

Torah is for All People



Is Torah for everyone? Or is it just for Jews? This is a major question facing many Messianic brethren today. It is the same question that was raised in the New Testament. It has to do with those who are physical Jews, biologically born of Israel, versus those who are physically Gentile, biologically born of the nations. Both groups are present in Messianic congregations and the vast majority are non-Jewish. I say non-Jewish because according to the Bible there are two groups that constitute physical Israel: the House of Judah (Jews) and the House of Israel (Ephraimites / Israelites). However, the question we are addressing is not about the two houses; rather, I am referring to the question in Acts 15 concerning the Law of Moses and Gentiles. Clearly, the Torah was given to Israel (all of the tribes) via Moses. There is no question about that. But Gentiles who come to faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who believe and trust in the Messiah's redemption, which commandments are they to follow? Is the Torah for everyone of faith or is it just for Israel?

You would think that the real conflict in any Messianic congregation would be the debate over "Covenant/Replacement" theology. The Church has advocated for centuries that Messiah did away with Jerusalem and the temple service, the customs of Moses, and the Law of Moses. They sound out that "Jesus was the final sacrifice" and "We are not under the Law." They would argue that there is no more obedience (that's legalism) and everything is now covered by "grace." The Church has historically taken the position that they (Gentile believers) are not to be keeping the Torah. That is for the Jews, and Jesus did away with it.

It is because of the Church's arguments that many brethren became Messianic. They walked away because the Church's position is directly refuted by the Messiah Himself in the New Testament. Yeshua's statement about "not even thinking" that He came to do away with the Law (Torah) rings supreme over any pastor or historical church father. Furthermore, Messianic brethren can easily see that the very basis of the New Testament teaching is laced with quotations and truths that originate from the Torah and the Prophets. Logically, you can't

say that the Law is annulled while at the same time quoting it as the reference and basis for New Testament truth.

Many Messianic brethren have succeeded in getting into a Torah study and discovered that there is no conflict with the Law of Moses and the New Covenant. Instead, they have found the true foundational prophecies proving that Yeshua of Nazareth is, in fact, the promised Messiah. Their New Covenant faith has grown and matured beyond the “party line” of their previous denominational church. Some of this maturing has also included the observance of Sabbath and festivals, keeping kosher, and abandoning “replacement theology.” They have discovered that the issue of commandments and Gentiles is addressed by the “letter to the Gentiles” issued by the Apostles James, Peter, and Paul in Acts 15. It is explicit in stating how the Gentiles are to be a part of the New Covenant fellowship and their relationship with the Torah.

This passage is at the core of the misunderstanding for many modern Messianic leaders. In shedding the replacement theology of the historical church they have failed to renew the writing of the Law on their hearts as the New Covenant promised. They have not established their faith in the Messiah beginning with God’s promise of a Son from the Torah. As a consequence they do not understand the Law of God nor the relationship that God established with all who join the ranks of Israel. Therefore, it is only natural that misunderstanding should occur and that the early leaders in particular would take such a negative position toward, for example, the two-house teaching and restoration of the whole house of Israel. They are completely behind the power curve in understanding the Torah and the inclusion of Gentile believers (aliens and sojourners).

Stepping back for a moment, this is the real reason why the two-house teaching is in dispute. Teaching Torah to every Messianic believer encourages everyone to find their roots in Israel (the heritage of Jacob, to be part of the remnant by faith). It means that there is no more distinction between a Jew and a Gentile in the New Covenant faith. Where have you heard that subject before?

Some Messianic Jewish leaders still hold to the Church’s teaching that the Torah is not for Gentiles. Adding a racist element to that error, some Messianic Jewish leaders have argued that the Jews have a “unique” calling and that they are being “deluded” in the Messianic Movement by all of those non-Jews hanging around. Further stated, their goals are to be a part of the greater Jewish community by advocating “Messianic Judaism.” They want unbelieving Jews to feel “at home” with them (to gently bring them to Messiah?) without any Gentiles hanging around. They have succeeded in garnering the support from other Evangelical church leaders for this agenda and approach. A de facto agreement has taken shape. The Messianic Jewish leaders want all of the Jewish believers and they will let the Evangelical church leaders have all of the Gentile believers. “Oh, the gentile believers can come for a visit, give their money and time to help build our congregations and ministries, but in the long run, they

belong over there with the Christians.” As long as the Messianic Jews don’t take issue with what the Church is doing, everything works out pretty well. However, the arrangement is perverse and contrary to the Scriptures.

The fly in the ointment here is of course the other Messianic brethren, former church members who share common experiences of being ostracized and spurned by the Church leaders because they would dare to learn God’s commandments. In particular, these other Messianic brethren have learned to keep Sabbath and festivals. They have learned about kosher and not eating pork and shellfish. They have begun to see a different eschatology. Instead of a rapture of the glorious Church, they are anticipating the Messiah who gathers His flock to the Land and returns to Jerusalem.

It is understandable that they want to share these exciting things they have learned (from the New Testament) with their Church brethren. But doing so brings into serious question the observance of Sunday as a replacement for Sabbath. Messianic brethren quickly learn how the church fathers adopted the sun god worship day to consolidate the early Christian converts. And then there was Easter, a complete distortion of the Messianic story of salvation and deliverance as the Lamb of God. The resurrection of the Messiah on the first day after Sabbath in no way annuls the Sabbath. The Lord’s day (the Messiah is the Lord of the Sabbath) is completely distorted because of the Messiah’s resurrection on the Feast of First Fruits. If you don’t know what the Feast of First Fruits is from the Torah teaching, it will be very confusing at this point. This is why we have the problem to begin with. As a consequence, churchmen are offended and concerned that they are doing something that God never said to do, that they have been duped by the traditions of men. Add to that the questions of Christmas and its idolatrous practices mixed with paganism and it is just too much. At this point, Messianics are shown the door escorted by a very unhappy Easter Bunny and not so jolly Santa Claus.

Many Messianic brethren have gone out the door of their former church this way. However, once they visit some well established Messianic assemblies they are shocked to find Messianic Jewish leaders who think they were wrong for questioning church observances. Specifically, some Messianic Jewish leaders question them as to why they are learning the Torah and keeping Sabbath themselves. Instead of welcoming these Messianic brethren who have been scorned by their churches for keeping the commandments of God, these leaders impugn them for keeping them.

If you are reading this and saying that just doesn’t happen in your Messianic assembly (and I hope it does not), let me assure you that leadership within the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, and Tikkun Ministries do practice this and have believed this way from the beginning. The dispute over the two-house teaching is not about an eschatology point of view. Instead, its very roots are about whether the Torah should be taught to everyone.

Let's examine for a moment their position and rationale. They believe that it is okay for church folks to observe Sunday as a replacement for Sabbath. They believe that Christians can eat pork and whatever they want. They believe there is nothing wrong with Christmas and Easter, or Halloween for that matter. They argue that everything is based on context (they love Jesus and Israel so there is nothing wrong here). Everything is really a matter of the heart and the Messiah really did set things up this way.

As I said before, they advocate that Jews have been given a "unique" calling that the Gentiles, even believers in the Messiah, are not part of. One particular leader actually says that a Gentile trying to keep the Torah is an example of "flakiness" and is not what they started or authorized when they started the Messianic movement years ago.

Again, this relates back to Acts 15, the letter to the Gentiles, and how they read it. So, let's take a look at this famous letter written by the Apostle James with the agreement of Peter and Paul.

"Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Acts 15:19-21

According to these Messianic Jewish leaders and Evangelical Church leaders this letter clearly takes issue with Gentile believers keeping the Law of Moses and the Torah. It only lists four restrictions, right? Let's review the list: 1. Idolatry, 2. Fornication, 3. Strangulation, and 4. Blood. At this point there is no additional instruction or meaning assigned to this letter. It is only used to say that Gentile believers are not to follow the Torah and all of its commandments.

But what is the truth here? What did James really say?

First, let's remind everyone that James knew the Law of Moses, just as Peter and Paul did. It was their custom to keep all of the commandments of the Law. James will encourage Paul in Acts 22 to go to the temple so that everyone will see that he "walks orderly, keeping the Law."

There is a particular teaching in the Torah that stands out emphatically. In fact, Torah teachers refer to it as the "heart of the Law." It is very near the middle in Leviticus 17 and 18. There are three topics that are addressed to the native born (Israelites) and aliens (Gentiles). They are both, native or alien, to keep the exact same commandments concerning any practice of idolatry. In particular,

they are only to worship the Lord in the way that the Lord specifies. They are not permitted to mix in any way other forms of worship from other religions with the worship of the Lord. Secondly, both the native and the alien are not to eat detestable things, even clean animals that have been strangled whereas their blood has not been vacated from the animal. Finally, Leviticus 18 specifically addresses various forms of sexual perversion that include incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. Again, the commandment is given to the native born and the alien.

Torah teachers (especially those from Judaism) will tell you that these are essentials. No person committing these transgressions may participate in any way with the worship of the Lord.

The question in Acts 15 addresses what should be instructed to the Gentile believers. The answer is what are essential to be a part of any Jewish assembly. The final statement by James removes any doubt about this interpretation by encouraging every Gentile believer to seek out the instruction of Moses offered in every city on every Sabbath (verse 21). In other words, the Gentiles in the faith are to begin with the essentials of the Law and then be instructed in the Torah of Moses on a weekly basis.

Oh my! How churchmen have gotten this all turned around. As I have visited many brethren and congregations in my ministry, I have asked how many have ever heard the letter to the Gentiles taught and shown the direct parallel to Leviticus 17 and 18. The answer has been “none.”

How is that possible? It is clearly in the Bible. The answer is simple: the Church has already taken a position against the teaching of the Torah. Why would they point out the opposite teaching to their position?

But now let's examine why the early Messianic Jewish leaders have followed suit with churchmen. I think there are two reasons: 1. They don't know what the Torah really teaches about Gentiles (aliens) and 2. They want the favor of Christian leaders to support their agenda for exclusive Messianic Judaism.

Now let's examine what the Torah really says about Gentiles in the faith.

Do you remember that earlier we said physical descendancy is not the path to being in the heritage of Abraham? It is NOT the ticket into God's house. Many are physically born Israel but only the “children of promise” are considered to be the “Remnant of Israel.” Paul says that the “Remnant of Israel” includes those from Jerusalem (the House of Judah) and those from among the Gentiles (the House of Israel).

even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Romans 9:24

The remnant of Israel includes the children of promise from the Jews and the children of promise from among the Gentiles. But they are all part of the same children of promise, the remnant of Israel.

What is God's plan for mankind? In particular, when God gave the Torah to Israel, what part does it play in His great plan for everyone? And finally, how does the Messiah and the Torah work together leading to His kingdom?

First, God wants all of mankind to enjoy His blessings and live. He commanded all men to "be fruitful and multiply." He "blessed" His creation, all of it, including the Sabbath day. This was before the Law was given to Moses and the children of Israel. Through Abraham, He promised to establish his family to be a blessing for "all the families of the earth." He promised a miracle son born to him, representing the miracle Son for all the families of the earth. Abraham prophesied to all of us that God would provide "a lamb in that place" (where Isaac was to be offered to God). Abraham's heritage was carried to the next generation in Isaac, from him to Jacob, and from Jacob to his children. Along the way, God also asserted a foundational truth concerning His Chosen People. The promises of God, the heritage of Abraham, the great plan of God's people is not defined by being physically born. Instead, there is a much more powerful element that constitutes being a recipient of His blessing and membership in His house.

Consider this Biblical fact: Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, did not receive what was intended by God for Isaac through Abraham and Sarah. Isaac's firstborn of the flesh, Esau, did not receive the blessing because of the prophecy given to his mother concerning his brother Jacob. Jacob's firstborn Reuben, did not receive the blessing intended for Joseph, the firstborn of his beloved wife, Rachel. Even Joseph's firstborn Manasseh was designated to be after Ephraim. And still further, the firstborn of all Israel were substituted by God to the Levites. God has always designated His firstborn to be those whom He chooses who are promised, prophesied, favored, chosen, and appointed.

The Apostle Paul says that anyone who is of the Messiah (including Gentile believers) is of the seed of Abraham. Thus, anyone who is a believer of the Messiah is part of the Remnant of Israel and is part of "all Israel." The Apostle taught exactly what we have just covered in Romans 9 through 11 referring to the "children of promise" as being the remnant of Israel.

But let's examine the Torah itself, the commandments of God given at Mount Sinai to the children of Israel. Did God give this exclusively to the physical descendants of Jacob? The answer is No. The people at Mount Sinai were a "mixed multitude." They were physical descendants of Jacob and there were others included. Who were the others? They were other slaves who were set

free and there were others who saw God's hand in Egypt and believed in Him, even some Egyptians.

Did God say to Moses, "Now Moses, separate out for Me two peoples. On My right hand place the physical descendants of Jacob, who will one day be called 'Jews.' To them I will give the Torah with Sabbath and festivals. And on the other hand gather all the future "non-Jews" who will receive "grace" and two commandments: love God and everyone else."

It didn't happen that way! Instead, God said through Moses for all people to be gathered, let the world hear this loud and clear.

When it came to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when the Messiah would offer Himself as the Lamb of God, God instructed us to keep the Passover this way:

Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land.

Exodus 12:19

He also said that everyone, even the alien, is to be circumcised (in the heart) to eat the Passover.

And if an alien sojourns among you and observes the Passover to the Lord, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he shall do; you shall have one statute, both for the alien and for the native of the land.

Numbers 9:14

Gentile believers are commanded to observe Passover. The Law also specifies the observance of Yom Kippur:

And this shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you;

Leviticus 16:29

Here is what the Torah says for the general assembly, anyone who would want to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And if an alien sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he wishes to make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the Lord, just as you do, so he shall do. As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.

Numbers 15:14-16

Gentile believers are invited to make sacrifice and worship with Israel, but they must follow the Law of Moses to do it. God always intended for Gentiles to be welcome in His temple. Isaiah restates it this way:

Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered."

Isaiah 56:6-8

Yeshua quoted this verse from Isaiah when He threw the money changers out of the temple courtyard. The Torah and the Prophets do not exclude the Gentiles. They never did. It was the Pharisees and the Sadducees who did that. But today it is churchmen who say the Torah is not for everyone.

Just as James wrote in the letter to the Gentiles, the Torah addresses eating detestable things (unkosher) and sexual perversion.

Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, "No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood."

Leviticus 17:12

But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you.

Leviticus 18:26

The definition for blasphemy comes from the Torah. It is the same definition for Gentiles.

Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

Leviticus 24:16

But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

Numbers 15:30

The definition for clean and unclean is the same for Gentiles according to the Law.

And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; and it shall be a perpetual statute to the sons of Israel and to the alien who sojourns among them.

Numbers 19:10

When it comes to tort justice, the law of damages and restitution, the Torah is also used for Gentiles.

Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him.’”

Deuteronomy 1:16

You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge.

Deuteronomy 24:17

What about the blessings of God? Does the Torah provide for blessings if a Gentile keeps the Torah?

And you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household.

Deuteronomy 26:11

Does the Torah instruct Israel to teach the Torah to all people?

Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 31:12

Where did we get this idea that the Torah should not be taught to Gentiles? Obviously from men who didn't want to keep the Torah and who don't know what it teaches.

Let's go back to the letter to the Gentiles and examine what it means with the Torah definition of the essentials.

We are to not mix any idolatrous ritual or activity in the worship of the Lord. Can we, for example, mix the ancient pagan ritual of fertility by symbolizing eggs? No. What if we color them and make them fun for our kids? No. What if we emphasize the resurrection of the Messiah? No.

Can we cut down an evergreen tree and bring it into our houses and decorate it? No. Jeremiah says this is an act of idolatry.

For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter.

Jeremiah 10:3-4

I know that Gentile Christians are not purposely setting up an idol when they bring a Christmas tree into their homes. I am convinced that there is nothing in their heart to mix paganism with their faith in God. But their actions override their intentions when they get on their knees in front of it to get the blessings. Then there is no question about it being an idolatrous act. This is what Jeremiah was talking about.

The letter to the Gentiles clearly states that we are to instruct all Gentiles to abstain from things contaminated by idols. If Easter eggs and Christmas trees don't qualify for this then the letter to the Gentiles is meaningless today and there is no such thing as idolatry and delusions. I don't think it is meaningless; I just think that some people are deluded. This is why all people need the Torah.

Messiah Yeshua warned that in the last days there would be those mixing other forms of worship to cause a stumbling for the sons of Israel. He reminded us of the story of Balaam and Balak. There is not one shred of difference today when a believer says we can observe Easter and Christmas in our faith. It is the teaching of Balaam. Yeshua said He wanted that corrected before He returns.

The letter to the Gentiles states that they are to abstain from fornication (all forms of sexual perversion). We live in a generation and world where homosexuality has become rampant. No longer is it in the closet or behind closed doors. There is a clear public agenda to promote tolerance of this alternative lifestyle. Is it permissible for our brethren to take part in our congregations if they are homosexual? No. What if they are Gentiles? No. What if a man or woman is an open adulterer? No. What if he is incestuous? No. What about a pedophile? No.

The letter to the Gentiles states that there is no instance (no tolerance) for these behaviors. The Torah is very explicit about these activities.

The letter to the Gentiles states that Gentile believers are not to eat any animal that is strangled or full of blood. That means that the Torah definition for what is food-clean and unclean-is for the Gentile as well. Does that mean that Gentile believers can eat pork? No. Can they consume shellfish? No. Do they have to use the same definition of clean and unclean that is taught in the Torah? Yes. What if they want to say alcoholic beverages such as wine and strong drink are forbidden by God? No. They are to keep the same list of what is clean (kosher) and unclean as the rest of God's people. There one law for all.

What about all of the other commandments and instructions of the Law? What about circumcision? What about Sabbath and festivals, or sacrifices and the Temple? They are all answered in the Torah. They should be taught the Torah.

This is what the letter to the Gentiles says!

Today, we have some Messianic Jewish teachers telling Gentile believers not to keep the commandments of the Lord, that the Torah should not be taught to all

people. They defend their position by stating that the Torah was never intended for them. They are flat wrong! The Torah says otherwise. Some of these brethren shift gears arguing that the Messiah changed things and the emphasis is not on the Torah and commandments any more.

Every good Jew knows that one of the greatest prophecies of the Messiah is “The Torah shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” It is said that the Messiah is to teach the Torah to everyone in the world. The whole world will know the Lord and keep His ways. No man will have to be told to know the Lord, because every man will know the Lord. This is what the prophets said. This is what Yeshua came teaching and doing. How can a Messianic believer who proclaims that Yeshua is the Messiah go around like the Gentile church telling believers not to learn the Torah? As brethren of the Messiah aren’t we supposed to do what the Messiah says and does? Didn’t Moses tell everyone to take a bath (mikvah) before hearing the Law? Didn’t the Messiah instruct us to go into all nations and teach them what we had been taught and to mikvah (baptize) them as well? That is Torah. Didn’t the Messiah instruct us to do exactly the same thing.

The answer is Yes.

The Torah says that the commandments are given for the native and the alien in the assembly of faith. It further states that every seven years, the whole law is to be read to all people of the Lord including men, women, children, and aliens (Gentile believers). The letter to the Gentiles specifically states that Gentile believers are to be taught exactly what is taught in the Torah with regard to idolatry, sexual behaviors, and kosher. The Messiah stated that anyone teaching those in His flock that any commandment is annulled will be least in His kingdom. Yeshua said that if you love Him, keep His Commandments (the Commandments are in the Torah). All of the Apostles kept the Law from Peter, James, and John to Paul.

Any person suggesting to you that Paul taught otherwise...

Consider this. If Paul did as they argue, then Paul will be least in the kingdom and should not be listened to any further. That would mean his letters are not worthy of being called Scripture. However, Paul did not teach against the Law as is rumored in the New Testament. The confusion stems from the teaching of the Pharisees, which Paul took great issue with. The Messiah did the same.

But if Paul did keep the Law and Christians argue that he was against the Law, then something has to be amiss with the latter teachers. This is what the Apostle Peter was referring to when he spoke of such men. He said of those using Paul’s arguments against the Torah as:

As also in all his [Paul’s] letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and

unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures [Torah and the Prophets], to their own destruction.

II Peter 3:16

For those who would argue that the “Gospel” is freedom from the Law, consider this. The good news is that we are free from the penalty of the Law for having transgressed the Law. Sin is the transgression of the Law; all have sinned (transgressed the Law). Yeshua is the payment for the penalty, not the end of the Law. Therefore He did not make the Law go away nor the possibility of sin go away. He is just the payment for the sin and we are to teach all believers to cease from sinning (to not transgress the Law). To do that we must teach the Law to all people.

There is only one viable conclusion from this question about the Torah and Gentiles. This is really not up for debate. Some issues require personal judgment; this is not one of them. There is no theological weasel room here. Stop listening to men explain God and His commandments; start listening to God’s voice from the mountain. God has clearly stated His commandments and they include the commandment to instruct every person, including the aliens (Gentiles), in the Torah. Teaching the seven laws of Noah for the Gentiles is the teaching of the Pharisees which the Messiah took direct issue with. There is no other alternative according to God. Therefore, let God be found true and any man teaching something different as a liar.

The Torah should be taught to all people – PERIOD !!!



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