

# **THE NEW TESTAMENT VALIDATES TORAH**

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

**J.K. McKee**



# **The New Testament Validates Torah**

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

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# Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

Special terms unique to this publication have been provided in the following chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Lidell & Scott)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	LXE: Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LXX: Septuagint
b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )	m. Mishnah
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	MT: Masoretic Text
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Ardt, Gingrich)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NIV: New International Version (1984)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
GNT: Greek New Testament	RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
Grk: Greek	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
Heb: Hebrew	TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
HCSB: <i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> (2001)	TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	v(s). verse(s)
IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>	Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>
KJV: King James Version	Vul: Latin Vulgate
	WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
	YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)



## INTRODUCTION

It is clear and obvious that the Body of Believers today has lost direction for the future. There are many problems among those in our faith today. The foremost of these problems is the widespread proliferation of sin and unbiblical behavior, which results in people having an ineffective spiritual walk and unable to fulfill the mission of God in the world. In response, many Believers strongly and rightfully advocate a return to a foundational grounding in the Holy Scriptures. By all means, we could not agree more! This is perhaps evidenced by the popular question: **What Would Jesus Do?** Many are earnestly and sincerely seeking the Lord and want Him to have total control over their lives. He is guiding them into His truth and people are being supernaturally changed.

Unfortunately for some of those who ask this question, parts of the answer may not come to their liking. The truth is that while our Lord and Savior lived a perfect life and is our example of how to serve and love one another, He also obeyed God's commandments. If we believe that the Messiah is the LORD God made manifest in the flesh, then the commandments of God are in fact *His commandments*. These "commandments" are not just vague concepts, but are contained in the first five books of Scripture, the Law of Moses or the Torah.

The Torah was given by God to His people to make them holy unto Him and set-apart from the world. If there is any concept that must be emphasized to today's generation, *it is separation from the world!* We are a generation that largely does not know how to be different from everyone else. Many Christians are of the false assumption that we will impact the world by "blending in" with contemporary culture, rather than by being different.

The majority of Messianic Believers, including myself, strongly believe that the Christian community has missed out on many of the eternal truths contained in the Torah. In response to the widespread Christian question "What Would Jesus Do?" it is clear from the Scriptures that our Messiah Yeshua obeyed the Torah. If we truly wish to emulate our Savior in *all* respects, we will give the extra effort needed and likewise want to honor and obey the Torah. If we truly want to be spiritually mature, we will cede God more control of our lives and not seek to do what is "minimally" required.

But with this come some serious problems. The majority of Christians, while often wanting to live a life consistent with Scripture, feel obliged for the most part to only follow the Apostolic Scriptures or the New Testament. Many fail to realize that the early Believers in the First Century had no "New Testament," but only had the "Old Testament," the Hebrew Bible or the Tanach,<sup>i</sup> to follow as their Scriptures. Many Christians today are of the false impression that the Apostolic Scriptures tell us that the Law of Moses or the Torah is no longer to be followed and is relatively unimportant for today, if important at all. Many have misinterpreted the Apostolic Scriptures because they do not have a

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<sup>i</sup> Or, such Scriptures in their Greek Septuagint translation.

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foundation in the Torah. On the whole, we do not know how Yeshua the Messiah was obedient to His Father, nor do we know what it really means when it is said of Yeshua, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD” (Hebrews 10:7; cf. Psalm 40:7). How many of us know who the Messiah truly is from what Moses wrote of Him and how He was to live?

With the rise of the Messianic movement, and many Believers realizing that in our time God is awakening us to the forgotten truths of the Torah, comes criticism from Christians regarding our obedience to it. Usually, as it has been my sad observation as a Messianic Bible teacher, vehement discussion among Christians and Messianic Believers can often occur, without any clear, rational, reasoned, or for that matter scholastic examination of Biblical texts. We hope to change that with *The New Testament Validates Torah*. I recognize that the message of Torah observance that the Messianic movement has is controversial and life-changing, and want to assure the most skeptical reader that many of us who have adopted Torah obedience into our walk of faith by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher—among other things—have not done this without careful and reasoned examination of the Scriptures, in addition to prayer and seeking the Father’s will.

The following treatise you are about to read addresses one of the most serious problems among Messianic Believers today. We believe that the Torah should still be followed today, but there are those who have told us that we are in error because of this belief. They are concerned for us, and believe that quite possibly we have left the community of faith. They quote us verses and passages from the New Testament that to them demonstrates that the Torah or Law of Moses is no longer important for Believers. The analysis we offer discusses many of these passages from the Apostolic Scriptures, which are quoted to us to supposedly prove that the “Law has been done away.” These Scriptures are reexamined in their proper context and are exegeted from an academic and fair-minded Messianic perspective that you will often find lacking in other works.

It is also my sad observation that many Messianic Believers cannot readily respond to the anti-Torah arguments given by some Christians. I recognize that there is a responsibility on our part to work beyond some of the “unscholarship” that exists in various sectors of the Messianic community, and set the record straight. Some problems have been created from the errant belief that the Greek New Testament is not inspired of God and cannot be trusted, and that the Apostolic Scriptures as we have them today are but a “bad translation” of a “Hebrew original” that supposedly once existed. This assessment is flawed because no historical case can be made for an original “Hebrew New Testament,” and failure to find a so-called “Hebrew New Testament” does lead some away from faith in the Messiah.<sup>ii</sup> As you will see in this analysis, the Greek New Testament is not what is in error, but varied and biased English translations that exist today are. Hopefully, while responding to the attacks against the Torah in this report for Christians, Messianic Believers will likewise be able to

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<sup>ii</sup> Consult the publications *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* edited by Margaret McKee Huey, and the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, for a detailed examination of this subject.

stand rest assured that the Father's Instruction is still for today. Furthermore, I pray that they will be convinced that the Greek Scriptures do firmly uphold the Torah and are thus truly inspired of God.

While this publication may not address every issue related to the Torah, I believe it addresses enough to get you thinking and will answer most of your questions in relation to its validity. If you believe that the Law has been done away with, you will most definitely be forced into the Scriptures to reevaluate your beliefs as you read this. If you already believe that the Torah is valid and for today, this analysis will help you in your dealings with others who do not believe so, and will shore up your confidence in the validity of following the Lord's Instructions. Most importantly, it is my hope and prayer that you see in this publication the fact that Torah obedience comes as one submits himself or herself to the will of God, and truly seeks to grow and mature in his or her walk of faith. I pray that this will help you in your walk of faith, and enable you to know our Creator on a deeper level. I know that I have experienced great spiritual growth and change since I embarked on this course, and I want to see you grow in your faith as well.

J.K. McKee Editor,  
TNN Online

This current publication represents an ongoing project in Messianic theology that is continually informed by additional studies and critiques of our Messianic faith. With a subject as significant as the validity or non-validity of the Law of God for Believers today, it is required that I offer additional information and/or modifications to *The New Testament Validates Torah* where I deem appropriate. Slight changes made in the current edition (2008) particularly reflect some of the conclusions that I have drawn via the writing of Messianic commentaries in TNN Press' *for the Practical Messianic* series. Updates to this book have thus occurred on average of about every two years (2004, 2006, now 2008).

Notable changes in this present version are the consideration of various proposals from advocates of the New Perspective of Paul (NPP), a theological strata that has arisen significantly in Christian academia in the past two decades. The reader may note a slight shift in emphasis (or remarks made in some footnotes) from previous editions as it concerns Paul's usage of "works of the Law" (*ergōn nomou*) pertaining not just to human action or Torah observance itself, but a specific type of Torah observance relating to either identity markers or a sectarian style of *halachic* orthopraxy. Also to consider is Paul's probable usage of the rhetorical convention *prosopopeia* in Romans 7, where Paul is not speaking autobiographically, but is speaking of an imaginary "I."

References to these points of view do not at all significantly alter *The New Testament Validates Torah* from its previous version, but the reader will notice a few differences with the companion MP3 Bible study.

J.K. McKee, July 2007

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## The 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: “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). God’s Word must be able to convict us regarding what sin is, and how we are to live and properly conduct ourselves in the world. Holy Scripture, coupled with the Spirit, is to guide and convict us regarding what we should and should not be doing. As we examine Scripture, we must be willing to put any preconceived ideas about God and His Word aside, and let the Word speak for itself in its totality. 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 in their proper context. We must know what the historical background behind a Biblical text is. We also must realize that our ultimate responsibility is to the truth and in pleasing our Heavenly Father.

The issue of the validity (or even relevancy) of God’s Law contained in Genesis to Deuteronomy is controversial for many of today’s Christians claiming to obey Him. Millions unfortunately misunderstand what it means to not be “under the Law,” correctly understood as being subject to the Torah’s penalties pronounced upon sinners,<sup>1</sup> which can result with many having ungodly lifestyles which do not reflect the examples given by our Lord Yeshua (Jesus).<sup>2</sup> Somehow, many believe that “freedom in Christ” equates to not being held to any set of standards or code of conduct by God. Yeshua the Messiah tells us that when He returns, “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 Christians today, who in their sincere pursuit of God, are investigating their Hebraic Roots and are being drawn into the Torah obedient walk of faith He wants us all to have. But then there are many others who are not interested in obeying the Lord and changing their lives.

Many pastors tell us that we should obey the laws of the land in which we live on the basis of Paul’s words in Romans 13, but many of the same will say that the Law of God—*perhaps including the Ten Commandments*—was “nailed to the cross” or “abolished,” taking extreme liberties in regard to Scripture. This is an incredibly dangerous approach to the Bible, as many prominent theologians and

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<sup>1</sup> This is addressed more fully in Appendix C, “What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?”

<sup>2</sup> *Yeshua* (ישוע) is the original Hebrew name of Jesus meaning, “He is Salvation” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is derived from the Greek transliteration of Yeshua, *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς), originally employed by the Greek Septuagint.

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expositors will be held responsible by the Lord for leading people astray by claiming that “certain parts of the Scriptures are not for them.” Do you think that if Christianity today taught that the Torah or Law of Moses were to be followed that we would have debates over whether or not pre-marital sex or homosexuality were sin?

We would not have these debates because the Torah plainly denounces these things as sin, and these are offenses Biblically punishable by death (in most cases). It is imperative to speak out on these issues, “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), seeking full compliance with the entire Bible. 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.

When comparing worldly laws to the Lord’s eternal ordinances, which ones have priority? Philippians 3:20 tells us, “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 supercede our loyalty to man. Yeshua says in Matthew 24:12 that “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.” What is this to mean? Do those who consciously disobey the Torah and practice lawlessness not love God? These are some very strong words from the Lord. Do we want to be those considered lawless or antinomian? Do we want to be loveless? Surely not. Even more so, do we want to be in a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”<sup>3</sup> for eternity? Perhaps it is time that we all begin to seek God and truly ask Him how we are to obey Him.

Throughout this publication, 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>4</sup>

Sadly, this is the case with many people in churches today. Many Christians today have no concept of what sin is, because sin is often defined from what they “feel” is wrong, rather than the standard that has been given by God in the Torah, and then in the remainder of His Word. Sin has become something that is often defined subjectively from a human’s point of view, rather than God’s point of view.

Many of these same Christians have wondered why we as Messianic Believers are led to obey the Torah, specifically those areas which are considered “unnecessary” for today such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the Biblical appointments of Leviticus 23, and the dietary laws. Many of the same are able to make seemingly “viable” cases against us, using 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. In contrast, we will prove such claims to be false, primarily based on what the Greek New Testament actually tells us, exegeted from a conservative Biblical perspective. As born again

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander M. Renwick, “Antinomianism,” in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 48.

Believers who have put our faith in 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).

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 also 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 handles the Torah or Law of Moses. Those who teach the Torah, and encourage others to follow its commandments, will be considered great, and those who teach against it will be considered least.<sup>5</sup>

The truth of the matter is that not all has been accomplished and the Torah still stands as valid instruction for us today. In this apologetic report, we answer the antinomian assault. This assault is the attack on the Torah as propagated by many in Christianity today. We fear that many Christians, especially those in positions of leadership, will be considered “least” in God’s Kingdom as a result of preaching against His commandments. **We desire to see that no one be least in the Kingdom** or be considered lawless, but rather that we all be in compliance with the Word of the Lord and receive all the blessings that He has for us. **We want to see people blessed by God**, as opposed to being cursed by Him or in some way separated from Him.

In our discussion relating to the validity of the Torah, we let Scripture answer the common reasons given by many against obedience to our Heavenly Father’s Instruction. In this analysis, we quote common objections raised by a “pastor,” and then analyze these statements on a point-by-point basis.<sup>6</sup> I think it is safe to say that these reason constitute many of those you may encounter as a Torah obedient Messianic.

When this study is complete, you as a Messianic Believer will be able to defend the validity of the Torah when a Christian who believes that the Law has been abolished confronts you. If you are a 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 been taught in the past. Most importantly, may the quest for all of us be to be in full compliance with the Word of God, and conformity to the example that our Lord and Savior, and indeed Rabbi, Yeshua the Messiah, demonstrated for us during His time on Earth.

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<sup>5</sup> As Walter C. Kaiser validly remarks in his book *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, “Jesus came not to denigrate or displace either the law...or the Old Testament...he came to fulfill and establish it...So serious a matter is the law that Jesus warns that if we ignore that law...we will meet with disapproval in the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:19)!” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983, 311).

<sup>6</sup> This analysis is loosely based on a discussion called “The Sabbath” on the website of Cornerstone Church of Garden City, KS <odsgc.net/~cornerst/sabbath.htm>, even though additional Scriptures have been added.

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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 the Torah, contrary to what many Christians might know, pre-dated Mount Sinai. Genesis 26:5 tells us that the Patriarch Abraham “obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” The Hebrew word translated “laws” in most Bibles is *torotai* (תּוֹרָתִי) or “My Torahs” (ATS). Abraham knew what God considered acceptable and unacceptable prior to the formal giving of the Torah to the Ancient Israelites.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, many Christians at large do not see themselves as a part of Israel, or even being related to Israel, as Israel was to be the holy and set-apart people to whom the Torah was given. Instead, many see themselves as a part of another group of elect called the Church, to whom the Torah apparently does not apply. This is often used as a basis for their rejection of it. Because the Law was not “given to ‘the Church,’” it is said that it is not for Believers today.

This analysis is not intended to address ecclesiology or the study of God’s elect. But the idea that God has two groups of elect as opposed to one people, Israel, is a concept that much of the Messianic movement rejects. We believe, rather, that the Lord has only one group of elect, the people of Israel. The Apostle Paul writes something very profound to non-Jewish Believers in his letter of Ephesians. He says, “remember that you were at that time 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 to their conversion of faith were “alienated” (RSV) from, but now because of their faith in the Messiah, that they are now a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Specifically, the Greek word *politeia* (πολιτεία) or “commonwealth” is defined by BDAG as “**the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity**,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a widely held interpretation in Judaism today, as the *Soncino Chumash* notes, “Abraham fulfilled all the laws of the Torah before they were revealed at Sinai, arriving at a knowledge of them through inspiration” (A. Cohen, ed. [Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983], 145).

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*citizenship*.”<sup>2</sup> This is a powerful term, because, if indeed non-Jewish Believers are a part of Israel, as citizens of Israel they are called to follow the Torah that was given to Israel. This concept is emphasized in Exodus 12:49: “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.”

There is no such thing in Scripture as a separate entity known as “the Church” that exists outside of Israel. When the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), commonly translated as “church,” is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, the Apostolic 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 *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus by extension, is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. *TDNT* remarks that “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>3</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, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is the Hebrew word for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* tells us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”<sup>4</sup> The martyr Stephen speaks of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV),<sup>5</sup> “the church” here speaking of the *ekklēsia* 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 yisrā’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>6</sup> (emphasis mine).

When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people away from Israel. They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel. It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” *Thayer* states that “in the Sept.

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<sup>2</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.

<sup>3</sup> K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

<sup>4</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>5</sup> Grk. *tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō* (τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

[*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to *קָהָל*, *the assembly of the Israelites.*”<sup>7</sup> It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation.”<sup>8</sup>

If we conclude that those claiming Yeshua as their Personal Savior are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, as opposed to “the Church,” then indeed we can assert that the Torah or Law of Moses is relevant instruction for Believers today.

*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...*

There is only one Law or Torah of God. However, when understanding what it is, especially in relation to the Greek Scriptures, it is imperative that we come to a proper understanding of the word *nomos* (νόμος), representative of “law.” *Nomos* does not always represent eternal commandments given by God to Israel which make up the Law of Moses, but can also be indicative of spiritual laws (perhaps better described as “spiritual constants”), Greco-Roman civil laws, and extra-Biblical “laws” enacted by Jewish Rabbis which today would make up the collection of Jewish religious law contained in the Mishnah and Talmud. In its ancient usage in Greek, *nomos* had a wider array of meanings, not limited to just “the Law of Moses,” which are employed in the Apostolic Scriptures.

L.A. Jervis states in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background* that “The Greek word usually rendered ‘law’ by the translators of the NT is *nomos*. This word meant both ‘law’ and ‘custom’ and so could refer to the laws of a society and to that society’s habits and customs.”<sup>9</sup> James H. Nichols, Jr., in his translation of Plato’s *Gorgias*, indicates that “*Nomos*, translated ‘law’ or ‘convention,’ includes written law, unwritten law, custom, and prevalent opinion.”<sup>10</sup> While *nomos* can mean “law (often of the Jewish sacred tradition),” meaning the Torah of Moses, it can also mean “principle, rule” (*CGEDNT*),<sup>11</sup> which would make it not limited to the Torah itself. Context always determines how *nomos* is to be properly applied.

In the examples given by the pastor above, he is correct in telling us that, in John 10:34 and 15:25, Yeshua speaks of only one Law or Torah, for there is only one Instruction for the people of God:

“Yeshua answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law, “I SAID, YOU ARE GODS”?’” (John 10:34).

In this verse, the Messiah quotes Psalm 82:6, which reads, “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High.’” He rebukes some Pharisees in this text for their manipulation of the Torah for their own advantage. He urges them to consider the proper usage of the Torah they hold so

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

<sup>8</sup> Two Christian translations that render *ekklēsia* as “assembly” include Young’s Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green.

<sup>9</sup> L.A. Jervis, “Law/Nomos in the Greco-Roman World,” in Craig E. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 632.

<sup>10</sup> Plato: *Gorgias*, trans., James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1998), 73, fn 69.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1971), 121.

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dear by referring to it as “your Law.”<sup>12</sup> Psalm 82, specifically, has God rebuking the unjust leaders of Israel for using the Torah for their own personal gain. The Lord calls them “gods” as a way of rebuking them, as they think that they are gods so they can use the Torah for their own purposes without incurring any Divine consequences from the Lord. John 15:25 is used by Yeshua in a similar way:

“But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’”

This verse includes a quotation of both Psalm 35:19 and 69:4:

“Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously” (Psalm 35:19).

“Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; what I did not steal, I then have to restore” (Psalm 69:4).

In the example from John 15:25, Yeshua does indeed treat the Torah as comprising the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures. The verses He quotes from concern His prophesied rejection by the Jewish religious leaders. But as it can be validly observed, the whole of the Bible is God’s Law, meaning His Teachings or Instructions regarding how we are to live.

The Hebrew word *torah* (תּוֹרָה), primarily used to represent the five Books of Moses, is defined by *BDB* as “direction, instruction, law.”<sup>13</sup> This is the standard definition provided by lexicons. The word *torah* is derived from the Hebrew verb *yarah* (יָרָה), meaning “to **throw, cast**” or “to **shoot...with arrows,**” pertaining to pointing to something, and can more specifically mean “to **instruct, teach.**”<sup>14</sup> *HALOT* says that “What is probably most likely is a connection with...יָרָה in the sense of stretching out the finger, or the hand, to pout out a route.”<sup>15</sup> This is because the Torah is to point the *right way* for us to do things. David testifies in Psalm 119:165, “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.”

The Torah is intended to be God’s Teaching or Instruction for His people. It is for this reason why the NJPS version renders the word *torah* as “Teaching,” as opposed to “Law.” The Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Tanach* simply leaves *torah* as “Torah.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Yeshua’s emphasis of “your Law” is no different than how God speaks of “your people” to Moses in Exodus 32:7 during the incident of the golden calf. It was not as though the Ancient Israelites suddenly lost their status as God’s people, any more than the Torah somehow no longer originates from God. Referring to something as “your...” in Scripture places a responsibility **upon the people** that they may have failed to properly perform (cf. Isaiah 1:13-14).

<sup>13</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 435.

<sup>14</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:436.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1710.

<sup>16</sup> We do note that while these Jewish versions of the Tanach use “Teaching” and “Torah,” respectively, Judaism has never viewed the term “Law” in a negative light as some Christians might today. The 1917 JPS version uses the word “law” for *torah*, and the word “law” (often with the term Pentateuch, meaning “book of five”) is certainly used in many Jewish commentaries and writings.

It is important for us to understand that *torah* does not mean “Law,” construed as “rules and regulations,” in the strictest sense of the word. It certainly does not mean “Law” in the sense of bringing people into bondage, but the Torah is intended to guide, direct, and instruct God’s people. In the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew word *torah* was rendered as *nomos*, a Greek term which we have just mentioned means “law.” The Apostolic writers used the word *nomos* most often to refer to the Torah of Moses, although *nomos* is not exclusively used in the New Testament to refer to the Torah.

Why the Rabbis who translated the Septuagint rendered *torah* as *nomos* did this is controversial for some in the Messianic movement. Warren Zev Harvey comments in *EJ*, “The Septuagint rendered the Hebrew *torah* by the Greek *nomos* (‘law’) probably in the sense of a living network of traditions and customs of a people.” However, this same entry goes on and says, “The designation of the Torah by *nomos*, and by its Latin successor *lex* (whence, ‘the Law’), has historically given rise to the sad misunderstanding that Torah means legalism.”<sup>17</sup>

I believe that the Rabbis who rendered *torah* as *nomos* wanted to convey the idea that the Torah contained the ruling directives of an orderly society, as opposed to personal teaching or instruction. The Septuagint translation was used as authoritative Scripture in the synagogues of Greek-speaking lands, and was responsible for presenting the message of the God of Israel to many non-Jews in the period before the First Coming of the Messiah, preparing the way for the spread of the gospel. The Torah was to be perceived as the “constitution” of the people of Israel, just as the *nomos* of a Greek city-state was to define the proper way of life for that group of people.<sup>18</sup>

***...and 1 Corinthians 14:21 when Paul quotes Isaiah. But it is important to remember that there is only one Law.***

This statement is accurate as well. 1 Corinthians 14:21 reads, “In the Law it is written, ‘BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,’ says the Lord.” This verse includes a partial quotation of Isaiah 28:11, “Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue.”

The pastor is correct again in assuming that the whole of the Hebrew Bible or Tanach was considered *torah*. However, *torah* or all of God’s Instruction should be considered to comprise the entirety of Holy Scripture, which would include the Apostolic Writings or “New Testament.” When claiming that “the Law,” meaning all Scripture, “was done away with,” are some Christians subtly implying that the “New Testament” was “done away with” as well? We seriously doubt that any reasonable Christian would make the statement that the “New Testament” was done away with, unlike statements that might be made concerning the “Old Testament.”

One of the prime declarations of the Apostolic Scriptures is that “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

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<sup>17</sup> Warren Zev Harvey, “Torah,” in [Encyclopaedia Judaica](#). MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> This analysis is purposefully not intended to debate the negative connotation that “Law” has for many Christians, so the term “Torah” has been employed more often to represent God’s Instruction. Consult Appendix G, “Torah As Constitution,” for a more detailed discussion of why *torah* was probably rendered as *nomos* in the Septuagint.

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When this statement was made in the mid-First Century, the only “Scripture” that existed at the time was what we consider to be the “Old Testament.” No “New Testament” had been canonized yet or even collected (or for that same matter fully written).

Many Christians who believe that the Torah has been abolished talk about the “New Covenant” that has replaced the “Old Covenant,” which by implication included Torah observance. Now that the Messiah has come, it is said, we no longer must follow the commandments of the Law of Moses. But in relationship to the “New Covenant,” Hebrews 8:1-6 tells us the following:

“Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘SEE,’ He says, ‘THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.’ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”

Yeshua the Messiah is, like the high priest in the Tabernacle or Temple on Earth would, presently interceding for us as our High Priest in Heaven. Just as the Torah tells us of an Earthly Tabernacle, so is there a more perfect one in Heaven. Unlike the Tabernacle and Temple that the Ancient Israelites had, this perfect one is part of “a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” It is based on the unconditional promise of eternal redemption through Messiah Yeshua’s sacrifice, more than just a conditional promise of if’s and do’s: “[T]he work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs [in the wilderness], just as the covenant he mediates is better” (Hebrews 8:6a, CJB).

Does this mean that the previous covenant was bad and should be totally discarded as some may advocate? No. Part of this is because the “covenant” is how God’s Word *functions*, and we often confuse Scripture with how it functions among various people. The New Covenant can only be inaugurated in the hearts of people who have been redeemed. We do not take eternal principles and universal truths espoused in the Torah and throw them away simply because Yeshua has come. It may be surprising to some of you to learn that the “New Covenant” was prophesied in the Tanach or “Old Testament,” and that it actually relates to the position of the Law in the life of the Believer:

“‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The promised *b’rit chadashah* (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה) or New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is what the author of Hebrews speaks of in Hebrews 8:10, “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE

THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.” The “New Covenant” is that God is going to “put my *Torah* in their minds, and write it onto their hearts” (CJB). The promised “New Covenant” that God is going to make with His people is actually that God is going to write the Law onto their hearts by His Spirit, *so that we all might keep it*. What has changed is that the penalties of the Law upon sinners have been remitted now that the Messiah has come and provided final atonement.

We must all recognize, however, that the Torah is incomplete without Yeshua—because in the Messiah we have the full atonement of our sins and embodiment of what it means to truly live the Torah. The Complete Jewish Bible translates Hebrews 8:6b as, “For this covenant has been given as *Torah* on the basis of better promises.” Translated “has been given as *Torah*,” the Greek verb *nomotheteō* (νομοθετέω) is defined by *Vine* as “to ordain by law, to enact.”<sup>19</sup> *LS* says that it means “to make law.”<sup>20</sup>

Those who reject the validity of the Torah, believing that they are upholding the “New Covenant,” need to be very careful. They may just be rejecting the “New Covenant” which has been “given as *Torah*.” Keep in mind how the Torah was given to Ancient Israel in an awesome scene of fire and smoke at Mount Sinai. Likewise remember how Yeshua was sacrificed on the cross at Golgotha (Calvary) on our behalf and the terrifying events that followed. Let us not throw the Scriptures out thinking that they are “old,” as some—whether conscious of it or not—do.

There is also some confusion relating to the terms that are most commonly used to describe the Scriptures: the Old and New Testaments. We employ these terms only for the familiarity of the reader. However, as you probably have already noticed, most Messianics prefer more neutral terms such as Tanach (תנ"ך) for the Hebrew Scriptures, which is an acronym for: *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings), instead of “Old Testament.” Our ministry also prefers the terms Apostolic Scriptures or Apostolic Writings, or Messianic Scriptures or Messianic Writings, instead of “New Testament.” This latter usage differs from many in the Messianic movement, who often use the terms Renewed Covenant or *B'rit Chadashah*. It is our opinion that these two terms are misnomers for the Apostolic Scriptures, as the promised *b'rit chadashah* of Jeremiah 33 is the Lord writing His Torah onto our hearts, not giving us a new set of Scripture. The Apostolic Scriptures compose the Spirit-inspired writings of the Apostles and early followers of the Messiah, but by no means make up a “covenant” as we know it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 198.

<sup>20</sup> H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 535.

<sup>21</sup> These thoughts are mirrored by Messianic author Tim Hegg in his book *The Letter Writer*. Hegg states, “It does no better to call the Apostolic Scriptures the ‘Renewed Covenant’ or ‘*B'rit Chadashah*’ (ברית חדשה), as is so common in Messianic circles. The Apostolic Scriptures do not constitute a covenant in any sense. They are the divinely inspired words of Yeshua and His apostles, giving us the ongoing progressive revelation of God to His people. They are the application of Torah to the people of God in the last days as inaugurated by the coming of Messiah, and they constitute the divine *halachah* for the congregation of Jew and Gentile as envisioned in the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. They in no way constitute a ‘new’ or ‘different’ or even ‘renewed’ covenant. They are simply the progressive revelation of the covenants which were given to the Fathers” (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2002, p 235, fn. 503).

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*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 pastor is accurate in his assessment that there is only one Torah and that it cannot be “subdivided” among moral, ceremonial, and civil commandments, in the sense that we can dispense with certain aspects of it but can continue to observe “all of it.” We should note, though, that not all parts of the Torah can be observed by one person, for there are commandments that apply to men, to women, to children, to husbands, to wives, to priests, and there are those that are only applicable in the Land of Israel. The Rabbis of Judaism have determined that there are 613 commandments in the Torah, and have categorized them appropriately and methodically, *beyond those that are “moral” and “ceremonial.”* In order to have an appropriate understanding of the Torah, we must consider the fact that not all aspects of it directly apply to the individual. We obey the commandments that are applicable to us based on our status in society. We do the best that we can if we are unable to observe all of the commandments in the Diaspora, recognizing that God’s mercy covers all.

The argument at hand is whether or not the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) uphold the Torah’s authority, as many Christians do not believe it does. The idea that Yeshua has “fulfilled” the Law comes from Matthew 5:17-18, although the implication from many is that when He “fulfilled” the Torah, it is now no longer applicable to the Believer. It is often said that Yeshua the Messiah “fulfilled and thus abolished” the Law. The KJV translation of these verses reads as follows:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

As far as mainline Christian translations are concerned, the NASU rendering of these verses is far more accurate, appearing as,

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 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.”

The reason the NASU translates this text more accurately is because there are **two different** Greek verbs translated as “fulfil” and then “fulfilled” in the KJV of Matthew 5:18, perhaps misleading the reader: “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17b, KJV).

The Greek verb translated as “fulfil” is *plēroō* (πληρόω). *Thayer* defines *plēroō* as “to make complete in every particular, to render perfect.”<sup>22</sup> *TDNT*, commenting on Yeshua’s work in relation to the Torah, validly remarks, “the idea is not simply that of validating the law as distinct from abolishing it. The goal of Jesus’ mission is fulfillment. He does not simply affirm the law and the prophets but actualizes the will of God that is declared in them from the standpoint of both promise and demand.”<sup>23</sup> The KJV rendering continues,

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<sup>22</sup> *Thayer*, 518.

<sup>23</sup> G. Delling, “*plēroō*,” in *TDNT*, 869.

“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18, KJV).

The Greek verb translated here as “fulfilled” is *gignomai* (γίνομαι), which is one of several “to be” verbs in Ancient Greek. CGEDNT gives a wide array of meanings for it, including, “become, be; happen, take place, arise...come into being, be born or created; be done (of things), become something (of persons); come, go.”<sup>24</sup>

These two different verbs are better translated in the NASU as “fulfill” (*plēroō*) and then as “accomplished” (*gignomai*). The RSV and NIV also render *gignomai* as “accomplished.” YLT and LITV both render *gignomai* as “come to pass.” Either way it is translated, *gignomai* has a much different meaning than does *plēroō*. The RSV renders Matthew 5:17 as “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.”

Yeshua, being our blameless sacrifice, fulfilled the Torah by living and interpreting it for us in His words, teachings, and deeds, thus perfecting it. By keeping the Torah perfectly, He could be our blameless sacrifice and atonement for our sin. He could not be our blameless, sinless Redeemer if He broke or annulled the Torah. This is recognized even by liberal theologians who admit, albeit reluctantly, that Jesus was a First Century Jewish Rabbi who taught the Law to His followers. Howard Clark Kee notes, concerning Matthew 5:17, “the declaration that both the purpose of God disclosed through the prophets and the demands of God that his people obey him have found their fulfillment in Jesus. There is to be no relaxation of the strictness of the commandments.”<sup>25</sup>

Not all has been accomplished, as there are still prophecies in the Torah, here being represented as the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, that have yet to occur. We are still awaiting the return of the Lord, the defeat of His enemies, and the complete establishment of God’s Kingdom on Earth. When He returns we are told that “the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). Does this sound like the “abolishment of the Law”? **On the contrary, when He returns the Torah will be enforced as the Law of the Land.**

So is the Torah for us today? *I can only answer for myself.* I choose the safe course of action, which is that the Torah is still relevant instruction for today. I choose to be in alignment with the words of our Messiah, who is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1), embodying it in His teachings, actions, and deeds. I choose to follow the totality of Scripture, rather than a selective reading of it. I choose to be part of the holy and set-apart people that our Heavenly Father desires in Deuteronomy 28:9:

“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.”

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<sup>24</sup> CGEDNT, 37

<sup>25</sup> Howard Clark Kee, “Matthew,” in Charles M. Laymon, *Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 615.