is the end of the Law" (Romans 10:4), "All things are lawful" (1 Corinthians 6:12), 'how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things" (Galatians 4:9), "abolishing...the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Ephesians 2:15), "having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14), and even "thus He declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19)—among many—are thoroughly addressed. Considerable attention is given to various Hebrew and Greek issues, potential translation differences, and differences of perspective. Cross-examination and discussion with a wide number of commentators have also been offered, as well as an exploration of important subjects present within today's Biblical Studies.

*The New Testament Validates Torah* is an important apologetic study that will benefit Messianic Believers and evangelical Christians alike. There is literally nothing in today's Messianic movement that has compiled and packed as much information on Torah relevance for God's people into a single book. Also, unlike some other publications issued on the message of Torah relevance, *The New Testament Validates Torah* is highly respectful to Protestant voices over the centuries who have valued what they have considered to be the "moral law" of the Old Testament, and seeks to fairly honor those who have preceded us in the faith, establishing common ground where possible.



# **THE NEW TESTAMENT VALIDATES TORAH**

**THE NEW TESTAMENT DOES NOT  
ABOLISH THE LAW OF MOSES**

**MAXIMUM EDITION**



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**J.K. McKee**

**MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS**

[messianicapologetics.net](http://messianicapologetics.net)

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## THE NEW TESTAMENT DOES NOT ABOLISH THE LAW OF MOSES

### MAXIMUM EDITION

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# Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>   | <i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community        |
| AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>  | HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)                              |
| ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)   | HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)   |
| Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament  | Heb: Hebrew  |
| Ara: Aramaic  | HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible   |
| ASV: American Standard Version (1901)   | ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>  |
| ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)  | IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>  |
| b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )  | IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>  |
| B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.   | ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>   |
| BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) | IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>   |
| BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>  | Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow) |
| BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>  | JBK: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Koren</i> (2000)   |
| BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>   | JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>  |
| C.E.: Common Era or A.D.  | KJV: King James Version  |
| CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)  | Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)   |
| CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)                                      | LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green</i> (1986)  |
| CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>  | LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)   |
| CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)   | LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)   |
| CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)  | LXX: Septuagint  |
| DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition  | m. Mishnah   |
| DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls   | MT: Masoretic Text   |
| ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>  | NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1977)  |
| EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>  | NASU: <i>New American Standard Update</i> (1995)   |
| eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text                       | NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>   |
| EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>  | NEB: <i>New English Bible</i> (1970)   |
| ESV: English Standard Version (2001)  | Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>   |
| exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own                | NETS: <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (2007)  |
| EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>  | NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>  |
| Ger: German   | NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>   |
| GNT: Greek New Testament  |  |
| Grk: Greek  |  |

NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*

NIV: *New International Version* (1984)

NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible–Catholic* (1985)

NJPS: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)

NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)

NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)

NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)

NT: *New Testament*

orthopraxy: lit. “the right action,” how the Bible or one’s theology is lived out in the world

OT: *Old Testament*

PME: *Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic Scriptures*

PreachC: *The Preacher’s Commentary*

REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)

RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)

t. Tosefta

Tanach (Tanakh): *the Old Testament*

Thayer: *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TEV: *Today’s English Version* (1976)

TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)

TNIV: *Today’s New International Version* (2005)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies’ 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

Vul: *Latin Vulgate*

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

Yid: *Yiddish*

YLT: *Young’s Literal Translation* (1862/1898)

# INTRODUCTION

How do many of today's Messianic Believers approach the issue of the validity of the Torah? Many feel that throughout history, the Jewish people have followed the Law, and that Christians have believed that the Law was abolished after the time of Christ. For many cases this is an accurate assessment, yet for many other cases this is not only too simplistic an approach, but it can also cause us as Messianics to foment some negative and inappropriate attitudes toward faithful Christian men and women who have preceded us in the faith, in past history. It is not difficult for us to see how not every Jewish person since the time of Yeshua has been obedient to the Torah, and so it should similarly not be too much of a stretch for us to acknowledge that there have been many Christians who have looked to follow Moses' Teaching, at least as a guide for ethics and morality.

One of the most useful and important exercises that I conducted during the completion of my M.A. in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2008) was to read the analysis contained in Stephen Westerholm's book *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*. While his purpose was to address a contemporary debate in terms of the Jewish background of the Apostle's letters, several of the opening chapters were most useful, as they summarized the approach that three significant figures of Protestant Christianity had in terms of the relevancy of the Mosaic Torah for Christians: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley.<sup>i</sup> What was basically presented is that two of the three main Reformation traditions had a largely positive view of the Torah (Calvinism, Wesleyanism), as including foundational instruction and commandments that all of God's people were to follow—what is often termed to be the “moral law”—with the other tradition tending to pit God's Law and God's grace against themselves as polar opposites (Lutheranism).

It is very true that a distinction within the Torah between commandments that are classified as being moral, civil, or ceremonial is a bit artificial.<sup>ii</sup> It cannot be denied, though, that throughout much of post-Reformation history the two great theological traditions of both Calvinism and Wesleyanism have largely looked to the Mosaic Law and the Ten Commandments to include ethical principles that all followers of the Messiah are to obey and not disregard. These are arguably the two main Protestant strands that have made the most amount of positive difference in Western society, either through the promotion of what is called the “Protestant work ethic” (Calvinism), or simply encouraging faithful Christians to be active in their communities and in accomplishing significant humanitarian works (Wesleyanism). This is important to someone such as myself, whose religious background from both sides of my family is principally Methodist and Presbyterian. **At no time** in evangelical Christianity (1980-1995) was I ever raised or taught to believe that the Law of Moses as a whole was abolished by Jesus. While I may have thought that some of its aspects were exclusively for Ancient Israel or the Jews for a time long before me, **never** would it have been tolerated for me to think that the Ten Commandments were smashed into pieces at the foot of the cross.

It can definitely come as a shock to many of today's Messianic Believers, when they realize that well known figures throughout Christian history have recognized—at least in a broad sense—

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<sup>i</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 22-87.

<sup>ii</sup> The division of the Torah's commandments as witnessed in the six divisions of the Mishnah (Agriculture, Appointed times, Women, Order of Damages, Holy things, Purities) seems to be more accurate. Consult the FAQ, “Torah, division of commandments.”

that the Torah serves as valid instruction and relevant instruction for Believers in Yeshua. Notwithstanding some of the finer points of the Law, one can survey some rather significant works that have molded the Christian psyche since the Reformation, and see how various instructions within Moses' Teaching, albeit largely moral, are lauded as being relevant for those who wish to emulate the Lord Jesus. The following are a small snapshot:

**John Calvin:** "The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law..."

"Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it. It is as if some servant, already prepared with all earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and observe his master's ways more carefully in order to conform and accommodate himself to them. And not one of us may escape from this necessity. For no man has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.

"Again, because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened by it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression..." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.7.12).<sup>iii</sup>

**John Wesley:** "I am afraid this great and important truth is little understood, not only by the world, but even by many whom God hath taken out of the world, who are real children of God by faith. Many of these lay it down as an unquestioned truth, that when we come to Christ, we have done with the law; and that, in this sense, 'Christ is the end of the law to every one that believeth.' 'the end of the law:'—so he is, 'for the righteousness,' for justification, 'to every one that believeth.' Herein the law is at an end. It justifies none, but only brings them to Christ; who is also, in another respect, the end, or scope of the law,—the point at which it continually aims. But when it has brought us to him, it has yet a farther office, namely, to keep us with him. For it is continually exciting all believers, the more they see of its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, to exhort one another so much the more..."

"Therefore, I cannot spare the law one moment, nor more than I can spare Christ: seeing I now want it as much, to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him. Otherwise, this 'evil heart of unbelief' would immediately 'depart from the living God.' Indeed each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me 'above gold or precious stones;' seeing I know every part of it as a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfill in its season" (Sermon #34, "Properties of the Law").<sup>iv</sup>

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** "This is the fundamental presupposition of the whole Sermon on the Mount. Jesus manifests his perfect union with the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament law and prophets. He has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them. He fulfills the law, and he tells us so himself, therefore it must be true. He fulfills the law down to the last iota....Jesus vindicates the divine authority of the law. God is its giver and its Lord, and only in personal communion with God is the law fulfilled. There is no fulfillment of the

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<sup>iii</sup> John T. McNeill, ed., and Ford Lewis Battles, trans., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp 360-361.

<sup>iv</sup> N. Burwash, ed., *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing, 1988), pp 349, 350.

law apart from communion with God, and no communion with God apart from fulfillment of the law” (*The Cost of Discipleship*).<sup>v</sup>

Generally speaking, those Christians who have preceded today’s generation of Messianic Believers in faith, who have had a positive view of the Law of Moses, have sub-divided it into the moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law. The ceremonial law and civil law are thought to have only been given to Ancient Israel until the destruction of the Second Temple, whereas the moral law was given to all of humanity to be followed by all people for all time. Theologians, who have approached the Torah this way, have undoubtedly had an incomplete picture of its intention—**but to their credit** they have certainly advocated that Yeshua the Messiah did not come to completely abolish the Torah, and perhaps replace it with an under-disciplined way of living by the Spirit, with no set code of conduct to confirm the direction of the Spirit. What is often classified as composing the “moral law” makes up a considerable majority of commandments in the Torah.

It can be rather easy for us to criticize the approach of dividing the Torah into divisions like the so-called “moral law” and “ceremonial law.” Rather than be negative toward it, though, we need to instead recognize that figures like Calvin or Wesley, from the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries, respectively, were products of their time. They lacked many of the Jewish sources and dialogue with the Jewish Synagogue from which Twentieth and Twenty-First Century scholars benefit. They did the absolute best that they could, by utilizing little more than the Biblical text by itself in Hebrew and Greek, various extant historical works like Josephus and Philo, the writings of the Church Fathers, and different figures from classical history. Even though Protestant countries in Europe were a bit more liberal and understanding toward the Jews than their Roman Catholic counterparts, it was not until the Nineteenth Century that Christian scholars began to really have access to ancient Jewish literature like the Mishnah, Talmud, or Midrashim. Only in the more modern era has direct access to the lands of the Bible become commonplace—not to mention the discovery of texts like the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947! *And, how long has it taken such information to finally filter down to the average layperson?*

Today’s Messianic Believers need to appropriately recognize and highly laud the positive benefits that many of our Protestant Christian forbearers have left us. We should be able to emphasize the areas of strong theological agreement and ideological commonality, in our quest to have *an even healthier* appreciation of the Torah in our faith practice and integration of our Hebraic and Jewish Roots. None of us should ever be caught making unfounded claims about *all* of the past generations of Christians somehow being “lawless,” perhaps in violation of the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), when many of them clearly did not benefit from the information and resources in Biblical Studies that we possess today. On the contrary, all of us know of Christians in our past history—or even immediate history, or personal discipleship—who made significant contributions to society and were greatly instrumental in the spread of the gospel and the transformative love of the Messiah to the unsaved of Planet Earth! Many of them had a very high regard for the Law of Moses and the Old Testament for guiding their faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

In many cases, such previous generations may specifically include various godly and saved persons *from our own families*, who may very well have followed the Mosaic Law and Ten Commandments to the best of their understanding. **We have the definite responsibility to honor and respect their legacies to us**, and to recognize the awesome task we have at letting the heritage they have given us, encourage us to continue forward in our faith’s reformation (cf. Hebrews 12:1). I ask you to ponder the thoughts of my late first cousin twice removed, Dr. Charles L. Allen (1913-

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<sup>v</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised edition, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp 137, 138.

2005),<sup>vi</sup> formerly the pastor of Grace Methodist Church in Atlanta, GA and First Methodist Church in Houston, TX. In his best-selling book *God's Psychiatry*, he wrote the following on the importance of the Ten Commandments:

“We have these rules, known as The Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20. They are not only the basis of conduct, both moral and spiritual, but also the basis of peace and prosperity for the individual and for the world. The Bible says, ‘The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God’ (Psalm 14:1), and it is only a fool who thinks he is big enough or smart enough to violate the unchangeable laws of the eternal God and get by with it. No man can break God’s law, he breaks only himself.”<sup>vii</sup>

Among the many things that I have written since 2004, ***The New Testament Validates Torah*** has served as the main, and sometimes the only book, that those who encounter my materials will read. Much of the reason for this is self obvious: today’s Messianic people have many questions about the validity and relevance of the Torah or Law of Moses, from the Apostolic Writings or New Testament. Does the New Testament abolish the Torah? Or, does the New Testament uphold its validity?

The last time I visited this publication was during a five month period from December 2010-April 2011, when the 2004 edition of *The New Testament Validates Torah* was doubled in size, particularly as my seminary exegetical skills were able to be help prepare it for a paperback and eBook release. My intention in late 2010 was to refine some of the arguments in favor of Torah validity, substantiating them with a fair modicum of engagement from the works of various Christian scholars and theologians who recognize that the Law as a whole has not been abolished by the sacrificial work of the Messiah, and that it at least serves as a guide Believers’ ethics and morality. It also strived to fairly dialogue with those Christian scholars and theologians who do believe that the Law of Moses was abolished and was intended exclusively for the pre-resurrection period. I am very pleased to say that this previous edition has well served the purpose of not only helping to defend the validity of God’s Torah for His people in the post-resurrection era, but that it also has helped to quell an ever-present problem in Messianic Bible teaching: making things *more simplistic and disengaged* from Biblical Studies.

The 2010s have been a very productive time for Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. In December 2012, the biggest transition we have ever made took place, as we relocated from Central Florida back to North Texas. 2013-2015 saw the release of three massive volumes to our *Messianic Helper Series* (Torah, Kosher, Sabbath). In 2015 we released a specialty edition of the New Testament as a part of our *Practical Messianic* commentaries, based on the 1901 American Standard Version, reflective of many of the conclusions defended in publications such as *The New Testament Validates Torah*. In 2016 we finished commentaries on the Pauline Epistles in the *Practical Messianic* series. **Not to be overlooked, was the Summer 2015 transition of TNN Online** (Theology News Network) **to Messianic Apologetics**. Paralleling this in the wider Messianic world, were the significant releases of the *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (TLV) in 2014, and *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* (CJSB) in 2016.

Today as we prepare to close out the 2010s, I had received a number of prompts from the Lord, in knowing that *The New Testament Validates Torah* was going to need a substantial update. This edition, which has been prepared throughout 2017, has taken into consideration much of the mass of material that Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics have produced in the past five

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<sup>vi</sup> Charles Allen was the first cousin of my maternal grandmother, Mary Ruth Franklin Jeffries (1919-), who herself is the daughter of the late Bishop Marvin A. Franklin (1894-1972), who served as President of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church from 1959-1960.

The information on the Bishop Marvin A. Franklin Historical Marker can be accessed online at <[georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm)>.

<sup>vii</sup> Charles L. Allen, *God's Psychiatry* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), pp 45-46.

to seven years. As a result, there has been a refinement of various points from the 2012 edition, many new Bible passages involving Torah validity *not limited* to general Torah relevance are now addressed, and various entries from commentaries and other publications have been transplanted into this one. It is my sincere hope and prayer that you find this resource to not be overwhelming, given its massive size, but instead be something that you can frequently access and reference, as you seek answers to your questions!

*J.K. McKee  
Spring 2017*



# **PART I**

**HAS THE LAW  
REALLY BEEN ABOLISHED?**



-1-

## CHRISTIAN MISUNDERSTANDING OR AN ANTINOMIAN ASSAULT?

In the quest for Biblical continuity, we must accept the whole canon of Scripture as being the inspired, inerrant Word of God for the Believer: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, TNIV). God’s Word must be able to convict us regarding sin, and how we are to live and properly conduct ourselves in the world: “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Holy Scripture, coupled with presence of the Holy Spirit filling our hearts and minds, is to guide and convict us regarding what we should and should not be doing, and how men and women of God are to properly live their lives pleasing Him. As we examine Scripture, we must be willing to put any preconceived ideas about God and His Word aside, and let the Bible speak for itself in its totality, with our *ultimate* loyalty being to the text—and not a particular theological tradition or ideology. It is imperative that as we do this, we must not hesitate to compare multiple English Bible translations and examine original meanings of Hebrew and Greek words and phrases in their proper context. We must know what the historical background behind a Biblical text is. We need to have an ample idea about what various scholars and specialists have proposed and commented upon. Above all, **we must strive to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father**, as we allow His love to change us from within and guide us to share the good news of His Son with all.

The issue of the validity (or even relevancy) of God’s Law, contained in the Pentateuchal books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, is controversial for many of today’s modern Christians who claim to obey Him. Millions of Believers have dismissed the foundational instruction of Moses’ Teaching, and not only find themselves ignoring or dismissing God’s commandments in the Law—but they find themselves living in ungodly ways in broad discontinuity to the example given by our Lord Yeshua (Jesus). Somehow, many believe that “freedom in Christ” equates to not being held to any set of standards or code of conduct by God, as opposed to being set free from the bondage and insidious influences of sin. Many, while rightfully recognizing that salvation is by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), purposefully overlook how we are to demonstrate good works resultant of such salvation (Ephesians 2:10).

Yeshua the Messiah issues a rather sober word, when informing His followers that at a definite point in the future, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41-42). Fortunately there are many Christian people today, who will *never* fall into this category, even if they may have an incomplete understanding or perspective on the importance of God’s Law. But then

again, there are many others who are not interested in obeying the Lord and changing their lives. They are the kinds of people who, most sadly, live forth that errant Corinthian slogan refuted by the Apostle Paul: “Everything is permissible for me” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NIV). There are many who express some degree of belief in the Bible, yet they are not willing to expel any effort to follow any of the Bible’s instructions, making the necessary changes to their lives.

Many contemporary, conservative Christian pastors will tell their churches that God’s people today should obey the laws of the land in which they reside on the basis of Paul’s words in Romans 13. Yet while we are to obey human government, at least to a wide degree as it provides some important civil services, many of the same will say that the Law of God—*perhaps including the Ten Commandments*—was either “abolished” by Jesus or “nailed to the cross.” Some would see this as being a bit inconsistent: heed secular law, **but** do not heed Divine law? Given the importance that the Torah of Moses plays within not only the Tanach or Old Testament, and how the Prophets of Israel continually call the people back to a path of obedience—but the significance it has within the teachings of the Messiah Himself and His Apostles—it is easy to see how some of today’s Christian leaders have taken various liberties in regard to Scripture.

Of course, it is not surprising to find out that many of today’s pastors and theologians have an answer to why the Law of Moses is to not really guide, or in some cases be that important, for Christian Believers. Some of these answers regard ecclesiology, and surround a view that the Law was only given to Israel, and not a second group of elect known as “the Church.” Some of these answers are theological, and concern presuppositional viewpoints which hold that only those who lived in the pre-resurrection era prior to the arrival of Jesus were to concern themselves with the Torah. In some cases, mostly among more liberal theologians, what composes the Torah is largely thought to not be the product of a real historical figure named Moses, but rather various literary sources and mythologies strewn together after the Babylonian exile in the Sixth Century B.C.E. (the JEDP documentary hypothesis).<sup>1</sup>

All three of these vantage points take some rather severe liberties in regard to the integrity of Scripture. If not rectified, I know that I have a concern that many prominent theologians and Bible expositors will be held directly responsible by the Lord for keeping zealous Believers *desiring mature instruction* away from heeding Moses’ Teaching (cf. Mark 9:42; Matthew 18:6; Luke 17:2). A relatively conservative Believer such as myself is well within his rights when he asks: *If more Christians today taught that the Law of Moses were to be followed, would we even have debates over whether things like homosexuality or abortion on demand were sin?* Simply comparing the condition of much of the evangelical Church from when my two parents raised me in the mid-to-late 1980s, and the way things have considerably devolved now in the mid-to-late 2010s, some significant reevaluation in terms of the validity and relevance of the Torah is sorely needed and is most imperative.

If more of the contemporary Church actually did believe that the Law of Moses were valid instruction, there would be no debate at all over whether homosexuality, pre-marital sex, or abortion were sins—or even if they could be tolerated. **The Torah plainly denounces these things as sin,**<sup>2</sup> and for most cases this level of offense originally merited a capital death penalty. It is true that there are evangelical Christians who recognize these things as sin, but who do believe that the Law of Moses was for a previous age. They rightly argue that the Apostolic Scriptures or New

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis and refutation of this, from one of the premier Jewish Bible scholars of the Twentieth Century, consult Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Homosexuality: Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; adultery: Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:24; abortion: Exodus 21:22-25.

Testament speak against these sorts of offenses,<sup>3</sup> but how strong an argument do they really have when they have chosen to be *purposefully* cut off from the Tanach or Old Testament?

It is imperative that we think critically and speak out about these sorts of issues, “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), seeking full compliance with the entire Bible and purpose of God from Genesis-Revelation. We must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by others or what they might think, as we should seek only to please our Heavenly Father and use the reasoning skills and abilities He has given us to probe His Word for answers, in order to be effective servants of His in the world.

When comparing worldly laws to the Lord’s eternal ordinances, which ones have priority? *The answer is most obvious.* The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20, “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah.” As citizens of God’s Kingdom, **we are to obey His instructions.** Our loyalty to God and to His Word must eventually override our loyalty to any human theology, as useful as much of it may be at times.

Yeshua says in the Last Days that “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). What is this to mean? Do those who consciously disobey or disregard the Torah not love God? Are they practitioners of lawlessness? These are some very strong words from the Lord. None of us should ever want to be among those labeled with the negative moniker: “**lawless.**” *We surely do not want to be considered loveless,* who may be regarded as demonstrating utter hatred toward our fellow human beings. Most importantly, **none of us wants** to be consigned to a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”<sup>4</sup> for eternity. Perhaps it is time that we all begin to seek the Lord, truly asking Him how we are to obey Him, and imploring Him for answers to various difficult-to-understand Bible passages.

## An Innocent Dismissal of God’s Law?

On at least one front surrounding the issue of the Torah being relevant to today’s born again Believers, it can be somewhat understood *why* many pastors and Bible teachers prefer not to focus too much time dealing with the “Old Testament.” How many of today’s pastors really want to have to deal with the many questions and criticisms lodged at them regarding controversies pertaining to whether there really was a King David or Conquest of Canaan, an Exodus of the Ancient Israelites from Egypt, and of course what Genesis chs. 1-11 really mean in light of modern science?<sup>5</sup> We cannot totally blame some spiritual leaders for wanting to avoid these kinds of debates, and instead simply trying to focus their assemblies on the teachings of the Lord Jesus and His love for all.

The problem, of course, is asking *when and if* a pastor’s congregation of Believers is going to be able to (ever) handle the solid food of God’s Word (Hebrews 5:12-13), and with it various Biblical controversies. Because many Christian pastors have consciously chosen—rather poorly—not to get involved with the various issues of the Tanach’s reliability, as a sad result too many Believers have been withheld from desperately needed instruction in the Law of Moses. The environment that they needed to facilitate further growth, maturation, and insight into the Scriptures has not always been present, *or in some cases even been facilitated or allowed.*

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<sup>3</sup> Homosexuality: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 2:10; Jude 7; adultery/fornication: Mark 7:21; Matthew 5:27-28; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Corinthians 5:10; 6:9; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Peter 2:11-18; Revelation 2:14, 20; 9:21.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

<sup>5</sup> For a fair-minded analysis and refutation of the practice of historical minimalism, whereby the Scriptural record is not treated as a valid testimony to support its own claims, consult Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

For an excellent analysis of the relevant Creationist data, the author highly recommends Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist’s Journey through Genesis 1-II* (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2014).

It is very true that much is lost when the commandments of the Torah are not frequently understood against an historical backdrop in the Ancient Near East. The meaning of instructions such as “The sons of the third generation [of Edomites and Egyptians] who are born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 23:8), can only be understood within the narrative of the Torah, and the relationship of Ancient Israel to those two groups. Likewise, many of the commandments that we read about, while seeming a bit archaic or outdated when compared to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century legal codes, afforded many rights and privileges to people within Ancient Israel in the Thirteenth Century B.C.E., who would not have otherwise been defended in either Mesopotamia or Canaan. To understand the Pentateuch, **no different than any other part of the Bible**, one must recognize its original setting and the initial audience to whom it was issued: Ancient Israel delivered from Egyptian servitude, being prepared to enter into the Promised Land.<sup>6</sup>

While there are definitely ancient historical and cultural issues to consider when reading the Torah—as well as a whole host of ancient Jewish interpretations and bodies of Rabbinical commentary as well—understanding its commandments is not something as difficult as one may think. The Lord exclaims, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach” (Deuteronomy 30:11), meaning of course it is “not too baffling for you” (NJPS). Even with some commandments in the Torah clearly given for an original Israelite audience and ancient level of technology, which cannot be followed in a modern world, they still very much *inform us* about the character of the God of Israel—especially as Israel’s Law was to be quite *subversive* to the laws of its pagan neighbors. Such commandments are to be placed upon the hearts and minds of God’s people *even today*, so that we might understand His redemptive purposes for humanity throughout the multiplied millennia of history.

It is entirely inappropriate to regard the Law of Moses as only being applicable or relevant for another era. The very promise of the New Covenant is that God’s Torah would be supernaturally transcribed onto the regenerated and cleansed hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). Likewise, it is anticipated that in the Last Days those from all over the world will stream to Zion to be taught from the Law (Micah 4:2-4; Isaiah 2:2-3). These missional texts—highly valued by many Christians, and most especially varied Old Testament theologians today—place the Torah of Moses squarely within the declaration of gospel message. While salvation in Yeshua (Jesus) is freely available to all who desire reconciliation with their Creator (Ephesians 2:8-9), the Torah provides the necessary instructions in order for the redeemed to practice the good works He expects of His people (Ephesians 2:10).

No conservative, evangelical Christian today wants to ever instinctively be accused of outright dismissing the Law of God, so instead there are various theologians who advocate that Believers are to follow a “law of Christ” (cf. Galatians 6:2). Rather than this “law of Messiah” being Yeshua’s own authoritative interpretation and application of the Torah (cf. Matthew 5:17-19), it would instead be something widely dissimilar from it. Even though it would properly embody His example of self-sacrifice and service, such a “law of Christ” would make a stark break from the Law of Moses in many areas. In one textbook I had to use in my seminary studies, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart—which for the most part is generally quite good in terms of the variety of topics it covers—its authors explain their position that there is definitely a distinction to be maintained between the Apostolic Scriptures and Tanach Scriptures, being of the position that “*The Old Testament is not our Testament.*” They summarize,

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<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of a variety of relevant issues, consult the author’s article “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 167.

“Only that which is explicitly renewed from the Old Testament Law can be considered part of the New Testament ‘law of Christ’ (cf. Gal 6:2). Included in such a category would be the Ten Commandments, since they are cited in various ways in the New Testament...and the two great commandments from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. No other specific Old Testament laws can be proved to be strictly binding on Christians, valuable as it is for Christians to know all of the laws.”<sup>8</sup>

Fee and Stuart’s mention of the Ten Commandments as being a part of this independent “law of Christ” is actually somewhat novel, as many would argue instead that the Ten Commandments are part of an abolished Law of Moses. Yet, in clearly wanting to regulate the Torah as only being relevant instruction for Ancient Israel, they issue a degree of caution—especially because of how significant obeying the Torah is throughout the remainder of the Tanach. For example, Fee and Stuart emphasize how “in the Old Testament the righteous regularly express delight in God’s law (e.g., Pss 19 and 119).”<sup>9</sup> Is their implication that Bible-believing Christians today *should not* express some level of spiritual delight, satisfaction, or at least appreciation for the Torah? Is it somehow *wrong* for Believers to pray to the Lord, “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8), or “If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction” (Psalm 119:92)?<sup>10</sup> Even if our salvation is to be certainly found in the finished work of the Messiah at Golgotha (Calvary)—and by no means in our various human actions—are we to really not admire God’s Instruction in the Law of Moses that much?

Many of today’s Bible teachers think that the Torah is just a part of past Biblical history, and is not really to be a part of a born again Believer’s spirituality in the present. Often not acknowledged, though, is that the main changes which have occurred in terms of the relationship that God’s people have to the Torah relate to the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices (Hebrews 7:18), which were clearly brought in to regulate sin (Galatians 3:19). Such a priesthood has been set aside (at least until the Millennium given the tenor of Ezekiel chs. 40-44) with the final sacrifice of Yeshua now offered (Hebrews 10:12, 14), and the Torah’s capital penalties have been absorbed by His atoning work (Colossians 2:14).<sup>11</sup> Changes which have **not occurred** concern how God’s people are to live and conduct themselves as His upright representatives in greater society, as Deuteronomy 26:18 admonishes, “The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments.”

Many of those who emphasize that Believers are to follow a separate “Law of Christ,” completely independent from the Torah, are by no means lawless or immoral people, as many of them truly live forth the greatest commandments to love God and neighbor.<sup>12</sup> But, many of these persons can be quite under-informed and rather anemic when it comes to actually fleshing out what the “Law of Christ” might actually be. Most commonly, a separate and independent “Law of Christ” is believed to compose Yeshua’s teachings in His Sermon on the Mount. Yet when this is asserted, no honest reader of Matthew chs. 5-7 can overlook the fact that Yeshua’s teaching is predicated on the authority of Moses’ Teaching, with the Lord Himself not only declaring His intention **not** to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 169.

In my review of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* for my inductive Bible study class on the Gospel of Matthew at Asbury Theological Seminary (Spring 2005), my main criticism was that it did not even get around to really discussing the Old Testament until about two-thirds of the way into their 287 page book:

“While I thought this was a good read, and I picked up many points from the authors, I was a little upset that they did not start us out from the Old Testament and work our way to the New Testament, and emphasized reading Scripture like a house starting with a foundation and building its way forward. I am sure they did this with the fact that many lay people will be reading this book, and the fact that people are generally more familiar with the New Testament than the Old Testament. I personally just thought talking about the Old Testament in detail two-thirds of the way through the book was out of place.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Also to be considered could be: Psalm 1:2; 119:77, 174.

<sup>11</sup> Consult the article “The Significance of the Messiah Event,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

abolish the Torah (Matthew 5:17), but to fulfill it and bring it to its acme or climax in His actions and ministry. As John R.W. Stott concurs, “He...claimed to be both teacher and lord, gave his own authoritative interpretation of Moses’ law, issued commandments and expected obedience.”<sup>13</sup> While Moses was by no means the Messiah, **to entirely disconnect the Torah from Yeshua’s teachings is a significant mistake.**

## Real Antinomianism in Our Day

When one seeks to defend the validity and relevance of the Torah for Messiah followers living today, it is common that you will see the term “**antinomian**” used. This is a technical, theological word that is often used to describe lawlessness. *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* states that “The word comes from the Greek *anti*, against, and *nomos*, law, and signifies opposition to law. It refers to the doctrine that the moral law is not binding upon Christians as a rule of life. In a wider sense it is applied to the views of fanatics who refuse to recognize any law but their own subjective ideas which they usually claim are from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> The *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* astutely informs us how “It has appeared periodically throughout church history.”<sup>15</sup>

Many of today’s Messianics will accuse various modern Christians of being “antinomian” because they do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, remember the appointed times or *moedim* of Leviticus 23, or eat a kosher style of diet. While I am among those who believe these things to be valid and worthwhile practices for Believers,<sup>16</sup> I recognize how there are many sincerely born again people who have not yet made them a part of their faith practice. I think it is more worthwhile that our attention be focused, especially now in the mid-to-late 2010s, upon some of the **true antinomianism** that has been growing in evangelical Christianity, which Messianic Believers and many evangelical Believers alike can agree is most disturbing and revolting. Perhaps if we can understand how we got to this point, then appropriate steps can be taken to solve the problem.

In the first two decades of the Twenty-First Century, it has become self-obvious that far too much of the organized Christian Church in the West has tolerated behavior *and sin* that my parents’ generation, and certainly my grandparents’ generation, **would never have allowed**. The Apostle Paul informs us of how “in the last days difficult times will come,” specifying how there will be various “haters of good,” and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1, 3, 4). While there have undeniably been various other low points throughout religious history, the kinds of discussions that go on regarding “sin” among a few of the theologians and Bible teachers I may read today *really* is utterly ridiculous, and at times down right revolting. Even what are perceived to be “New Testament commandments” of Jesus are largely dismissed, as the only thing that is said to really matter is just some rather vague or ever-fluxuating concept of “love.”

There is a significantly undiagnosed reason why various liberal theologians and pastors seem to be having more and more success among today’s Christians: **conservatives who largely dismissed the relevance of the Torah did not teach as much on sin as they should have**. Look at the degradation of just basic ethics and morality over the past half century. When people are not taught that “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4)—even in an incomplete sense of just composing Divine ethical and moral instructions—then sin can quickly become whatever people “feel” is wrong. While the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints is to surely be present to convict us, if we have no guidelines of what sin is from the Holy Scriptures, then we can have a tendency to make “sin” into whatever we want, or even what best fits our fallen human agenda.

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<sup>13</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander M. Renwick, “Antinomianism,” in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Donald S. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 13.

<sup>16</sup> For a further investigation and discussion, consult the various volumes of the *Messianic Helper* series by Messianic Apologetics.

Does this mean that some might actually manifest a modern-day form of Judges 17:6, “everyone did as they saw fit” (TNIV)? Not submitting oneself to the instruction of God in the Torah, much less being informed by its commandments, has allowed far too many *claiming Believers* to subjectively define sin from an errant, mortal, and probably a rather fleshly-oriented point of view—rather than from the standpoint of our Eternal Creator.

While there are many truly saved and born again Christians, who just need to start *reading more of their Bibles* on a more frequent basis—and who will be convicted by the Lord to change their various habits—there is an immensely singular controversy in contemporary evangelicalism which has been directly caused by dismissing the Torah or Law of Moses. The biggest controversy in evangelical Christianity today easily regards **the validity of homosexuality**, with debates over the possible ordination of homosexual clergy splitting many churches and denominations.<sup>17</sup> What is the basic logic of those arguing in favor of homosexuality being acceptable for Christian people? It is that the sexual instructions which prohibit such behavior were only intended for Old Testament times and the culture of Ancient Israel (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13), **and that Jesus abolished the Law!** Jack Rogers, formerly an evangelical Presbyterian, states some of the reasons how he came to believe that homosexuality is now acceptable:

“The Hebrew word *toevah* translated as ‘abomination,’ refers here to something that makes a person ritually unclean, such as having intercourse with a woman while she is menstruating. Ritual purity was considered necessary to distinguish the Israelites from their pagan neighbors....Jesus was concerned [only] with purity of heart...When we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17), we understand that our challenge is not meticulously to maintain culturally conditioned laws, but rather, with Jesus, to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40). When these texts in Leviticus are taken out of their historical and cultural context and applied to faithful, God-worshipping Christians who are homosexual, it does violence to them.”<sup>18</sup>

Since the legalization of homosexual marriage in the United States in 2015, a definite spiritual shift has taken place in the evangelical Christian world, with many leaders and pastors steadily embracing homosexuality as something not actually prohibited by God’s Word. While it may be true that there are areas of significant improvement that many of today’s Believers need to make—as the Lord Yeshua died for *all sinners*, and none of us needs to be found making a final judgment on any particular person’s salvation—the Apostle Paul did not at all consider homosexual practice to just be something cultural, but directly consequential of humanity’s general rebellion against the Creator God (Romans 1:26-27).<sup>19</sup> I am sorry to say that the evangelical Christianity which made a rather genuine and positive contribution to my family in the 1980s and 1990s, now finds itself in its twilight period.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the evangelical Christians whom today’s Messianic Believers are likely to encounter, rightly oppose homosexuality as a valid lifestyle, and the ordination of gays and lesbians as clergy. They oppose abortion-on-demand, pre-marital sex, and would certainly uphold a Torah ethic in many places, being social conservatives. *They also want, as all of us should, to demonstrate Yeshua’s*

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<sup>17</sup> The various positions of this debate are accessible in Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Preston Sprinkle, William Loader, Megan K. DeFanza, Wesley Hill, and Stephen R. Holmes, *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), pp 72-73.

<sup>19</sup> Consult the FAQ, “Romans 1:26-27,” which includes an analysis of the clause *para phusin* or “against nature.”

<sup>20</sup> I am even more sorry to report that in Spring 2015, the main person responsible for conferring my M.A. in Biblical Studies upon me at Asbury Theological Seminary, laying his hands and praying over me, Dr. Steve Harper, publicly came out in favor of homosexual marriage, albeit in his retirement. Even more lamentable than this, though, was the utter silence from many of his former faculty colleagues, in publicly condemning him.

Much of Harper’s transition to accepting same-sex relationships as being acceptable to God is covered in his book *For the Sake of the Bride: Restoring the Church to Her Intended Beauty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014).

love to those who are in error. But, it cannot be denied that a **major factor** in today's evangelical Christianity being radically split on these issues is precisely because the Torah has been jettisoned from its collective psyche and spiritual ideology. Even among some of your very conservative, evangelical Believers of today—when the Law of Moses is entirely relegated to past Biblical history—is it at all possible that important ground has been ceded to the enemy? In the past several decades, Satan has certainly done an excellent job at wreaking havoc on contemporary evangelicalism. Much of the culmination of this has been witnessed via the homosexual agenda (although heterosexual sins certainly abound as well). Because too many people are not quite sure what to do with the Torah, has a true **antinomian assault** been unleashed upon too much of the Body of Messiah?

## Appreciating the Hebraic and Jewish Roots of Our Faith

No one should be at all surprised, as a direct result of the magnitude of contemporary Christian ethics and morality being skewed—why many evangelical Believers (in spite of what some denominations say) consciously know that they have **ignored God's Instruction in the Old Testament for far too long** and that this must be rectified. This is not to say that they want to dismiss with the teachings of Jesus or the New Testament in any way. *Instead*, what they want is a far more holistic Biblical worldview.

In the case of my own family throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, once my late father Kimball McKee (1951-1992) came to faith in 1984, he was not only stirred to regularly study the Holy Scriptures—but he and my mother became acquainted with the Messianic Jewish teacher Zola Levitt and the Hebraic and Jewish Roots of Christianity. While much of this involved understanding how Jesus Christ prophetically fulfilled things such as the Passover, or how He will return in association with the Fall holidays of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*<sup>21</sup>—it also definitely involved being a bit more aware of the Law of Moses and God's commandments. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kim McKee brought some rather early Messianic understanding into Christ United Methodist Church of Florence, KY, most notably by holding an educational Passover presentation during Holy Week right before Easter/Resurrection Sunday.

Before my father died and went to be with the Lord in 1992, he had been approved by his district superintendent of the United Methodist Church in Northern Kentucky for local pastoral ministry,<sup>22</sup> and had he lived he would probably have remained in Methodism until some of the present circumstances being faced by evangelicalism at present. Yet, being raised by a good Presbyterian in my Grandad McKee, and having married the granddaughter of the highly regarded Methodist Bishop Marvin A. Franklin in my mother—my father **would never** have been among those who advocated some "Law of Christ" entirely independent from the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. I fully believe that were he still with us today, he would totally approve of the spiritual *and* ministry course that we have continued on in his stead, honoring the legacy he set before us.

While many Christian Believers have known that they must heed the Torah's instruction in terms of the Ten Commandments, and the Torah's ethical, moral, and sexual instructions—much of the interest that has helped significantly grow the Messianic movement in the past two to three decades (1990s-2010s) has been because their interest in Moses' Teaching has not stopped there.

It is undeniable that the modern Messianic movement originally began as an evangelistic outreach of Jewish Believers to their fellow Jews who needed to know Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah. As many Jewish people came to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah, they needed to establish

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Zola Levitt, *The Seven Feasts of Israel* (Dallas: Zola Levitt Ministries, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Consult the author's article "To Those Who Have Gone Before Us" (September 2007 Outreach Israel News).

communities where they would be able—as strange as it might sound to others—to still *be Jewish*. They could still observe the weekly *Shabbat*, the holidays of Israel, eat kosher, perform circumcisions and *bar/bat mitzvah*, use the *siddur* (prayer book) and wrap *tefillin* (phylacteries), and identify with their cultural Jewish heritage and be involved with the State of Israel. In more recent days, however, the Messianic movement has also been a significant magnet for many sincere evangelical Christians, who want to embrace their Hebraic and Jewish Roots, and a life of Torah obedience, in a far more tangible and real way than *just following* the Law’s ethical and moral instructions. These Believers want to live **as much as they can** like their Jewish Savior, and they want to be united in congregational fellowship with their fellow Jewish Believers as a testament to the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15) that He has formed, itself a small snapshot of the greater reconciliation to come to the cosmos (Ephesians 1:21-23).

Of course, as this has taken place, and as the broad Messianic movement tends to have a very positive and even pro-active view of Torah observance—this has spurred on a great deal of questions, as well as much criticism. Most of this has come from various Christian persons, who when they witness families such as my own enter into the Messianic community and adopt a lifestyle of Torah obedience—keeping *Shabbat*, the appointed times, and eating kosher among other things—really wonder why we would do this. More often than not, those who are the most skeptical and critical (as opposed to those who are open-minded, but just not totally sure at present), do actually believe that the Law of Moses has been abolished by Yeshua the Messiah.

Aside from our Lord’s own words that explicitly stand against any person who says that He came to abolish the Torah (Matthew 5:17ff), many of today’s Christians are unable to realize that throughout a great deal of Church history—the widespread dismissal of the Law of Moses that one witnesses has been **the most common proof** used by the Jewish community against the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth. Many religious Jews think that Jesus classifies, according to the Deuteronomy 13 warnings against false prophets, as a man who led people away from the Torah of Moses—at least because of the conduct of His later followers.<sup>23</sup>

Among various Jews, mostly academics, Jesus is of course approached from the perspective of basically being a good moralistic teacher or a kind of liberal social reformer. It is thought that some of His followers probably embellished some of His original teachings, given much of the Messianic fervor in First Century Judea. One who came along and is thought to really have “cashed in” on the Jesus message was Paul of Tarsus, perhaps as some opportunist who abused the message of the man from Nazareth. Among some Jews, Paul is thought to have taken the Jesus message out to Greeks and Romans, distorting it and promising them an easier way to Heaven or the world to come. This came by this man Paul teaching that those from the nations did not have to keep the Law of Moses. Jewish columnist David Klinghoffer writes the following in his book *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus*:

“Again and again, addressing Christians of Jewish and non-Jewish background, he granted full liberty from the law. ‘Now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive’ [Romans 7:6]. Christ was ‘the end of the law’ [Romans 10:4]....If he personally sometimes obeyed the laws, this was only for appearances’ sake. It made observant Jews who had not as yet accepted Christ feel comfortable. He admits this plainly: ‘To the Jews I become as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I become as one under the law—that I might win those under the law...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some’ [1 Corinthians 9:20, 22]...[I]t’s obvious that after a Jew had acquired Paul as his teacher, the full implications of the novel doctrine would be

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<sup>23</sup> It is very true that along with this, one of the other main reasons why many Jews throughout history have rejected Yeshua as Messiah, is because orthodox Christian theology affirms Him as being Divine, the LORD, God the Son. In much Jewish theology, however, the Messiah is to only be human. This is steadily becoming a major area of disagreement within parts of the Messianic community, but one which must ultimately be guided by the claims of the Biblical text.

For a further discussion, consult the author’s publications *Salvation on the Line: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity*, released in two volumes.

revealed to him. Henceforth this new Jewish believer would be ‘discharged’ from the commandments.”<sup>24</sup>

Such a view of these same Pauline passages is, quite sadly, confirmed in the words and conclusions of many of today’s well-known and highly respected Christian theologians *who precisely declare that Christ came to abolish the Mosaic Law*. We can be overwhelmed with Jewish opinions over two millennia in terms of what they think about the message contained in the Messianic Scriptures, or what various Christian voices have said. Our job as responsible Bible readers, however, is to postulate whether is it entirely irreconcilable that the New Covenant expectation is “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it” (Jeremiah 31:33), with the Pauline assertion “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4, NASU)—a widespread and common view of this being some kind of termination.<sup>25</sup>

**What do today’s Messianic Believers do about this, who believe that the Law of Moses remains relevant instruction to be heeded by the redeemed?**

## Correcting Christian Misunderstandings

From a surface reading of many English Bibles to be sure, those who want to make the case that the Law of Moses has been nullified are able to make seemingly “viable” positions against today’s Messianic movement. They are able to take verses from the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), which if we just examined at face value in English, *could* suggest that the Torah has been done away with or abolished. But as any responsible Bible reader, who has invested an appropriate amount of time into the discipline of either inductive Bible study or exegesis knows—our appeal is ultimately to be to the source text *that sits behind* our English translations.

In this publication, *The New Testament Validates Torah*, we will make considerable utilization of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures and demonstrate why the Law of Moses was not at all abolished or nullified by Yeshua the Messiah, and why figures such as the Apostle Paul did not dispense with it either. Passages such as those above (Romans 7:6; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 9:20, 22) and many others, will be exegeted from a conservative Biblical perspective with careful attention to the source text, and they will be engaged with an appropriate array of scholarly views—both for and against a pro-Torah position. Yet, as born again Believers who should have put our individual faith in the completed work of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), we must understand that in light of all the arguments we will be examining, *His words* relating to the Law of Moses stand primary:

**“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished”** (Matthew 5:18; cf. Luke 16:17).

Letting Yeshua the Messiah, the LORD God made manifest in the flesh, be our Interpreter, we must conclude that the Torah has not yet passed away. *Heaven and Earth still stand!* Notably, the Messiah further tells us, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). At the very least, what the Lord tells us here is that one’s status in the Kingdom is determined by how he or she handles the Torah or Law of Moses. Those who teach from the Torah, affording it an honored place in one’s Bible

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<sup>24</sup> David Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), pp 108-109.

Against: Pamela Eisenbaum, “On the Contrary, We Uphold the Law!”, in *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp 208-239 where this liberal Jewish professor argues that Paul has been misunderstood in terms of opposing the Law. Contrary to someone like Klinghoffer, what she thinks he really opposes is Torah-keeping for non-Jews *but not* Torah-keeping for Jews. While I would be of the position that God’s Torah bears relevance for all of His people, regardless of ethnicity, Eisenbaum’s analysis is worthy of a perusal.

<sup>25</sup> Notable to this verse is recognizing that the NASB does list for Romans 10:4 the alternate reading “Or, *goal*” (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994], 1498). More obvious would be how the 2005 TNIV says “Christ is the culmination of the law,” but even more to the point would be the 2010 Common English Bible’s “For Christ is the goal of the Law.” (Technical details are evaluated further in our analysis of Romans 10:4.)

reading, and encouraging others to follow and value its commandments—will be considered great. Those who teach against the Torah and dishonor its instructions will be considered least.

**I truly desire to see that no born again Believer ever be considered “least” in the Kingdom of Heaven,** much less be considered lawless. We need to all be in compliance with the Word of the Lord and receive all of the great and awesome blessings that He has for us! **I want to see people blessed by God,** as opposed to being penalized by Him in any way.

Thankfully, as I have reviewed my own family’s Christian history and the denominational traditions represented therein, I have been able to find various voices throughout post-Reformation history who have rightfully recognized that faithful Believers need to approach the issue of Biblical continuity from Genesis-Revelation with great care, skill, and sensitivity. Certainly as time has moved forward, and there has been more sustained contact with the lands of the Bible, greater research into the Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, and more historical and archaeological information to appropriate—some generations have had more “light” than others. Among these groups of Messiah followers spread across the centuries, though, is not only a definite desire to serve and please Him—making a sustained difference in the world—but also a need to recognize that there is a specific plan and purpose witnessed in the Holy Scriptures. Walter C. Kaiser, who is undoubtedly one of my most favorite evangelical theologians, expresses how only a Supreme and Omniscient God could be behind the marvelous tapestry of the Bible, giving it a single, unifying theme of redemption. In his book *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, he summarizes,

“When a full document like the Bible is drawn from so many individual books written over such a long period of time, and the writers did not know each other and rarely were contemporaries of each other or even from the same continents, it is hard to imagine that any kind of coherence or ongoing strategy would be possible. But the Bible, extending over two testaments and some sixteen hundred years, and written by about forty writers in three languages, representing three continents, exhibits some strong general schemes that suggest a common archetypal plan and purpose in the story of redemption....If God was behind the production of all these contributions, then the unity is the result of a driving plan and the harmony reflects what he has willed and purposed.”<sup>26</sup>

With such an impetus of seeking a thematically-unified Bible behind many previous generations of faithful and Messiah-honoring Believers—it should be no surprise that in our day, among many seeking God’s truth, there is a highly renewed interest in the Torah or Law of Moses. One of the final admonitions of the Tanach Scriptures, interestingly enough, is actually: “Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel” (Malachi 4:4). Yet while previous generations of Christians were limited in their understanding of Moses’ Teaching to perhaps only its moral and ethical instructions—however important and critical these may have been for their time—today’s emerging Messianic movement, being highly informed from Jewish theology, is able to promote an even wider scope of Torah relevance and obedience for God’s people.

No one, most especially myself, denies how the rise of the Messianic movement has led to a number of Christian persons vehemently opposing God’s Torah. Some of this comes as an over-reaction to the bad attitudes of various extremists and fundamentalist voices identifying themselves as “Messianic” or “Hebrew Roots,” and their over-inflated rhetoric against some of the ills of historic Christianity. At the same time, though, even when a message of Torah validity is presented fairly, reasonably, and in concert with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the thrust of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17), and a greater embodiment of God’s love and grace being central—there are still those who want absolutely nothing to do with it. *They*

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<sup>26</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 20-21.

believe that the Apostolic Scriptures are on their side, and that the Law of Moses has been fully abolished and rendered inoperative. They sometimes believe that Torah observant Messianics are trying to “earn their salvation,” **or are perhaps even unsaved!** Rather than just dismiss their claims, as far too many Messianic persons I know have done, we have to instead consider the requirement of Proverbs 18:17 upon us as responsible and mature people of God:

**“The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines”** (NRSV).

I believe that when you finish reading the analysis provided in *The New Testament Validates Torah*, that as a Messianic Believer you will be able **to strongly defend** the validity of Moses’ Teaching for born again Believers when a Christian who believes that the Law has somehow been abolished confronts you. If you are an evangelical Christian investigating Messianic theological views, you will no doubt be challenged and be forced into the Scriptures to reevaluate many of the things you have either been taught or have heard in the past. Most importantly, for whomever you are: may the quest for all of us be **to be in full compliance with the Word of God**, and conform to the example that our Lord and Savior Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) demonstrated for us during His time on Earth.

## Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?

Within **Part I** of *The New Testament Validates Torah*, we will be analyzing the specific views of a stereotypical evangelical Christian pastor, who believes that the Law of Moses was abolished by Jesus. The various reasons and objections to following the Torah that he offers are fairly common, in terms of what is commonly said when Messianic Believers interact with various Christian family members, friends, but above all acquaintances or certain associates from a church. We will analyze the statements that this “pastor” makes on a point-by-point basis. I think it is safe to say that these reasons constitute many of those you will often encounter as a Messianic Believer, who wants to live the life of our Lord Yeshua, by being obedient to the Torah.

The pastor’s comments are reproduced below, before we begin our review of his remarks:

## Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?

some thoughts on the Mosaic Law from a typical pastor<sup>27</sup>

The Law is a unit of 613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel. The word Law is sometimes used when referring to all Old Testament writings such as in John 10:34 and 15:25 when Jesus quotes Psalms and 1 Corinthians 14:21 when Paul quotes Isaiah. But it is important to remember that there is only one Law. When referring to the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, we are speaking of three aspects of the Law, not three laws. Those who say we must keep the Law tell us that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial and civil laws, but not the moral law.

First, the Law was given to point out our sins. “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions...” (Galatians 3:19). It is the standard that is used to show how sinful we are.

Many people think that the Law was given so that by keeping it we will become righteous. This is a wrong understanding of the Law. The Law is our referee to show us how many times that we step out of bounds. It shows how utterly filthy and wicked our sin is (Romans 7:13). In God’s eyes, even our righteousness is called filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Second, it points to the Savior: “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). The Law not only points out the problem, but also the solution. It is our tutor (teacher) to lead us to Christ that we might be **justified by faith, not by keeping the Law**. Jesus paid for all of the sins of the world (1 John 2:2; 1 Peter 2:24), the very sins that the Law pointed out. The only way to receive forgiveness from sins is by receiving Jesus Christ into our lives because there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).

No one is able to keep the Law. Hebrews 7:18-19 tells us that the Law was set aside because of its weakness, because the Law made nothing perfect. As a matter of fact, the power of sin is in trying to keep the Law (1 Corinthians 15:56). This is why Paul said that the Law was given so that transgression might increase (Romans 5:20). Sin takes opportunity through the commandments and becomes alive by increasing the desires to break them (Romans 7:8-9).

Most people believe that the Law is “Laws” rather than “Law.” If we keep the entire Law and break **only one**, we are guilty of breaking them all. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). The Law is not like a carton of eggs, where if you break 5 you still have 7 unbroken eggs. It is like a sheet of glass—if you break one part, the whole sheet is broken. If you keep one part of the Law, you are obligated to keep them all.

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<sup>27</sup> This analysis is loosely based on a discussion called “The Sabbath,” which originally appeared on the website of Cornerstone Church of Garden City, KS <odsgc.net/~cornerst/sabbath.htm> in 2000 (their church website is now <<http://cornerstonepeople.org>> and this information has been subsequently removed), even though additional verses and passages have been added.

No one will be justified by the Law. "Because by the works of the Law no one will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). If the Law were able to impart life, then righteousness would have been based on the Law (Galatians 3:21). But it can't, so it isn't. The following verses show that Christians are not obligated to keep the Old Testament Law:

\*indicates passages added to the original list

Isaiah 1:13-14: God hates the Jewish feasts of the Old Testament\*

Ezekiel 20:12-26: God actually gave His people bad laws that they could not follow.\*

Hosea 2:11: God has put an end to the Old Testament Sabbath and feast days.\*

Matthew 5:17: Jesus fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law.

Matthew 11:13: The Law of Moses was only in effect until John the Baptist.\*

Mark 7:1-23: Jesus Christ declared the dietary laws, and hence all commands, of the Mosaic Law to be obsolete.\*

John 1:17: The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth realized through Christ.

John 13:34: Jesus Christ gave us a new law of love to replace the laws of the Old Testament.\*

Acts 10:1-48: Peter was shown a vision nullifying the dietary laws.\*

Acts 15:19-21: The Apostolic decree says nothing about new Christians observing the Mosaic Law.\*

Acts 20:7: The early Christians met on the first day of the week, a clear abolishment of the Jewish Sabbath.\*

Romans 3:19-22: Through the works of the Law no one will be justified.

Romans 3:27-31: Justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Romans 4:5: God justifies those who do not work.

Romans 6:14-15: We are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:23: Eternal life is a free gift.

Romans 7:1-25: We were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ.

Romans 8:1-4: The law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 10:4: Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 11:6: Grace is no longer on the basis of works.

Romans 14: God does not care about what days people celebrate or what food they eat.\*

1 Corinthians 6:12-20: All things are now lawful.\*

1 Corinthians 8: Paul permitted Gentile Christians to eat idol food, a clear violation of the Mosaic Law.\*

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: It is only necessary to keep the Old Testament law to convert Jews to Christ.\*

1 Corinthians 10:14-33: Paul says to eat whatever is set before you.\*

1 Corinthians 16:2: The early Christians met on the first day of the week, a clear abolishment of the Jewish Sabbath.\*

2 Corinthians 3: The veil of the old covenant has been removed.\*

Galatians 2:11-21: By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 3:12-14: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

Galatians 3:23-25: The Law is our tutor to lead us to Christ.

Galatians 4:8-11: The Sabbath and Old Testament feast days are weak and worthless principles.\*

Galatians 5:1-4: Those who try to keep the Law of Moses have fallen from grace.\*

Ephesians 2:8-10: We are saved by grace, not as a result of works.

Ephesians 2:14-15: The Law was abolished in the flesh of Christ.

Philippians 3:2-11 Righteousness is not derived by the Law.

Colossians 2:14: The Law of Moses was nailed to the cross of Christ.

Colossians 2:16-23: Christians are not to be judged for not keeping the Sabbath and Old Testament feast days.\*

1 Timothy 1:8-9: The Law is not made for a righteous man.\*

1 Timothy 4:1-5: Those who observe the dietary laws have committed apostasy against Jesus.\*

2 Timothy 1:9: Salvation is not according to works.

2 Timothy 2:15: The Word of God is to be rightly divided between the Old and New Testaments, Israel and the Church.\*

Titus 1:14: The Old Testament law is to be regarded as nothing more than Jewish myth.\*

Titus 3:5-8: He did not save us according to our deeds, but according to His mercy.

Titus 3:9: We are not to be concerned about obedience to Jewish laws.\*

Hebrews 4:1-10: Jesus is our Sabbath rest now.\*

Hebrews 7:11-12, 18-19: A change of law has taken place, because it was weak and worthless.

Hebrews 8: The New Covenant makes the Old Covenant obsolete.

Hebrews 10:1: The Law was only a shadow of good things to come.

Hebrews 10:9: God takes away the first covenant to establish the second.

Revelation 1:10: The Sabbath has now been replaced with the Lord's Day.\*

Some people try to argue, "If we are no longer under the Law, what's left to keep us in line? That means we can now sin all we want." On the contrary, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12).

Grace is actually a higher law than the Old Testament Law. Grace changes our hearts so that we want to do God's will. It is called the law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12), the royal law (James 2:8), the law of the Spirit of life (Romans 8:1-4), the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), the law of faith (Romans 3:27), and the law within (Hebrews 8:10). We are now under the law of the Spirit who lives within every Believer and not under the letter of the Law: "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).



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## ANSWERING: WHAT IS THE LAW?

**Pastor:** The Law is a unit of 613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel. The word Law is sometimes used when referring to all Old Testament writings such as in John 10:34 and 15:25 when Jesus quotes Psalms and 1 Corinthians 14:21 when Paul quotes Isaiah. But it is important to remember that there is only one Law. When referring to the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, we are speaking of three aspects of the Law, not three laws. Those who say we must keep the Law tell us that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial and civil laws, but not the moral law.

**“The Law is a unit of 613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel.”**

There is only one Instruction for the people of God, and when it was codified it was given to the people of Ancient Israel. But *torah* as God’s Teaching or Instruction, contrary to what many contemporary Christians might know, certainly pre-dated Mount Sinai. Genesis 26:5 affirms how the Patriarch Abraham **“obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”** The Hebrew translated “laws” in most Bibles is *torotai* or “My Torahs” (ATS), also “teachings” (NJPS) or “instructions” (TNIV). Abraham surely obeyed God, and knew a wide degree of what He considered acceptable and unacceptable prior to the formal giving of the Torah to the Ancient Israelites.

In Genesis 26:5 affirming that Abraham obeyed God’s “laws,” what these various “Torahs” would have likely included would have been a series of instructions primarily relating to ethics, morality, various sorts of animal sacrifice, and other practices that would mark him out as serving the One True God and not the gods of Mesopotamia or Canaan.<sup>1</sup> The usage of the plural *torot* could imply that as Abraham grew in his relationship with the Creator and fellowshiped with Him, that he was taught more laws by Him as time progressed, such as the rite of circumcision and the significance it would have for his descendants.<sup>2</sup> Originally having to answer the call of the Unseen God to leave Ur (Genesis 12:1; 15:7), Abraham was surely not told everything he was to do all at once.

A common Jewish interpretation of Genesis 26:5, as the *Soncino Chumash* notes, holds that “Abraham fulfilled all the laws of the Torah before they were revealed at Sinai, arriving at a knowledge of them through inspiration.”<sup>3</sup> In some cases, Jewish interpreters have taken the plural *torot* or “laws” to be both the Written Torah and Oral Torah,<sup>4</sup> the latter of which now composes literature like the Mishnah and Talmud. While it is very possible that among the various “laws”

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 95.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 17:10-27.

<sup>3</sup> A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983), 145.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Nossou Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 129.

Abraham followed could include those various oral explanations that would aid Ancient Israel with the keeping of the commandments codified at Mount Sinai, the main point to be taken from Genesis 26:5 is that Abraham's faith in the Unseen God was in no way incompatible with him being obedient to whatever instructions such a God gave him. Abraham could not remember the Passover, which is clearly rooted in the Exodus experience of the future nation of Ancient Israel from Egypt. But among those things which could be clearly given to him, Abraham was faithfully obedient. In his Genesis commentary, John Calvin correctly detected the main focus of what Abraham following God's "laws" means:

"[A]lthough laws, statutes, rites, precepts, and ceremonies, had not yet been written, Moses used these terms, that he might the more clearly show how sedulously Abraham regulated his life according to the will of God alone—how carefully he abstained from all of the impurities of the heathen—and how exactly he pursued the straight course of holiness, without turning aside to the right or to the left."<sup>5</sup>

John H. Sailhamer similarly concludes, "by showing Abraham to be an example of 'keeping the law,' the writer has shown the nature of the relationship between law and faith. Abraham, a man who lived in faith, could be described as one who kept the law."<sup>6</sup>

Of course, many readers of Genesis 26:5 do not know what to do with the assertion that Abraham followed God's "laws" or "Torahs." The critical tradition, which views the Pentateuch as being a compilation of different sources after the Babylonian exile, might view this only as a statement of the so-called J source or Yahwist,<sup>7</sup> which has been read into the account and is largely fictional. While it is easy to disregard such a liberal opinion, even conservative Christian readers issue objections to the mere thought that Abraham observed any of what would later be codified as the "Mosaic Law." Objections are often made on the basis that Abraham married his half-sister, which is clearly prohibited.<sup>8</sup> Later, Jacob married two sisters,<sup>9</sup> and also erected a pillar to God.<sup>10</sup> Worst of all, Abraham took his wife's handmaiden Hagar to conceive a child,<sup>11</sup> a definite practice of Ancient Near Eastern paganism which has never been viewed with the greatest of compliments in the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup>

The answer to much of this can elude some people, but these oversights—aside from the obvious fact that these people were limited mortals and were by no means perfect—is that there was a period when the Patriarch Abraham was an idolater, and such influences are not always easily removed. Joshua 24:2 states,

"Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods [*elohim acheirim*].''"

It is true that the Torah would not be formally codified or written until Mount Sinai. But, it is to definitely be noted that a large part of the Torah being given to Ancient Israel in such a written form was to help establish the Levitical priesthood (Galatians 3:19), and with it regulate atonement for sins via animal sacrifice in the Tabernacle or Temple until the arrival of the Messiah (Hebrews 10:1, 3). The plural *torotai* is undoubtedly used in Genesis 26:5 to describe the obedience of Abraham, because he had to learn all of the instructions—*mitzvotai chuqotai v'torotai*, "My commandments, My statutes and My laws"—directly from God, albeit somewhat loosely in some cases.

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<sup>5</sup> John Calvin: *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 2:60.

<sup>6</sup> John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in Frank E. Gaebel, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:187.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp 270-271.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 20:12; prohibition: Leviticus 18:9, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 29:15-35; prohibition: Leviticus 18:18.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 28:22; 31:13; prohibition: Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 16:22.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:25.

J.H. Hertz, in his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, suggests that the commandments (*mitzvoth*) Abraham received were “Laws dictated by the moral sense, e.g. against the crimes of robbery, bloodshed, etc.,” that the statutes (*chujim*) were “Laws ordained by God which we are to observe although reason cannot assign an explanation, e.g. the prohibition of swine’s flesh,” and laws (*torot*) were “Customs and traditional ordinances orally transmitted from generation to generation.”<sup>13</sup> Passing any of this down orally to the succeeding generations would have been highly difficult, because of how various pagan, Ancient Near Eastern practices are seen interspersed within the early narratives of Genesis, and would have required an authority like Moses to finally and formally deliver via the transcription of the Pentateuch or *Chumash*.<sup>14</sup>

Generally speaking, all mature Christians agree that Abraham is an example that born again Believers are to follow (cf. Romans 4:16), but any argument that Abraham lived his life and conducted himself entirely on blind faith, *with no instructions or commandments of any kind* to follow, is most unsupported.

Still, many of today’s Believers disregard the importance of the Torah as including important instructions to be obeyed, because the Law was given to Israel and not the Church. This is resultant from the unfortunate fact that many Christians at large do not often see themselves as being grafted-in to the olive tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-18), or even being related to Israel—as Israel was to be the holy and set-apart people to whom the Torah was given (Deuteronomy 28:9). For dispensationalists especially—who hold to a view that God has *two groups* of elect, believed to be Israel or the ethnic Jewish people *and* the Church—Christian Believers who make up the second group of elect are those to whom the Torah does not apply. This is often used as a basis for their rejection of it, along with various proof texts that are offered to support a termination of its authority. Because the Law was not “given to the Church,” it is then relegated to past history, not really to be used for the spiritual guidance of the Messiah’s followers today.

The analysis of *The New Testament Validates Torah* is not intended to address ecclesiology or the study of God’s elect in any large detail. But the idea that God has *two groups* of elect (Israel and “the Church”), as opposed to **one** composite group of elect (Israel), is a concept that much of the Messianic movement rejects. We believe, rather, that the Lord has only one group of elect: the community of Israel. The Apostle Paul asserts something very profound in the general epistle written to the non-Jewish Believers of Asia Minor. He tells them that although they may be criticized for somehow being “uncircumcised” (cf. Ephesians 2:11),<sup>15</sup> they are to instead “remember that you were at that time [prior to salvation] separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Paul says that these non-Jewish Believers prior their salvation were “alienated” (RSV) from “citizenship in Israel” (NIV), but because of their faith in the Messiah, that they were now a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Ephesians 3:6 lays out more fully how redeemed Believers from the nations “are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel.” **This hardly sounds like non-Jewish Believers being a part of a separate “Church” entity.**

In Ephesians 2:12, the specific Greek term *politeia*—“commonwealth” (NASU), “community” (NEB), or “citizenship” (NIV)—is to be properly viewed as **“the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity, citizenship”** (BDAG).<sup>16</sup> This is an extremely powerful term, because, if indeed

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<sup>13</sup> Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> At least in terms of the narrative materials from Genesis 1:1-37:2, a conservative scholar like R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 548-551 holds that this material could have originally survived on eleven clay tablets that could have later been used by Moses in the composition of the Pentateuch.

<sup>15</sup> Keep in mind that for Second Temple Judaism, “circumcision” pertained much more to one’s status as an ethnic Jew or proselyte to Judaism, than to an actual medical operation.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 845.

non-Jewish Believers are a part of Israel along with their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters in the Lord, *tēs politeias tou Israēl*, then as fellow citizens with them they are called to heed the Torah as relevant instruction for their lives—similar to how any Jewish person naturally would. The sojourner who entered into Ancient Israel was called to learn from and follow Moses’ Teaching, as Deuteronomy 31:12 is direct to emphasize, “Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law [*kol-divrei ha’Torah ha’zot*].”<sup>17</sup>

There is really no such thing in Scripture as a separate entity of elect known as “the Church,” which exists outside of Israel. When the Greek word *ekklēsia*, commonly translated as “church,” is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, the writers use it as a reference to the people who the Lord first called out of the world at Mount Sinai.

In the Apostolic Scriptures no reader can deny how *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and so by extension it is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. But whether this is an appropriate rendering or not is something critical to ask, because when many people encounter the word “church” they think not of a living and breathing group of Messiah followers, but instead of a building with a steeple.<sup>18</sup> *TDNT* offers some rather important remarks on the term *ekklēsia*:

“Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic...‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly.”<sup>19</sup>

This Christian commentary says that “assembly” would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*. The Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating three centuries before Yeshua, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal*, or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is one of the main Hebrew terms for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* informs us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”<sup>20</sup> When the martyr Stephen speaks of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV), *tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō*, “the church” here he is speaking of is actually the assembly/congregation of Israel.

The Hebrew word *qahal* is used in the Tanach to describe the people of Israel. *TWOT* indicates that “*qāhāl* may...designate the congregation as an organized body. There is *qahal yiśrā’el* (Deut 31:30), *qahal YHWH* (Num 16:3, etc.), and *qahal ʾēlōhīm* (Neh 13:1) and then at other times merely ‘the assembly’ (*haqqāhāl*). We encounter...‘the assembly of the people of God’ (Jud 20:2). Of special interest is the phrase ‘congregation of the Lord’ (*qahal YHWH*) of which there are thirteen instances (Num 16:3; 20:4; Deut 23:2-4; Mic 2:5; 1 Chr 28:8). It is the nearest OT equivalent of ‘church of the Lord.’”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Some of the issues surrounding Torah passages such as Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16, 29-30, have been considered in the author’s article “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*).

<sup>18</sup> Note how there are various people one will encounter in the Messianic community, who will not use the term “church” because they somehow think it has pagan origins. **But** we do not readily use the term “church” to describe God’s people on theological grounds, and the confusion it frequently can cause. When “the Church” is typically referred to in the author’s writings, it is primarily to refer to a religious institution.

Consult the FAQ, “Church, word of pagan origin.”

<sup>19</sup> K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

<sup>20</sup> Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.