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A Post-New Perspective Analysis of Darrell Bock's
Views Pertaining to Torah Observance

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, Messianic Jews generally fall into one of two broad categories: Those who are Torah observant, and those who consider the laws contained in the Mosaic Law as valuable, but optional. Those who hold the latter position may be Torah observant as an evangelistic strategy, as a way of practicing contextualization, or as a means of doing outreach to ethnic Jews. Nonetheless, they do not believe that sustained Torah observance is a necessary/vital component of their Christian faith. Observant Messianic Jews would argue that when Jesus initiated the New Covenant, he did not nullify/abrogate the Mosaic Covenant, and they maintain an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant faithfulness/fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant. Dr. Darrell Bock is one of the foremost proponents of Progressive Dispensationalism. Bock believes that Messianic Jews “can” be Torah observant, but they are not under any obligation to be. The researcher, by way of contrast, holds a Post-New Perspective position, and believes that the Mosaic Law should be adhered to out of faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant, not missionary expediency. The purpose of this research is to examine the works of Dr. Darrell Bock, and to interact with his positions regarding the matter of whether twenty-first century Messianic Jews should be Torah observant or not. This dissertation employs a bibliographic and textual approach to the theological question of whether Messianic Jews should continue to be Torah observant.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Jesus Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8).¹ This dissertation is also dedicated to Dr. Darrell Bock, who followed Paul’s command, had the same mindset as Christ Jesus, and in humility considered me more important than himself, looking not to his own interests, but to my interests as well (Phil 2:3-5). Dr. Darrell Bock is my hero and having him serve on my dissertation committee was one of the highest honors of my life. Dr. Bock is a scholar par excellence, a preeminent individual who only comes once in a generation, in whose shadow I will always run.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007).

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction (The Research Problem)	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
The Thesis.....	5
Rationale and Need	6
Research Problem and Research Questions	11
Limitations	11
Definitions	12
Literature Review	13
David Rudolph	13
Dan Juster	14
Mark Kinzer	15
Mark Nanos	15
Richard Bauckham	16
Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg	17
Markus Bockmuehl	17
John Fischer	18
Morna Hooker	18
Gabriele Boccaccini	19
Peter Tomson	19
Michael Wyschogrod	20
Krister Stendahl	21
David Friedman	21
Bruce Marshall	22
John Gager	22
Yair Furstenberg	23
Seth Postell	23
Walt Kaiser Jr	24
Richard Hays	25

Summary Argument.....	25
Statement of Methodology.....	25
Chapter 2: Did the New Covenant Annul/Abrogate the Mosaic Covenant? If First-century Messianic Jews Were Torah Observant, is There Any Reason Why This Should be a Temporary Practice?.....	27
The Gospels and Acts	28
Mark 7:18-19.....	28
Peter’s Vision of Impure and Unclean Animals in Acts 10.....	33
The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).....	42
The Circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3).....	50
Romans	56
Romans 7:1-6 & Romans 8.....	56
Romans 10:3-4.....	64
Romans 13:8-10.....	68
Romans 14.....	73
I Corinthians & Galatians	83
I Corinthians 9:19-23.....	83
Galatians 3:17-29.....	94
Galatians 5:2-4.....	108
Summary and Conclusion of Chapter 2.....	116
Chapter 3: Should 21st-Century Messianic Jews be Torah Observant?.....	129
If First-Century Messianic Jews were Torah Observant, Should Twenty-first Century Messianic Jews Also be Torah Observant?.....	129
What are the Benefits of Messianic Jews Being Torah Observant?.....	132
What Does it Mean for a Messianic Jew to be “Torah Observant?”.....	135
Messianic Jews are not Required to Observe Rabbinic Traditions.....	135
Many of Jesus’ Conflicts with the Jewish Religious Leadership Revolved Around the Oral Law, not the Written Torah.....	138
Messianic Jews Should Adopt a Hillelite Perspective.....	141
How Did Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” Remain Torah-Observant in Predominately Non-Kosher Environments?.....	142

Do Not Throw Out the Baby with the Bathwater	146
What are Some Dangers That Messianic Jews Need to Avoid?.....	147
Dual Covenant Theology is Heretical	147
Danger #2 – Viewing Torah Observance as Being in Conflict with the Baptism/Filling of the Holy Spirit	152
What are Some Other Implications of This Study?.....	153
The New Testament is not Antisemitic	153
Christianity Should not be Understood as an Independent Religion, Separate from Judaism	155
Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Researchers	159
Conclusion.....	159
Recommendations for Future Researchers.....	163
Bibliography	165

Chapter 1: Introduction (The Research Problem)

In recent years, the locus, or center of Christianity has, “shifted inexorably away from Europe, southward, to Africa and Latin America, and eastward, toward Asia ... [today if] we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria, or in a Brazilian favela.”² Statistically speaking, Christianity is now an African religion, and by 2050, only one in every five Christians in the world will be a non-Hispanic white. Christianity has traditionally been associated with European civilization and Western imperialism. As Christianity spreads into every nook and corner of the globe, missiologists stress the need for “contextualization,”³ namely, “the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context.”⁴ In the 20th century, not only was the modern Jewish state created in 1948 following the collapse of the British Mandate but also thousands of Jews started coming to faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Lord. As these new Jewish believers began to assemble with one another, questions began to be raised, such as,

Should the Church today respond as the historical Church, which said, “Welcome into the Church. You are no longer Jews. You are now Christians?” Or should the Church recognize that Jewish identity is a matter of birth and a covenant relationship with God that goes all the way back to Abraham? ... How were they to live as Jewish believers in Messiah Jesus? Should they form congregations of their own where they could remain

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Kindle, 1.

³ Or, in Roman Catholic circles, “inculturation.”

⁴ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Westmont: IVP Academic, 2005), Kindle, 114.

Jews in lifestyle and practice and where they would be able to express their faith in a Jewish way?⁵

As things have evolved over time, in the twenty-first century, Messianic Jews generally fall into one of two broad categories: Those who are Torah observant, and those who consider the laws contained in the Mosaic Law/Pentateuch as valuable but optional. While many within both groups reject supersessionism,⁶ and many hold to a premillennial view of eschatology,⁷ they diverge when it comes to Torah observance. Observant Messianic Jews would argue that when Jesus initiated the New Covenant, he did not nullify/abrogate the Mosaic Covenant, and they maintain an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant faithfulness/fidelity (to the Mosaic Covenant). On the other hand, non-observant Jews may adopt some Jewish symbols and practices as a way of integrating Jewish people into Christianity, but for them, on-going and sustained Torah observance is not believed to be an important/necessary component of their Christian faith.

Statement of the Problem

Messianic Jews have found a home within the dispensational premillennialism camp, because of dispensational premillennialism's general distinction between the Church and ethnic Israel. Among the newer generation of dispensational premillennialists, a popular form of dispensationalism known as "Progressive Dispensationalism" is widely adhered to. This configuration of dispensationalism, unlike classical dispensationalism, believes that there is a present form of the Messianic kingdom ("already"), which will be more fully realized in the

⁵ Stan Telchin, *Messianic Judaism is Not Christianity* (Ada: Chosen Books, 2004), Kindle, 17-18.

⁶ Supersession is the idea that the Church has replaced the Jewish people as God's covenant elect people.

⁷ Premillennialism is the view that after Christ's return, ethnic Israel will respond *en masse* to Jesus, become participants in the New Covenant, and become subjects in Jesus' 1000-year reign centered in Jerusalem.

millennium in a physical/tangible/concrete manner (the “not-yet”). Among both classical and Progressive Dispensationalists, it is rare to find a Messianic Jew who is Torah observant.

One of the foremost proponents of the Progressive Dispensationalist viewpoint is Dr. Darrell Bock. Because Bock’s name is virtually synonymous with Progressive Dispensationalism, this dissertation will focus upon his writings. Furthermore, Bock has written extensively on matters pertaining to Messianic Judaism, so his content provides a fertile ground for interaction with the Progressive Dispensationalism viewpoint regarding Torah observance.

This dissertation will be critiquing Dr. Darrell Bock’s view of Torah observance for Messianic Jews from a Post-New Perspective point-of-view. Since the 1970’s and the publication of E.P. Sanders’ work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, a movement within Pauline scholarship has arisen that has come to be known as the “New Perspective on Paul.” Scot McKnight defines the “Old Perspective on Paul” in this way:

In the old perspective Paul was converted from Judaism to Christianity; in the old perspective the law was (primarily) an instrument of accusation, and the New Testament and Jesus’s teachings and especially life in the Spirit was now the way to live properly before God ... in the old perspective “works of the law” refers to human attempts to establish themselves before God on the basis of works and merit building; in the old perspective grace is much more a New Testament word, and law and works and merit the Old Testament words. The old perspective came to us through Paul as interpreted by Augustine in the famous Pelagian controversies; it came to us then through Luther ... the old perspective saw Judaism as the past work of God and the church as the present work of God so that it is fair to say the old perspective is inherently supersessionist.⁸

McKnight then distinguishes the Old Perspective on Paul from the New Perspective:

Judaism was no longer seen as a works-based religion, and therefore when Paul fought against “works of the law,” he was not fighting against works-based righteousness ... To begin with, in the new perspective Judaism is best described as covenantal nomism. That is, in the new perspective one became a Jew, or one found acceptance with God, on the

⁸ Scot McKnight, “The New Perspective and the Christian Life,” in *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life: Ethical and Missional Implications of the New Perspective*, edited by Scot McKnight and Joseph Modica (Ada: Baker Academic, 2016), Kindle, 126-128.

basis of God’s covenant election of Israel ... Nor were Jews at all convinced that they had to be perfect, as the Reformers so often emphasized, in order to be accepted by God. The whole of the Bible spoke against that view, for, after all, they had a system of forgiveness established in the temple system. Every year, on Yom Kippur, they confessed their sins and their priests announced absolution. Perfection, it was assumed, was impossible. Torah observance then was not about getting to heaven or entering the covenant or being good enough to be approved. Rather, the law was God’s gracious instruction on how elect people were to live in the land ... works of the law refer to circumcision, Sabbath observance, and food laws— that is, to the laws and practices that Jews did and gentiles did not do and that therefore distinguished Jews from gentiles. “Works of the law” then was shorthand for “become a Jew” or “be a Jew.” The old perspective framed Paul as a Christian over against Judaism. The new perspective framed Paul as a Jewish Christian or a Christian Jew over against resistant forms of Judaism, but still within Judaism.⁹

And finally, McKnight draws a contrast between the New Perspective, and the Post-New

Perspective:

In the old perspective Paul was a Christian over against Judaism; in the new perspective Paul is a Jewish Christian or a Christian Jew, still a Jew but very much a “fulfilled, messianic” Jew. In the post–new perspective, Paul is a Jew. Paul’s faith is 100 percent Jewish ... Jewish believers in Jesus follow the Torah; gentile believers in Jesus follow the Torah so far as the Torah is for them. A critical text for the post–new perspective is found in Acts 15:28–29 ... others, like Richard Bauckham, have argued on the contrary that the four stipulations of Acts 15 are not the hoped-for morality of gentile believers but instead are specific laws shaped for gentiles living in the *Eretz Israel*. In other words, instead of modifying or toning down Torah for gentiles, this set of stipulations affirms Torah for gentiles— so far as it applies to them— but does so in a way that the Torah is never toned down for Jewish believers in Jesus ... What I see then in the post–new perspective is the end of supersessionism ... For the Jewish believer kosher obtains, and for many today that means full kosher— no different than your typical Hasidic Jew. “Church” fellowship is more often than not seen as synagogue-like fellowship with very Jewish things going on ... The “unity” of the one people of God is realized in separation, not in integrated fellowship, worship, and discipleship ... Instead of a law that had to be abrogated, we have a law that has to be followed (by Jewish and gentile believers); there is no thought here of a works righteousness but of a grace-shaped election formed through a covenant God made with Israel, and the whole Christian life is about the Torah and, for gentile believers, Paul’s teaching about how gentiles who are not given the Torah are to live.¹⁰

This paper will critique the writings of Darrell Bock regarding the continuity/discontinuity of the Mosaic Law from a Post-New Perspective point-of-view (the view that Messianic Jews should

⁹ McKnight, Kindle, 131-132.

¹⁰ Ibid., Kindle, 134-136.

continue to be Torah observant out of covenant fidelity). Bock says, “My view is not Messianic Jews should or must follow the Law but can do so. This is a big difference as there is no mandate to do this in my view. I Corinthians 9:19-22 is a reflection of my view.”¹¹ He also writes, “[T]he church, at least in Jerusalem, kept portions of the law as a means of staying in contact with Jews, for the sake of the gospel.”¹² This sentiment differs from the view of the author of this paper, who believes that Messianic Jews *should* continue to follow the Mosaic Law, out of fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant, not as a means of attaining salvation.¹³

The Thesis

In this study, it will be argued that Torah observance by Messianic Jews is not an evangelistic strategy, a way of practicing contextualization, or a means of doing outreach to ethnic Jews. Nor is Torah observance to be done solely with the purpose of “not giving offense” to the local Jewish communities. Instead, Messianic Jews are to be Torah observant out of faithfulness to the covenant God made with them at Sinai. In an expanded form, this thesis is best stated by Mark Kinzer, who draws a fundamental distinction between the opinion of the author of this dissertation, and that of Dr. Bock:

Many Messianic Jews seek to observe the laws of the Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch), whereas others treat these laws as national customs that are valuable but optional ... First, postmissionary Messianic Judaism summons Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency ... If they [missionary-minded Messianic Jews] could be convinced that Messianic Judaism was an ineffective evangelistic strategy, they would set it aside and search for something more effective. This is the type of Messianic Judaism which Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod chastises: “What I find painful are messianic Jewish congregations which adopt Jewish symbols and practices to attract Jews but are not committed in principle to

¹¹ Dr. Darrell Bock, email message to author, 10 October 2019.

¹² Darrell Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015), Kindle, 276.

¹³ The author of this paper subscribes to the Post-New Perspective, while Bock does not.

Torah observance. These groups use Jewish symbols and practices to make the transition of Jews to Gentile Christianity easier. Their aim is Jewish integration into a Christianity that does not demand sustained Jewish Torah observance indefinitely.”¹⁴ Postmissionary Messianic Jews agree with Wyschogrod. Their congregations are “committed in principle to Torah observance” and “demand [it] . . . indefinitely.” The motivation is covenant fidelity, not missionary expediency.¹⁵

Rationale and Need

In the first century, the early Church community consisted predominately of ethnic Jews. Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew, and the early Messianic Jews lived by-and-large strictly in accordance with the Torah.

In Acts 15, a council was held pertaining to the issue of whether the “Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). The conclusion was that Gentiles who came to faith in Jesus were not required to undergo circumcision or to be Torah observant (to undergo Jewish conversion). In the twenty-first century the situation is reversed: The Church is predominately Gentile, and the question is being asked, “Should Messianic Jews undergo circumcision and be expected to be Torah observant?” This issue was never raised at the Jerusalem Council, because it was assumed that Jews would remain practicing Jews – this was normative.

The early, first-century Christians did not feel any need to break with the Jews of their day just because they believed in Jesus as the Messiah. In Acts 21, James, and the elders of the church in Jerusalem told Paul, “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law” (20). Because some were slandering Paul, saying that,

¹⁴ Michael Wyschogrod, “Response to the Respondents,” *Modern Theology* 11:2 (April 1995): 237.

¹⁵ Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2005), Kindle, 13-14.

“you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs” (21), Paul was instructed to undergo a purification rite so that “everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law” (24).

Many Jews who embrace Christianity abandon their covenantal responsibilities of Jewish life and identity rooted in the Torah and become assimilated into Gentile congregations. Furthermore, because of intermarriage with Gentiles, within a few generations, the children of Jewish converts lose their unique/distinct ethnic Jewish identity.

Supersessionists, or those who subscribe to replacement theology, believe that the Christian Church has replaced Israel as the covenantal/chosen people of God. Some theologians even understand the Church to be the new, spiritual Israel.¹⁶ Many Messianic Jews, by way of contrast, adhere to what they call, “Olive Tree Theology,”¹⁷ which comes from chapters 9-11 of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. The root of the olive tree are the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised Abraham all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates rivers (Gen 15:18-21), that he would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:2-9), and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). To the descendants of these patriarchs, the people of Israel, were “the adoption to sonship ... the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving

¹⁶ “Supersessionism first arose after the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt in A.D. 135, expressed in the writings of second-century Christians such as Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis, and also in the Letter of Barnabas. It quickly spread to become the prevailing viewpoint of the Christian church” (Blaising, Craig, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser [Grand Rapids: Chosen People Ministries, 2008], Kindle, 1173-1175). Incipient supersessionism ideas can be seen in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho. Martyr writes, “For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ, as shall be demonstrated while we proceed” (Martyr, Justin, Dialogue with Trypho [San Francisco: Fig, 2012], Kindle, 274-276).

¹⁷ An excellent example of *Olive Tree Theology* can be seen in chapter III of David Stern’s book, *Messianic Judaism*.

of the law, the temple worship and the promises ... and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah” (Rom 9:4-5). At that time, Gentiles were, “separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). When Jesus came, He came as a Jew, and His first followers were all Jewish. Although “many thousands of Jews ... believed, and all of them [were] zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20), nevertheless, most of the Jewish community rejected Christ. On the other hand, the gospel message began to spread to the Gentile community (Acts 10), and Gentiles soon composed the bulk of the church. Paul describes this phenomenon, in Romans 11, as the “natural branches” (the Jews) being “broken off,” and the “wild branches” (the Gentiles) being “grafted in.” Although the Jewish people, as a nation, have been temporarily “cut off,” nonetheless, Paul stresses that, “Israel has [only] experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Jews has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). The natural branches will eventually be grafted back in. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, in his book *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, examines all 73 occurrences of the term “Israel” in the New Testament, and concludes that “[t]he term Israel is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing remnant within. It is never used of the Church in general or of Gentile believers in particular.”¹⁸ Similarly, Walt Kaiser says, “These two terms, Jews and Israel, are never contrasting terms, for when Paul wished to make that distinction, he spoke of those who were Jews ‘outwardly’ versus those who were Jews ‘inwardly’ (Rom 2:28-29) ... As believers, Gentiles are ‘children of Abraham’ (see Gal 3:29), but that's not the same thing as saying they

¹⁸ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1994), Logos Software, 699.

are ‘children of Israel.’”¹⁹ According to Bruce Marshall, Torah observance is one of the primary ways Jewish identity can be maintained:

The obvious answer is by Jewish observance of the full range of traditional Jewish law (*halachah*, which embraces both the written and oral Torah, that is, both biblical and rabbinic law . . .). This observance, in which the Gentiles will surely have no interest and to which God’s electing will does not obligate them, will be the chief means by which Abraham’s descendants can be identified, and indeed will keep the Gentiles at a certain distance, thus ensuring that Abraham’s children do not, through intermarriage, vanish into the sea of nations. The ancient and distinctive responsibilities of the Jewish people towards God are, as it were, the mark of Israel’s primordial and permanent election which remains *post Christum* . . . The Jewish people cannot be permanently elect unless they can be distinguished at all times from the nations, and the observance of traditional Jewish law seems to be the one mark by which this distinction can be sustained *post Christum*.²⁰

The primary beneficiaries of this dissertation will be Messianic Jews, who are debating about the merits of Torah observance. The secondary beneficiaries will be the entire body of Christ. As the articles of faith of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations state, Messianic Jewish groups exist, “(2) to bear witness to Yeshua within the people of Israel, and (3) to serve as an authentic and effective representative of the Jewish people within the body of Messiah.”²¹ If the Apostle Paul saw the state of the Church in the twenty-first century, he would be in shock: “For the apostle [Paul], therefore, a purely Gentile church, existing for itself and out of itself, without a Jewish Christian section, would quite simply be not conceivable, let alone theologically tenable.”²² Just as the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel came with fresh messages from God, but did not start a new religion, in the same way, Peter, Paul and James did not “convert to Christianity,” and did not intend to be pioneers of a brand new religion. Christianity

¹⁹ Walt Kaiser, “Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium in Light of Israel’s Future (Romans 9-11),” in *To the Jew First*, ed. Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), Kindle, 438-452.

²⁰ Bruce Marshall, “Christ and the Cultures: The Jewish People and Christian Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91-92.

²¹ Kinzer, Kindle, 5201.

²² Peter Von der Osten-Sacken, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 108.

needs to undergo what Pinchas Lapide calls a “*Heimholung*” (“repatriation”), that is, a “bringing home to Judaism today what is originally rooted in Jewish experience.”²³ David Sterns gives a fantastic illustration of the current state of Israel:

The present situation with commonwealth Israel is that Gentiles from many nations recognize the Jewish Messiah, yet the majority of national Israel do not. Suppose citizens of Canada, India, Nigeria, Australia, and other members of the British Commonwealth of Nations recognized Elizabeth II as their Queen, but most individual Englishmen, as well as the British government, did not. In this circumstance it would be wrong to say that Great Britain was no longer a member of the Commonwealth— when in fact it would still be the central member among equals.²⁴

There have been many books written by Messianic Jews concerning the continuity/discontinuity of the Mosaic law. From this perspective, this research is not novel. What makes this research unique is Progressive Dispensationalism is a relatively new movement, emerging in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Thus, there has been scant literature produced about the relationship between Progressive Dispensationalism and the Post-New Perspective regarding the question of Torah observance.

Philosophically, this dissertation will seek to answer the following questions: Is it important that Messianic Jews maintain their ethnic identity? How should Messianic Jews relate to their fellow Jews, and how should they interact with Gentile believers and Gentile unbelievers? Theologically, this dissertation will attempt to answer the following questions: Is Torah observance antithetical to a Spirit-filled Christian life and does Torah observance cross the line into pluralism and dual-covenant theology?²⁵ Finally, and most importantly, does Torah

²³ Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus – A Jewish Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 6.

²⁴ David Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel: A Message for Christians* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2010), Kindle, 436-440.

²⁵ Dual-covenant theology suggests that Jews can be saved by faith apart from faith in Jesus Christ, and that Jews are related to God by a covenant independent of faith in Jesus.

observance by Messianic Jews portend a denial of the non-negotiable and central doctrine of the Christian faith, namely, justification by faith in Jesus alone?

Research Problem and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the works of Dr. Darrell Bock, as representative of the Progressive Dispensationalist position, and to interact with his positions regarding the matter of whether or not twenty-first century Messianic Jews should be Torah observant. The following research and operational/sub-questions define the parameters of this investigation²⁶:

RQ1: If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, why did they cease their practice?

SQ1: Did the New Covenant annul/abrogate the Mosaic Covenant?

SQ2: If the first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, is there any reason why this should be a temporary practice?

RQ2: Should twenty-first-century Messianic Jews be Torah observant?

SQ1: If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, should twenty-first-century Messianic Jews also be Torah observant?

SQ2: What are the benefits of Messianic Jews being Torah observant?

SQ3: What does it mean for a Messianic Jew to be “Torah observant?”

SQ4: What are some dangers that Messianic Jews need to avoid?

SQ5: What are some other implications of this study?

Limitations

The results of the research of this paper are meant to be applicable to ethnically Jewish Christians, not Gentile Christians. Furthermore, the outcome of this research may not be germane

²⁶ To answer these questions, the author will also clarify how biblical mandates intersect with the historical and cultural setting.

for those who hold to other ecclesiological/eschatological positions such as supersessionism, amillennialism or postmillennialism.

Definitions

- *Supersessionism* - the idea that the Church has replaced the Jewish people as God's covenant/elect people.
- *Premillennialism* - the doctrine that after Jesus' physical return to earth, he will inaugurate a 1000-year reign on earth.
- *Dispensational Premillennialism* – the premillennial view which draws a distinction between the Church and ethnic Israel.
- *Progressive Dispensationalism* – the dispensational premillennial position which sees a present form of the Messianic kingdom which will reach its culmination/fulfillment in the millennium.
- *Jew* – one who has an ethnically Jewish mother, regardless of the father's lineage. Rabbinic tradition would point to Ezra and Deuteronomy 7:4 to support this interpretation. While some aspects of Judaism are patrilineal (i.e., determining if one is Levi, Kohen, or Yisrael, and tribal rights/inheritance), “Jewishness” is matrilineal.²⁷
- *Messianic Jew* – an ethnically Jewish Christian.
- *Torah observant Messianic Jew* – an ethnically Jewish Christian who keeps the Law of Moses and the commands specific to the Jewish people.
- *Non-Torah observant Messianic Jew* – an ethnically Jewish Christian who does not adhere to the commands of the Law of Moses that are specific to the Jewish people.

²⁷ “Why is Jewishness Matrilineal?” Chabad.org, accessed 20 October 2022, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/601092/jewish/Why-Is-Jewishness-Matrilineal.htm.

Literature Review

The Post-New Perspective, or the “Paul within Judaism” point of view is a relatively new school within New Testament scholarship. Most of the publications in this school have been published in the twenty-first century. This chapter will highlight a few scholars who are doing stellar work in the Post-New Perspective movement.

David Rudolph

In the author of this dissertation’s opinion, the most significant modern, scholarly publication within the Post-New Perspective movement is David Rudolph’s *A Jew to the Jew: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23*. Rudolph studied under Richard Bauckham at Cambridge University. While Rudolph’s primary focus is upon I Corinthians 9, he gives brilliant commentary on Mark 7:19 (“he declared all foods clean”), Acts 10 (Peter’s vision), Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council), and I Corinthians 7:20 (“Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called”). In his exegesis on Romans 14:14, 20, Rudolph points out that the “weak” and “strong” are not those who are Torah observant (presumably “the weak”) and the non-Torah observant (presumably “the strong”), but rather those who are Torah observant (“the strong”), and those who are overly-scrupulous in their Torah observance (they are “weak” due to the fact that they go beyond what the Torah demands). Rudolph also notes how Paul’s view can be considered a “Hillelite” view, since he studied under Gamaliel and his positions reflect this school. Finally, regarding I Corinthians 9:19-20, Rudolph states that part-time Torah observance would be considered inconsistent by the Jews he was trying to teach. Rudolph notes that Jesus maintained Levitical kosher laws, and yet did not hesitate to eat in the presence of “sinners” (presumably, without violating Levitical kosher laws). Similarly, Paul practiced a flexibility of lifestyle, all the while holding to a strict observance of Jewish law.

Dan Juster

Dan Juster is the founding president of the *Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations* (UMJC). While not as scholarly as *A Jew to the Jews* (by Rudolph), *Jewish Roots: A Foundation for Biblical Theology* is notable for its thoroughness and serves as a suitable primer for anyone who wants to become acquainted with the Post-New Perspective. If one wants to know what questions to ask, *Jewish Roots* is the place to start (albeit it is not the place to “end” – one will want to look to other resources if they want to “go deeper”). Juster demonstrates that like Roman Catholic dogma, Jewish *halakhah*, or the Oral Law, is a mixture of good/bad – there are times when it contradicts Scripture. In the author of this dissertation’s opinion, Juster’s greatest contribution to the canon of scholarship, is how he illustrates that Torah observance should not be viewed as antithetical to being filled with the Holy Spirit – under the New Covenant, Messianic Jews are empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the demands of the Mosaic Law. Juster compiles a list of over 1000 commands to believers in the New Testament, to show that the 613 laws found in the TaNaK are not the sum of all that God requires of his people. Another significant contribution of Juster is how he suggests that only certain priestly/sacrificial aspects of the Mosaic Covenant were terminated as opposed to the entire Torah *universus*. According to Juster, “Judaizers” are not Messianic Jews who maintain Jewish practice and heritage (while trusting in Jesus alone for salvation, and not depending upon their own power/strength [as opposed to being baptized in the Holy Spirit]) but are those who impose circumcision and Jewish conversion (Torah observance) upon Gentile believers in Jesus. Finally, Juster exegetes the meaning of the “law of Christ,” and explicates how this is not a substitute/replacement for the Torah.

Mark Kinzer

More than any other author, it was Kinzer who inspired the author of this dissertation to choose the thesis for this work. It was Kinzer who in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* clearly articulated the bipartite argument, setting “covenant fidelity” in opposition to “missionary expediency.” Kinzer’s genius is in boiling down complex arguments into easy-to-understand syllogisms. For example, Kinzer responds to those who interpret the book of Hebrews in a way which terminates the Torah by saying that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Titus in A.D. 70 did not keep Jews from circumcising their sons, observing the Sabbath, and eating kosher. One of the recurring themes in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* is the importance of Jews maintaining their ethnic identity in light of God’s dealing with the Jews at the end of age. For Kinzer, the message and power of Jesus does not lead to less Jewish practice, but more. Kinzer sets for the important concept of modified supersessionism, which he defines this way: “Yeshua-believing Jews who continue to live as Jews constitute the authentic heirs of the Jewish spiritual tradition, while the Jews who do not believe in Yeshua have forfeited their standing as part of the people of Israel.”²⁸

Mark Nanos

Among the most prolific of writers within the “Paul within Judaism” movement is the Reformed Jew, Mark Nanos. In Nanos’ opinion, Pauline theology should not be viewed as Paul versus Judaism, Paul or Judaism, Paul as opposed to Judaism, or Paul outside Judaism, but Paul squarely fixed in the theology of Judaism. Like the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, Paul did not seek to begin a new religion, but simply came with a new and fresh message from God. Nanos

²⁸ Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2005), Kindle, 1595-1602.

agrees with those in the New Perspective on Paul movement, that many Christians scholars fall into “Luther’s trap” of proposing that Jews are Torah observant to be saved. He says this is false – Jews are Torah observant because they are motivated by their covenantal relationship with God. Nanos takes a novel approach to interpreting Philippians – Nanos does not believe Paul is referring to Judaizers in Philippians, but members of the *Cynic* movement. According to Nanos, Paul is putting forth a realized eschatology, in which Gentiles can become “children of Abraham” without needing to undergo Jewish conversion (circumcision and Torah observance).

Richard Bauckham

From Bauckham’s book, *The Jewish World Around the New Testament*, and from his chapter, “James and the Jerusalem Council Decision,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, it is fair to put him within the Post-New Perspective camp. Because Bauckham is an expert in the Judaic and Second Temple roots of New Testament texts, and has a firm grasp of their Jewish context, he is uniquely qualified to comment on the interrelationship between the early Church and the Jewish world of its time. Bauckham’s commentary on Acts 15 is particularly insightful. Bauckham notes how the Jerusalem Council, recorded in Acts 15, is the “second Jerusalem conference” (the first occurring in Acts 11:1-18 following Peter’s encounter with Cornelius). The second conference was held because there were lingering issues about Gentile conversions/missionary movements that were still unresolved after the first conference. According to Bauckham neither the discussion nor the decision of the Jerusalem Council had anything to do with Jews adhering to their call or heritage. In other words, it was presumed that Jews would maintain their Torah observance. Bauckham’s other significant contribution is how he correlates the four prohibitions for Gentiles that were decided by the Jerusalem Council to the

laws for “foreigners in your midst” in Leviticus 17-18. By maintaining these prohibitions, and avoiding impurity, Gentile Christians would be able to fellowship with Messianic Jews.

Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg

Lizorkin-Eyzenberg is one of the freshest faces in the Paul within Judaism movement, and his books are aimed at popular consumption. *Jewish Insights into Scripture* and *The Jewish Apostle Paul* are exhilarating to read, and his short essays give the reader small portions of truth that are easily digestible. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg has a couple novel ideas that are worthy of mention. First, he suggests that the “Judaizers” in Galatians were Messianic Jews who were politically motivated in their desire for Gentile converts to be Torah observant. Jews in Galatia were exempt from the imperial cult. When Gentiles converted to Christianity, they fell under the umbrella of the synagogue. The Jewish believers wanted to maintain the status quo with Rome and not be criticized for having Gentiles in their premises who were not conforming to Jewish practice. Second, Lizorkin-Eyzenberg gives a novel interpretation of Galatians 3. In Galatians 3, Paul says that for Jews, the “law was our guardian until Christ came” (Gal 3:24). Lizorkin-Eyzenberg draws an analogy to the Jewish Bar Mitzvah. Just as the Torah was our guardian until Christ came, in the same way a Jewish father has responsibility over his son until the time of his Bar Mitzvah.

Markus Bockmuehl

Markus Bockmuehl’s work, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*, is superlative in the way it does not treat New Testament backgrounds matters superficially but is comprehensive in presenting all the viable options. For example, in his comments on Acts 10:28, Bockmuehl unpacks what Peter meant when he said,

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.” Bockmuehl gives a wide variety of first-century views about Jews sharing meals with Gentiles. Furthermore, Bockmuehl discusses how the Noachide commands can be extrapolated from Genesis 1-11.

John Fischer

John Fischer serves as a professor of Judaic Studies and is the Vice President of Academic Affairs at *St. Petersburg Seminary and Yeshiva* in Florida. Fischer edited *The Enduring Paradox*, and his chapter “Covenant, Fulfillment, and Judaism in Hebrews” contains invaluable theology. Fischer’s greatest contribution to the Paul within Judaism movement is how he views the interrelationship between the Mosaic and New Covenant. Fischer interprets τέλος (*telos*) in Romans 10:4 to mean “goal,” or “fulfillment,” as opposed to “end.” According to Fischer, the New Covenant does not invalidate the Old, but renews, supplements, and enhances it. According to Fischer, the primary problem with the Mosaic Covenant, was not the covenant itself, but the ability of the Jewish people to keep it. For Fischer, there is little “new” in the New Covenant – the New Covenant is a renewal, or ratification of past covenants, and allows the participants in the covenants to experience all the benefits God originally intended. The indwelling Holy Spirit allows Messianic Jews to be Torah observant with a greater degree of internality, stability, and depth than they could prior to the advent of the New Covenant.

Morna Hooker

Morna Hooker’s specialty is studying early Christian thought in the setting of Jewish biblical inheritance. Morna Hooker is good at walking the fine line of being a proponent of the Paul within Judaism view, and yet avoiding the error of dual-covenant theology. In her chapter,

“Christ, the ‘End’ of the Cult,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, she emphasizes that the message of the New Testament is never, “leave Judaism,” but rather, “leave behind your former understanding of Judaism.” According to Hooker, the book of Hebrews challenges Jews to trust in the superiority of Jesus as the Son of God, to trust in the superior revelation which he brought, and to trust in what Christ achieved through his death/resurrection. She does not leave open the door to the possibility of a “dual-covenant” track of salvation apart from Jesus – Jesus’ sacrifice has rendered certain Jewish sacrifices redundant, and to keep on repeating them is to say that Jesus did not solve the problem of sin.

Gabriele Boccaccini

Gabriele Boccaccini is a professor and Head Fellow at the *Jean and Samuel Center for Judaic Studies*. Boccaccini’s *Paul’s Three Paths to Salvation* and *Paul the Jew*, which he edited, is priceless for those who seek to develop a Paul Within Judaism theology. Boccaccini is adamant in his assertion that Paul was Torah-observant, that he never encouraged Jewish believers in Christ to forsake the Law, and that even though Paul preached justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, he did not feel himself free from the obligations of the Mosaic covenant. According to Boccaccini, Paul never changed his Jewish religious or cultural identity after his conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. Boccaccini draws attention to the fact that Paul was an “apostle to the Jews,” long before he was an “apostle to the Gentiles,” and even in his Gentile mission, he would preach, “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Rom 1:16).

Peter Tomson

The Dutch scholar, Peter J. Tomson, while not receiving credit for it, is the originator of much of the key thought/ideas within the Paul within Judaism movement. His landmark work,

Paul and the Jewish Law, shows how Jewish *halakhah* influenced both Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. According to Tomson, in Mark 7:1-23, Jesus is not nullifying biblical food laws, but is attacking rabbinic tradition, “the laws of men,” which are secondary to what is written in the Torah. While Rudolph’s work is masterful, he was probably building upon the shoulders of Tomson, who says that in Romans 14, Paul was adopting a “Hillelite view” of ceremonial impurity, and that Romans 14 deals with Messianic Jews who are hyper-sensitive or hyper-halakhic in their sensibilities. Tomson’s other contributions include equating “circumcision” with being a “law-abiding Jew,” and analyzing the writings of Paul, and fixing them within the Hebrew/Pharisaic tradition.

Michael Wyschogrod

If there is any one scholar who deserves to be called the “Father of the Post-New Perspective” movement, it is Michael Wyschogrod. While Wyschogrod was an Orthodox Jew, in reading his works, it is difficult to distinguish him from a Christian theologian. Wyschogrod spent his career dealing with the relationship between and encouraging dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that he ever accepted the divinity of Christ, Wyschogrod argued that it is impossible to reject Jesus’ divinity based upon the teaching of the Hebrew Bible. Wyschogrod’s father was a Hungarian chess master, and the way Wyschogrod approaches theology reflects his heritage. According to Wyschogrod, the fact that the Jerusalem Council, in Acts 15, was debating circumcision and Torah observance for Gentiles, implies that Messianic Jews continued to be observant. Wyschogrod delivers a rebuke to Messianic Jews who only adopt Jewish symbols and practices to attract Jews. He also criticizes those Messianic Jews who say that they are no longer obliged to submit to the Torah, because they are now “under the law of Christ.” While Gentiles are not under obligation to

submit to the demands of Jewish religious or cultural identity, this does not relieve Messianic Jews from being indefinitely bound to the Mosaic Covenant.

Krister Stendahl

If there is any other scholar, other than Michael Wyschogrod, who deserves to be labeled as among the “patristic fathers” of the Post-New Perspective on Paul, it would be Krister Stendahl. Stendahl was the former Bishop of Stockholm in the Church of Sweden and was a professor in Harvard Divinity School. Stendahl’s area of specialty was explicating the Jewish context of the New Testament. He was active in promoting Jewish-Christian dialogue, both being the second director of the Center for Religious Pluralism at the *Shalom Hartman Institute* in Jerusalem and being a regular lecturer at Brandeis University. Stendahl’s study comparing Paul’s missionary “call” in Galatians 1:13-16, to the “call” of Isaiah in Isaiah 49:1, and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5, is robust scholarship.

David Friedman

David Friedman’s book, *They Loved the Torah: What Yeshua’s First Followers Really Thought About the Law*, is both cerebral and smartly argued. Friedman draws attention to Jesus’ Torah observance, to how Paul encouraged Messianic Jewish congregations to maintain their Torah observance and argues that Peter never argued that the Mosaic Commandments were cancelled. Friedman sets forth Ananias as a prototypical Torah-observant Messianic Jew. Friedman contends that if Paul was not Torah observant, he would have been immediately dismissed, and his message disregarded. The fact that he would not just speak once in a synagogue but was invited back to speak over a period of time, argues that Paul was Torah observant. Friedman postulates that Paul circumcised Timothy to put into practice his own rule

for all the churches (per I Cor 7:17-18). Friedman lives year-round in Israel and is himself Torah observant. In the author of this paper's opinion, Friedman's greatest contribution is to build a persuasive case for how the Jewish Apostle Paul could remain Torah observant as he traveled in Gentile territories, planting churches. By staying with God-fearers like Lydia and Titus Justus, or with Jewish co-workers like Priscilla and Aquila, Paul maintained a Torah-observant lifestyle and remained in ritually fit environments.

Bruce Marshall

Bruce Marshall is a Professor of Christian Doctrine at SMU's *Perkins School of Theology*. One of Marshall's interests is the relationship between Judaistic and Christian theology. Spending time reading Marshall's book *Trinity and Truth*, and his article, "Christ and the Cultures: The Jewish People and Christian Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, will not be time wasted. Marshall's greatest contribution to the Post-New Perspective dialogue, is his focus upon Jewish ethnic identity. According to Marshall, Jesus not only remained a Jew after his resurrection, but he will identify as Jew in the eschaton, not in isolation, by himself, but in relationship with the Jewish people. Marshall maintains there is a permanent, eschatological distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and the primary way Jewish identity can be maintained for physical descendants of Abraham, is by Torah observance. Because of Israel's permanent election, they must be always distinguished from other nations and not vanish via intermarriage into the sea of nations.

John Gager

For one seeking to read Paul's letters from a Post-New Perspective, John Gager's book, *Reinventing Paul*, is priceless. Gager's greatest contribution to the Paul within Judaism

movement is in clarifying verses where the Apostle Paul supposedly contradicts himself or appears to be inconsistent. For example, he suggests that the troublemakers in Galatia may not have been ethnic Jews by birth, but instead may have been Gentiles who received circumcision as adults. When Paul said, “if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you” (Gal 5:2), if taken out of context, this could be interpreted to mean that Paul was against Messianic Jews receiving circumcision (as opposed to Gentile believers in Christ). Gager points out that Jews and Gentiles are intertwined in their destinies, because Romans 11:25 says, “a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Gager’s commentary on Galatians 4 is insightful, especially in the way he uses “adoption” language for Gentiles and ascribes to them the same status as Isaac.

Yair Furstenberg

Yair Furstenberg is the head of the Department of Talmud and *Halakhah* at *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*. Furstenberg’s exegesis of Mark 7:19 allows the Christian to view this passage through Jewish eyes. Furstenberg shows the rabbinic/Tannaitic background of why eating food with defiled hands could cause the food to become ceremonially contaminated, and by extension, also defile the body. Furstenberg shows how Jesus’ view about food and defilement was a Pharisaic-Hillelite view, which Rudolph illustrates was Paul’s position as well.

Seth Postell

Seth Postell would not identify himself as one who holds the Post-New Perspective on Paul point-of-view. Nonetheless, as a Messianic Jew, Postell’s book, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills its Goal in Yeshua*, has some interesting points of overlap with this dissertation. In the opinion of the author of this dissertation, Postell’s greatest contribution to this

study lies in his debunking of rabbinic Oral Law. It is common for religious Jews to divide the Torah into two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. Like many Roman Catholics elevate church dogma to the same level as Scripture, many Jews do the same thing with the Oral Law. Postell gives several lines of evidence to support his view. First, when Ezra the scribe returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, there is no mention of an Oral Law, or of the Oral Law being part of God's covenant with Israel. Second, Postell notes that Ethiopian Jews, after being separated from other Jewish groups for thousands of years, did not have a concept of "Oral Law," when they were repatriated to Israel.

Walt Kaiser Jr.

Like Postell, Walt Kaiser Jr. would not identify as being one who holds to a Paul Within Judaism view. Kaiser is a prolific writer, and his works are many, but regarding this dissertation, the most relevant of his writings are "An Evangelical Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, and "Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium in Light of Israel's Future," in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*. Having studied at Brandeis and having taught the Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for over 20 years, Kaiser is uniquely qualified to talk about matters pertaining to Judaism/Christianity. Like other writers, Kaiser does not see the "new" covenant as anything new, but as a renewed, enlarged, and restored covenant. One thing Kaiser does well is explicate the glorious future for Israel, which can be compared to "life from the dead." According to Romans 11:5, the beginning of the eschaton will be signaled by when those who are "in Abraham," will also be "in Christ." Kaiser notes that there were aspects of biblical sacrifices and the priesthood that had a planned obsolescence, but those things that were deleted, abrogated,

and replaced were delimited from their first appearance. Reading Kaiser is a helpful contrast to those who believe that Christ is the τέλος (“end”) of the law, in the sense of “terminating” it.

Richard Hays

Richard Hays and the author of this dissertation are unanimous in their agreement that the book of Hebrews only abrogates the Day of Atonement sacrifice, and only because it was a shadow of Christ’s true sacrifice which grants us access to God. The fact that Christ is our atoning sacrifice, and the great high priest, does not imply that other sacrifices or the entire priesthood was replaced. Hays proposes the new covenant language in Hebrews 8 does not imply that the Torah has been negated. Regarding the topic of this dissertation, *Children of Promise*, and Hays’ two articles in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* are applicable.

Summary Argument

In conclusion, the Post-New Perspective view is not a fringe view but is held by world-class theologians who make brilliant arguments in its defense. Because both Progressive Dispensationalism and the Post-New Perspective are relatively new theological movements, having been spawned primarily in the last half-century, this dissertation will help fill a gap which exists by way of a direct engagement between the two movements. The research in this dissertation will assess Bock’s views and then critique them from a Post-New Perspective outlook.

Statement of Methodology

This dissertation is theological in nature. It is seeking to answer the question, “Should Messianic Jews continue to be Torah observant?” This topic is not an exegesis of one passage of Scripture but is an examination of what the Bible as a whole says about this subject. The author

of this dissertation will employ a bibliographic and textual methodology, looking at what Dr. Darrell Bock has written about this topic, and trying to distill his opinion.

Chapter 2: Did the New Covenant Annul/Abrogate the Mosaic Covenant? If First-century Messianic Jews Were Torah Observant, is There Any Reason Why This Should be a Temporary Practice?

Both Darrell Bock and the author of this dissertation agree that after the advent of the New Covenant, and after the Day of Pentecost, ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus continued to be Torah observant. However, they diverge when it comes to the reason they maintained their Torah observance. For Bock, it was for the sake of the gospel, for a missionary purpose, to stay in contact with the Jewish community, and to not “give offense.” The author, by way of contrast, believes that the early Jews maintained their Torah observance²⁹ out of fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant, made with their forefathers on Sinai. In the author’s opinion, they saw no contradiction between being New Covenant believers, baptized with the Holy Spirit, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and maintaining their Jewish heritage. For the early Jewish Christians, only certain targeted, sacrificial/priestly aspects of the Law had been abrogated, but not the entire thing.

In this chapter, the author of this dissertation will present his critique of Dr. Bock’s view of Torah observance by Messianic Jews in our current era. By way of clarification, Dr. Bock and the author would agree about the role of the Mosaic Law in the life of Gentile Christians. Where they disagree pertains to the role of the Mosaic Law in the life of the Messianic Jew (ethically Jewish believers in Jesus Christ). Both would accept the decision of the Jerusalem Council that Gentiles are not under obligation to be circumcised or required to keep the Law of Moses. This chapter will seek to answer the research question (RQ1), “If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, why did they cease their practice?” Furthermore, this chapter will see to answer the two sub-questions, namely, “Did the New Covenant annul/abrogate the Mosaic

²⁹ And should be Torah observant, in the author’s opinion.

Covenant?” and “If the first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, is there any reason why this should be a temporary practice?” This chapter will focus on eleven passages of Scripture where Bock and the author disagree in their interpretation.

The Gospels and Acts

Mark 7:18-19

In Mark 7, some Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands” (Mark 7:5)? After Jesus left the crowd, he addressed his disciples saying, “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus, he declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18-19). According to Bock, Jesus reconfigures the Levitical food laws, so they are permitted, but no longer “required”:

What goes into a person cannot defile him, so no food can defile. The vision of Acts 10:9–16 and its exposition in Acts 11:2–18 makes the same point about diet, something also suggested by the discussions in Rom 14 and Gal 2:11–14. Jesus is demonstrating his authority to make judgments about the Law. It is likely, given the Torah’s teaching on clean and unclean foods, that Jesus is making a declaration about a new reality coming as a result of the eschatological arrival of the kingdom. This is part of the “new wineskins” that Jesus brings as the promise is realized (Mark 2:22). Defilement is now exclusively moral and not cultic (v 20). The following of food laws is not obligatory, but optional (I Cor 8:8). Jesus’ point is that ultimate purity is a matter of the heart (Rom 14:14, 20).³⁰

In his book, *Jesus the God-Man*, Bock gives a quote by Ben Witherington which the author of this dissertation agrees with, except for what he says about Jesus “setting aside” aspects of the Torah:

Sometimes he [Jesus] affirms the validity of some portions of the law. Sometimes he intensifies the law’s demands (e.g., portions of the Sermon on the Mount), a point of view that does not violate the law but goes beyond it. Sometimes he adds new material,

³⁰ Darrell Bock, *Mark (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Kindle, 225.

apparently of juridical force to the law (e.g., his teaching on adultery and divorce in Mark 10// Matthew 19). Sometimes he sets aside Torah as he does in Mark 7: 15 ... All of this suggests that Jesus did not see himself as a Galilean Hasid [“holy man”] or another prophet, even one like Elijah. He saw himself in a higher or more authoritative category than either of these types familiar to Jewish believers.³¹

This study disagrees with Bock’s understanding of Mark 7:18-19. When Mark adds the statement, “Thus, he declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19), in a scribal addition, he is not implying that Jesus is obliterating or marginalizing the Laws of *Kashrut* (כְּשָׁרוּת, *casherut*). Juster says, “A ‘food’ would be defined as that which was listed as acceptable in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy. Hence the passage may only mean that foods not ritually treated according to the ... Pharisaic tradition are yet acceptable for eating. When we turn to the parallel of Matthew 15, this becomes almost certain—for Yeshua there concludes, ‘Eating with unwashed hands does not make a man unclean.’³²

In personal correspondence with the author of this dissertation, Bock objects to Juster’s limiting the issue in Mark 7 to the issue of ceremonial hand washing. According to Bock, Jesus also discourses about “food going in and out” (“whatever goes into a person ... [goes into] his stomach and is expelled” [Mark 7:18-19]), thus touching on the issue of *kashrut*. The researcher disagrees with Bock on several grounds. First, if Jesus had repudiated the laws of *kashrut*, then the hesitations of the early church on the issue are irrational (Acts 10:14-15; 15:28-29; Rom 14:14; Gal 2:11-14). David Garland says (concerning why Jesus did not terminate the Levitical food laws in Mark 7), “It would help explain why such a dramatic pronouncement from Jesus that declared all foods to be clean was not cited to settle the later debate over this issue in the

³¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 65, quoted in Darrell Bock and Benjamin Simpson, *Jesus the God-Man: The Unity and Diversity of the Gospel Portrayals* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2016), Kindle, 116.

³² Dan Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation for Biblical Theology* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 1986), Kindle, 126.

churches.”³³ Second, to infer that Christ is terminating the Levitical food laws in Mark 7, is to commit the same logical fallacy many do with Hosea 6:6 (“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings”):

Some men have inferred from such a passage as this, together with Isaiah 1:11-20; Micah 6:6-8; Jeremiah 7:21-26; and others, that God never desired the sacrificial system in Israel. This is surely a shortsighted view, for God Himself instituted the Levitical system in Israel, as is clear from the books of Moses. What God is requiring is something deeper than the mere routine of sacrifice-bringing and sacrifice-offering. It is easy to substitute the visible for the real. The Lord would have godliness first and foremost.”³⁴

Third, Robert Banks, in his book, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, makes the point that Jesus, in the parallel passage of Matthew 15, is neither negating the Law, nor affirming it, but is outlining, “an entirely new understanding of what does [the human heart] and does not constitute defilement.”³⁵ Banks also says that Jesus’ statement, “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him” (Mark 7:18) is not an annulment of the laws of *kashrut*, but is a Semitic hyperbolic statement meaning, “pollutions from within are more serious than pollutions from without.”³⁶

David Garland gives some helpful background information from the Mishnah:

Jesus’ explanation does not explicitly declare that all foods are clean, only that they somehow come out clean. Furthermore, the statement fits the rabbinic perspective on defecated food. According to the *Mishnah*, excrement is not ritually impure though it may be offensive. This surprising judgment may be the key to Jesus’ argument. With a droll twist Jesus argues that if food defiles a person, why is it not regarded as impure

³³ David Garland, *Mark (The NIV Application Commentary)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 276.

³⁴ Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1948), 36.

³⁵ Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 141.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

when it winds up in the latrine – at least according to the tradition of the Pharisees defilement must come from some other source than food.³⁷

Peter Tomson interprets Mark 7:18-19 as a type of halakhic dispute which was common in the Tannaic era (10-220 CE). Tomson writes,

When studied on its own terms the synoptic dispute narrative (Mark 7:1-23; Matt 15:1-20) appears not to be about dietary laws but about purity. Apparently, the disciples did not wash their hands for a regular meal – obviously, a matter of ritual purity. The Pharisees see this as an encroachment upon “the tradition of the elders.” This is a technical term, not for a biblical commandment, as a reference to the food laws would require, but for a tradition of the Sages. For Jesus this tradition, as the one regarding fictional vows, is secondary to a biblical commandment such as the duty to honor one’s father and mother (Mark 7:10-13; Matt 15:3-5). Indeed, the washing of hands is evidently a post-biblical innovation identified as such in Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition. Finally, the saying which concludes Jesus’ argument has to do with impurity contracted by eating impure food: “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (Matt 15:11). While the deeper message of the saying is that moral transgression overrules ritual failure, it is obviously based on the halakhic opinion that impure food does not render a person to be impure. This reflects a more conservative opinion in early Tannaic discussions about derivative impurity. Nonetheless the view that the synoptic debate is about biblical food laws appears to have ancient antecedents. It is based on the secondary clause Mark 7:19b which is interpreted to mean: “Thus he declared all foods clean.” However, the impression that this interpretation is supported by the major manuscripts should be seen in the light of the fact that it is historically unimaginable that Jesus would have infringed upon the biblical food laws. His point is precisely that “the commandments of men” are secondary to what is written in the Torah.³⁸

David Rudolph mirrors Tomson’s view, commenting, “Mark’s editorial comment in 7:19b, uphold[s] the validity of the Torah’s ritual purity system. Prioritization, not abrogation, is the aim of Jesus’ teaching. Mark 7:19b is best understood as a matter of Gentile halakhic application and not an apocalyptic pronouncement that all food is now clean.”³⁹

³⁷ Garland, 276.

³⁸ Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 241.

³⁹ David Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 47.

Yair Furstenberg traces rabbinic sources which show how eating food with defiled hands could contaminate food, and cause someone's body to be defiled:

Halakhic principles indeed can be deduced from various Tannaitic sources which together portray a model of ritual contamination in which impurity can spread from ritually impure hands to the body. Since at that time people normally ate without cutlery, it was common for ritually impure hands to come into contact with food and, critically, with the liquids which usually constituted an essential part of a meal. Liquids, according to halakhic models of ritual purity, can carry contamination from a person's hands to food ... In other words, when hands come into contact with a mix of solid food and liquids, the food becomes ritually impure to the same degree as the hands.⁴⁰

Even though this notion is found in Tannaitic writings, Furstenberg clarifies that it is extra-biblical: "It seems, then, that no biblical source actually suggests that contamination can spread through ingestion. In the Hebrew Bible, eating, unlike emission or discharge, is not a means of transferring defilement. Only in later purity laws, influenced by the Pharisaic hand-washing practice as well as other factors, does concern with ingesting impurity become a major theme."⁴¹

Furstenberg shows how Jesus was adopting a Pharisaic-Hillelite understanding of food and defilement:

According to the laws that appear in Leviticus 11, only the consumption of prohibited foods, such as the carcass of an animal not ritually slaughtered or a 'swarming creature', can cause impurity, and not the consumption of foods that have become contaminated. This fact is articulated explicitly by Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki), the authoritative Talmudic commentator, who states: 'According to the Torah food does not contaminate the person eating it.' Rashi's statement, which summarizes the approach of the Talmud to this issue, is surprisingly similar to Jesus' anti-Pharisaic saying.⁴²

⁴⁰ Yair Furstenberg, "Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15," *New Testament Studies* 54, (2008): 184.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 182.

Ottenheijm gives a brilliant summary statement: “Jesus ... agrees with the Hillelite Pharisees in the negation of the inherent power or the merely physical quality of ritual impurity.”⁴³

Peter’s Vision of Impure and Unclean Animals in Acts 10

In the Mediterranean city of Caesarea, there was a centurion named Cornelius, who was, “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). Cornelius was not a full Jewish proselyte, as he had not undergone circumcision (Acts 11:3), but he was a “God-fearer,” namely, a Gentile who had great respect for the God of Israel. Cornelius was visited by an “angel of God” (10:3), who instructed him to, “send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter” (10:5). In obedience to the angelic vision, Cornelius sent two of his personal servants to Joppa to find Peter.

The following day, as Cornelius’ servants were approaching Joppa, Peter went up on the roof to pray. While he was praying, “he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ And the voice came to him again a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven” (Acts 10:10-16). Peter is told by the voice to eat non-kosher, or *treif* food, which contradicts the Jewish dietary regulations of *kashrut* found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (see Lev. 11). How could it be that a seemingly divine voice would tell Peter to do something which

⁴³ Eric Ottenheijm, “Impurity Between Intention and Deed: Purity Disputes in First Century Judaism and in the New Testament,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M.J.H.M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 146.

is contrary to the Torah? Was Peter being deceived by Satan? Bock adds some helpful perspective on what is requested of Peter:

In the OT, there are a few cases where someone is asked to do something offensive or illegal. In Genesis 22:1–2, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; in Hosea 1:2–3 God asks Hosea to marry a harlot; in Isaiah 20:2–3 God tells Isaiah to go naked for three years. In each case God asks the person to do that which is objectionable, and their responses differ from Peter’s. Abraham felt certain from the start that God would provide a sacrifice other than his son, and so he moved forward in unquestioning obedience (Gen 22:8). Hosea also seems to have obeyed God’s command straight away (Hos 1:3), as did Isaiah (Isa 20:2, “and he did so”). Peter’s initial response is not analogous to these situations but bears greater resemblance to the numerous cases in which people argue against surprising messages brought to them by heavenly messengers. Examples include Mary, the mother of Jesus, who expressed confusion about how she, a virgin, could bear a son (Luke 1:34), and Zechariah, who argued with the angel in the temple when he was told that his aged wife would conceive and bear a son (Luke 1:18).⁴⁴

“[W]hile Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision” (Acts 10:17), “while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them’” (Acts 10:19-20). After Peter arrived in Cornelius’ home, and “found many persons gathered” (Acts 10:27) there, Peter interprets his vision in this way, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me” (Acts 10:28-29)?

How Bock interprets the meaning of Peter’s vision, and how the author of this paper interprets the meaning of Peter’s vision differs significantly, and marks one of the most radical dissimilarities in our points-of-view. It seems more appropriate to limit the meaning of Peter’s vision to people, namely, Gentiles. Bock, by way of contrast, interprets Peter’s vision in Acts 10 in a “both-and” fashion, namely that the vision not only pertained to Gentiles becoming saved

⁴⁴ Darrell Bock. “Apologetics Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.” in *The Gospel and Acts (The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible)* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), Kindle, 18673-18683.

apart from Jewish conversion, but also with doing away with Jewish dietary regulations of *kashrut*. Bock says, in his comment on Mark 7:19 (“Thus he declared all foods clean”), “The disciples probably did not realize this implication at the time, but they came to appreciate the saying later. Peter’s vision of the sheet with all kinds of food on it in Acts 10 shows that it was several years before the disciples realized how God viewed this issue of food.”⁴⁵ Bock states his view as follows:

The law is not a way of salvation. It might instruct and guide, but it is not binding for the church. Nothing makes this distinction clearer than the vision from God himself. In that vision, God shows Peter that all foods are to be considered clean. This vision stands in clear contrast to what the law taught (Lev 11; Acts 10: 9– 16). Peter’s hesitation to believe the vision only underlines the contrast contained in this instruction. The fact is that the “end of the law’s reign” in this kind of an area is something God insists on, despite the apostle’s objection. In short, the Mosaic law has ended because God has brought its role to an end!⁴⁶

Additionally, Bock says,

The two concepts of food and of table fellowship as signs of accepting Gentiles are related, for associating with Gentiles and eating what they may have prepared as hosts would in normal Jewish thinking entail the probable risk of uncleanness. In addition, the two ideas are closely tied together in the law (Lev. 20:24b-26). Indeed, Polhill (1992:225) argues that “purity distinctions and human discrimination are of a single piece.” The food laws underscore Israel’s separation from the nations. By making unclean food clean, God is showing how table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles are more easily accomplished in the new era. The vision symbolizes that what separated Jews from Gentiles is now removed, as Peter will explain in Acts 10:28. It “frees Peter from any scruples about going to a Gentile home and eating whatever might be set before him” (so Marshall 1980: 186; also, Bruce 1990: 256; a similar idea is expressed by Paul in I Cor. 10:27). God uses the picture of unclean food now made clean to portray unclean Gentiles now made clean. That such previous lawbreaking visions point to the act being carried out also shows that food and people are in view here ... Acts 10 is the strongest passage in Acts indicating the removal of food laws that have social implications.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bock, *The Gospel of Mark (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary)* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 459.

⁴⁶ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)*, Kindle, 276.

⁴⁷ Darrell Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 389-390.

The researcher, contra Bock, believes that Peter's vision only pertains to people, not food, and that after Acts 15, the Jewish people continued to maintain food distinctions, not "out of consideration for the Jews they are trying to reach," but out of fidelity to the Mosaic law.

With time and subsequent events, Peter interprets his vision. Fascinatingly, Peter's vision is never interpreted to be a cessation of the Levitical food laws (כַּשְׂרוּת - *kashrut*) – it is only interpreted to mean that Gentiles can now be included among God's people without the need for Jewish conversion (circumcision and Torah observance). Here is a list of places where Peter interprets his vision:

- 1) **Acts 10:28** - "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." Peter interprets his vision to mean that he should not "call any person common or unclean."
- 2) **Acts 10:34-35** - When Peter arrives at Cornelius's home in Joppa, he declares, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Once again, Peter interprets his vision to mean that God accepts men from "every nation."
- 3) **Acts 11:12-18** - In chapter 11, Peter was criticized by some Jewish believers in Jerusalem who say, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:3). After explaining his vision, Peter explained, "And the Spirit told me to go with them [the men from Caesarea] ... As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning ... If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way" (Acts 11:12-17)? The Jewish believers respond to Peter's interpretation of the events, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). Peter's vision is understood to mean that God has accepted the Gentiles, and the visible evidence for this was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- 4) **Acts 15:7-11** - At the Jerusalem Council, Peter addresses the apostles and elders, saying, "[I]n the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith ... we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." Peter reaffirms that his vision implied that, "Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe."

One may argue, “If Peter did not interpret the vision as extending to food, then why did Peter object? Was not Peter explicitly told to eat non-kosher meat? The vision clearly revealed to Peter that he is free to eat all kinds of previously ceremonially unclean meat.” The researcher would respond to this objection in several ways. First, in the vision, Peter did not take one of the unclean animals, slaughter it, and eat it. What happened immediately following his three-fold vision is relevant. Acts 10:17 says, “Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate.” The Holy Spirit then tells Peter, “Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:20). Peter then interprets his vision, after his arrival at Peter’s house, “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without objection” (Acts 10:28-29). To divorce the vision from the events which immediately follow the vision, and Peter’s own interpretation of the vision, is a theologically short-sighted.

Secondly, Cornelius was a “God-fearer,” so even though Peter ate in Cornelius’ home, as Acts 11:3 says (“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them”), it seems unlikely that they ate non-kosher food – in other words, Cornelius was aware of Jewish dietary restrictions and probably respected Peter by serving him ceremonially clean food (kosher). The Acts narrative says several things about Cornelius: 1) He was a “devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). 2) According to an angel, his prayer and gifts to the poor had come to God’s attention: “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). 3) Cornelius was “well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation” (Acts 10:22). F.F. Bruce writes about Cornelius: “Cornelius, though a Gentile, was a worshiper of the God of Israel. Such Gentiles are commonly

called ‘God-fearers’ ... some observed with more or less scrupulosity such distinctive Jewish practices as sabbath observance and abstention from certain kinds of food (notably pork).”⁴⁸ Being that Cornelius was a “God-fearer,” even though he and Peter shared a meal together, it was highly likely that this meal was in conformity with Levitical food laws.

Third, the author of this dissertation believes that Bock commits the logical fallacy of, “proving too much,” when he argues that Peter’s vision implies that the “law has ended,” and “the removal of food laws.” The author of this paper would like to provide an analogy from Ezekiel 4. God tells the prophet Ezekiel, “‘And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.’ And the LORD said, ‘Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them’” (Ezek 4:12-13). God’s purpose in having Ezekiel do this, was to be a “sign for the house of Israel” (Ezek 4:3). God states explicitly that Ezekiel’s baking bread over “human dung” was to illustrate that, “the people of Israel [will] eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.” The Mosaic Law did not explicitly say that cooking food over human excrement was prohibited, but it did give instructions about how it was to be properly disposed of (Deut 23:12-14). God told Ezekiel that cooking food in this way would make the food טמא (*tamah* - “unclean,” “ritually/ceremonially impure”). Ezekiel’s reaction shows that he understands the implications of the action God requested of him: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth” (Ezek 4:14). Daniel Block writes:

The prophet cites three categories of dietary taboos that he has not violated from his youth: the ban on flesh from animals that have died natural deaths, from either disease or exhaustion; flesh of animals that have been killed or mutilated by a beast of prey; and

⁴⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts (New International Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 204.

contaminated meat. The last expression, בָּשֶׂר פְּגוּל, is rare, but the sense is suggested by Lev 7:18 and 19:7, where פְּגוּל refers to sacrificial meat that has not been eaten by the third day. In the absence of refrigeration such meat would obviously have begun to decompose. In Isa 65:4, the only other occurrence of the term, the “broth of פְּגָלִים” is paired with בָּשֶׂר הַחֲזִיר, “the flesh of swine.” The prophet’s words represent a protest of innocence in matters pertaining to holiness and ceremonial purity, reminiscent of Deut 26:13-15.⁴⁹

No Jewish commentator has ever suggested that Ezekiel’s sign to the people of Israel was intended to end the law, or “remove the food laws.” God commanded Ezekiel to eat “unclean,” “defiled,” or “tainted” food (Ezek 4:13-14), and Ezekiel lived between 622 and 570 B.C., and yet the Levitical food laws remained in effect for at least the next 500 years.⁵⁰

Markus Bockmuehl gives some helpful background material which helps us understand Peter’s statement in Acts 10:28 (“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean”):

Outright rejection of the Torah is only one of the wide range of possible scenarios for Jews eating with Gentiles ... Observant Jews might adopt one of the following four positions: they could either:

- 1) refuse all table fellowship with Gentiles and refuse to enter a Gentile house,
- 2) invite Gentiles into their house and prepare a Jewish meal,
- 3) take their own food to a Gentile’s house, or indeed
- 4) dine with Gentiles on the explicit or implicit understanding that food they would eat was neither prohibited in the Torah nor tainted with idolatry.

This latter policy could, for example, be refined in the request to be given only vegetarian or other specified kinds of food – an option that even Paul explicitly legitimates in Romans 14.1-15.6 ... Nevertheless, given the widespread Jewish conviction about the impurity of idolatry, it is clearly hardline views about Gentile intentions that would most obviously incline conservative Palestinian Jews to consider it wholly “unlawful”

⁴⁹ Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24 (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 186.

⁵⁰ The researcher believes the Levitical food laws remain in effect up until the present day.

(ἀθέμιτόν, Acts 10.28) for Jews to enter a Gentile's house and to eat with them (συνεσθίειν, Acts 10.28; 11.2).⁵¹

David Rudolph and the author of this paper hold identical views of Acts 10, when he says, "To contend that Jesus' words in Acts 10:14 were to be taken literally and signaled an end to Jewish Christian dietary distinctions is to forget that unclean animals in the vision were symbolic of Gentiles with whom Peter avoided contact. Peter interpreted the vision symbolically (Acts 10:28; cf. vv. 34-5). No indication exists that Peter or the other apostles took the vision literally (11:1-18)."⁵² Contra Bock, Rudolph contends that Peter's surprised reaction is convincing evidence that Jesus had not abolished the Levitical food laws (or if he had, the Holy Spirit had not yet "taught" Peter this truth):

Peter saw a vision in which Jesus commanded him to eat unclean animals. Peter replied, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean" (Acts 10:14). Peter's response is most revealing. If Jesus had taught the acceptability of eating unclean food, Peter would not have been shocked. "The story presupposes that Peter is not aware of a previous ruling by the historical Jesus to the same effect." His shock indicates that he had never received such a teaching or example from Jesus over the three-year period that he was with him." Peter was part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. If Jesus had terminated the Torah's dietary laws, it is reasonable to assume that Peter would have known about it.⁵³

In his landmark work, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23*, Rudolph contends that the Jerusalem Council debate is compelling evidence that Levitical food laws were still in force:

The Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 centered on the question of whether Jesus-believing Gentiles were exempt from Mosaic law. If the Torah's dietary laws had been abrogated as early as Acts 10, and Jesus-believing Jews were now exempt from the requirements of Mosaic law, there would be no reason to debate whether the law was

⁵¹ Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 58-59.

⁵² David J. Rudolph, "Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b," *EQ* 74:4 (2002): 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

binding on Jesus-believing Gentiles. Acts 15 implies that Peter's vision in Acts 10 concerned men, not the menu (Acts 15:9). The apostolic decree was only addressed to "Gentile believers" and clarified the "requirements" (including certain minimal food restrictions) that were incumbent upon the "Gentile believers" (Acts 15:19-20, 23). The presupposition throughout Acts 15 is that Jesus-believing Jews like Peter (who was present at the Jerusalem Council) continue to observe Mosaic law.⁵⁴

Michael Wyschogrod takes a similar tack, writing, "It is clear that both parties agreed that circumcision and Torah obedience remained obligatory for Jewish Jesus believers since, if this were not the case, one could hardly debate whether circumcision and Torah obedience were obligatory for gentiles. Such a debate could only arise if both parties agreed on the lasting significance of the Mosaic Law for Jews. Where they differed was its applicability to gentiles."⁵⁵

It may strike the modern reader as strange that unclean and clean animals in Peter's vision, are used to symbolize Gentiles and Jews. However, Kinzer notes, "The use of animal symbols to represent categories of human beings is common in apocalyptic literature. Outside the biblical canon, the most striking example is found in Enoch's Book of Dream Visions (Enoch 83–90)."⁵⁶

Richard Bauckham states,

Gentile society as a whole was generally regarded as morally impure because of the pervasive idolatry and the prevalence of sexual practices abhorrent to Jews ... This is why the whole Jerusalem church was shocked to hear that Peter had entered Cornelius's home and shared meals with uncircumcised men (Acts 11:2–3) ... Of course, neither Peter nor any of the Jerusalem leaders entertained the idea that Jewish believers in Jesus should give up observing Torah. But Torah observance no longer constituted a barrier

⁵⁴ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23*, 49.

⁵⁵ Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 1995): 170.

⁵⁶ Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2005), Kindle, 311.

between Jews and Gentiles, since their fellowship was based not on Torah, but on faith in Jesus the Messiah and experience of the transformative power of the Spirit.⁵⁷

In conclusion, “if a gentile had accepted Yeshua, he was clean in Him. This was the import of Peter’s vision in Acts 10, accompanied by the words, that ‘what God has cleansed, do not call it unclean.’ If gentiles were clean in Yeshua, then the truth was to be reflected by eating with them.”⁵⁸ “Peter’s vision calls for radical rethinking of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. But according to the interpretation found within the Lukan text itself, the vision does not call for an abolition of the dietary laws for Jews.”⁵⁹

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

According to Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria where, “they remained no little time with the disciples” (Acts 14:28). The church at Antioch was unique because it had a considerable number of Gentile converts. According to Acts 15:1, “[S]ome men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” According to these Jewish believers who came from Judea, a person could not become a Christian without first becoming a Jew, which necessarily involved circumcision. This issue resulted in “no small dissension and debate” between Paul and Barnabas, and these Jewish believers who came down from Judea. Consequently, “Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question” (Acts 15:2). Those who accompanied Paul and Barnabas could serve as witnesses to bear testimony that they were not twisting the facts/verdict of the apostles/elders in Jerusalem. When Paul and Barnabas finally arrived in Jerusalem, they

⁵⁷ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Council Decision,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2013), Kindle, 179-180.

⁵⁸ Juster, Kindle, 80.

⁵⁹ Kinzer, Kindle, 71.

are faced with a similar objection to what they had dealt with in Antioch: “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). “This group makes two demands: Gentiles are (1) to keep circumcision, as also noted in verse 1, and (2) to keep the law. Luke uses the term *δεῖ* (*dei*, “it is necessary”) to make the point, and so they are arguing that such compliance is a divine necessity.”⁶⁰ What these converted Pharisees were claiming, was not unreasonable. God had clearly said, “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen. 17:14; see also Exodus 12:48-49).

For a period, the apostles and elders deliberated the matter (Acts 15:6), and “[a]fter there had been much debate, Peter stood up” (Acts 15:7) and addressed those who had gathered there. Peter begins his address by saying, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe” (Acts 15:7). Peter starts by reflecting on the event, which happened almost a decade previously, when he, at the initiative of God, preached the gospel to the Gentiles (Cornelius and those gathered in his house). As soon as Peter preached to the Gentiles (“by my mouth the Gentiles” [Acts 15:7]), as soon as they “hear[d] the word of the gospel” (Acts 15:7), and as soon as they “believe[d]” (Acts 15:7), they received the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit given on the Day of Pentecost to the Jews, as a sign of God’s acceptance, without having done anything except believe. In his commentary, *Acts*, Bock says, “The event has correctly been called the

⁶⁰ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 496.

‘Pentecost of the Gentile world’ ... The Spirit’s arrival is the sign of the new age (Luke 3:15-17). The arrival of promise confirms that Gentiles can be saved.”⁶¹

Peter says, “And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9). “God has acted by giving the Gentiles the Spirit without first being circumcised. Although Peter does not say this directly here, this is his point (as 15:7–9 later argue). The Spirit was given to Gentile hearts that God had already cleansed and sanctified.”⁶² Bock writes, “The giving of the Holy Spirit was an act by which God bore witness to their genuine response and God’s acceptance of them. What is important here is that God gave the Spirit without any circumcision being done. God accepted Gentiles as they were when the Spirit came.”⁶³ He also adds, “Peter’s reply is simple. God has acted by giving the Gentiles the Spirit without first being circumcised. Although Peter does not say this directly here, this is his point (as 15:7–9 later argues). The Spirit was given to Gentile hearts that God had already cleansed and sanctified. This act of God speaks to promise and how it trumps previous practice.”⁶⁴

In verse 10, Peter also says that his fellow believers ought not “plac[e] a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). Bock writes,

As Paul explains in Rom. 7, the law is holy, but its demands cannot be met ... Peter is arguing that these requirements place more restrictions on Gentiles than God has done by his act of saving Cornelius and create a weight that does not allow one to complete a task,

⁶¹ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 400-402.

⁶² Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)*, Kindle, 366.

⁶³ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 500.

⁶⁴ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)*, Kindle, 365-366.

just as Israel has failed ... The topic here is Gentile salvation and the law, not the value of the law in witness to the Jews. This does not mean that there is no value in practicing the law in order to reach out to the Jews, as the decree itself will show.”⁶⁵

Last, but not least, James, the half-brother of Jesus, and primary leader in the Jerusalem church, rendered his verdict/ruling on the matter at hand. The first thing he says is, “Simeon has related how God first visited [ἐπεσκέψατο, *epeskepsato*] the Gentiles, to take from them a people [λαὸν, *laon*] for his name” (Acts 15:14). Bock says,

The term “people” (λαός) is significant because it often refers to the people of God (Acts 7:34; 13:17), as it does here. In the OT, this term refers to Israel (Deut. 26:18-19; 32:8-9; Ps. 134:12 LXX [135:12 Eng.]), although Zech. 2:11 (2:15 LXX) uses it to refer to Gentiles as a part of renewed Israel ... Even a committed Jewish believer such as James can see and affirm that Gentiles can be included among believers directly without having to become Jews. This is an innovation of the new era that Jesus and the distribution of the Spirit on Gentiles have brought.⁶⁶

James quotes from the LXX version of Amos 9:12 (“that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord”), as opposed to the Masoretic text of the verse, which reads, “so that they may possess the remnant of Edom [עֲדוֹמָה - *edom*].” Amos 9:12 says two key things about Gentiles. First, the expression, “who are called by my name,” “is a Hebrew idiom, frequent in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature, that denotes YHWH’s ownership. It is frequently used of Israel as YHWH’s own people (e.g., Deut 28:10; 2 Chr 7:14; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:19), distinguished from the Gentiles, who are ‘those over whom your name has not been invoked’ (Isa 63:19).”⁶⁷ Second, the “use in Amos 9:12 of ‘all the nations’ [כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם, *vcal hgoyim* (MT) πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *panta ta ethne* (LXX)] is unique and would have been read by early Christians as strong evidence that Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to belong to the messianic people of God ... It shows that in the messianic age, Gentiles, precisely as Gentiles, will no longer be ‘profane’ but

⁶⁵ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 501.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

will join the Jews in belonging to God’s holy people, those ‘over whom YHWH’s name has been invoked.’”⁶⁸

In verses 15-18, James quotes Amos 9:11-12 in the LXX, to show that the Old Testament prophets predicted that Gentiles would be saved apart from conversion to Judaism (circumcision and Torah observance). Even though James quotes from Amos, he says, “[T]he words of the prophets [plural] agree” (Acts 15:15). “James’s point is not just about this one passage from Amos; rather, this passage reflects what the prophets teach in general, or what the book of the Prophets as a whole teaches. Other texts could be noted (Zech. 2:11; 8:22; Isa. 2:2; 45:20-23; Hos. 3:4-5; Jer. 12:15-16). James is stressing fulfillment, for the prophets agree with what Peter has described.”⁶⁹

James, quoting from Amos 9:11-12, says, “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord’” (Acts 15:16-17). “The reconstructed booth for David, for James, portrays the place of the rule and benefits that come through the Messiah, Jesus.”⁷⁰ The goal of the reconstructed booth of David, is “that” (ὅπως, *hopos*) the “remainder/rest/remnant” (οἱ κατάλοιποι, *hoi kataloiptoi*) of “mankind/humanity” (τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *ton anthropon*) may “seek the Lord” (ἐκζητήσωσιν ... τὸν κύριον, *ekzetesoin ... ton kurion*), “namely/even” (καὶ, *kai*) “all the Gentiles/nations/peoples” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *panta ta ethne*). Furthermore, God has called Gentiles “to be my own.” Bock

⁶⁸ Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Council Decision,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, Kindle, 181.

⁶⁹ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 503.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 504.

says, “The current community now preaches about these benefits to Gentiles, who can also be included among God’s people (Acts 2:30-36; 13:32-39) ... This fulfills not only the promise to David about his line but also a commitment to Abraham that through his seed the world would experience blessing (Gen. 12:3; Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3). Thus, James argues that this Gentile inclusion is part of the plan of Davidic restoration that God through the prophets said he would do.”⁷¹

Bock says of the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15: “What we have in Acts 15, however, is a declaration about what Gentiles are wise to do out of consideration for the Jews they are trying to reach. Had the law been the basis for such restrictions, it would have been appealed to. Instead, the point is not that God commands this dietary restriction ... [t]he point concerns how Jews view such matters, not that God has commanded it for the church,”⁷² and, “My view is not Messianic Jews should or must follow the Law but can do so ... there is no mandate to do this in my view.”⁷³

The Jerusalem Council, in Acts 15, concluded that Gentiles were under no obligation to be circumcised or to keep the law of Moses. Nonetheless, they issued an “apostolic decree,” which contained four prohibitions which as Bock rightly observes, “are probably to keep relations from becoming strained in a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles as well as to warn about association with idolatry ... the list is not so much about the law as having a spirit of

⁷¹ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 504.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 389-390.

⁷³ Darrell Bock, email message to author, 10 October 2019.

sensitivity about that which may cause offense ... they display a cross-cultural concern that leads to harmony.”⁷⁴

Commentators ordinarily take one of two approaches to the four prohibitions: They either tie them to the “four things that are prohibited to ‘the alien who sojourns in your/their midst’ in Leviticus 17-18,”⁷⁵ or they tie them to the Noachide Laws. Michael Wyschogrod gives some helpful insight into common Jewish views concerning Torah observance among Gentiles in the first century:

Before we can understand the significance of the coming of Christ for gentiles, we must understand the attitude toward gentiles in the Judaism of the period. Gentiles were under no obligation to obey the commandments of the Torah, an obligation which was the result of God’s covenant with Israel, and which did not apply to those outside the covenant. Nevertheless, God was by no means indifferent to the conduct of gentiles. This conduct had to conform to the so-called Noachide commandments which bore Noah’s name because, in rabbinic thinking, they were rooted in God’s covenant with Noah and his descendants reported in the ninth chapter of Genesis ... The Noachide Law is, then, the Torah of the gentiles.⁷⁶

While many commentators attempt to explain the foundation/origin of the Noachide commandments, Markus Bockmuehl does a superlative job with his explanation. Here, he extrapolates the Noachide Commandments from pre-Sinaitic narratives:

It is instructive to observe some of the human sins described in Genesis 1-11. Adam and Eve are expelled for disobeying God’s command of 2.16 and wanting to be like God (3.5), which could be seen as an act of blasphemy. The Promethean serpent is cursed for deception (3.14). Cain and Lamech murder a man and raise the question of just retribution (4). God’s reason for sending the flood is the violence (6.11, 13, סמך) of humanity. Ham is guilty of exposing his father’s uncovered nakedness (9.20-27; cf. Lev 18; וְגִלְתָּ אֶת-עֶרְוַת־אָבִיךָ; in the Noachide Commandments); unlawful sex of a different kind is perpetrated by the “sons of God” in chapter 6. God also establishes a covenant with Noah

⁷⁴ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 506-507.

⁷⁵ Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Council Decision,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, Kindle, 183.

⁷⁶ Michael Wyschogrod, “Paul, Jews and Gentiles,” in *Abraham’s Promise*, ed. R. Kendall Soulen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 190-193.

and his descendants, with positive commands against bloodshed and the consumption of blood from an animal (Gen 9.4-6, what came to be known as the law of the torn limb, cf. Gen. Rab. 34.13: אבר מן החי). Genesis 11, finally, almost by way an inclusio, describes the urban, cultural equivalent of wanting to be God: “Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves” (11.4). One might argue, then, that Genesis 1-11 already endorses a number of very general moral precepts which could be taken to apply to humanity as a whole. In particular, divine commandments to both Adam and Noah are mentioned. Other pre-Sinaitic principles might be drawn from the rest of Genesis (e.g., Dinah’s rape and its aftermath, Gen 34; Onan’s refusal of Levirate marriage, Gen 38).⁷⁷

Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg is representative of those who believe that the four prohibitions can be tied to the laws given for “strangers who sojourn among” (הַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר־יָגוּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם), *heger asher yagur betocam*) the Israelites in Leviticus 17-21. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg says,

The long-awaited time has arrived, the time when representatives from among the Nations/Peoples must worship Israel’s God alongside those from the nation/people of Israel in the same way as when they were sojourners with Israel (Lev 17-21). This was confirmed by the “Jerusalem Council” confirmed in Acts 15:28-29. If one compares these references, you will see that the Jerusalem Council did not make a new ruling, rather, they accepted the existing summary of the Levitical laws for the Nations who were living as a part of Israel. This explains why there were Jews gathered in Acts 15 that had no disagreement among them, the subject had long been settled and accepted by all. Jews were also commanded to carry on just as they had – worshiping the God of Israel as Jews without changing their status from Israel to that of one of the Nations (conversion). This was because, for Paul and the council there is only one sure and known way to worship God (both for Israel and for the Nations) faith in and obedience to Jesus the Jewish Messiah ... [Paul’s] argument is as follows: If the non-Jews, who follow the Jewish Christ, go through proselyte conversion, therefore becoming “of the circumcision” or “Jews”; the God of Israel will never be recognized as the God of the entire world. Apostle Paul came to believe that the time for the long-awaited joint worship of the One God by Israel and the Nations had finally arrived. This was the main difference between him and other Jews both in his time and those of the future.⁷⁸

In conclusion, the final decree/decision by the Jerusalem Council, “is said to be the decision of the Holy Spirit (v. 28). What exactly is the meaning of this decision? Of great note is that not a word of the decision or the discussion leading up to it questioned the propriety of Jews

⁷⁷ Wyschogrod, 151.

⁷⁸ Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Apostle Paul: Rethinking One of the Greatest Jews that Ever Lived* (Israel: Jewish Studies for Christians, 2020), Kindle, 43-45.

maintaining their call and heritage. This was never at issue in the New Testament period but was assumed to be the natural stance of Jews.⁷⁹ Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg clarifies that only portions of the Torah were applicable to specific individuals:

Does the Torah of Israel then apply to Gentile Christ-followers also? The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, the Torah clearly has some applicability to everyone. The first-century council of leaders in Jerusalem highlighted only four categories of behavior forbidden to Gentile believers (Acts 15:19-21) ... On the other hand, the Torah was never meant to apply in the same way to everyone. It contains many laws and regulations applicable only to specific groups of people. For example, there are laws that are only applicable to Levites, others that are prescribed specifically for priests or high-priests, still others that pertain only to men or women, and yet others given only to sojourners or temporary residents in Israel.⁸⁰

The Circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were traveling through Asia Minor (Lystra and Derbe) when they were joined by a young believer named Timothy. Even though his father was a Greek, nevertheless, his mother Eunice was Jewish. For this reason, Paul, “circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3). Paul did this because if he happened to be ministering among unbelieving Jews, he did not want them to regard Timothy as an apostate Jew who stood in violation of the Mosaic Covenant. Lystra was outside of Palestine, and mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles occurred. Both Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, were sincere believers in Jesus (2 Tim 1:5), and they raised Timothy in the instruction of the Holy Scriptures from the time of his early childhood (2 Tim 3:15). Where Bock and the author of this paper diverge, is that the researcher does not believe that Paul circumcised Timothy simply as an evangelistic strategy, but that he

⁷⁹ Juster, Kindle, 82.

⁸⁰ Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *Jewish Insights into Scripture* (Israel: Jewish Studies for Christians, 2017), Kindle, 58.

was indeed, “standing up for the law” (contra Bock). Bock writes, “This is different than his refusal to circumcise Titus, noted in Gal 2:3, because Titus was a Gentile. It shows an ethnic demarcation in practice that Luke is sensitive to note. It also shows how Paul applies a principle stated in I Cor 9:19. He is a Jew to the Jews, when it comes to issues of practice, which means he shows respect for such practices at those times.”⁸¹ Bock also says:

Even though Paul holds a view of freedom regarding the law (Gal 5:2; I Cor 7:18), he is sensitive to how it works in a mixed community and in the context of the gospel (I Cor 9:19-23) ... Paul’s action indicates support for the attitude of sensitivity shown in the council of Acts 15 ... Paul is not standing up for the law, as many claim, but is affirming Jewish heritage alongside Gentile heritage ... Here Paul is being faithful to the promise for Israel ... If Paul is going to work in the synagogue, circumcision will ensure Timothy’s credibility. Mixed marriages were forbidden in Judaism, but when they occurred, children were still to be raised as Jews. A later text, b. *Yebam.* 45b, makes the mother’s nationality determinative for the children ... Paul’s action shows his desire to continue to reach out to Jews and affirm the new faith’s link to the promises of the past in Judaism. Although it is an issue of indifference, Paul has Timothy circumcised out of respect, since a Jewish person is involved (Gal 5:6; 6:15; I Cor 9:23-30).⁸²

One may argue that Paul said that circumcision was no longer important, when he said, “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God” (I Cor 7:19). How can Paul make such a seemingly contradictory statement, namely, “Keeping God’s commands is what counts,” when circumcision was one of God’s commands (Gen 7:9-14)? Was Paul nullifying circumcision as the obligatory and perpetual sign of the covenant that was made between God and Abraham (and his descendants)? In the author of this dissertation’s opinion, the Apostle is making the same point John the Baptist made in Matthew 3:9 when he said to his Jewish audience, “And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” Jews in John’s Day assumed that they were guaranteed entry

⁸¹ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)*, Kindle, 366-367.

⁸² Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 522-523.

into the Messiah’s kingdom because of their physical lineage from Abraham.⁸³ Unfortunately, apart from faith in Jesus Christ, their physical ancestry would not profit them. Likewise, apart from faith in Jesus, “Circumcision is nothing,” because Christ is their sole means of atonement, and “uncircumcision is nothing,” because God accepts Gentiles, in an uncircumcised state, when they place their faith in Jesus. David Garland says,

For Paul to say that circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing reveals that God’s call in the crucified Christ voids all former classifications that assign worth to people based on their ethnicity. Having accepted God’s call, Christians must accept that God accepts them as they are. Their conversion requires a change in lordships, spiritual values, and moral behavior, but not a change in race, gender, or social caste. Altering their status will not make them more acceptable to the God who justifies “the uncircumcised on the ground of faith and the circumcised on the basis of the same faith” (Rom 3:30), nor will it make them “more saved.”⁸⁴

One of the main goals of the writer of the book of Hebrews is to demonstrate that Jesus and the gospel message are superior to all that came before. Jesus is superior to the prophets (1:1-3), he is superior to the angels (1:4-2:18), he is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13), he is a superior high priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28), he is superior to Melchizedek (7:1-10), the New Covenant, that he introduced, is superior to that of the Old (8:7-13), and the New Covenant Offering, namely, his own blood, is superior the blood of bulls and goats (9:1-10:18). Now, because of Christ’s better sacrifice, we can have direct access to God. However, some interpreters of this book have understood the book to propose the abolition of Jewish holidays, dietary law, circumcision, and the Sabbath. Kinzer demonstrates that this is not the case:

When speaking of changes in the Torah, the author deals exclusively with the tabernacle/temple and its associated institutions (the priesthood and the sacrifices). As Jewish history has shown, these elements of the Torah—while important—could be eliminated from Jewish life without the loss of the Torah or of the distinctive Jewish

⁸³ For example, Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1 says כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, *cal ysrael yesh lahem heleck laolam habah* (“All Jews have a share in the World to Come”).

⁸⁴ David Garland, *I Corinthians (BECNT)* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2003), 306.

existence ordained in the Torah. The centralized worship institutions of Israel constituted a self-contained component of the Torah that was not required for the continuance of Jewish life. The destruction of the temple in 70 CE did not prevent Jews from circumcising their sons, resting on the Sabbath, or eating kosher food.⁸⁵

The historian Epiphanius gives us a snapshot of an early Messianic Jewish fellowship:

They are mainly Jews and nothing else. They make use not only of the New Testament, but they also use the Old Testament of the Jews; for they do not forbid the books of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings ... They practice circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the Law, and are so Judaic in their mode of life that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God ... so that they are approved by the Jews from whom the Nazarenes do not differ in anything, and they profess all the dogmas pertaining to the prescriptions of the Law and to the customs of the Jews, except they believe in Christ ... They preach that there is one God, and his son Jesus Christ. But they are very learned in the Hebrew language; for they, like the Jews, read the whole Law, then the Prophets ... They differ from the Jews because they believe in Christ, and from the Christians in that they are to this day bound to the Jewish rites, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and other ceremonies.⁸⁶

Jason Meyer makes an excellent point when he says, “Paul can circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:3) without both of them coming under the ‘yoke of slavery’ (Gal 5:1) and without being ‘alienated from Christ’ (5:4) and without ‘falling from grace’ (5:3).”⁸⁷

Dan Juster does a masterful job of explaining the importance of circumcision for ethnic Jews who seek to be Torah observant:

Circumcision is a sign of this [the Abrahamic] Covenant as well as Sabbath, which was given to Israel in Exodus 20. There is nothing to indicate that this Covenant has been done away with by God ... Abraham has a spiritual seed in non-Jewish believers as well. The purposes of God with the nation are never done away with because of the spiritual seed ... A careful study will reveal that the terms “Jew” and “Israel” are reserved for the physical nation, also designated by circumcision. Non-Jewish believers are not called spiritual Israel or spiritual Jews, but Abraham’s spiritual seed, or Abraham’s offspring (Romans 4; Galatians 3:29) ... All followers of Yeshua have spiritual equality. Yet this does not do away with Israel’s calling or election or her distinct purpose in God’s economy as a nation among nations ... We can say, however, that rightly understood and

⁸⁵ Kinzer, *Kindle*, 1547-1551.

⁸⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, xxxix, 7.

⁸⁷ Jason Meyer, *The End of the Law* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), *Kindle*, 175.

applied by the above criteria, Jews—including followers of Yeshua—are called to maintain Torah. This is not done because of legalistic bondage; it is motivated by love and the calling to be part of Israel’s national identity and is laid upon hearts by God’s Spirit.⁸⁸

Günther Bornkamm writes:

Above all, however, it must have been impossible for Paul, especially after the agreements made at the Apostolic Council, to consider circumcision as a ceremony irrelevant to faith and missionary activity. He could scarcely do such a thing for the sake of the Jews for whom circumcision meant more than that. Nor could he do it for the sake of the gospel, for it was precisely with regard to this question that there was a head-on collision between his gospel and the Jewish and Judaizing understanding of salvation.⁸⁹

Rudolph remarks, “There is no evidence in the literary context that Paul regarded circumcision as a Jewish cultural expression detached from its first-century meaning as a sign of the covenant.”⁹⁰ He also writes, that when Paul says, “Circumcision is nothing” (I Cor 7:19), “Paul is more likely saying that οὐδέν is ‘related to salvation,’ that is, ‘neither circumcision nor the lack of circumcision has ultimate bearing on salvation.’ With respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant.”⁹¹ “[C]ircumcision and Jewish identity do not elevate the Jew above the Gentile before God. There is a difference in role, but no hierarchy of status.”⁹²

One may argue, “If being circumcised as a Jew has no bearing upon his salvation, then this would indicate that circumcision is now irrelevant.” The author of this dissertation would

⁸⁸ Juster, *Kindle*, 37-42.

⁸⁹ Günther Bornkamm, “The Missionary Stance of Paul in I Corinthians 9 and in Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 203.

⁹⁰ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23, 25-27*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹² Kinzer, *Kindle*, 74.

respond to this by saying that there are approximately 1050 New Testament commands,⁹³ and although we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus, apart from works, we are still to strive to follow all the New Testament commands. In the Old Testament, there are another 613 commands, and while there have been some alterations in the priesthood and sacrificial system, by and large, the commands are still valid. Gentile Christians do not practice the 1050 New Testament commands “in order to be saved,” but “because they are saved.” Likewise, Jewish believers are not Torah observant “in order to be saved,” as if they can add anything to what Christ has already done, but out of fidelity to the covenant made with Moses and their ancestors.

Professor Schiffman gives some insight from the Mishnah, which he dates to circa 125 C.E., but he says is emblematic of Tannaitic thought that was common in first-century *halakhah*:

The given rationale has nothing to do with Timothy’s entrance into the kingdom of God. Timothy was already identified as a follower of Yeshua in Acts 16:1. However, the local Jewish custom and interpretation of the Torah identified Timothy as a Jew, since his mother was Jewish. Therefore, Timothy needed to be brought into the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants in order to live his life as a Messianic Jew, not giving any offense to the local Jewish communities. Professor L. H. Schiffman noted that, according to both the Mishnah (Kiddushin 3:12–4:14) and first-century rabbinic consensus, if a Jewish male fathered a child with a non-Jewish mother, the child was not Jewish. Conversely, if a Jewish mother gave birth to a child by a Gentile father, the offspring fit into the legal category of a ממזר (Hebrew, mamzer, an illegitimate child) according to Tosefta Kiddushin 4:16 ... Jewish custom identified Timothy as Jewish, and his circumcision as a violation to be rectified. From the point of view of the Gospel alone, there was no need to bring Timothy into the Covenant. Since Timothy was a Jew according to first-century interpretation of the Torah, he was summarily circumcised and obliged to fully live as a Jew (see Gal 5:3) ... If Rabbi Sha’ul did not respect the Torah, then he would have had no reason to circumcise Timothy. The Torah is clear that every Jewish male needs to be circumcised (see Gen 17:10–14). Sha’ul, in circumcising Timothy, was respecting and keeping the Torah.⁹⁴

⁹³ “1050 New Testament Commands,” Christian Assemblies International, accessed 29 March 2022, https://www.abc.net.au/reslib/201407/r1308729_17984331.pdf.

⁹⁴ Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Was there a Galilean *Halakhah*?” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee Levine (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 143-156.

Romans

Romans 7:1-6 & Romans 8

Bock states his view about Romans 7:1-6 in his commentary on Ephesians: “Jesus did what others could not do by bearing the law’s penalty and thus opening the door for a different kind of access to God (Rom 3:19–31; 7:6). The impact was a shift in how God administers salvation: where the law was a primary guide before, now it is the Spirit in Christ (Rom 7:1–6; 10:4; Gal 2:19; 3:1 – 4:6; Eph 2:18). The role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed.”⁹⁵ Of the same passage, Craig Blaising (in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, which is co-authored by Bock, and may/may not represent Bock’s personal view) writes:

This observation becomes even clearer in Romans 7:1-6 where Paul compares the law to a marriage covenant. Certainly, in this passage, the law means the Mosaic covenant itself. Paul speaks of our relationship to the law (Mosaic covenant) ending in the death of Jesus Christ just as a marriage partner’s obligation to the marriage covenant ends in the death of the other partner (vv. 3-4). It is possible for that marriage partner to enter into a new marriage covenant, and likewise Paul using the language of the prophecies of the new covenant, speaks of our being “released from the law” (freed from the Mosaic covenant) and “serving in the newness of the Spirit” (brought into the new covenant).⁹⁶

Romans 8:2 says, “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Craig Blaising says,

The termination of the Mosaic covenant was in view of the establishment of a new covenant in which God would write His law into the hearts of His people (Jer 31:33) and cause them to walk in His ways (Ezek 36:27). So, although Paul teaches that Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4; that is, law in the form of the Mosaic covenant), he also says that believers are “not . . . without the law of God but under the law of Christ” (I Cor 9:21; cf. Gal 6:2; this is law in the form of the new covenant). He also speaks of this new covenant law as the “law of the Spirit” (Rom 8:2), since the Spirit is the characteristic

⁹⁵ Darrell Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), Kindle, 71-72.

⁹⁶ Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1993), Kindle, 196.

feature of the new covenant. James refers to it as the “royal law” (Jas 2:8, 12) connecting it again to the Christ, the anointed king. The progressive dispensationalism of New Testament theology is not antinomian. For while it teaches that Mosaic covenant law has ended dispensationally, it also teaches that it has been replaced by new covenant law.”⁹⁷

A quick reading of Romans 7:4-6 may lead one to conclude that being “bound to Christ” implies that a Messianic Jew has been completely released from Torah observance. Romans 7:4 says, “you ... died to the law through the body of Christ,” and Romans 7:6 says, “we have been released from the law,” and “we serve ... not in the old way of the written code.” Instead, Paul is making the same point Jesus made with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews: “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). While it may seem ironic, a Messianic Jew can be Torah observant, and yet be “dead to the law,” “released from the law,” and not “serving in the old way of the written code.” How can this be? Prior to the Messianic Jew’s conversion, he was “in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in [him] ... so that [he] bore fruit for death” (Rom 7:5). Without the Holy Spirit, while a Jew was still “in the realm of the flesh,” the law “aroused sinful passions.” Rather than preventing people from sinning, the law did the opposite – it stimulated and provoked sin. An unbelieving Jew is a slave to sin and lives a life of bondage to the law. The “old way of the written code” (Rom 7:6) simply refers to the impotence of the law to effect righteousness separate from the Holy Spirit. The Messianic Jew, by way of contrast, has “died to the law” (Rom 7:4) in the sense that through faith in Christ, the power of the law, which in cooperation with sin produced death, has been broken. The Messianic Jew is now married to Christ (“that you might belong to another” [Rom 7:4]), can “bear fruit for God” (Rom 7:4) and can “serve in the new way of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6). The same Holy Spirit that can raise the dead (Ezek

⁹⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 199.

37:14), and the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11), transforms the Messianic Jew from within so they can be righteous.

Juster lays things clear: Torah observance, and being baptized/filled with the Holy Spirit, are not antithetical. A Messianic Jew can be Torah observant in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Juster remarks about Romans 7 and 8:

Romans 7 and 8 are the great chapters which summarize that the way of obedience is through the power of the Spirit. This is because, from our own power in our fallen nature (called the flesh), it is impossible for us to obey the Law. The problem is not the Law. That reflects God's eternal character and standard. Yeshua said that not a "jot" or "tittle" of the Law would pass away until all is fulfilled. Heaven and earth would pass away before God's Law (Matt 5:17-18) ... The problem is not the Law, but our sinful nature which is bent toward transgressing the Law ... So, Paul describes the man who seeks to obey the Law by his own power as not able to do the very things he desires. This is the law "principle" of the sin nature, and it perpetuates a state of spiritual and physical death (the law or principle of death) ... For through Him, we are given a reborn spirit, and in recognizing that we died to our old self in Him and rise to new life, we are empowered by the Spirit to no longer be in bondage to sin ... We may still fall; but we now have the power to obey. From our position in Yeshua, we can grow to progressive obedience in love. Hence, the Spirit enables us to fulfill the Law (Rom 3:31) ... The issue is not a conflict between Law and Spirit but between flesh and spirit. Do we seek to please God by our own fleshly efforts to keep the Law, or do we depend on the resurrection power of His Spirit within? We are to set our mind on depending on the Spirit. By His power, we can please God.⁹⁸

In Romans 7:4, the Apostle Paul says, "you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God." What specifically does Paul mean when he says, "you ... have died to the law" (ὁμοῖς ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ - *humeis ethantothete to nomou*)? According to C.E.B. Cranfield, the "death" is a death to the condemnation of the Mosaic Law: "In the case of Christians and their relation to the law's condemnation ... a death has occurred ... εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ἑτέρῳ indicates the purpose for which they were put to death. They were thus set

⁹⁸ Juster, Kindle, 166-167.

free from the condemnation pronounced by the law, in order that they might belong to Christ.”⁹⁹ Douglas Moo believes that “death to the law” means a death to the binding force of the law: “For to be ‘dead to the law,’ as we have seen, means to be delivered from the ‘power-sphere’ of the law.”¹⁰⁰ If a Jew is not born-again, and lacks the Holy Spirit, and attempts to be Torah observant, “the law is presented as not only failing to deal with sin but as actually stimulating sin in the person who is ‘bound’ to it.”¹⁰¹ Prior to placing faith in Jesus, Paul was zealous in his Torah observance, but he did so in the power of his own flesh (apart from the Holy Spirit): “circumcised on the eighth day ... a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee ... as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil 3:5-6). Nonetheless, in his pre-conversion state, Paul did not “know Christ” (Phil 3:8), he did not have a “righteousness ... which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:9), and he did not know “the power of his resurrection” (Phil 3:10), that is, the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead that works in the lives of Christians. Schreiner agrees with Moo, that Paul is talking about more than the “condemnation of the law,” per Cranfield, but “Paul is also thinking of the law as a power that wields influence over human beings and exercises control by abetting sin ... The verb *καταργεῖν* (*katargein*, to release) is also used in 6:6, which states that the human being controlled by the power of sin has been released from sin’s power through the death of Christ ... The death of Christ definitively broke the power of the law that in concert with sin produced death.”¹⁰² None of this precludes the possibility that a born-again Messianic Jew, who

⁹⁹ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 1 (I-VIII) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 335-336.

¹⁰⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 416.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹⁰² Thomas Schreiner, *Romans (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2018), 345.

has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, can be Torah observant in the Spirit's power. Commenting on Ezekiel 36:27 ("And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."), Moshe Greenberg says, "God will no longer gamble with Israel as he did in old times, and Israel rebelled against him; in the future—no more experiments! God will put his spirit into them, he will alter their hearts (their minds) and make it impossible for them to be anything but obedient to his rules and his commandments."¹⁰³

Romans 7:6 says, "But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code." According to Jason Meyer,

[T]he genitive of origin best fits the context because the "oldness" originates from the "letter," and "newness" stems from the Spirit as seen in the relationship between letter and Spirit and the results that flow from them (bearing fruit unto death/fruit for God) ... The presence of the Spirit points to the new age in which the promise of the new covenant becomes a reality in terms spoken beforehand by Ezekiel ... Old things are qualitatively old because they belong to the old age. New things are qualitatively new because they belong to the new age ... I will argue that the letter/Spirit dichotomy represents a fundamental contrast between the outward/ineffectual and the inward/effectual.¹⁰⁴

Schreiner, by way of contrast, interprets the two genitive nouns, "Spirit" (πνεύματος - *pneumatōs*) and "letter" (γράμματος - *grammatōs*), in Romans 7:6 ("we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code") as "genitives of source, 'newness that has its origin in the Spirit' and 'oldness that stems from the letter.'"¹⁰⁵ "Thus, as in Romans 2:29, the 'letter' refers to the OT law and its inability to effect righteousness apart from the Spirit. The

¹⁰³ Moshe Greenberg, "Three Conceptions of the Torah in Hebrew Scriptures," in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zehnfache Nachgeschichte*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 375.

¹⁰⁴ Meyer, *Kindle*, 47-48, 57, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, 346.

letter refers to the commands (cf. 7:7) of the law that are unable to produce the righteousness demanded. The letter of the law demands but does not produce obedience.”¹⁰⁶ Once again, being baptized and living in the power of the Holy Spirit should not be viewed as being antithetical to Torah observance. Moses, in the context of the giving of the Mosaic Law, looked forward to the day when “God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). Peter Craigie says, “In 30:6 [“circumcision of the heart”] ... is seen rather to be an act of God and thus indicates the new covenant, when God would in his grace deal with man’s basic spiritual problem.”¹⁰⁷

Romans 7:6 says, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” C.E.B. Cranfield writes, “Paul is not opposing the law as such and in itself to the Spirit is clear, since only a few verses later he affirms that the law is ‘spiritual’ (v.14) ... It is the letter of the law in separation from the Spirit. But, since the ‘the law is spiritual’ (v.14), the letter of the law in isolation from the Spirit is not the law in its true character, but the law as it were denatured. It is this which is opposed to the Spirit whose presence is the true establishment of the law.”¹⁰⁸

In sum, the researcher disagrees with Bock when he says that the Messianic Jew’s “relationship to the law (Mosaic covenant) end[ed] in the death of Jesus Christ,”¹⁰⁹ or that the

¹⁰⁶ Schreiner, 347.

¹⁰⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 364.

¹⁰⁸ Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 1 (I-VIII), 339-340.

¹⁰⁹ Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 196.

Messianic Jew has been “‘released from the law’ (freed from the Mosaic covenant).”¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, the Messianic Jew needs to be “‘joined to Christ,” be brought into the New Covenant, and must be baptized and serve in the Spirit. Any righteousness a Messianic Jew has is that which comes not from Torah observance, “‘but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9).

Romans 8:1 says, “‘Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The Messianic Jew who has accepted Jesus’ sacrifice as payment for his own sin, has had his debts cancelled, his relationship with God has been restored, and his old nature has been exchanged for a new one.

Romans 8:2 says, “‘For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” According to Schreiner,

The argument of the text [Rom 8:2-4] as a whole can be summarized as follows. Those in Christ are no longer under the condemnation of sin (v.1) because in Christ they have been freed from the power of sin on the basis of Jesus’s atoning death, so they are now able to fulfill the law. Thus, those who limit Rom 8:1-4 to forensic categories fail to perceive the connection drawn in the text between judicial and dynamic realities: those freed from the curse of the law are now liberated to keep the law’s commands.¹¹¹

Believers are not in the sphere of the flesh but are instead in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. One of the primary differences between the old and new covenants, is that the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:27) empowers God’s people in this era to obey his commands (Jer 31:32-33). It is Holy Spirit which delivers the believers from the dominion of the law, which in turn produces sin and death. The “‘law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). The law was not inadequate because of its content, but rather because “‘it was weakened by the flesh” (Rom

¹¹⁰ Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 196.

¹¹¹ Schreiner, 391.

3:3). Because of mankind's fleshly nature, the Mosaic Law, without the Spirit, can never produce life. Finally, verse 4 says, "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Not only are Messianic Jews judicially and forensically made right in God's sight by virtue of Jesus' work on the cross, but they are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey God's commands. Schreiner says, "In Paul's theology genuine obedience to the law, demanded and promised in the OT, is realized to the extent possible this side of the eschaton (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-28)."¹¹²

Romans 8:4 clarifies the relationship between the Law and righteousness.

Judicial/forensic righteousness, before God, cannot be achieved by Torah observance alone.

Romans 8:4 says that the "righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." The Law demands perfect obedience for one to be declared righteous before God. However, "the law's just demand is fulfilled in

Christians not through their own acts of obedience but through their incorporation into Christ.

He fulfilled the law; and, in him, believers also fulfill the law."¹¹³ Nonetheless, Paul links

Christians fulfilling the law, and "walking according to the Spirit." Moo continues, "God not

only provides in Christ the full completion of the law's demands for the believer, but he also

sends the Spirit into the hearts of believers to empower a new obedience to his demands ... [t]o

walk 'according to the Spirit,' on the other hand, is to live under the control, and according to the values, of the 'new age.'"¹¹⁴

¹¹² Schreiner, 400-401.

¹¹³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International commentary on the New Testament)*, 484.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 485.

Romans 8:7-8 says, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” A Jew who has is unregenerate, who has yet to place his faith in Christ, lacks the Holy Spirit. Even though he may be Torah observant, his flesh is hostile to God, and his mind/being desires what is contrary to the Law. The solution is found in Romans 8:12-17. God longs to pour out his Spirit into Messianic Jews, the “Spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom 8:15), the Spirit that cries out “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15), and by that Spirit, Messianic Jews can “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13), and “live” (Rom 8:13). The researcher dissents from Bock when he says that in Romans 8, “The termination of the Mosaic covenant was in view,”¹¹⁵ that the “Mosaic covenant has ended dispensationally,”¹¹⁶ or that “Paul teaches that Christ is the end of the law.”¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, Bock and the author agree that we are in the New Covenant era, and that the “Spirit is the characteristic feature of the [N]ew [C]ovenant.”¹¹⁸

Romans 10:3-4

Romans 10:3-4 says, “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” According to Bock, “There is a library of debate around whether *telos* [τέλος] means ‘end,’ ‘goal,’ or both. I tend to agree with Seifrid¹¹⁹ that it is both. The imagery of attaining a goal in pursuit of something is present in 9:31, yet Paul’s normal handling of the issue of law suggests ‘end’ (Gal 3). Such a subtle double entendre fits this

¹¹⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 199.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Approach to the Old Testament in Rom 10:6-8,” *TrinJ* n.s.6 (1985): 3-37.

former rabbi.”¹²⁰ In *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*, Bock summarizes his view of Romans 10:4 saying, “Paul is saying that the Mosaic law has reached its goal and therefore ceases to play the same central role it once had prior to Jesus’ coming, though it is still relevant as it is seen through Christ.”¹²¹

Probably the most thorough lexical study of the word τέλος was done by Robert Badenas, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Sheffield and is entitled *Christ the end of the Law: Romans 10.4 in Pauline Perspective*. Badenas examines τέλος from a historical, biblical, cognate literature, and exegetical/contextual perspective. Badenas’ conclusion is:

The study of Chapter 2 has shown that the semantic import of τέλος is primarily “teleological” (directive, purposive, completive), not temporal or terminal. Τέλος with genitive is specifically used to indicate result, purpose, outcome, but not termination. The phrase τέλος νόμου, in all the instances that have been found in the present research, denotes either the object/purpose of the law or its fulfillment, never its abrogation. Therefore, the current translation of Rom 10.4 as “end of the law” in the sense of termination/cessation/abrogation would be, linguistically speaking, exceptional and hardly – if at all – correct.¹²²

He adds, “It [τέλος] means that this righteousness that Christ has brought for all is the object and goal to which all along the law has been directed, its true intention and meaning ... It [Israel] did not see, therefore, that ‘Christ is the goal, the aim, the intention, the real meaning and substance of the Law – apart from him it cannot be properly understood at all.’”¹²³ While the researcher agrees with Badenas, by way of concession, Brice Martin makes the excellent point that even if one interprets τέλος to mean “termination,” then one could take the “salvation history view ...

¹²⁰ Darrell Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents,” in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Kindle, 2473-2476.

¹²¹ Köstenberger, Bock and Chatraw, *Truth in a Culture of Doubt* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), Kindle, 50.

¹²² Robert Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 145-146.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

[namely that] the law is abolished [or terminated] with regard to the attainment of salvation [the temple system of atonement has been abrogated by Christ].”¹²⁴ Gerhard Friedrich says,

The narrower context esp. supports this interpretation [that the Law has been “set aside as a way of salvation by the Christ event”] of R.10.4. Here νόμος corresponds to man’s own righteousness, which the pious Jew seeks, v.3; God’s righteousness stands in contrast with the νόμος; this is the righteousness which God creates, His justifying work. In R. 10:4 νόμος is esp. the Law by keeping which one is just before God. This possibility of justification before God is abolished by Christ’s cross.¹²⁵

According to Schreiner, “The translation ‘goal’ is also defended from the racing illustration in 9:30–33, yielding the conclusion that Christ is the goal of the race, and the Jews stumbled over him but the gentiles obtained the goal.”¹²⁶ Romans 10:4 says, “For Christ is the end [τέλος, *telos*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” If we interpret τέλος, *telos* in Romans 10:4 to mean “goal,” or “fulfillment,” as opposed to “end,” or “termination,” then, according to John Fischer, we could understand “the later new covenant ... not [as] invalid[ating] the earlier Mosaic covenant. And this is consistent with the renewal procedures and perspectives of the ancient Near Eastern covenants. When a covenant was renewed, the earlier version was not scrapped; it was enhanced and supplemented.”¹²⁷ Jason Meyer writes,

The term *kainos* also has the meaning of something “new,” “fresh,” or “newly invented,” with reference to time or origin. It also carries an added connotation of something qualitatively “new” ... The important thing to note for the present study is that the qualitative dimension appears to emerge consistently in eschatological contexts. Furthermore, these terms often occur in clusters in such contexts. God promises the arrival of something new that will surpass the old existing thing. For example, Ezek 36:26 contains the promise that God will give Israel a “new heart” (*kardian kainēn*) and a

¹²⁴ Brice Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 130.

¹²⁵ Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Vol. 8 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1972), 56.

¹²⁶ Schreiner, 521.

¹²⁷ John Fischer, “Messianic Congregations Should Exist and Should Be Very Jewish,” in *How Jewish is Christianity*, ed. Louis Goldberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 132.

“new spirit” (*pneuma kainon*) ... The change in quality is evident from the descriptions of the two hearts. The old heart is hard like a rock, while the new heart is soft like flesh. The wider context also clarifies that God’s new act will solve the problem that led to Israel’s exile: her habitual unfaithfulness to Yahweh and His statutes ... Theologian Karl Barth attempts to balance emphasizing the “new” work of God in the new covenant, while also stressing its renewed dimension because it is not a “replacement” covenant in terms of a “cancellation” ... [according to the Apostle Paul] the Mosaic covenant is now “old” because it belongs to the old age, whereas the new covenant is “new” because it belongs to the new eschatological age.¹²⁸

Walt Kaiser advocates a similar view to that of John Fischer:

[Jeremiah 31] is the only place in the Old Testament where the expression “new covenant” (31:31) occurs ... The truth of the matter was that Jeremiah found no fault with the Sinaitic covenant. Both Jeremiah and the later writer of Hebrews were emphatic in their assessment of where the trouble with the covenant made in Moses’ day was to be found. The problem was with the people, not with the covenant-making God or with the moral law or promises ... Thus, the word “new” in this context would mean the “renewed” or “restored” covenant (cf. Akk. *edēšu*, “to restore” ruined temples, altars, or cities; Heb. *hodesš*, connected *adatñ*, “to renew the moon”) ... We conclude, then, that this covenant was the old Abrahamic-Davidic promise renewed and enlarged ... There were items of discontinuity as well. If we were to use all seventeen passages noted above, some of the new features would be: (1) a universal knowledge of God (Jer 31:34); (2) a universal peace in nature and the absence of military hardware (Isa 2:4; Hos 2:18; Ezek 34:25; 37:26); (3) a universal material prosperity (Isa 61:8; Hos 2:22; Jer 32:41; Ezek 34:26 – 27); (4) a sanctuary lasting forever in the midst of Israel (Ezek 37:26, 28); and (5) a universal possession of the Spirit of God (Joel 2:28 – 32) ... The new covenant was indeed addressed to a revived national Israel of the future; but nonetheless, by virtue of its specific linkage with the Abrahamic and Davidic promise-plan of God contained in them all, it was proper to speak of a Gentile participation both at that time and in the future. The Gentiles would be adopted and grafted into God’s covenant with national Israel.¹²⁹

Jesus is the τέλος (“end”) of the Law in the sense that He is the goal or purpose of the

Law. Juster unpacks the meaning of τέλος saying:

He is the personal embodiment of a human life lived in spirit and truth according to Torah standards. He is the living Torah. He is the goal of Torah, the perfect life to which holy standard and sacrificial system had pointed. He is the finisher of the misuse of Torah as a system of works-righteousness. When we believe in His sacrifice, we understand the

¹²⁸ Meyer, *Kindle*, 35-38, 268.

¹²⁹ Walt C. Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), *Kindle*, 4860-4925.

true purpose of the Law was never to be a system of merits by works. The “telos” of the Law, however, can never mean doing away with the Law since the cardinal rule for interpreting Scripture is that the true meaning of a passage must always be understood in the light of the whole of the Bible!¹³⁰

In summary, “As Christ consummates one era of salvation history, so he inaugurates a new one ... Because the Jews have not understood that Christ has brought the law to its culmination, they have not responded in faith to Christ; and they have therefore missed the righteousness of God, available only in Christ on the basis of faith. At the same time, Christ, by ending the era of the law, during which God was dealing mainly with Israel, has made righteousness more readily available for Gentiles.”¹³¹ Cranfield articulates,

[W]e are convinced that there is no statement in any of Paul’s epistles, which, rightly understood, implies that Christ has abolished the law ... Paul is concerned that Israel has misunderstood the law ... Christ is the goal to which all along the law has been directed ... τέλος should be understood ... : Christ is the goal, the aim, the intention, the real meaning and substance of the law – apart from Him it cannot be properly understood at all ... Christ was the goal and meaning and substance of that law which they were so earnestly pursuing, and the righteousness to which the law was summoning them was all the time nothing other than that righteousness which God offers to men in Christ.¹³²

Romans 13:8-10

Romans 13:8-10 says, “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”

¹³⁰ Juster, *Kindle*, 96-97.

¹³¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International commentary on the New Testament)*, 641-642.

¹³² C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 2 (IX-XVI) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 519-520.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Bock asserts, “Where the law was a primary guide before, now it is the Spirit in Christ (Rom 7:1–6; 10:4; Gal 2:19; 3:1 – 4:6; Eph 2:18). The role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed ... His provision enables us to do what the law pushed for in its stipulations: to love God and others (Rom 13:8–10).¹³³

Some theologians believe that in the New Covenant era, the Torah has been replaced by the “law of Christ,” or the “law of the Spirit.” James Dunn does a marvelous job of illustrating how these concepts should not be viewed as antithetical to Torah observance:

Some wish to press this flexibility in Paul’s use of *nomos* still further. They find it difficult to envisage Paul linking “the law” with the highly positive motifs of his theology, “faith,” “Spirit” and “Christ” – (1) “the law of faith” (Rom 3:27), (2) “the law of the Spirit” (8:2) and (3) “the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). For them it makes more sense to understand Paul using *nomos* in the sense of “principle” or “rule” rather than in the more specific sense of “law”/“Jewish law.” That is certainly a very possible usage for *nomos* at the time of Paul, as Heikki Räisänen in particular has shown. The only trouble is that in each case the context shows that Paul is thinking in terms of the Mosaic law as such. The case can be made briefly. (1) In Rom 3:27-31 we have an *inclusio* where “the *nomos* of faith” (3:27) is spelled out as the law “established” through faith (3:31), where clearly the Pentateuch is in view. (2) Rom 8:2 is the climax to an argument where Paul has defended the law by depicting it as a tool used by sin (7:13-23) ... The implication is hardly distant that a different power could use this essentially holy, good, and spiritual law (7:12-14) in a positive way ... Obviously the term *nomos* is being used flexibly, but the crucial point is that “the law of the Spirit” enables the believer to fulfil the law. And (3) in Gal 6:2 “the law of Christ” is best understood as taking up the thought of 5:14: the law summed up in the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18) is equally summed up by Christ’s teaching and life as a living out of the love command. It has been too little noticed that the command to “love the neighbor” is equally portrayed as summing up and fulfilling the whole law in Rom 13:8-10.¹³⁴

The author of this paper agrees with Bock’s statement that “His provision enables us to do what the law pushed for in its stipulations: to love God and others (Rom 13:8–10).”¹³⁵ All of

¹³³ Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, Kindle, 71-72.

¹³⁴ James Dunn, *Romans 1-8 (Word Biblical Commentary)* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 449-450.

¹³⁵ Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, Kindle, 72.

God's laws have their foundation in God's character. Willem VanGemeeren says, "Because God is good, loving, compassionate, faithful, and merciful, he expects his people to live out these same qualities in their relationship with him and with one another."¹³⁶ Christopher Wright says, "When Israel went after other gods ... the effects were not just religious but also ethical ... idolatry always has disastrous social and ethical effects, as the prophets saw clearly. How we behave depends on what or whom we worship – then as now."¹³⁷ According to Edmond Jacob, "If the nature of man can be defined by the theme of the image of God, his function can be qualified as the imitation of God."¹³⁸ Because all ethics have their origin in God's character, and since Jesus was God incarnate, that is why we are told to be imitators of Christ ("Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" [I Cor 11:1]). I John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." The connection here is plain – God is love, and his children, who have been born of God, and know him, will likewise love because they have a love that is given them by the Holy Spirit ("love is from God" and "the fruit of the Spirit is love" [Gal. 5:22]). Schreiner notes: "In Christian tradition the love command often summarizes the essence of the law (e.g., Matt. 5:43-48; 19:19; 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-33; Luke 10:25-28; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8)."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Willem VanGemeeren, "A Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, edited by Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), Kindle, 22.

¹³⁷ Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), Kindle, 25.

¹³⁸ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 173.

¹³⁹ Schreiner, 659.

While the researcher agrees with Bock, that the Holy Spirit, “enables us to do what the law pushed for in its stipulations: to love God and others (Rom 13:8-10),”¹⁴⁰ nevertheless, he disagrees with Bock when he says that the “role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed.”¹⁴¹

Romans 13:8 says, “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” The researcher agrees with Moo, that in saying, “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law,” Paul is not minimizing “the importance and continuing relevance of the other commandments but ... [is] insist[ing] that love must every be the guiding principle in our obedience to these other commandments ... [nonetheless] it would be premature to claim that love ‘replaces’ the law for the Christian, as if the only commandment we ever needed to worry about was the command of love.”¹⁴²

Romans 13:9 is a strong proof that Torah observance should not be viewed as antithetical to the command to love one’s neighbor. Romans 13:9 says, “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” In quoting commandments six, seven eight and ten, Paul says that these representative commands in the Decalogue can be “summed up” in the statement, “You shall love you neighbor as yourself.” Just in case one thinks this summary statement, which originates in Leviticus 19:18 (“love your neighbor as yourself”), cannot also be applied to the other 609 commandments in Judaism, Paul says, καὶ εἴ τις ἑτέρα ἐντολή (“if there is any other commandment”). Paul is not

¹⁴⁰ Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, Kindle, 71-72.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International commentary on the New Testament)*, 814-815.

novel in this statement but is instead drawing upon a tradition that Jesus himself summarized the Torah in this way, by referring to Leviticus 19:19 (i.e., Mark 12:31 [“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”]).

Dunn writes,

It is important to appreciate the fact that the idea of the law being summed up in a single formulation is not new or distinctively Christian. According to *b. Sabb.* 31a, Hillel summed up the law in the negative form of the golden rule: That which you hate do not do to your fellows; this is the whole law ... More striking still, Rabbi Akka spoke of the same passage (Lev 19:18) as “the greatest principle in the Torah” (*Sipra* on Lev 19:18) ... In so arguing, therefore, Paul is not making an anti-Jewish point; on the contrary, it is one that many Jews would readily accept.¹⁴³

Schreiner says, “Paul most likely believes that the moral norms of the Mosaic law are part of the law of Christ (Gal 5:14; 6:2; I Cor 9:21) ... The commands Paul cites ... are required because they belong to the law of Christ, and the law of Christ includes the moral norms of the law ... Paul sees love and keeping commands as compatible.”¹⁴⁴ He also says, “Nor do we need to pit the Spirit ... against fulfilling the law ... In Paul’s theology the Spirit is the means by which the law is observed, and thus keeping the law is not a heavy burden but a joy (Ps. 119).”¹⁴⁵

In sum, as Paul says in Romans 13:9 (which is analogous to the teaching of Jesus), in addition to the commands of the Decalogue, “whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” God is love, and all the commands in the Bible, are rooted in God’s character. Torah observance should not be viewed as adversarial to the Holy Spirit, but instead, the Law should be practiced in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Cranfield says, “To draw the conclusion from Paul’s statement that love is the

¹⁴³ James Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (Word Biblical Commentary)* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 778-770.

¹⁴⁴ Schreiner, 659-660.

¹⁴⁵ Schreiner, 659-660.

fulfilling of the law that we can therefore afford to forget the Ten Commandments and all the rest of the law and just make do with the general commandment of love (or, as those who are inclined to draw this conclusion, would probably prefer to call it, the principle of love) would be altogether mistaken.”¹⁴⁶

Romans 14

In his commentary on Acts, Bock says two things which shed light on the heart of our theological disagreement:

[T]he presence of Gentiles in the community of believers raised questions about observance of the law ... Paul does not try to persuade Jewish believers to live like Gentiles, but rather to be sensitive to issues related to them. This means that table fellowship, food laws, and issues tied to ceremonial purity may be handled differently when Gentiles are involved, but Paul probably did not see this as encouraging Jewish believers to ignore the law ... Do what we tell you . . . Purify yourself along with them (21:23–24): Does this episode indicate that Paul was deceptive in taking this vow? After all, he was encouraged to take the vow as a way of showing the people that “what they were told about [him] amounts to nothing” (v. 24), when in fact what they had been told about him was largely true—that Paul’s view of the law differed from the majority view among Christian Jews.¹⁴⁷

The author of this paper does not believe that Jewish believers handled “food laws, and issues tied to ceremonial purity” differently when Gentiles were involved, nor do I believe that “Paul’s view of the law differed from the majority view among Christian Jews.”

Romans 14 says, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables ... One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike ... I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is

¹⁴⁶ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 2 (IX–XVI) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 679.

¹⁴⁷ Darrell Bock, *The Gospels and Acts (The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible)* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), Kindle, 9728.

unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean ... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble” (Rom 14:1-2; :14; :21).

There are two incorrect approaches to Romans 14. The first approach is to assume that the “weak in faith” are unbelievers,¹⁴⁸ namely, they are “legalists in the sense that they think to earn a status of righteousness before God by their own works and imagine that their abstention from meat and wine and observance of special days constitute a claim on God, people who have not yet learned to accept justification as God’s free gift.”¹⁴⁹ Even though the believers in Romans 14, are called “weak in faith,” Paul treats them as being born-again: “to seek to be justified on the ground of one’s works would have been, for Paul, a matter of having ceased to have, or of never having had, true faith, and, had the people referred to really failed to grasp the truth that justification is by faith alone, Paul would not have regarded them as genuine believers.”¹⁵⁰ Schreiner says,

Paul would not have tolerated the weak if they contended that adherence to food laws was necessary for salvation. This is the false gospel that he fiercely resisted in Galatians ... It is not the case ... that the weak believed that abstaining from meat and wine and observing certain days were necessary for salvation. There is no hint that they were trying to impose these requirements on the strong for the latter’s salvation. It seems likely that they believed that one would be a stronger or better Christian if one observed their prescriptions.¹⁵¹

The second incorrect approach to Romans 14 is to assume that Paul is dealing with the same issue in Romans 14 that he is in I Corinthians 8 and 10 (“food offered to idols”).¹⁵² On a surface

¹⁴⁸ This view is held by C.K. Barrett, who believes that the “weak in faith” are men who fail to understand the concept that men are justified by grace alone, in Christ alone.

¹⁴⁹ Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 2 (IX-XVI), 690.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 691.

¹⁵¹ Schreiner, 676-677.

¹⁵² Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 2 (IX-XVI), 691.

level, there are some immediate parallels that would initially make one believe that the same issue is being discussed: 1) Both passages use the same word for “weak” - ἀσθενέω. 2) The “strong” are urged not to “grieve” (λυπέω – Rom 14:15) or “wound” (τύπτω – I Cor 8:12) “weak brothers.” 3) The “strong” are told not to put a πρόσκομμα (“stumbling block” – Rom 14:13) or to “put a snare (in the way)” (σκανδαλίζω – I Cor 8:13) of the “weak.” 4) Total abstinence from eating or drinking is better than causing one’s brother to stumble (Rom 14:21 and I Cor 8:13). There are two reasons why we should not think Paul was talking about the same topic in Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 and 10. First, Paul never uses the expression, τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων (“things sacrificed to idols”) in Romans 14 (unlike I Corinthians 8 and 10). Second, in Romans 14, Paul does not criticize the strong for their exercise of liberty, except as it pertains to the weak and the possibility of destroying their faith. However, in I Corinthians 8 and 10, the “strong” were in danger of doing something that was legitimately forbidden, that would have been forbidden whether or not the “weak brothers” were involved. The Jerusalem Council had instructed the churches “to abstain from the things polluted by idols” (Acts 15:20). According to Bock, τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (“things contaminated by idols”) refers to “pollution associated with idols and their rituals.”¹⁵³

There are several strong indicators in Romans 14 that the issue at hand is a distinctively Jewish one. First, “the words κοινὸν (*koinon*, common) in verse 14 and καθαρὰ (*kithara*, clean) in verses 20 ... stem from Jewish circles, where the observance of food laws was crucial.”¹⁵⁴ Dunn adds, “κοινός in ordinary Greek means simply ‘common, ordinary.’ The sense ‘profane, unclean’ derives from the use of κοινός as equivalent to the biblical כִּזְבּוּ (e.g., Lev. 11:4-8; Deut

¹⁵³ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 505.

¹⁵⁴ Schreiner, 690.

14:7-10; Judg 13:4; Hos 9:3) or לֶחֶם (Lev 10:10; Ezek 22:26; 44:23).”¹⁵⁵ Second, Cranfield shows that Paul reveals a “sympathetic gentleness ... to the weak in this section ... the main thrust of his exhortation ... [is] to the strong, to persuade them go to out of their way to ‘please’ the weak and to refrain from doing anything likely to ‘grieve’ them.”¹⁵⁶ Third, the “weaker” brother, was still observing days, eating, and abstaining from eating “in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God” (Rom 14:6). Even though they may be mistaken by being overscrupulous, nonetheless, they are doing so with the correct motive, “with the intention and desire of serving the Lord by so doing.”¹⁵⁷ The issue in the Roman church was not necessarily between Jew/Gentile, but also was an intermural matter between Jews who practiced different levels of Torah observance. That is why Paul counts himself as among the “strong” in Romans 15: ἡμεῖς οἱ δυνατοὶ (“we who are strong”).

Dunn sets the context for Romans 14:

[T]he Jewish community had been expelled less than ten years previously ... In the interval, provision for proper slaughter of clean animals would probably have become much more limited and may even have been closed down as part of the means of achieving the expulsion. Jewish Christians returning to Rome in small numbers may well have hesitated to draw attention to their being Jews by insisting on proper techniques of slaughter and have preferred to avoid meat altogether.¹⁵⁸

Gary Shogren gives a variation of Dunn’s view, saying,

Jews harbored a general suspicion toward gentile butchers. In addition, they lacked kosher butchers in the wake of the Jewish resettling of Rome. But how long could that have lasted? Barrett suggests that within a short time “... the possibility of finding compliant Jewish – or even Christian – shopkeepers does not seem too remote ... We will suggest, therefore, that the vegetarianism may have had its start as a temporary expedient; it then came to acquire a religious patina that remained long after it was genuinely

¹⁵⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (Word Biblical Commentary)*, 818.

¹⁵⁶ Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Volume 2 (IX-XVI), 696.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 706.

¹⁵⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (Word Biblical Commentary)*, 801.

consequential. That is, the Weak broadened the umbrella of uncleanness to encompass a more symbolic form of detachment. They observed an ongoing “partial fast” from the meat and wine of Rome.¹⁵⁹

The Torah did not require Jews to practice vegetarianism. Nonetheless, out of an abundance of caution, the “weak” brethren felt like the “simplest and safest course would be to avoid meat altogether.”¹⁶⁰ It is the researcher’s belief that Paul maintained his practices as a Pharisee, observing Levitical food laws, but did not observe the restrictions of the “weak,” who went beyond the Mosaic Law’s demands in their Torah observance. Schreiner summarizes Paul’s argument in Romans 14:

What damages the weak, then, is to engage in behavior that is contrary to their faith and conscience. In the community they hide their convictions and partake of food and drink they consider to be defiled (cf. Schlatter 1995: 257). Such hypocrisy injures their conscience and plunges them toward ruin. Thus, in verse 14 Paul argues that even though all foods are clean, they are unclean if anyone “thinks” (λογιζομένῳ, *logizomenō*) they are defiled. In other words, it is wrong for the weak to eat unclean foods and drink wine because they are convinced that such eating and drinking is forbidden by God. Their subjective judgment determines whether eating is beneficial for them (so Fitzmyer 1993c: 696). They are “grieved” (v. 15) because they are persuaded that they have violated a divine norm. If people begin to engage in behaviors that they consider to be immoral, we can understand why their faith is undermined (cf. Reasoner 1990: 84). When human beings begin to act contrary to their consciences, they no longer have an anchor for their lives. The center no longer holds; they are now adrift and subject to the convictions and consciences of others, and authentic faith can’t survive when one lives on the basis of the convictions of others.¹⁶¹

According to Rudolph, the key to understanding Romans 14 lies in understanding that Paul was a student of Gamaliel (“I ... [was] educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers” [Acts 22:3]). Rudolph says, “The Pharisaic *havurah* had such an approach when it came to ritual purity. *Tosefta Demai* chapter 2 describes the ‘one who

¹⁵⁹ Gary Shogren, “Is the Kingdom of God about Eating and Drinking or Isn’t It?” (Romans 14:17), *Novum Testamentum*, Jul. 2000, Vol. 42: 247-248.

¹⁶⁰ Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (Word Biblical Commentary)*, 801.

¹⁶¹ Shreiner, 694.

imposes on himself the obligations' and describes the various areas of ritual purity that he takes on. Similarly, in *Mishnah Hagigah* 2:5–7, the individual's commitment to ritual purity is related to the particular level he chooses to take on, and his level of responsibility corresponds to his personal intention."¹⁶²

Furstenberg says,

the Mishnah states the conditions for achieving each grade of purity: For example,

הטובל לחולין והחזק לחולין אסור למעשר. "If a man immersed himself to render himself fit to eat of unconsecrated produce, he may not touch [Second] Tithe." According to this translation purity depends only on personal intention and decision. As one immerses, he must decide what kind of purity he is accepting upon himself ... verse 14 [Romans 14:14] could be best understood in light of the purity system described in Mishna Hagigah. There we say that things that were completely pure on one level were deemed impure on a higher level. Inevitably, a scrupulous Pharisee (for example) who looked inwards, towards the inner circles where he, his cloths and his foods were all considered to be impure, could not but arrive at Jesus' conclusion. Indeed, he must be careful lest his food turn into a stumbling block for the priest, but as a consequence, a notion of relative impurity must develop.¹⁶³

The Pharisaic schools of Hillel and Shammai had significant disagreements over the matter of how, "human intention [was] ... a factor in determining the halakhic status of actions or vessels [and] ... in their view[s] of liquid susceptibility (that is, the ability of liquids to transfer and contract impurity)."¹⁶⁴ Eric Ottenheim says, "First century interpretations of the Levitical law of susceptibility to impurity by liquids range from susceptibility by moisture (Qumran) via susceptibility through moistening (Beth Shammai) to susceptibility by human will (Beth Hillel)

¹⁶² Rudolph, "Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20," in *Paul the Jew*, eds., Gabriele Boccaccini & Carlos Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), Kindle, 152.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 157.

¹⁶⁴ Rudolph, "Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20," in *Paul the Jew*, Kindle, 158.

... According to the view of Beth Hillel, impurity became a matter of classification through the human will.”¹⁶⁵

According to Rudolph, in Romans 14, Paul is taking a Hillelite approach to ceremonial impurity. The Dutch scholar, Peter Tomson, notes that there are strong similarities between the writings of the Apostle Paul and Rabbi Hillel: “Of special significance for crucial elements of Paul’s teaching are similarities with the Hillelite tradition.”¹⁶⁶ The Apostle Paul was trained by Gamaliel. Gamaliel was the son of Simeon ben Hillel and the grandson of Hillel the Elder, the Jewish scholar associated with the development of the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the House of Hillel school of Tannaim. Rudolph says,

Paul’s training as a Pharisee of Pharisees, and his broad exposure to pluriform Second Temple Judaism, made him into something of a first-century halakhic pluralist who favored the Hillelite emphasis on personal intention when it came to purity issues. Seen in this way, Paul’s statement in Rom 14:14b— “it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean”—was not an expression of indifference toward ritual purity, but a claim consistent with the on-the-ground reality of a variegated first-century Judaism. “Nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom 14:14a). An underlying assumption behind the Hillelite view that personal intention can change the purity status of objects and persons is that nothing is unclean in itself. This is consonant with a haggadic tradition.¹⁶⁷

In Romans 14:14, Paul says, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.” In an analogous way, the Apostle says, in verse 20, “Everything [food] is indeed clean” (Rom 14:20). Many Christian commentators believe that Paul was teaching the same lesson as Jesus in Mark 7: “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus, he

¹⁶⁵ Eric Ottenheijm, “Impurity Between Intention and Deed: Purity Disputes in First Century Judaism and in the New Testament,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, 141-143.

¹⁶⁶ Tomson, 266.

¹⁶⁷ Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20,” in *Paul the Jew*, Kindle, 159.

declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18-19). Mark Nanos shows how a denial of intrinsic impurity does not contradict the laws of kosher:

Paul’s declaration of the purity of all things should not be taken out of its contextual argument . . . Paul is really just appealing to the inherent truth of the purity laws; they exist because the holy God declared them so (e.g., Lev 11:41–45; 19:2; 20:25–26). God has chosen what is pure to eat and what is impure, both for the Jew and for the gentile who worships him. Everything was created good, yet God declared to Adam, to Noah, and to Moses what was and was not to be eaten. Purity is not intrinsic; it is imputed. God has spoken and it is so.¹⁶⁸

In the beginning, when “God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind . . . God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:25). Most Jews from the Hillelite perspective believed that “Instead of attributing an innate, ontological impurity to forbidden animals such as swine or camel . . . [the] (im)purity language in the Mosaic legislation [is being used] more in a functional than ontological sense. Impurity is imputed, not inherent.”¹⁶⁹ Kathy Ehrensperger notes that the laws of *kashrut* were only for the Jews, due to God’s covenant with Israel, and not for the Gentiles:

Jewish food laws of course are regulations related to God’s covenant with the people Israel. That “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Ps. 25:1) is not questioned in any way by the setting of the laws that regulate which parts of God’s creation are at the disposition of the people Israel. The impure animals are impure for the covenant people, as is emphasized in almost mantra-like manner in Leviticus 11: “it is unclean/impure for you” (11:4, 5, 6, 7); “they are unclean for you” (11:8); “they are untouchable for you” (11:10-11, 12, 23) etc. As with other purity regulations, these apply to the covenant partner Israel and not to the nations. Gentiles are not required to keep purity laws, particularly not (all of) those that are related to ritual impurity, as these are only relevant for Jews in their relationship with God.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), Kindle, 199-200.

¹⁶⁹ Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20,” in *Paul the Jew*, Kindle, 160.

¹⁷⁰ Kathy Ehrensperger, “‘Called to be Saints’—The Identity-Shaping Dimension of Paul’s Priestly Discourse in Romans,” in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation: Essays in Honour of*

According to Rudolph, the issue in Romans 14 was not kosher versus non-kosher, but rather “potentially defiled food,” or “doubtful food.” Shogren says, “Jews practiced ‘safe eating’ through abstinence. The Jews could not trust the level of truth in advertising when the gentile butcher claimed that the meat was free of uncleanness. They avoided contact with meat altogether, rather than risk contamination.”¹⁷¹ There is an entire tractate in the Mishnah, entitled דמאי, *dmay* (“Doubtful”) that is dedicated to discussing items, such as food, which could potentially be ceremonially defiled (and the different circumstances in which this may hold true). Rudolph says,

It is likely that Jesus-believers in Rome were overly concerned about clean food becoming defiled by association (κοινός) at communal meals. Vegetables apparently did not pose the same risk in their view and the weak were content to eat only vegetables (Rom 14:2), action that Paul considered extreme and unnecessary. The level of concern for scrupulous food preparation and unintentional mixtures ... was excessive from Paul’s perspective and a reflection of misplaced spiritual priorities (Rom 14:17). Paul was aware of their pastoral needs, and he knew that this outlook was not healthy.¹⁷²

Rudolph gives some helpful background:

A well-educated ultra-Orthodox Jew, however, one who has attended yeshiva and studied Jewish law, knows that pork is not unclean in itself. It has been assigned an unclean status. Thus, if the ultra-Orthodox Jew’s kosher food comes into contact with pork, there is a legal remedy – nullify the pork! Ultra-Orthodox Jews understand that nullification of unclean foods is a fundamental aspect of maintaining a kosher kitchen. There are two ways to nullify unclean foods: *bitul b’shishim* (nullification in a ration of sixty). If pork accidentally falls into the ultra-Orthodox Jew’s kosher food and the pork constitutes the minority of the food, then under the principle of *bitul b’rov*, the pork may be legally nullified, and the food eaten ... I contend, however, that Paul’s training in Pharisaic *halakhah* led him to ask critical questions about accidental mixtures that the weak in Rome did not ask. Paul is echoing a Pharisaic understanding that no food is impure (κοινός) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτος) in essence; it is the halakhic designation of it as “impure” or “unclean” that makes it impure or unclean ... Paul probably viewed the

William S. Campbell, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 105-106.

¹⁷¹ Shogren, 246-47.

¹⁷² Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 37.

reaction of the weak in Rome to be comparable to overscrupulous Pharisees that he knew. He understood that even Pharisaic *halakhah* did not require such stringency ... The weak, however, were concerned about accidental contact with defiling sources or defilement through association (κοινός). One could imagine that some of the Gentiles who were less familiar with the Torah unwittingly brought levitically unclean food to the communal meals and placed it side-by-side with clean food on the table. The weak were distraught and outraged over this; some may have even left the table-fellowship over it ... This is not a rejection of the Torah's dietary laws but a minimizing of the importance of κοινός ... Paul's teaching does not undermine law observance for Jews but directs law observance so that Mosaic law is prioritized over traditional interpretations and expansions of the law, an approach consistent with Jesus' *halakhah*.¹⁷³

Rudolph further clarifies:

[T]he “weak” were not simply people who were Torah-observant, but individuals who were judgmental when they saw others following a standard of Torah observance in relation to purity that was seemingly lower than their own ... the strong in faith were those who held a non-ontological view of purity. They knew that “nothing” was unclean in itself. Paul counted himself among the strong (Rom 15:1) because he had this knowledge. He maintained the normative Hillelite-Pharisaic perspective that intention determined impurity, that individual standards of impurity could vary, and that God can overlook accidental mixtures.¹⁷⁴

Peter Tomson believes that Paul, in Romans, was exclusively addressing a Gentile audience, who are dealing with halakhic sensibilities of Jews who take different approaches to “doubtful matters”:

[T]he food problem in Rom 14 was complex. At one level Paul's plea appears to have been for willingness on the part of gentile Christians to make allowances for basic Jewish food laws. On another level, he argued that gentile Christians should also bear with “hyper-halakhic” anxieties regarding gentile wine and meat ... in Romans and Galatians Paul argued diametrically opposed cases: at Antioch he would have openly withstood “hyper-sensitive” Jews who made troubles for the gentiles, while in Rom 14 he appeals to gentiles to be tolerant towards such over sensitive Jews!¹⁷⁵

In summary, Paul is encouraging his readers to, “prayerfully define their own standards of observance, respect the standards of others, and keep the Torah's *skandalon* command not to

¹⁷³ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 38-41.

¹⁷⁴ Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20,” in *Paul the Jew*, Kindle, 162-164.

¹⁷⁵ Tomson, 241.

put a stumbling block before those who might fall (Lev 19:14; Rom 14:13). In doing this, they will be keeping one of the greatest commands of all in Jewish law, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Lev 19:18; Rom 13:9; 14:15).”¹⁷⁶

I Corinthians & Galatians

I Corinthians 9:19-23

In I Corinthians 9:19-23, the Apostle Paul says, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law.... I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” Paul had been slandered by some who said that he was, “teach[ing] all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs” (Acts 21:21). To demonstrate that “there is nothing in what they have been told about you” (Acts 21:24), and to show that he was “liv[ing] in observance of the law” (Acts 21:24), Paul was instructed to join in a Jewish purification rite along with four other believers who had taken a vow to do so. Bock comments, “When Paul returns to Jerusalem, James advises him to carry out purification rites (Acts 21:17-24). Taking the advice, Paul reflects sensitivity to Jewish Christian concerns. In this way, Paul follows principles contained in his own writings (I Cor 9:19–23).”¹⁷⁷ Bock refers to this same passage to explain why Paul circumcised Timothy (whose mother was Jewish, and whose father was a Greek), in Acts 16:1-3:

¹⁷⁶ Tomson, 171.

¹⁷⁷ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, Kindle, 384.

“Paul is not requiring circumcision here as a component of conversion or acceptance before God; rather, he is electing to take this step because it is prudent in the present situation. It removes an obstacle to Jewish acceptance of the gospel, something he affirms in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.”¹⁷⁸ He elaborates, saying, “1 Corinthians 9 represents him supporting such tactics. Paul does not try to persuade Jewish believers to live like Gentiles, but to be sensitive to issues related to them. This means that table fellowship, food laws, and issues tied to ceremonial purity may be handled differently when Gentiles are involved, but Paul probably did not see this as encouraging Jewish believers to ignore the law.”¹⁷⁹

Mark Nanos believes that this passage has been the source of much misunderstanding about Paul. It is typically interpreted to mean that Paul only periodically obeyed the Torah when it was expedient to do so. “[O]bserving or not observing the law is an unimportant issue before God.”¹⁸⁰ Jason Meyer reflects the sentiment of many when he says,

This perspective seems to represent Paul’s approach in 1 Cor 9:20–21. He can temporarily become like one living under the Mosaic law in order to win the Jews, who live under that law. However, he makes a permanent distinction by saying that he is not “under the law,” even though he momentarily lives like the Jews for missiological purposes (v. 20). He also says that he can temporarily live as one outside the law in order to win the Gentiles, who live outside the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law.¹⁸¹

This idea has also been prevalent among New Perspective theologians. For example, Heikki Räisänen said, “1 Cor 9.20 f. is absolutely incompatible with the theory of an observant Paul.”¹⁸² N. T. Wright insists that the idea Paul remained a Torah-observant Jew “is not only anachronistic

¹⁷⁸ Bock, *The Gospels and Acts*, Kindle, 19185.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 19709.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Nanos, *Reading Paul within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos*, vol. 1 (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), Kindle, 414.

¹⁸¹ Meyer, Kindle, 283-284.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 419.

and ignorant, but also that a reasonable person would naturally recognize that ‘[b]eing a Jew’ was no longer Paul’s basic identity.”¹⁸³ Another adherent of the New Perspective, E.P. Sanders, said, “When among Gentiles he [Paul] does not observe the Jewish law.”¹⁸⁴ Nanos points out the fallacy of this thinking: “It would not work for Paul to observe law when he goes to a synagogue and then not when he was with Gentiles ‘in the same church.’”¹⁸⁵ Some interpreters have concluded that Paul was Torah-free, because he primarily ministered among the Diaspora, among non-Jews. The ordinary view of Paul in I Corinthians 9 sees Paul like a chameleon – he mimics Jews when he is with Jews, and mimics Gentiles when he is with them – he does not become inwardly what he appears to be outwardly. If this view is true, then Nanos says that while in the short-run it may be expedient, in the long-run it would be counter-productive. Nanos writes, “Surely some Jews would hear rumors of his non-Jewish eating behavior, for example, when with non-Jews, and others would no doubt witness this behavior. The same is true about non-Jews witnessing Jewish behavior when he was among Jews.”¹⁸⁶ Nanos argues that if Paul was only an actor regarding Torah observance, then Paul was duplicitous and perpetuated misunderstandings. Some have even understood Paul, when he described his former way of life in Judaism as σκύβαλα, *skubala* (Phil 3:8),¹⁸⁷ to be saying that Judaism is “crap,” rather than simply being a comparative to describe the overwhelming superiority of his current life in relationship with Christ. If these descriptions of Paul hold true, then Nanos says, “He may have

¹⁸³ Meyer, Kindle, 419.

¹⁸⁴ Mark Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), Kindle, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 2017-2019.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 437-439.

¹⁸⁷ Nanos, *Reading Paul within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos*, vol. 1, 472.

thought of himself as a ‘good Jew,’ but no other practicing Jews would have.”¹⁸⁸ The prevailing notions about Paul are that Paul believed the Torah was obsolete, it had run its course and was outmoded, and that “Paul taught and practiced a Judaism-free way of living based on his belief in Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁹

The best articulation of the researcher’s view of I Corinthians 9:19-23 is given by Hans Conzelmann, who writes about Paul’s parenthetical statement in verse 20 (“though not being myself under the law” - μὴ ὄν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον), “He is able as a Jew to practice Jewish customs, without teaching that the Law is a way of salvation. And he does not have to deliver the Jews from their practice of the Law, but from their ‘confidence’ in the Law as a way of salvation (Phil 3:2ff) ... Accordingly the agreement in Gal 2, that Jewish Christians are to continue to keep the Law, is not a compromise, but a direct application of the *sola fide*.”¹⁹⁰ In a like manner, Joseph Fitzmyer says,

This important qualification finds an explanation in Gal 2:15-16, where Paul speaks of himself and Cephas, “We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a human being is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.” That is why he can now phrase his relation to the law as he does here; to be justified Paul feels no obligation to observe the Mosaic law and all its precepts.¹⁹¹

The author agrees with Conzelmann, that the Torah is not a “way of salvation,” with Paul, that one cannot be “justified by works of the law,” and with Fitzmyer, that “to be justified Paul feels

¹⁸⁸ Mark Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), Kindle, 482.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 487.

¹⁹⁰ Hans Conzelmann, *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Heremeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 160.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 370.

no obligation to observe the Mosaic law.” Nonetheless, if a Messianic Jew trusts in Jesus alone for their salvation, the researcher believes that Torah observance should be a way of life.

David Garland has a fascinating interpretation of Paul’s odd statement in I Corinthians 9:20, namely, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.” Since Paul was born a Jew, how could he “become as a Jew?” According to Garland, “becoming a Jew,” for Paul, involved submitting himself to synagogue discipline:

Paul does not mean that he occasionally obeyed Jewish customs to decoy Jews into listening to his message. The clearest example of what Paul means by becoming “as a Jew” and as “one under the law” in his description of the thirty-nine lashes he suffered at the hands of the Jews (2 Cor 11:24). We can only guess that the synagogue inflicted this punishment for Paul’s proclaiming his faith in the crucified and risen Christ, which they presumably considered blasphemous, and his altered understanding of the hope of Israel that now included uncircumcised Gentiles in the people of God ... The Mishnah rules, “And thy brother seem vile unto thee [Deut. 25:3] – when he is scourged then he is thy brother” (*m. Mak.* 3:15). This axiom clarifies what it means for Paul to become like one under the law ... He bowed to synagogue discipline to maintain his Jewish connections ... If one wanted to stay a member of the Jewish community, one had to submit to its discipline ... Paul accepted these penalties to keep open the option of preaching the gospel message in the synagogue.¹⁹²

According to Rudolph, I Corinthians 9:19-23 is one of two primary passages of Scripture that show that Paul was only occasionally Torah observant after his Christian conversion. First, Rudolph writes, “I Cor 9:19-23 is part of a group of texts in the Pauline corpus and Acts that depict Paul’s Jewishness as erased or inconsequential in Christ.”¹⁹³ Second, “the traditional case posits that Paul did not regard idol-food as forbidden for Jesus-believers, a perspective in conflict with the Torah-observant life. The I Cor 8:1-11:1 pericope was prompted by a query that Paul received from the Corinthians concerning idol-food (Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, *peri de ton eidolothuton* [I Cor 8:1; cf. 7:1]). Because Jews regarded idol-food as forbidden food, Paul’s

¹⁹² Garland, *I Corinthians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2003), 420.

¹⁹³ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 2.

response to the query provides the exegete with something of a barometer of his Jewish convictions.”¹⁹⁴ Third, “the conditional case contends that Paul’s statement in I Cor 9:20b (‘I myself am not under the law’) is an explicit renunciation of Mosaic law. Almost all contemporary studies of the passage maintain that ‘not under the law’ means not under the authority of Mosaic law.”¹⁹⁵ Rudolph also gives four weaknesses with the traditional view:

1. Paul could not have been “all things to all people” all the time ... he was often around Jews and Gentiles together, thus restricting his ability to be “all things to all people.”
2. The standard interpretation portrays Jews as simpletons ... According to Luke, Paul’s congregation in Corinth met in a house that was next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7).
3. It is doubtful that Paul employed such a foolhardy strategy. Once his inconsistency with respect to basic Torah commandments became known, it would have caused to “stumble” the very people he was trying to “win” ... obedience to the Law was a lifelong matter. Francis Watson concurs, “Occasional conformity to the law” is entirely alien to the Jewish way of life and could never have helped him to “win those under the law” ...
4. Proponents of the traditional view of I Cor 9:19-23 do not typically respond at length to Pauline or Lukan texts that appear to be at variance with the view that Paul was only occasionally Torah observant (e.g., Acts 21:17-26; Gal 5:3; I Cor 7:17-24) ... “problem” texts are expected to come into alignment with I Cor 9:19-23. There is no overriding, reason, however, to maintain this presupposition. One could just as easily argue that I Cor 9:19-23 should come into alignment with Paul’s “rule in all the churches” in I Cor 7:17-20 that Jews are to remain Jews and not live as Gentiles.¹⁹⁶

Commentators typically interpret the Apostle Paul’s statement, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law” (I Cor 9:20), in two primary ways. The first way has to do with rhetorical adaptability. When Paul said, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (I Cor 9:22), he was not talking about what Nanos calls “behavior adaptability,” but rather, he simply altered his rhetorical strategy, “‘arguing from the premises’ of each different interest group to bring them to

¹⁹⁴ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹⁶ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 12-13.

conclusions about the gospel that they might not have otherwise considered relevant for themselves. When seeking to win Jews to the message of the good news in Christ, Paul argues from Jewish premises.”¹⁹⁷ Nanos clarifies his “rhetorical adaptability” position saying, “When Paul mentions causing himself to become like the ‘lawless’ or ‘sinner’ (ἄνομος, *anomos*), often translated ‘without Law,’ it is no more likely that he means he abandons halakhic behavior or acts like a sinner than it is that Jesus behaved like a prostitute or tax-collector to relate to them. Paul is a self-confessed slave to righteous living. Communicating the message of Christ to sinners does not entail behaving sinfully in order to do so.”¹⁹⁸ When Paul was preaching before pagan audiences full of idolaters, he did not compromise either his Jewish behavioral practices, or his convictions, but he tried to argue for belief in Christ based upon their worldview. “[H]is behavior among the non-Jew philosophers in Athens is described in terms of rhetorically adapting to non-Jew philosophers. He ‘became like’ a polytheist to make his point to polytheists, but in no way did he become a polytheist or practice idolatry to do so ... Paul must sacrifice his ‘right’ to assert the perspective of Jewish Scriptures and traditions about the revelation of the One God as if self-evident.”¹⁹⁹

Nanos gives Acts 17 as an example of “rhetorical adaptability.” Paul was dealing with philosophers who were polytheists. Paul acknowledges that the Athenians were “very religious” (Acts 17:22), and he attempts to explain YHWH to them using an altar, on which was inscribed, “To the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). He also seems to quote from Epimenides: “as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Acts 17:28). By way of contrast, in

¹⁹⁷ Nanos, *Reading Paul within Judaism*, Kindle, 723-725.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 727-731.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 750-755.

the same chapter, when Paul was in Thessalonica, he entered a synagogue, and “on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). Paul does not use Epimenides in the synagogue, and he does not reason from the Scriptures in the Areopagus.

Gabriele Boccaccini says, “Paul’s pastoral strategy of ‘rhetorical adaptability’ cannot be taken as evidence that he was no longer a torah-observant Jew and preached Jewish believers in Christ to forsake the law. Paul saw no conflict between the law and the promise. Being no longer ‘under the law’ (I Cor 9:20) meant for him that he was no longer under the power of sin and was justified in Christ, not that he was free from the obligations of the Mosaic covenant.”²⁰⁰ Gager says of Paul’s words in I Corinthians 9, “this is a description not of inconsistency or self-contradiction but rather of Protean adaptability.”²⁰¹

While the author of this paper agrees with Nanos, that I Corinthians 9 includes the concept of “rhetorical adaptability,” it is my belief that Paul is also talking about “lifestyle adaptability,” or, “halakhic adaptability.” Rudolph gives seven reasons why this is the case:

1. As Mark Given has demonstrated, the expression ἐγενόμην ... ὡς, in both literal and figurative contexts, refers to “concrete, observable changes.”
2. Paul’s repeated use of nomistic language in I Cor 9:20 (“I became as one under the law ... I became as one without the law [though I am not without the law of God but am in Christ’s law]”) would seem to indicate that lifestyle is in view ...
3. I Cor 9:27 (“but I punish my body and enslave it”; cf. v.19 “slave to all”) reinforces the impression that Paul is speaking about lifestyle adaptability in the previous verses.
4. I Cor 10:32-33 (“Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved”) is a recapitulation of I Cor 9:19-23. The language of trying to “please everyone in everything” presumably includes lifestyle adaptability (cf. I Cor 7:32-34; 9:1-18; 2 Cor 5:9) ...

²⁰⁰ Boccaccini, Kindle, 154.

²⁰¹ Gager, Kindle, 1571-1572.

5. The I Cor 8-10 context focuses on food-related accommodation. There are more than twenty-five references to food and commensality in the pericope. Also, in I Cor 10:27b, Paul appears to echo Jesus' rule of adaptation with respect to being a guest in another's home ("eat what is set before you" [cf. Luke 10:8]). This is lifestyle adaptability.

6. A compelling case can be made that Paul applies his I Cor 9:19-23 principle of accommodation to the "strong" in relation to the "weak" in Rom 14-15. Here Paul emphasizes adaptability, not rhetorical adaptability.

7. As I propose in chapter 5 of this monograph, Paul's accommodation language in I Cor 9:19-23 likely refers to halakhic adaptability in different table-fellowship contexts, with ordinary Jews, strict Jews, and Gentiles.²⁰²

In I Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul continues his argument about some of the rights and privileges he had as an apostle. In I Corinthians 9:1, he says, "Am I not free?" Paul had the right to material support, but he renounced this right and worked with his hands. If Paul was married, like Peter, he would have had apostolic "right" to take his wife along with him when he traveled to minister (I Cor 9:5). Even though Paul had many "rights," he offered the gospel "free of charge" (I Cor 9:18), meeting his material needs by making tents. Even though Paul was "free from all" (I Cor 9:19), he made himself "a servant of all, that [he] ... might win more" (I Cor 9:19) souls for the sake of the gospel. Paul sacrificed his freedoms voluntarily to make himself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people for Christ. There are four groups Paul seeks to win: the "Jews," those "under the law," those "outside the law," and the "weak" (I Cor 9:20-22). Paul makes the puzzling statement, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews" (I Cor 9:20). Paul was born a Jew; he was an ethnic descendant of Jacob – how could he "become a Jew?" He was himself – he lived in accordance with Jewish customs, culture, and sensibilities, being fully Torah observant. He was not "under the law" in the sense that his Jewish identity was primary (his relationship with Christ was first), and in the sense that he was not depending upon animal sacrifices for atonement (as opposed to the blood of Christ). He was born-again,

²⁰² Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 16-17.

being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit (as opposed to observing the Law in the power of his flesh). The Apostle Paul was freed from the power of sin and the curse of the law, was liberated to observe the Mosaic Law in the power of the Holy Spirit and could seek to “win” those who were still “under the law,” but were still trying to achieve a judicial righteousness before God, which can never be achieved by Torah observance alone. Paul was walking in the Spirit, having met the righteous requirement of the law, through faith in Christ, and was attempting to “win” other Jews, who were still relying on their own acts of obedience and had yet to be incorporated into Christ by grace through faith in Jesus. Paul also sought to win those who were “outside the law,” namely Gentiles, who could made right with God through faith in Christ, without the need to conform to Jewish legal requirements such as circumcision and the maintenance of Levitical food laws. Paul was always Torah observant, but he brought the gospel to Gentiles, something many Jews refused to do, out of fear of ceremonial defilement. And finally, Paul sought to win the “weak,” by giving up his right to be “strong.” Jews who were overly scrupulous in their Torah observance, going beyond what the Mosaic Law required (i.e., being vegetarian, avoiding all contact with Gentiles), were also among those who Paul sought to “win.”

According to Rudolph, Paul’s becoming “all things to all people,” was patterned after how Jesus became “all things to all people.” He says,

By associating with all through open table-fellowship, one could say that Jesus became all things to all people (sinners, Pharisees, and ordinary Jews). One might even call this a form of “interchange,” for “shared meals symbolized shared lives – intimacy, kinship, unity” ... “sinners” was more or less synonymous with “Gentiles” (Gal 2.15; cf. Mark 10.33 with 14.41, and Matt. 5.47 with Luke 6.33) ... There is no evidence that Jesus called his disciples to be willing to violate the biblical food laws ... One qualification, however, should be added to the Lightfoot-Sloyan reading: “those under the law” may refer more broadly to Jews who scrupulously observed the law ... Pharisees lived among the people and were open to table-fellowship if a guest conformed to their halakhic

standards ... [when] Paul returned to Tarsus or Israel ... he received hospitality from Pharisees he knew intimately ... In such situations it is proposed that Paul became as one under the law to win those under the law.²⁰³

In addition, Rudolph gives four reasons why “Paul use[s] the expression ‘under the law’ (ὕπὸ νόμον, *hupo nomon*) to refer to Pharisees or Jews who strictly adhered to the law.”²⁰⁴ First, “Pharisees and other ardent observers of the law stood out among the law-observant populace as particularly zealous for the Torah.”²⁰⁵ Second, “the Pharisees stood out as ‘under the law’ because they made a show of their strict Torah observance.”²⁰⁶ Third, “‘under the law’ is a term that the Pharisees and other strict sects used to describe themselves in contrast to the general populace.”²⁰⁷ Fourth, “the apostle considered [a] narrow interpretation of the law a burden. Extremely strict Jews were ‘under [the burden of a stringent interpretation of] the law.’”²⁰⁸ Kinzer further clarifies,

Being “under the Torah” (*hupo nomon*) is contrasted here with being “outside the Torah” (*anomos*). If the former refers to the status of Jews apart from the death and resurrection of Yeshua, the latter refers to the status of Gentiles, who, apart from those events, are entirely outside the framework of the divine covenants established with the people of Israel. Whereas *hupo nomon* is negative only in relation to the greater status offered through Messiah’s death and resurrection, *anomos* is an entirely negative term.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 182-196.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Kinzer, *Kindle*, 86-87.

Galatians 3:17-29

Bock, in *Jesus the Messiah*, says, “The law was a pedagogue pointing to the Christ until he came, exposing sin and the need for a delivering promised one. Paul, in effect, gives the law a temporary role that served in God’s plan until the promised Messiah came (Gal 3:17-22). When Christ bore the curse of the law for us, he freed us and showed that justification was by grace, not by works of the law. The law as a pedagogue could be left behind.”²¹⁰ While Bock and the author of this paper would agree that the law was a pedagogue and had the goal of pointing people to Christ, we disagree about the “temporary” nature of Torah observance for Messianic Jews.

Galatians 3:22-23 says, “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.” The Torah “is God’s law, it serves as God’s instrument to accomplish his purpose. It cannot of itself impart life, but (ἀλλὰ - [alla]) by showing the bankruptcy of human effort it shuts men and women up to the grace of God as their only hope.”²¹¹ The limitation of mankind’s “imprisonment” (συγκλείω - *sugkleio*), the extent our “being held in custody” (φρουρέω - *phroupeo*), or our “having been locked up” (συγκλείω - *sugkleio*) “under sin” (ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν – *hupo hamartian*) is temporal – “until the coming faith [faith in Jesus Christ – Gal 3:22] would be revealed” (εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι – *eis tein mellousan apokalupsthenai*).

²¹⁰ Darrell Bock, “Messiah Confessed: Pauline Epistles,” in *Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 363.

²¹¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 997.

The Apostle Paul makes the same point (as in verses 22-23), in verses 24-25, saying, “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” According to Longnecker, “For while today we think of pedagogues as teachers, in antiquity a *paidagōgos* was distinguished from a *didaskalos* (“teacher”) and had custodial and disciplinary functions rather than educative or instructional ones.”²¹² The Mosaic Law, was given as a παιδαγωγός (*paidagogos* - “trainer”), “for the purpose” (ἵνα – *hina*) “that we might be justified by faith” (ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν – *ek pisteos dikaiothomen*). Being Torah observant, and living a nomistic lifestyle, without having faith in Christ as the ultimate goal, is missing the purpose of the Torah. Moo says,

For all the undeniably positive aspects of this custodianship, it was nevertheless a custody that brought with it a servitude to sin from which the law was unable to provide a release ... The law, God’s good and holy law (Rom. 7:12), is in itself impotent to rescue fallen human beings from their sinful state and the wrath that sin brings ... [Paul views] salvation history as a series of events that lead up to a point of climax or culmination (see esp. Rom. 10:4 and Moo 1996: 636–43). God imposed the custodianship of the law not simply “until”²¹³ faith in Christ arrived but “with a view to” that eschatological climax.²¹⁴

Even though minor children may be under the tutelage of a παιδαγωγός (*paidagogos* - “trainer”), that is not the case with those who are God’s children (Gal 3:26), those who have been baptized into and clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27), with those who are corporately one in Christ (belonging to God’s people) beyond ethnic distinction (Gal 3:28), those who are Abraham’s offspring (Gal 3:29), and those who are heirs of the world to come, according to the promise (3:29). Verse 26 explicitly states that the way we become children of God, is “through

²¹² Richard Longnecker, *Galatians, Volume 41 (Word Biblical Commentary)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), Kindle, 9841.

²¹³ According to Moo, εἰς rarely has a pure temporal meaning. He remarks that it often has a “telic nuance” (“looking to the day”).

²¹⁴ Douglas Moo, *Galatians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), Kindle, 402-403.

faith” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως). Moo writes about verse 26, “The language of sonship is applied to Israel in the OT. God names Israel his “son” (e.g., Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9), and the people of Israel are “sons of God” (in LXX, NASB, e.g., Deut. 14:1–2; Hosea 1:10) ... To claim that all believers—and especially, of course, Gentile believers such as the Galatians—are “sons of God” is to claim that they enjoy the full status of God’s people.”²¹⁵ He also explains how believers in Christ can be likewise considered “Abraham’s offspring”:

By faith one can enter into union with Christ and be counted, with him, as the “seed” to whom the promises were made. At the same time being the “seed” of Abraham is equivalent to being his “sons,” or “children” (3:7). And so the argument comes full circle. Those who have faith are “Abraham’s sons” (3:7) because faith unites us with Christ, who is the ultimate “seed” and “son” of Abraham. “Being ‘in’ Christ enables them to be ‘in’ Abraham.”²¹⁶

Dwight Pentecost, in his article, “The Purpose of the Law,” rightfully notes that the Torah has many purposes:

[T]o reveal the holiness of God, ... to reveal or expose the sinfulness of man ... to reveal the standard of holiness required of those in fellowship with a holy God ... [as a schoolmaster] to supervise physical, mental, and spiritual development of the redeemed Israelite until he should come to maturity in Christ ... [as a] unifying principle that made possible the establishment of the nation ... to separate Israel from the nations in order that they might become a kingdom of priests ... the Law was given to a redeemed people to make forgiveness of sins and restoration to fellowship [per Leviticus 1-7] ... to make provision for a redeemed people to worship ... [to reveal] whether a man was rightly related to God or not ... [Tenth, and finally] the Law was given to reveal Jesus Christ.²¹⁷

It is the contention of the author of this dissertation that the fifth and sixth functions of the law, namely marking out the Jewish people as a distinct people, endure to this day. While the Torah had a pedagogical function of pointing the nation of Israel to Christ, nonetheless, it also has an

²¹⁵ Moo, *Galatians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, Kindle, 414-415.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 423.

²¹⁷ Dwight Pentecost, “The Purpose of the Law,” in *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1971, Vol. 128 (511), 229-233.

enduring role of marking out Jewish Christians as an enduringly unique people among Christians, in general, from πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *panta ta ethne* (“all nations”).

In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Christopher Wright says, “God’s answer to the international blight of sin was a new community of international blessing ... the key to that role and that mission would be their ethical distinctiveness.”²¹⁸ Israel’s peculiarity lay in the fact that God created them to be, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). Israel was distinct from other peoples, because they lived lives of obedience to God’s law, and they strived to live apart from sin. God wanted, “to create a new community of people who in their social life would embody those qualities of righteousness, peace, justice and love that reflect God’s own character and were God’s original purpose for humanity.”²¹⁹ Even though Israel lived in the midst of nations, as Balaam said, “behold, a people dwelling alone, and not counting itself among the nations” (Num 23:9)! As Israel walked in obedience to God, the Jewish people would be an example to the nations and reflect God’s character. The connection between Israel’s obedience to God’s ethical commands, and Israel’s role among the nations, can be seen clearly in Deuteronomy 4:5-8, which says,

Look! I have taught you statutes and ordinances just as the Lord my God told me to do, so that you might carry them out in the land you are about to enter and possess. So be sure to do them, because this will testify of your wise understanding to the people who will learn of all these statutes and say, “Indeed, this great nation is a very wise people.” In fact, what other great nation has a god so near to them like the Lord our God whenever we call on him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this whole law that I am about to share with you today?

²¹⁸ Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Kindle, 49-50.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 51.

As Israel lived in obedience to God's laws, the surrounding nations would realize the superiority of those laws, and in turn be drawn to Israel's God.

Juster shows how Torah observance and a New Covenant belief in Jesus should not be viewed as oppositional:

Paul does not demean the Law as a standard of God. Rather, with the advent of the Messiah, all is done in His power and under the inspiration of His Spirit. We approach the Law as "adults," not as children who have rules set over them due to their immaturity, hence, the analogy of the schoolmaster and the Law before Messiah. In Messiah, we are sons of God's kingdom and not under the Law as a custodian, but under the power of the Spirit as sons who follow by inspiration and reason, not rote.²²⁰

Not only was Jesus born as a Jew, but He continues to be Jewish, even after His resurrection.

Jesus is not a Jew detached from His people – He is a Jew in the context of His relationship to other Jews and by his participation in their community. Bruce Marshall comments, "So in willing his own incarnation, it seems that God wills the permanence, indeed the eschatological permanence, of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. But Jesus cannot be a Jew or be identified as such (as he will be in the eschaton), all by himself, in isolation from his people."²²¹

In Exodus 24, when the Mosaic Covenant was ratified, Moses, "took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exod 24:7-8). Messianic Jews observe the Torah not for the sake of missionary expediency, but out of covenant faithfulness. Many within the Messianic Jewish community believe that if they

²²⁰ Juster, *Kindle*, 110-111.

²²¹ Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 178.

are to be faithful to God's covenant with their people, then they are not only permitted, but obligated to follow basic Jewish practice.

Ethnically Jewish believers in Jesus have a "calling within a calling." Blaising says,

First of all, God Himself is at the same time God over all and King of the nation Israel. These relationships are not utterly distinct. They intentionally overlap. God's authority and power over the earth and the heavens is employed in His rule over Israel (from the division of the Red Sea waters to seasonal blessings in the land). His rule over Israel mediates His rule over other peoples (in both blessing and curse). Israel, then, becomes the focal point for God's relations with humanity and His providence over the rest of creation ... [in Romans 11] Paul then looks to the salvation of "all Israel" at the coming of the Savior. Messiah will fulfill the new covenant for Israel as a whole as predicted by the Old Testament prophets (11:26-27). It is important to note that the covenant to which the quotation in Romans 11:26-27 refers (Isa 59:20-21) most definitely includes the full blessings of national salvation including inheritance in the land of promise. The very next verses in Isaiah predict the exaltation of Jerusalem as the capital of the eschatological kingdom (Isa 60), the very passage which influenced John's vision in Revelation 21-22. The new covenant reaffirmed the same national hope expressed in the other covenants. And Paul declares "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).²²²

The greatest issue that modern-day Messianic Judaistic congregations struggle with, regarding evangelism/ecclesiology, pertains to the question of assimilation. Michael Wyschogrod defines the problem in this way: "In fact, throughout the centuries, Jews who entered the Church very quickly lost their Jewish identity. Within several generations they intermarried, and the Jewish traces disappeared ... In short, if all Jews in past ages had followed the advice of the Church to become Christians, there would be no more Jews in the world today."²²³ While not being opposed to the evangelization of Jews, but because Jewish converts to Christianity have traditionally lost their Jewish/Israelite identity, the Carmelite priest from a family of Jewish origin, Elias Friedman, believes that the current hardening of the Jewish people to the gospel are part of a divine plan to preserve the Jews as a distinct, ethnic group until the

²²² Blaising & Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 219 and 270.

²²³ Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11:2, 169.

time of Christ's second advent at the end of the age. He says, "Where the Jews are concerned, God, in fact, had drawn a veil over their eyes, until the time should arrive for them to accede, collectively, to the faith. During that period, only a remnant would believe. Never has the Christian mission to the Jews succeeded in overcoming what was a divine decree."²²⁴ Juster makes a case for separate Messianic congregations, saying,

Wouldn't it be possible for Messianic Jews to be part of non-Jewish New Testament fellowships while maintaining their individual and family Jewish identity as well as their involvement in the Jewish community? Yes, it is possible. There are some strong individuals who have done this, even maintaining regular synagogue attendance ... For most people, however, such a strong individualistic stance is simply not practical ... addition, Messianic congregations can uniquely provide for the special ongoing discipleship needs of Jewish believers who wrestle with the questions of their Jewish identity and practice vis-a-vis New Testament faith ... The eventual end for many not in Messianic congregations would be slippage from a Jewish life resulting in a large chance of assimilation for the children of these Jewish believers in Yeshua.²²⁵

As Kinzer says, "In preparation for God's dealings with the Jewish people at the end of the age, and as an expression of respect for Israel's irrevocable election, the church should urge all such Jews to associate with one another and to do their best to maintain their identity as Jews/Israelites."²²⁶ Telchin writes, "Yet underlying almost all of the responses is the powerful truth of Paul's instructions: The Jewish people are to be 'provoked to jealousy' (see Rom 11:11). Certainly, the Jewish people quoted above were provoked to jealousy by what they saw in the lives of their friends and relatives, what they read in Scripture and what they heard from the pulpit."²²⁷ Juster points out the absurdity of saying that the Torah was only temporary:

²²⁴ Friedman, Elias, *Jewish Identity* (St. Louis: The Miriam Press, 1987), 167.

²²⁵ Juster, *Kindle*, 3764-3777.

²²⁶ Kinzer, *Kindle*, 5153.

²²⁷ Stan Telchin, *Messianic Judaism is Not Christianity: A Loving Call to Unity* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2004), *Kindle*, 1170-1176.

[After Christ's return and the millennial kingdom is established] The worldwide kingdom shall recognize the feast of Succot (Zech 14), sending representatives to Israel. Sabbath will also probably gain worldwide recognition, continuing into the new heavens and the new earth (Isa 63:23) ... As followers of Yeshua, Jews are part of the universal people of God. Their national identity is still Israel just as a Frenchman's is France. As part of Israel, they participate in God's purposes in the nation ... God has a covenant with Abraham's physical seed as well as his spiritual seed and He will always work through both. God does not give the Church up for Israel or Israel for the Church.²²⁸

In his comments on Galatians 4:21-31, Juster adds,

A quick reading of this passage has caused some to conclude that Jews who follow their calling are under bondage and are slaves; they should therefore give up all Jewish practice and identity ... The contrast is not at all about being called to Jewishness, but is rather a contrast between flesh and spirit. Paul is contrasting the spirit, promise, and faith to the flesh and a fleshly understanding of the Law ... The Judaizers also sought to use human means to fulfill God's divine purposes. Keeping the Law by human effort, they contended, would bring salvation. Indeed, they taught that Gentiles must accept circumcision (become Jews) and keep the Law of Moses to be saved ... There is nothing in this passage to suggest that fulfilling the God-given call to be part of the nation of Israel is, itself, bondage ... The Jew who follows the way of the Spirit may sense a love for his nation and a call to witness to God's purposes in it.²²⁹

Juster also notes how the New Covenant does not replace the entire Torah, but only abrogates specific aspects of the priestly and sacrificial system:

[A cursory and anti-Messianic Jewish reading of the book of Hebrews can lead a] critic of Messianic Judaism thus draws the conclusion that all dimensions of Jewish identity and practice are part of what is obsolete and should be forsaken ... The New Covenant replaces this Covenant because of the weaknesses inherent in that old system which was given only for a time to point to the sacrificial-priestly work of Yeshua ... The New Covenant replaces the Mosaic as the way of entrance into the presence of God and providing a new way of approach to God by the sacrifice of Yeshua, which replaces the sacrifices of the Mosaic revelation central to it. The splendor of Yeshua's personal revelation makes the other revelation fade in comparison. It does not provide a new Law, but rather the power to do the Law in Him. In that covenant we are accepted as perfectly righteous before God and are privileged to enter boldly unto the throne of Grace. Hence, the Mosaic mediation system of priest and sacrifice is superseded.²³⁰

²²⁸ Juster, Kindle, 33-36.

²²⁹ Ibid., Kindle, 115-117.

²³⁰ Ibid., Kindle, 118-125.

Galatians 3:26-28 says, “[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The traditional interpretation of these verses is that those who have been “baptized into Christ,” who have, “clothed ... [themselves] with Christ,” and are, “children of God,” no longer have any distinct ethnic identity – in other words, the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been eliminated in Christ. Rudolph gives four reasons why this reading should not be understood as being correct. “First, the Gal 3 context has more to do with the justification of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ and the community formed by these believers than the elimination of Jewish and Gentile identity in the present age.”²³¹ Second, “if in Paul’s thought the third pair (male and female) is not erased, why should it be concluded that the first pair (Jew and Greek) is erased?”²³² Third, “Paul [may] have been thinking of a Genesis 2 778-like unity in Gal 3:28? The argument adds to the case that the relationship between Jew and Gentile in Galatians 3:28 is one of ‘unity with distinction,’ not sameness.”²³³ “Fourth, Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) in his letters ... [a]ll of this suggests that, for Paul, the Jew-Gentile distinction is preserved, not erased in Christ.”²³⁴

In his commentary on Luke/Acts, Kinzer says that in the writings of Luke the Physician, “we find a universal assumption—that the message and power of the Messiah leads Jews to more rather than less fervent Jewish practice. It also leads Jews into new relationships of love,

²³¹ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 30-31.

²³² *Ibid.*, 31.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

friendship, and partnership with non-Jews. But these new relationships do not violate the ancestral commitment of Jews to their people and their distinctive way of life.”²³⁵ “When he [Paul] told a Jew that he had found the long-promised Messiah, he appeared to his hearer as a Jew telling of a Jewish discovery,”²³⁶ as opposed to a Jew introducing a new faith, divorced from any Judaic foundation. W.D. Davies says,

The Gospel for Paul was not the annulling of Judaism but its completion ... Both in his life and thought, therefore, Paul’s close relation to Rabbinic Judaism has become clear, and we cannot too strongly insist again that for him the acceptance of the Gospel was not so much the rejection of the old Judaism and the discovery of a new religion wholly antithetical to it, as his polemics might sometimes pardonably lead us to assume, but the recognition of the advent of the true and final form of Judaism, in other words, the advent of the Messianic age of Jewish expectation.²³⁷

Gabriele Boccaccini writes, “The Jewish movement in the first century was a Jewish messianic movement, not a separate religion. Paul, who was born and raised a Jew, remained such after his ‘conversion;’ nothing changed in his religious, ethical, and cultural identity. ‘Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I’ (2 Cor 11:22).”²³⁸

Ezekiel’s Temple, in Ezekiel 40-48, makes a fascinating case study of how aspects of the Old and New covenants can function together in harmony, and how certain sacrificial and priestly elements of the temple system have been altered.²³⁹ Many premillennialists believe that

²³⁵ Kinzer, *Kindle*, 71.

²³⁶ H.L. Ellison, “Paul and the Law – ‘All Things to All Men’ in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Biblical and Historical Essays presented to F.F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday), 196-197.

²³⁷ W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), 323.

²³⁸ Boccaccini, *Paul’s Three Paths to Salvation*, *Kindle*, 45.

²³⁹ This section is not incidental to the researcher’s argument. Ezekiel’s temple shows aspects of both the New and Old Covenants, working together in tandem. Furthermore, there is an absence of a high priest, and the atoning sacrifice, which is what is to be expected if Christ replaced both.

the temple described in these chapters refers to a literal, future, millennial temple. They also contend that animal sacrifices and the priesthood will be restored during the millennium. However, this view has met with many harsh reactions. For example, John Taylor says, “If it follows from this that Old Testament festivals, blood sacrifices, priesthood and worship at a temple are to be reintroduced, after the New Testament revelation of Christ and his finished, fulfilling work, it shows how completely this view misinterprets the significance of Christ's salvation and how it casts doubt on the consistency of God's dealings with mankind.”²⁴⁰ In answer to Taylor, there is no evangelical premillennial who would deny the efficacy of Christ’s atoning work at Calvary. Nevertheless, as Charles Feinberg, a Jewish convert, points out, “Because certain conditions do not obtain in our age is no guarantee that God has not indicated their presence in an age that follows ours. The opposition, with a false view of what God is accomplishing in time, wrongly makes our age the last one before the eternal day.”²⁴¹ Interestingly, in Ezekiel 40-48, there is no mention of a high priest, presumably because Jesus is now serving as our great high priest (Heb 4:14-16). Furthermore, there is no mention of a Day of Atonement because Jesus has already atoned for the sins of mankind. Even Jewish scholars have recognized that the sacrifices in Ezekiel are profoundly different from what is in the Torah. For example, Radak wrote about Ezekiel 46:4: “This is not the offering written in the Torah, either for Shabbat or for a festival, but rather, there will be an innovation in the sacrifices” (ואין זה קורבן)²⁴² Radak believed that the sacrificial

²⁴⁰ John Taylor, *Ezekiel an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 247.

²⁴¹ Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel – The Glory of the Lord* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 234.

²⁴² Dr. Tova Ganzel, thetorah.com, “The Discrepancies Between the Sacrifices in Ezekiel and the Torah,” accessed 30 April 2019, <https://thetorah.com/the-discrepancies-between-the-sacrifices-in-ezekiel-and-the-torah>.

laws would change radically in the Messianic era. Tom Holland says, “Ezekiel, a priest who had preached against the sin of tampering with the laws of Yahweh, does the unthinkable by changing the law of Moses and the sacrificial system.”²⁴³ It is likely that the sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48 are not for an atonement for sin, but for the removal of ceremonial/ritual impurity. Randall Price has a brilliant theory concerning the role of Millennial sacrifices:

[T]his kind of sacrificial "atonement" is not for salvation nor for inward sanctification, but to preserve outward corporate "sanctification" (or ceremonial purification) so that a holy God can remain in the midst of an unholy people ... the Old Testament sacrificial system was effective, [but] it was not expiatory. In the words of Hebrews, it was effective for temporary ritual restoration, the "cleansing of the flesh" (Hebrews 9:13; see also 9:10), but it could not permanently expiate guilt by "tak[ing] away sins" (Hebrews 10:4) or "cleans[ing] the conscience" (Hebrews 9:14) ... the outward and earthly character of the ceremonial sacrifices and the internal and spiritual character of Christ's sacrifice are of two different kinds, operated in two different spheres, and were for two different purposes. Under the present administration of grace - in which Christ is absent from the earth and our approach is in the heavenly realm - sanctification is possible under the spiritual provisions of the New Covenant (the Holy Spirit, the new heart). However, under the coming administration of the kingdom in which Christ will be present on the earth and the approach will be at the Temple in Jerusalem, outward corporate "sanctification" (or ceremonial purification) will be necessary, as well as inward personal sanctification, under the full terms (spiritual and physical) of the New Covenant.²⁴⁴

If we understand Ezekiel's Temple, as many premillennialists do, as a future, millennial temple, then it is fascinating to see that many Judaistic practices are reinstated such as the Levitical priesthood, circumcision (44:9), Sabbath observance (44:24), “[Jewish] festivals, the New Moons and ... all the appointed festivals of Israel” (44:17), and the celebration of Passover (45:21).

Amillennialists and premillennialists frequently debate about a literal interpretation of prophecy, and the idea that “Israel and the nations will revert to observing the Mosaic Law even

²⁴³ Tom Holland, *Tom Wright and the Search for Truth: A Theological Evaluation* (London: Apiary Publishing, 2017), Kindle, 268.

²⁴⁴ Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 556-557.

though it was fulfilled and rendered obsolete by Christ (Matt 5: 17; Rom 10: 4; Heb 8: 13).”²⁴⁵

Matt Waymeyer²⁴⁶ responds to this objection saying,

There is simply no reason why a future, eschatological celebration of this feast [the Feast of Booths] would require the re-establishment of anything that has been abolished or rendered obsolete by the first by the first coming of Christ ... As some premillennialists have noted, the Feast of Booths is the only Old Testament feast without a corresponding New Testament anti-type. But even if an anti-type of the Feast of Booths were identified, Jesus Himself indicates that this would not preclude the possibility of its future celebration. In Luke 22, when Jesus spoke about the establishment of a New Covenant, He looked ahead to eating a Passover meal with His disciples in the coming kingdom (vv. 15– 16). Consequently, even though the New Covenant has replaced the Mosaic Covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Heb 8:13)— and even though Christ is identified as the anti-type of the Passover in I Corinthians 5:7— Jesus and His disciples will nonetheless eat a Passover meal together.²⁴⁷

The researcher holds a view, like James Dunn, regarding the purpose of the “works” of the Torah:

They are not the things someone might do in order to impress God. They are, quite specifically, the things the Jew does, not in order to earn God’s favor but to demonstrate it: specifically, to demonstrate that he or she really is a member of God’s people. In the first century more or less everyone, whether Jew or gentile, knew what those ‘works’ were: circumcision of male children, various food taboos, and sabbath observance. These were particularly important for Diaspora Jews, living outside from the holy land itself, for whom such ‘works’ marked them out from their pagan neighbors.²⁴⁸

At times, the Apostle Paul appears to make light of being Jewish, when he is speaking hyperbolically, to demonstrate that being in Christ is “relatively speaking,” more important than being an ethnic Jew. Rudolph explains (commenting on I Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15):

²⁴⁵ Matt Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* (The Woodlands: Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), Kindle, 1539.

²⁴⁶ The author of this paper does not agree with his idea that the “New Covenant has replaced the Mosaic Covenant.”

²⁴⁷ Waymeyer, Kindle, 1556-1563.

²⁴⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), Kindle, 92.

I contend that Paul uses hyperbole in these passages to stress that being “in Christ” is more important than being Jewish. This means that being Jewish could still be very important to Paul. He is simply relativizing A to B. In support of this possibility, there are several occasions when Paul uses “nothing” (οὐδέν) or “not anything” (οὔτε ... τι) language in a clearly hyperbolic way ... [in] 2 Cor 3:6-11 ... Paul contrasts the glory of Moses’ ministry with the ministry of the Spirit ... Both are truly glorious revelations of the God of Israel, but one is more glorious than the other. To emphasize the “surpassing glory,” Paul uses language that downplays the Sinai revelation. But it is wrong to mistake that as trivialization of the old covenant glory. It is instead a rhetorical device intended to highlight the greater glory ... Paul’s manner of expression (οὐδέν ... ἀλλὰ and οὔτε ... τι ... ἀλλὰ) in I Cor 7:19, Gal 5:6 and 6:15 is consistent with the Jewish idiom of dialectic negation in which the “not ... but ... ‘antithesis need not be understood as an ‘either ... or,’ but rather the force of ‘more important than.’”²⁴⁹

Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg disagrees with Bock’s idea that the law only had a transitory role until Jesus arrived: “Paul believed that a new age had dawned with the coming of the Messiah. This meant that the Christ-following Jews were no longer guided by the Torah (like a tutor), but also through personal faith in Christ Jesus. However, just as in the case of the father and the Torah, the believers were not to disregard the Torah simply because they were now interacting directly with someone who was even greater – Christ Jesus through God’s Holy Spirit!”²⁵⁰

Lizorkin-Eyzenberg draws a brilliant parallel to the Bar Mitzvah tradition:

Until the time of becoming a Bar Mitzvah, the father has responsibility over his son. He is to offer him close guidance until such time as he will be able to engage with the Torah on his own. The idea here is not that the thirteen-year-old son is no longer in need of parental guidance. It does not mean that the boy is now permitted to desist from honoring his father or should no longer obey him. But it means that from this point on he is now considered competent to engage with Torah in his own right. It is possible that the apostle Paul, who was steeped in Pharisaic Judaism of the first century, had a similar idea. He understood, together with some other Jews of his time, that the coming of the Jewish Christ brought about some kind of transfer of responsibility. In one of his letters to the Gentile followers of the Jewish Christ, the apostle Paul wrote about his countrymen’s experience with the Torah: “Before the coming of the faith, we were closely guarded by the Torah (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι), until the faith that was to come would be revealed. The Torah was our guardian (ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγός) until Christ

²⁴⁹ Rudolph, 29.

²⁵⁰ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *Jewish Insights into Scripture*, Kindle, 57.

came, that we might be justified by faith. Now that the faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:23-25).²⁵¹

“Paul does not describe the law itself as a pedagogue; he only describes the particular historical function of the law before the “coming of this faith” (3:23) ... Paul’s comparison of the law’s function to that of a pedagogue does not necessarily imply that he thought the law itself was of a limited duration. His only point here is that this particular function of the law (i.e., to enclose Israel under a curse) is of a limited duration (i.e., until Christ).”²⁵²

Galatians 5:2-4

In Galatians 5:2-4, Paul writes, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” In these verses, Paul says that if the Galatian, Gentile believers allowed themselves to be circumcised by the false teachers, then they would be under obligation to keep the whole Mosaic Law. God had already made it plain that Gentiles were acceptable to him through faith in Jesus alone, apart from law-keeping. In light of these two verses in Galatians, did Paul contradict himself when he circumcised Timothy in Acts 16:1-3 (“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek ... Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”)? Bock writes,

This does not contradict the Galatians passages, where Paul argues that to require circumcision is to take on all the law. Paul is not requiring circumcision here as a

²⁵¹ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *Jewish Insights into Scripture*, Kindle, 56-57.

²⁵² Todd Wilson, “The Supersession and Superfluity of the Law? Another Look at Galatians,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, Kindle, 237.

component of conversion of acceptance before God; rather, he is electing to take this step because it is prudent in the present situation. It removes an obstacle to Jewish acceptance of the gospel, something he affirms in I Corinthians 9:19–23.²⁵³

Galatians 5:2 says, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” The conditional particle, “if” (ἐάν – *ean*) implies that the Gentile Galatians had not yet accepted circumcision. Moo articulates, “Of course, Paul’s flat prohibition of circumcision is contextually determined. He is unalterably opposed to requiring Gentiles to be circumcised in order to qualify them for full membership in the people of God. He has nothing against circumcision of Jews when it is not a matter of a requirement for salvation.”²⁵⁴ Keener adds, “Circumcision was not wrong in itself, certainly not for Jews (see 5:6) but accepting it as a supplement justification in Christ *de facto* renounced faith in Christ’s sufficiency.”²⁵⁵ In Galatians 3:7, Paul says, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” According to Paul, one can join the spiritual family of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ – this contrasts with being physically related to Abraham by blood. Nonetheless, there were some who were falsely telling the Gentile Galatians that without being circumcised, they could not be identified as Abraham’s children.

Galatians 5:3 says, “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.” For Jews, circumcision was virtually synonymous with becoming part of the covenant people of God. For a Gentile to undergo Jewish conversion, circumcision meant that they were required to obey that same commands as those who were ethnic Israelites. Longnecker writes,

²⁵³ Michael Wilkins, Craig Evans, Darrell Bock and Andreas Köstenberger, *The Gospels and Acts (The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible)* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), Kindle, 19185.

²⁵⁴ Moo, *Galatians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, Kindle, 521.

²⁵⁵ Craig Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2019), Kindle, 444.

And in the NT, parallel to Paul's statement of 5: 3 is Jas 2: 10: "For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking all of it" ... It seems, therefore, that David Daube has not overstated the case in saying: "The inter-dependence of all precepts, their fundamental equality, the importance of even the minor ones, or apparently minor ones, because of their association with the weightiest— these were common themes among the Tannaites" (*The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 251).²⁵⁶

Because Paul is pointing out, in verse three, that circumcision entails adhering to the entirety of the Mosaic Law, this may imply that this is something that has not been mentioned to the Galatian Gentiles yet.

Galatians 5:4 says, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace." When Galatian Gentiles seek to be justified via Torah observance, they have been cut off from the grace that is associated with Christ's work of atonement on our behalf. Longnecker says,

The Judaizers must have assured the Galatians that in accepting supervision for their lives from the prescriptions of the Mosaic law they were not forsaking Christ or renouncing grace, but rather were completing their commitment to both. Paul, however, tells them just the opposite: commitment to Christ and commitment to legal prescriptions for righteousness, whether that righteousness is understood in forensic terms (i.e., "justification") or ethical terms (i.e., "lifestyle" and expression), are mutually exclusive; experientially, the one destroys the other.²⁵⁷

Moo summarizes Paul's argument in verse 4: "As we noted in our comments on verse 2, circumcision signifies the intention to put oneself under the law of Moses and therefore (and this is the point that Paul is driving home to the Galatians) to seek to secure one's status with God in terms of that law."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Longnecker, *Kindle*, 12397-12401.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Kindle*, 12406-12409.

²⁵⁸ Moo, *Galatians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, *Kindle*, 526-527.

In his book, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism*, Nanos points out a common error of assuming all talk of circumcision necessarily pertains to Jewish/Judaizer opposition. In Philippians 3:2-3, Paul says, “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision.” It is commonly assumed that in Philippians 3:2, Paul was calling certain Jewish people, “dogs,” “evildoers,” and, “those who mutilate the flesh.” It is commonly believed that Paul was referring to Jewish Christians who were, “Judaizers,” that is, they were trying to convince non-Jewish Christians to undergo proselyte conversion. Nanos makes a brilliant case that Paul is not referring to “Judaizers,” but to Cynics. “The Cynics were philosophers who were literally called ‘Dogs [κύων, *kuon*; ὁ Κυνικός, *ho kunikos*],’ and who aspired to the highest level of doggishness as a matter of honor!”²⁵⁹ While Paul’s reference to “mutilation” has traditionally implied that Paul opposes circumcision, and no longer practices Judaism or values a Jewish identity, the “Torah makes plain the Jewish aversion to “mutilation” as practiced by the idolatrous nations (Lev 19:28; 21:5 [LXX uses the verbal form of the same Greek word for mutilation as does Paul]; 1 Kgs 18:28; Hos 7:14).”²⁶⁰ The Talmud says of Cynics: “The *kynukos*, that is, the dog/Cynic, is one who is characterized by four things: he ‘sleeps in the graveyard, burns incense to the demons, rends his clothing, and destroys what people give him.’”²⁶¹ These descriptions could certainly entitle them to the label, “mutilators.” The Cynics would literally “mutilate” coins, by taking a chisel to them, and bucking social convention by making incisions upon them. They would famously wear tattered clothing, even in the wintertime.

²⁵⁹Mark Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), Kindle, 3888-3890.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., Kindle, 4699-4702.

²⁶¹ Ibid., Kindle, 5118-5119.

Nanos' argument for the "dogs" being Cynics is extraordinarily strong. Nanos writes, "Cynics were famously characterized as harassing those passing their way by 'barking' insults at them for living according to the norms of 'civilized' behavior."²⁶² It could be said that the bellies of the Cynics were their "gods," because they participated in the symposia, an event synonymous with gluttony. The Cynic Cynulcus was entitled the "leader of dogs." One-time Cynulcus was insulted for his gluttony, called a "dog," and he responded to his insulter (Ulpian): "You glutton, whose god is your belly [κοιλιόδαίμον, *koiliodaimon*]."²⁶³ Nanos bolsters his case for Paul's reference being Cynics, saying:

When Paul writes of those "who glory in their shame," this language can naturally refer to any behavior that is contrary to what Paul believes honorable behavior should be. The phrase can refer euphemistically to the Cynic's strategic public demonstration of animal-like behavior, including stereotypical provocative acts such as farting and defecating, masturbating, and the like, in order to expose that conventions of human social behavior are human constructions: the Cynic thus glories in his shame (*Diogenes Laertius, Lives* 6.69; *Diogenes, Ep.* 44). This language is close to that used by Lucian when specifically writing of a Cynic who practiced erections in public, euphemistically referring to the penis as the "shameful thing [αἰδοῖον]" (*Peregrinus* 17). Hesychius included reference to "the shameless one" in his lexicon entry for κῦών: "the male member, and the barking animal, and the shameless one, and the star, and the sea animal." Later lexicons continue to equate Cynics and shamelessness.²⁶⁴

Pertaining to the book of Galatians, there has been much dispute among commentators regarding the identity of the "influencers," that is, those who were throwing the Galatian Christians into confusion and perverting the gospel of Christ. Traditionally, these have been interpreted to be "Judaizers," that is, Jewish Christians from the churches in Jerusalem who are

²⁶² Nanos, *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos*, Kindle, 4907.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 4968.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 4986-4995.

following Paul around. Bruce Winter makes a fascinating suggestion as to who the “influencers” might be:

[T]he pressure towards circumcision of the Gentiles of Galatia ... [is] the result of concerns raised by the local Christ-believing Jews of the churches there. Because their own legal rights to exemption from participation in the imperial cult were jeopardized by leaving the protection provided by the *religio licita* status of the local synagogues, which is now also the predicament of these Gentiles, it was necessary to take “evasive” action by giving the appearance of being “under a Jewish, as distinct from a synagogue, umbrella.” This could be accomplished by circumcising the Gentiles, which would render them proselytes “in the eyes of the outside world,” because the “social identification of Jews by the Gentile world was their observation of the law.”²⁶⁵

In a similar vein, Lizorkin-Eyzenberg writes, “The false ‘Good News’ that Paul the Pharisee was accusing others of was the insistence that Jewish Christ-following Galatians would be better off and closer to Israel’s God if they joined the Jewish people by becoming full-fledged Jews. If they did so, the local Jewish authorities (non-Jesus following Jewish authorities) would treat them with dignity and respect, keeping both the Roman government and the Roman approved Jewish authorities happy by maintaining the status quo. It was a win-win-win situation.”²⁶⁶ Juster gives a helpful clarification about what “Judaizing” is (especially, as it pertains to circumcision):

The term “Judaizing” is easily bandied about today by many who do not truly understand what the controversy was all about. This is a sad example of human carelessness in handling the holy Word of God. What is Judaizing? Let us begin with a negative and then a positive. Negatively, it is not a term to be applied to believing Jews who maintain their practice and heritage in their call to be part of the nation of Israel. Neither does Judaizing refer to non-Jews who have a love and appreciation for Jewish things. As the Scriptures define it, Judaizing is the view that unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved, i.e., “it is necessary to charge them to keep the law of Moses ... (15:1). Judaizing is also any position which holds that circumcision and following the call to be a Jew places an individual on a “higher plain of spirituality” with God which is otherwise unobtainable.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 163.

²⁶⁶ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Apostle Paul*, Kindle, 92.

²⁶⁷ Juster, Kindle, 77-78.

He also gives some helpful clarification about the circumstances being addressed in Galatians: “Galatians was written before the Acts 15 decision on Gentile freedom in the Gospel ... We should note that the Book of Galatians does not address the issue of Jewish followers of Yeshua maintaining their Jewish practice and identity. This is not even in view.”²⁶⁸

Rudolph agrees with Dunn, that “circumcision” language is frequently used as a metaphor for a “Torah-observant” lifestyle:

Paul’s division of humanity into circumcision and foreskin ... supports the view that I Cor 9:19-23 does not preclude a Torah-observant Paul ... What did Paul mean by circumcision and foreskin? Why didn’t he say, “Jew and Gentile?” ... Circumcision was not merely a single act of law-keeping. It was the first act of full covenant membership and obligation. “Circumcision” could stand metonymically for a whole people precisely because it characterized a people’s whole existence, a complete way of life. As Christians today speak of a “baptismal life,” so we could speak of a “circumcision life.” Tomson equates circumcision and foreskin with “being a law-abiding Jew or living as a gentile” ... In I Cor 7:17-24, Paul refers to his “rule in all the churches” that Jews are to remain Jews and Gentiles are to remain Gentiles. Since this text describes “circumcision” and “foreskin” (metonymies for Jewish/Gentile identity and lifestyle) as enduring callings and not merely temporary situations in life. It adds strength to the argument that I Cor 9:19-23 does not preclude a Torah-observant Paul ... Jews are called to remain in their calling as Jews. Gentiles are called to remain in their calling as Gentiles ... Both have God’s authorization and seal of approval. Both callings are consistent with the believing life. Jews and Gentiles have commandments to keep. “With respect to salvation no social situation is more advantageous than another.”²⁶⁹

Kinzer uses deductive reasoning to produce the following syllogism from I Corinthians 7:17-20, Galatians 5:3 and Galatians 5:11: “Major premise: All those who are circumcised should remain circumcised (i.e., should accept and affirm their circumcision and its consequences). Minor premise: All who are circumcised are obligated to observe the Torah (i.e., live according to distinctive Jewish practice). Necessary conclusion: All those who are born as Jews are obligated

²⁶⁸ Juster, *Kindle*, 110.

²⁶⁹ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 73-86.

to live as Jews.”²⁷⁰ “[W]hen Paul states that the circumcised must not reverse their circumcision, he rules that Jews ‘in Christ’ must remain Jewish and keep the Jewish law, since keeping the law is inextricably intertwined with circumcision and ethnicity (Gal 5:3).”²⁷¹ Pamela Eisenbaum provides some helpful tips for interpreting Galatians:

Paul’s audience is made up of Gentiles, so everything he says about law applies to Gentiles, unless specified otherwise ... when Paul rails against circumcision, as he does in Galatians, it is not because circumcision is inherently bad. It is because he does not want Gentiles to get circumcised ... Paul makes clear that his concern lies specifically with the justification of Gentiles (Gal 3:8), and when he says that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal 3:13), he means that Christ has removed the curse that Gentiles suffered under because, to paraphrase Deuteronomy, those who do not do what the Torah requires are cursed (27:26).²⁷²

In Galatians 2, in the narrative about Paul’s opposition to Peter, it mentions, “men from James”: “For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles” (Gal 2:12). Gager makes the important observation, “Paul’s opponents there must have claimed the authority of James (I take the phrase ‘certain men from James’ in 2.12 to mean ‘people who claimed James’s authority’), and probably of Peter too. The apostle seeks to set the record straight: his law-free gospel had been recognized and approved by James and Peter! Those who claimed otherwise are not to be trusted. They are hypocrites (2.13)!”²⁷³

Finally, Gager adds,

As a final word, Paul returns to the stark antithesis of law and Christ. "I Paul say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no profit for you." (5.2) Taken out of context, these words of Paul lead to the view that the law has been annulled for Israel. But read within this letter, they merely reiterate what Paul has claimed many times over

²⁷⁰ Kinzer, Kindle, 73.

²⁷¹ Anders Runesson, “Paul’s Rule in All the ἐκκλησία,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2013), Kindle, 216-217.

²⁷² Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2010), Kindle, 216-218.

²⁷³ Gager, Kindle, 884-886.

in his series of rebuttals: Gentiles are now redeemed from the curse of the law by Christ; to return to the law (i.e., to be circumcised) is to stand again under the curse „, in Chapter 5, Paul ... poses a rhetorical question: "If I am/were still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" (5.11). Three things are clear in this question: Paul feels persecuted over the issue of circumcision; he no longer preaches circumcision; and, at least by implication, at some prior time he did preach circumcision (of Gentiles?) ... All we can know for certain is that Paul felt persecuted by his opponents (see 5.11) and argued that their gospel of circumcision (of Gentiles) threatened to undermine the scandal (*skandalon*) of the cross. In this context, *skandalon* must refer to the resistance occasioned by his gospel that Gentiles were now redeemed by Christ, without circumcision.²⁷⁴

Summary and Conclusion of Chapter 2

In the final portion of this chapter, the researcher would like to summarize the areas in which Bock and he disagree in order to attempt to answer Research Question #1, "If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, why did they cease their practice?" and the two sub-questions, namely, "Did the New Covenant annul/abrogate the Mosaic Covenant?" and "If the first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, is there any reason why this should be a temporary practice?"

First, Bock takes Jesus' words in Mark 7:18-19 ("Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled [Thus, he declared all foods clean.]?") to mean that, "What goes into a person cannot defile him, so no food can defile ... The following of food laws is not obligatory, but optional."²⁷⁵ The researcher, by way of contrast, does not believe that Jesus was abrogating the Laws of *Kashrut*, but was simply saying that food that was eaten with unwashed hands (not in accordance with the Pharisaic tradition) did not render a person ceremonially unclean. Jesus' point was an illustration of a common halakhic dispute, and his argument shows a Pharisaic-

²⁷⁴ Gager, *Kindle*, 1043-1055.

²⁷⁵ Bock, *Mark* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), *Kindle*, 225.

Hillelite understanding of food and defilement. In Mark 7, Jesus is not addressing dietary laws, but ceremonial purity, and his conclusion is that “the commandments of men are secondary to what is written in the Torah.”²⁷⁶

Second, Bock interprets Peter’s vision of the unclean animals in Acts 10 to mean that “God shows Peter that all foods are to be considered clean. This vision stands in clear contrast to what the law taught (Lev 11; Acts 10:9-16) ... In short, the Mosaic law has ended because God has brought its role to an end!”²⁷⁷ The researcher, by way of contrast, believes that Peter’s vision simply meant that, “God has shown me [Peter] that I [Peter] should not call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Peter’s vision is never interpreted, in the book of Acts, as a cessation of Levitical food laws, but it is only interpreted to mean that Gentiles can now be included among God’s people without the need for Jewish conversion (circumcision and Torah observance). The Jerusalem Council decision, in Acts 15, that Gentiles were exempt from Torah observance and circumcision was based on the premise that these were still binding/in effect for Jewish believers in Jesus. Peter’s vision was not literally concerned with the Levitical food laws but regarded how Torah observance was not to be a barrier between Jews and Gentiles – Gentiles are now spiritually clean via their relationship to Christ, and Jews and Gentiles could now fellowship and eat together.

Third, Bock says of the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15: “What we have in Acts 15, however, is a declaration about what Gentiles are wise to do out of consideration for the Jews they are trying to reach. Had the law been the basis for such restrictions, it would have been appealed to. Instead, the point is not that God commands this dietary restriction ... [t]he point

²⁷⁶ Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 241.

²⁷⁷ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts (Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series)*, Kindle, 276.

concerns how Jews view such matters, not that God has commanded it for the church,²⁷⁸ and, “My view is not Messianic Jews should or must follow the Law but can do so ... there is no mandate to do this in my view.”²⁷⁹ Conversely, the researcher believes that Torah observance is not an evangelistic strategy, not a means of practicing contextualization to ethnic Jews, is not “valuable but optional,” nor are Jewish symbols and practices simply to be seen as means to aid Jews in their conversion to Christianity. Messianic Jews are Torah observant out of fidelity to the Mosaic covenant. As Rudolph notes, “The presupposition throughout Acts 15 is that Jesus-believing Jews like Peter (who was present at the Jerusalem Council) continue to observe Mosaic law.”²⁸⁰ The Jerusalem Council decision, “is said to be the decision of the Holy Spirit (v. 28) ... not a word of the decision or the discussion leading up to it questioned the propriety of Jews maintaining their call and heritage. This was never at issue in the New Testament period but was assumed to be the natural stance of Jews.”²⁸¹ The four prohibitions that are given to Gentile Christians by the Jerusalem Council can be linked to the laws given to the “alien who sojourns in your midst” in Leviticus 17-18.

Fourth, according to Bock, when Paul circumcised Timothy, in Acts 16:1-3, “Paul is not standing up for the law ... Paul’s action shows his desire to continue to reach out to Jews and affirm the new faith’s link to the promises of the past in Judaism.”²⁸² The researcher, by way of contrast, believes that Paul circumcised Timothy, because he was, “standing up for the law,” and the circumcision was not simply an evangelistic strategy/attempt at contextualization. The fact

²⁷⁸ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 389-390.

²⁷⁹ Darrell Bock, email message to author, 10 October 2019.

²⁸⁰ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in I Corinthians 9:19-23*, 49.

²⁸¹ Juster, *Kindle*, 82.

²⁸² Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 522-523.

that Jesus has offered a final, atoning sacrifice, providing mankind direct access to God, does not imply that other aspects of the Torah such as Jewish holidays, dietary laws, Sabbath observance, and circumcision have been abrogated. Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis, Cyprus (315-403 A.D.), has provided us with ample evidence, in his writings, that circumcision continued to be practiced among Messianic Jews throughout the fourth century. The advent of the New Covenant did not terminate Jewish identity or the nation of Israel, and circumcision remains as the primary sign of the Covenant between God and ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus. Although circumcision has no bearing on salvation, and does not impute a hierarchy of status, Paul circumcised Timothy because his mother was Jewish, and Paul wanted Timothy to confirm his covenantal identity and bring him into the Abrahamic/Mosaic Covenant. In Genesis 17, God commanded circumcision to Abraham and his descendants, in what was to be an “everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:13) – by circumcising Timothy, Paul was honoring this command.

Fifth, in his commentary on Ephesians, Bock writes, “The impact was a shift in how God administers salvation: where the law was a primary guide before, now it is the Spirit in Christ (Rom 7:1–6; 10:4; Gal 2:19; 3:1 – 4:6; Eph 2:18). The role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed.”²⁸³ Conversely, the researcher does not believe that the initiation of the New Covenant has ended, released, terminated, or “ended dispensationally,” the Mosaic Covenant, for ethnic Jews who trust Jesus for salvation (following matrilineal descent).²⁸⁴ Torah observance, and being baptized/filled with the Holy Spirit, should not be viewed as being antithetical – a Messianic Jew can be Torah observant in the power of the

²⁸³ Darrell Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, Kindle, 71-72.

²⁸⁴ Some would argue that here I am arguing for “Dual Covenant” theology. This is not the case. Ezekiel 36:24-27 says of Israel: “I will take you out of the nations,” “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you,” and then in verse 27, it says that God will, “move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” “Decrees” (קִחַ – *choq*), and “law” (מִשְׁפָּט – *mishpat*) connect Torah observance with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit. “The issue is not a conflict between Law and Spirit but between flesh and spirit. Do we seek to please God by our own fleshly efforts to keep the Law, or do we depend on the resurrection power of His Spirit within?”²⁸⁵ Under the Mosaic Covenant, the problem was not with the Torah, but with the people’s ability to keep the Torah. The New Covenant has not cancelled or replaced the Torah, but instead has brought about a qualitative newness, a “new heart,” and a “new spirit,” enabling the Jewish people to be faithful to Yahweh and his commands. Paul did not bring a new religion, but a new prophetic message, in the same vein as Isaiah and Jeremiah. During the millennium, which is definitively in the New Covenant era, we will see many Judaistic practices reinstated such as the Levitical priesthood, circumcision (Ezek 44:9), Sabbath observance (Ezek 44:24), “[Jewish] festivals, the New Moons and ... all the appointed festivals of Israel” (Ezek 44:17), and the celebration of Passover (Ezek 45:21). Nonetheless, in Ezekiel 40-48, there is no mention of a high priest, presumably because Jesus is now serving as our great high priest (Heb 4:14-16). Furthermore, there is no mention of a Day of Atonement because Jesus has already atoned for the sins of mankind.

Sixth, Bock says of Romans 10:3-4, “There is a library of debate around whether *telos* means ‘end,’ ‘goal,’ or both. I tend to ... [believe] that it is both. The imagery of attaining a goal in pursuit of something is present in 9:31, yet Paul’s normal handling of the issue of law suggests ‘end,’”²⁸⁶ and, “Paul is saying that the Mosaic law has reached its goal and therefore ceases to play the same central role it once had prior to Jesus’ coming, though it is still relevant as it is seen through Christ.”²⁸⁷ The researcher, by way of contrast, believes that Paul only meant,

²⁸⁵ Juster, Kindle, 165-167.

²⁸⁶ Darrell Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents,” in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Kindle, 2473-2476.

²⁸⁷ Köstenberger, Bock and Chatraw, Kindle, 50.

“goal,” in his use of τέλος, *telos*. Christ is the substance, the goal, the righteousness, and the true sacrifice to which the Torah pointed. Kaiser notes, “nothing [in the Torah] was deleted, abrogated, jettisoned, or replaced except that which was clearly so delimited from its first appearance.”²⁸⁸ With the first advent of Christ, Judaism can no longer function as a vehicle for salvation and atonement apart from Christ. The high priesthood and the Day of Atonement sacrifice had, “a deliberately built-in planned obsolescence.”²⁸⁹ Similarly, Hays says, “[T]he author of Hebrews is not interested in a blanket abolition of the Mosaic Torah. Rather, his concern focuses narrowly on the cultic practice of offering sacrifices for sins under the first covenant, particularly on the Day of Atonement, as Heb. 9 will show.”²⁹⁰ Kaiser contends,

Some have argued that it was the Lord’s intent to replace the old with a new covenant, but if that were true in every respect, then why does the new covenant repeat almost three-fourths of what had been in the Abrahamic-Davidic covenants? Rather than superseding the covenants of promise that had preceded it, it affirmed them as well as supplemented them. It would be wrong to think that just because the sacrificial system had been replaced therefore the whole law, including the moral law of the Decalogue (Ex 20; Dt 5) and the Holiness Code (Lev 18 – 20), had likewise been superseded and replaced.²⁹¹

The author of this dissertation agrees with E.P. Sanders’ concept of Covenantal Nomism, namely, that Jews did not believe in a works righteousness/merit theology, but instead believed that they entered into the Abrahamic covenant via birth and performed good deeds out of a conviction that they were already in a covenantal relationship which had been initiated by God. In sum, “Paul clearly viewed the Torah from a different perspective in light of the inbreaking of

²⁸⁸ Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, Kindle, 9378.

²⁸⁹ James Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 9371.

²⁹⁰ Richard B. Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City: New Covenantalism in Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), Kindle, 1929-1932.

²⁹¹ Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 8751.

the Messianic era. But this does not mean that Paul taught that the Torah was now null and void. To the contrary, Paul lived and died as a Torah-observant Jew and never taught that Jewish believers in the Messiah should abandon the Torah.”²⁹²

Seventh, Bock says of Romans 13:8-10, “The role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed ... His provision enables us to do what the law pushed for in its stipulations: to love God and others (Rom 13:8–10).”²⁹³ Some theologians believe that in the New Covenant era, the Torah has been replaced with the “law of Christ,” or the “law of the Spirit.” All of God’s laws have their foundation in God’s character, which is love (I Jn. 4:8). The researcher does agree with Bock’s statement that the provision of the Holy Spirit, in the New Covenant era, enables us to “love God and others.” However, the author disagrees with his statement that, “the role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed.” The researcher agrees with Juster who writes, “Our essential and central content of faith is the love of God, the atonement in Yeshua and the power of the Spirit. This produces a new approach to Scripture whereby the Spirit places God’s desires upon our hearts as well as empowers us to perform God’s will.”²⁹⁴ The author of this dissertation rejects the idea that Paul was only, “part-time” Torah observant. This would be unethical and understood by Jews that he was a law breaker. The researcher agrees with H.L. Ellison who wrote, “Either he did not observe the law at all, or he was strict in its observance at all times ... Because daily practice (observance of the Law) was the characteristic mark of a Jew, and

²⁹² Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Vol. 4: New Testament Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), Kindle, 5448.

²⁹³ Bock, *Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, Kindle, 71-72.

²⁹⁴ Juster, Kindle, 108-109.

because Paul’s activity was usually carried out in close proximity to the Jewish community, it can be seen that he was regularly being observed by Jewish leaders and authorities.”²⁹⁵

Eighth, in his commentary on Acts, Bock says of Paul’s Nazirite vow in Acts 21, “he was encouraged to take the vow as a way of showing the people that ‘what they were told about [him] amounts to nothing’ (v. 24), when in fact what they had been told about him was largely true—that Paul’s view of the law differed from the majority view among Christian Jews.”²⁹⁶ He also says of Romans 14, “He respects Jewish believers who keep their practices and joins them here (Rom 14–15). Paul only complained when the church made such acts mandatory and saw them as being required for salvation.”²⁹⁷ In the opinion of the author of this dissertation, Messianic Jews should be committed, “in principle” to Torah observance, and should do so not out of missionary expediency, but out of fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant. The researcher believes that the “weak” and the “strong” of Romans 14, are not Messianic Jews who are Torah observant (presumably, “the weak”), and Messianic Jews who are non-Torah observant (presumably, “the strong”), but rather Messianic Jews who are Torah observant (“the strong”), and Messianic Jews who are overly-scrupulous in their Torah observance, who have expanded the Torah (perhaps with good intentions, attempting to put a “fence around the Law”), adding meticulous human traditions to their *halakhah*. The researcher believes that in Romans 14, Paul was taking Hillelite approach to ceremonial purity. “[T]he ‘weak’ were not simply people who were Torah-observant, but individuals who were judgmental when they saw others following a standard of Torah observance in relation to purity that was seemingly lower than their own ... the strong in

²⁹⁵ Lawrence Rich, “Jewish Practice and Identity in the Book of Acts,” in *The Enduring Paradox*, ed. Dr. John Fischer (Baltimore: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2000), 32-33.

²⁹⁶ Bock, *The Gospels and Acts*, Kindle, 9728.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 19723.

faith were those who held a non-ontological view of purity. They knew that ‘nothing’ was unclean in itself. Paul counted himself among the strong (Rom 15:1) because he had this knowledge.”²⁹⁸

Ninth, Bock says of Timothy’s circumcision in Acts 16: “Paul is not requiring circumcision here as a component of conversion or acceptance before God; rather, he is electing to take this step because it is prudent in the present situation. It removes an obstacle to Jewish acceptance of the gospel, something he affirms in I Corinthians 9:19–23.”²⁹⁹ He also says, “I Corinthians 9 represents him supporting such tactics. Paul does not try to persuade Jewish believers to live like Gentiles, but rather to be sensitive to issues related to them. This means that table fellowship, food laws, and issues tied to ceremonial purity may be handled differently when Gentiles are involved, but Paul probably did not see this as encouraging Jewish believers to ignore the law.”³⁰⁰ The author of this dissertation disagrees with Bock, and believes that Paul was always Torah observant, even when he was among Gentiles. The researcher believes that Paul followed his own, “rule in all the churches” (I Cor 7:17-20), that Jews were to remain in their Jewish lifestyle. Occasional Torah observance would have been a stumbling block to Jews, and interpreted as being inconsistent, sly, unprincipled, and law-breaking. The researcher disagrees with Nanos, that I Corinthians 9 is just about “rhetorical adaptability” – the researcher believes it also included “lifestyle adaptability,” or, “halakhic adaptability.” The author believes that Rudolph’s concept of “a lifestyle of flexibility within the contours of Jewish law” is correct – Jesus shared meals with “sinners,” but there is no evidence that he ever ate non-kosher food. The

²⁹⁸ Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20,” in *Paul the Jew*, Kindle, 162-164.

²⁹⁹ Bock, *The Gospels and Acts*, Kindle, 19185.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 19709.

author of this dissertation agrees – there were times when Paul adapted a more stringent interpretation of the law in order to reach Pharisees and those who strictly adhered to the law, but the researcher does not believe he ever violated the Levitical food laws.

Tenth, Bock writes, “The law was a pedagogue pointing to the Christ until he came, exposing sin and the need for a delivering promised one. Paul, in effect, gives the law a temporary role that served in God’s plan until the promised Messiah came (Gal 3:17-22). When Christ bore the curse of the law for us, he freed us and showed that justification was by grace, not by works of the law. The law as a pedagogue could be left behind.”³⁰¹ While Bock and the author of this paper would agree that the law was a pedagogue and had the ultimate goal of pointing people to Christ, they disagree about the “temporary” nature of the Mosaic law. It is the author of this dissertation’s belief that the Torah has an enduring role, to our present day, of marking out the Jewish people as a unique and distinct people among other nations on the earth. Not only was Jesus born as a Jew, but He continues to be Jewish, even after His resurrection. Jesus is not a Jew detached from His people – He is a Jew in the context of His relationship to other Jews and by his participation in their community. The “Jew-Gentile distinction is preserved, not erased in Christ.”³⁰² This being the case, Jews should be encouraged to associate with one another so they can maintain their Jewish practice and identity. The New Covenant has enabled ethnic Jews to be Torah observant in the power of the Holy Spirit, in relationship to Christ, with consciences cleansed due to Christ’s sacrifice, with commands that have been internalized, written on their hearts. “Paul’s comparison of the law’s function to that of a pedagogue does not necessarily imply that he thought the law itself was of a limited duration.

³⁰¹ Bock, “Messiah Confessed: Pauline Epistles,” in *Jesus the Messiah*, 363.

³⁰² Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 32.

His only point here is that this particular function of the law (i.e., to enclose Israel under a curse) is of a limited duration (i.e., until Christ).”³⁰³

Eleventh, Bock explains why Paul did not contradict his teaching in Galatians, by circumcising Timothy in Acts 16, saying, “This does not contradict the Galatians passages, where Paul argues that to require circumcision is to take on all the law. Paul is not requiring circumcision here as a component of conversion or acceptance before God; rather, he is electing to take this step because it is prudent in the present situation. It removes an obstacle to Jewish acceptance of the gospel, something he affirms in I Corinthians 9:19–23.”³⁰⁴ Dunn correctly notes that, “Circumcision can also be considered a ‘summary’ act, representing the entire act of observing the Torah, because ‘it was the first act of torah-observance (of covenantal nomism) for both native born Jew and proselyte.’”³⁰⁵ The author of this dissertation agrees with Juster who says,

What is Judaizing? Let us begin with a negative and then a positive. Negatively, it is not a term to be applied to believing Jews who maintain their practice and heritage in their call to be part of the nation of Israel ... As the Scriptures define it, Judaizing is the view that unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved, i.e., “it is necessary to charge them to keep the law of Moses” ... (15:1). Judaizing is also any position which holds that circumcision and following the call to be a Jew places an individual on a “higher plain of spirituality” with God which is otherwise unobtainable.³⁰⁶

Juster also notes, “Galatians was written before the Acts 15 decision on Gentile freedom in the Gospel ... We should note that the Book of Galatians does not address the issue of Jewish

³⁰³ Wilson, Kindle, 237.

³⁰⁴ Wilkins, Evans, Bock and Köstenberger, Kindle, 19185.

³⁰⁵ Dunn, 155.

³⁰⁶ Juster, Kindle, 77-78.

followers of Yeshua maintaining their Jewish practice and identity. This is not even in view.”³⁰⁷

Bruce Winter and Lizorkin-Eyzenberg suggest that the “Judaizers” in Galatians may have been politically motivated. Winter suggests that the Jews in Galatians were exempt from participating in the imperial cult, but this was jeopardized by uncircumcised Gentiles who were coming under the umbrella of the synagogue. Lizorkin-Eyzenberg similarly believes that the “Judaizers” may have been pressing Gentile believers in Christ to become circumcised to keep both the Jewish and Roman authorities happy by maintaining the status quo.

In answer to sub-question #2, namely, “If the first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, is there any reason why this should be a temporary practice?” in the author of this dissertation’s opinion, the answer is, “From a biblical perspective, ‘No.’” The researcher does not believe a person can prove, from the Bible, that Torah observance was intended to be temporary for Messianic Jews. In answer to sub-question #1, “Did the New Covenant annul/abrogate the Mosaic Covenant?” The researcher believes the answer, once again, is “No.” The New Covenant did not cancel or replace the Torah, but instead brought about a qualitative newness – a new heart, and a new spirit. Only certain aspects of the Law were abrogated, namely, the Day of Atonement sacrifice and the high priesthood, not all the sacrifices and the entire priesthood.

The answer to research question #1, that is, “If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, why did they cease their practice?”, is complex and is more historical, than theological. Twenty-first century, Torah-observant, Messianic Jews would most often identify with the Nazarenes, a group that maintained their Jewish heritage throughout the second century. Some Messianic Jews, who were living in Greek-speaking lands, acculturated in non-Jewish

³⁰⁷ Juster, Kindle, 110.

settings, and lost their Jewish identity. Some Messianic Jews, in the second century, became Ebionites. This was a heretical movement – they denied the deity of Christ, they rejected most of the New Testament except for Matthew, and they adopted an anti-Paul stance and insisted upon Jewish conversion for Gentile believers. By the time of the second century, there was great tension between the church and the synagogue, and Messianic Jews were eventually rejected by both groups. Even though the background of the New Testament has a Hebrew context because the New Testament was written in Greek, as the gospel spread among Greek-speakers, they had a tendency to apply the content of the Bible to a Greek context. In addition, once the original apostles died, the leadership of the Church passed into the hands of non-Jewish leaders who did not appreciate the Jewish biblical heritage. Eventually, the Gentile Church began to adopt a condescending attitude towards the Jews, and passages of Scripture which condemned the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders in the time of Jesus were misinterpreted to condemn all things Jewish.

Chapter 3: Should 21st-Century Messianic Jews be Torah Observant?

If First-Century Messianic Jews were Torah Observant, Should Twenty-first Century Messianic Jews Also be Torah Observant?

When God and the nation of Israel entered the Mosaic Covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-24), the covenant was initially made with the Exodus generation. Like other Suzerain/Vassal treaties, God promised Israel blessing for obedience to the Mosaic Law and cursing if they were to disobey. Not only was the Mosaic Covenant made with the Exodus generation, but it was reiterated with their offspring in the book of Deuteronomy and was valid for each subsequent generation of Jews. Because the Messiah is the central theme of the Law, Jesus is the goal of the Law, the Law serves as a pedagogue leading one to faith in Christ, and because Jesus has replaced forms such as the priesthood, temple, sacrifice and atonement with substance and reality, it is the obligation of any Torah observant Jew to receive Jesus as his Savior. Jesus “came to his own, and his own people [the nation as a whole] did not receive him” (John 1:11). In his lament over Jerusalem, Jesus longed to extend his Messianic protection over the nation, like a “hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Matt 23:37), but they “were not willing” (Matt 23:37). Instead, they would face the curses of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 28-29), their “house is left to you desolate” (Matt 23:38 – Jerusalem would be sacked by Titus and the Romans in A.D. 70), and the Jews would not see Jesus again until they would say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 23:39). Yes, 21st-century Jews should be Torah observant out of fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant - the sign of a truly observant Jew is to receive Jesus as their Messiah/Savior. In Deuteronomy 31:30-32:43, Moses sang a song, which says that after Israel’s defeat and scattering among the nations, God’s judgment would not be permanent, and he would be faithful to his promises. Once again, God would manifest himself as a powerful deliverer, heal

his people, and destroy their enemies. The Jews will say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 23:39), when Christ returns, and he will “pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They [the Jews] will look on ... [Jesus] the one they have pierced” (Zech 12:10). When the Jewish nation receives their Messiah, they will be recipients of the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant. Juster writes,

Since Torah is central to Judaism, a Messianic Jew must gain an accurate understanding of Torah in general if he is to know how to relate his Jewish heritage to Christian theology ... Hence, the whole of the commands are part of a covenant with Israel, and although we can discern the universal principles of this treaty which apply to all peoples (as Paul’s quoting “Honor your mother and father” to the Ephesians), the treaty is an indivisible whole as given to Israel ... To spurn the Sabbath as a covenant sign was to spurn the covenant and the special relationship between God and the nation Israel.³⁰⁸

“Torah is for Jews but provides a standard for all ... That God punished Israel for her wrongdoing reflects God’s ongoing participation in the covenant. This kept God and the people of Israel in the covenantal relationship.”³⁰⁹ The researcher agrees with Stokes, who wrote, “my view is that the period we are in has both the former and new covenants operating ... The sacrificial system ebbs and flows with the availability of a Temple ... I don’t believe the death of Yeshua changed any of that.”³¹⁰ So, we have the Torah in full force for Israel and the New Covenant emerging for all peoples.”³¹¹

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul’s “rule in all the churches” (I Cor 7:17) should be applied today. According to the Apostle Paul, his “rule in all the churches” (I Cor 7:17) was for, “each person [to] lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him ... Was anyone at the time of his call

³⁰⁸ Juster, Kindle, 14 and 16.

³⁰⁹ Eisenbaum, Kindle, 219-221.

³¹⁰ This needs to be qualified. Jesus replaced the Day of Atonement sacrifice, and he is the current high priest.

³¹¹ Bruce Stokes, E-mail posting to the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations’ Leaders’ Onelist.

already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision” (I Cor 7:17-18). Paul’s “rule” is consistent with the decision of the Jerusalem Council – Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or be Torah observant but were instead to keep four prohibitions that are consistent with the laws for foreigners residing among the Israelites in Leviticus 17-21. The underlying assumption of the Jerusalem Council was that Jews would continue to remain practicing Jews. Juster gives an example: “Sabbath, however, is an integral part of God’s treaty between Himself and Israel ... The Sabbath is called a sign ‘between me and the people of Israel’ ... To spurn the Sabbath as a covenant sign was to spurn the covenant and the special relationship between God and the nation Israel.”³¹² The author of this dissertation agrees with Michael Wyschogrod who writes, “Gentiles [are] ... under no obligation to obey the commandments of the Torah, an obligation which was the result of God’s covenant with Israel and which does not apply to those outside of the covenant.”³¹³ Nanos correctly notes in the book of Galatians, “Paul opposed non-Jews becoming Jews after they became followers of Jesus.”³¹⁴ In the author of this dissertation’s opinion, modern-day Messianic Jews should be like the early Nazarenes, who, “were Biblically-oriented in a very full sense and accepted the central doctrines of the New Testament. They practiced their Jewish heritage as part of their life in Yeshua.”³¹⁵ Juster summarizes the author of this dissertation’s view, saying, “in Yeshua, Jew and Gentile accept one another and have table

³¹² Juster, *Kindle*, 15-16.

³¹³ Wyschogrod, 190.

³¹⁴ Nanos, *Reading Paul within Judaism*, Kindle, 131.

³¹⁵ Juster, *Kindle*, 136.

fellowship, prayer, and praise together! This does not imply, however, that they are to have identical calling and lifestyles.”³¹⁶

What are the Benefits of Messianic Jews Being Torah Observant?

Messianic Jews should maintain their unique Jewish identity and avoid assimilation.³¹⁷ As Kinzer says, “In preparation for God’s dealings with the Jewish people at the end of the age, and as an expression of respect for Israel’s irrevocable election, the church should urge all such Jews to associate with one another and to do their best to maintain their identity as Jews/Israelites.”³¹⁸ Bruce Marshall writes, “The Jewish people cannot be permanently elect unless they can be distinguished at all times from the nations, and the observance of traditional Jewish law seems to be the one mark by which this distinction can be sustained *post Christum*.”³¹⁹ Juster advocates Messianic congregations saying, “Messianic congregations can uniquely provide for the special ongoing discipleship needs of Jewish believers who wrestle with the questions³²⁰ of their Jewish identity and practice vis-a-vis New Testament faith.”³²¹

Messianic Jews have a glorious future. Craig Blaising explains that there are certain aspects of the New Covenant which will be fulfilled at this time: “There are features promised in

³¹⁶ Juster, *Kindle*, 112-113.

³¹⁷ This would also hold true for ethnic Jews who were not Torah observant prior to their Christian conversion.

³¹⁸ Kinzer, *Kindle*, 5153.

³¹⁹ Marshall, “Christ and the Cultures: The Jewish People and Christian Theology,” in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, 91-92.

³²⁰ This would also hold true for Messianic Jews who do not “wrestle with these questions.” While with regard to the question of salvation/justification, all that is necessary is faith in Christ. However, with regard to sanctification, or living the Christian life, these questions are relevant.

³²¹ Juster, *Kindle*, 3764-3777.

that covenant whose fulfillment has been delayed until the return of Christ (such as the national and territorial promises in Jer 31:31, 36 and Ezek 36:28 and 37:14).”³²² Romans 11:15 says, “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” As Ezekiel predicted, when Jesus returns, “I will put my Spirit within you [the nation of Israel], and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord” (Ezek 37:14). When Jesus establishes his millennial kingdom, “I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all” (Ezek 37:21-22). Kaiser says of Paul’s words in Romans 11:15, “By this, Paul meant that more than merely untold spiritual blessings would result ... When these who were ‘in Abraham’ would also be ‘in Christ,’ untold benefits would result, signaling the coming of the eschaton itself.”³²³ One day, “the pendulum of history [that has] swung from Israel to the Gentiles, ... will swing back to Israel again.”³²⁴ One day, “all Israel” will be saved. Most of the Jewish nation will come to faith in Christ. When that happens, Messianic Jews will once again be “the head and not the tail.” Once the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in ... all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25-26). Michael Vanlangingham says, “[W]hat Paul foresees is a time when the Gentile world erupts with spiritual life following Israel’s restoration ... His words are best

³²² Blaising, “The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 3343.

³²³ Kaiser, “Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium in Light of Israel’s Future (Romans 9-11),” in *To the Jew First*, Kindle, 479-485.

³²⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *Logos*, 541-542.

accounted for if Israel is present in its own land and the blessings for the world flow from the nation under God's governance in accordance with OT expectations."³²⁵

Messianic Jews have a "double calling." Forrest and Palm articulate the tension Christians hold when explaining God's relationship to biological Jews: "They [Jews] ... retain an irrevocable and special relationship with God because of their forefathers, a relationship which continues to be evidenced in several important ways. Yet, this relationship is not salvific by itself; it finds its ultimate fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ and His Church."³²⁶ Gershon Nerel explains while "it is absolutely true that the non-Jewish believers in Yeshua participate in Israel's spiritual heritage (see Eph 1:3-5), yet this universal election does not cancel the particular election of Israel. Israel must remain separate³²⁷ – as there is an election within an election."³²⁸ In Kaiser's opinion, the "promises in the Scripture ... [were] retained and progressively enriched ... without jettisoning God's promises to the ancient nation of Israel or barring the door for the Gentile inclusion while grafting all believers, Jew and Gentile, into the same olive tree."³²⁹ In spite of the fact that the Jewish people, as a nation, have been temporarily "cut off," nonetheless, Paul stresses that, "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way, all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26).

³²⁵ Michael Vanlangingham, "The Jewish People According to the Book of Romans," in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2014), Kindle, 2533-2536.

³²⁶ Forrest & Palm, "All in the Family: Christians, Jews, and God," www.hebrewcatholic.net. Accessed 30 June 2021. <http://www.hebrewcatholic.net/all-in-the-family-christians-jews-and-god>.

³²⁷ In the opinion of the author of this dissertation, "separate" is too strong of a word – I would choose, "distinct." "Separate" implies more than Ephesians 2 suggests. They have a right to have distinct practice, but they are not "separate," but "one" in Christ.

³²⁸ Gershon Nerel, "Modern Assemblies of Jewish Yeshua-Believers Between Church and Synagogue," in *How Jewish is Christianity*, Louis Goldberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 103.

³²⁹ Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, Kindle, 566.

The natural branches will eventually be grafted back in. According to the Apostle Paul, in Romans 2:25-29, “A true/good Jew, according to the Apostle Paul, is one who has both the circumcision of the flesh and the circumcision of the heart!”³³⁰ “Israel belongs to God on the basis of grace, not because of obedience ... Exactly why God did choose Israel was as much a mystery to ancient Jewish writers ... as it is to modern readers. But the very mysteriousness of the reason points to its being an act of grace—for no one really knows why God chose Israel; God just did.”³³¹ The author of this dissertation agrees with Blaising who writes, “God Himself is at the same time God over all and King of the nation Israel ... His rule over Israel mediates His rule over other peoples (in both blessing and curse). Israel, then, becomes the focal point for God’s relations with humanity and His providence over the rest of creation.”³³² As Stern says, “the Church has not clearly grasped that the Holy One of Israel, Yeshua, is in union not only with the Church, but also with the Jewish people.”³³³

What Does it Mean for a Messianic Jew to be “Torah Observant?”

Messianic Jews are not Required to Observe Rabbinic Traditions

When an Orthodox Jew, in the 21st century, is asked, “What is Torah?” He will mention the TaNaK, but will also add the “Oral Law, which the Orthodox say was revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Oral Law is set forth in the Talmud, the Halakhic Midrashim, and the writings of later sages – the *Savora'im*, *Pos'kim*, *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* – in their codes

³³⁰ Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Apostle Paul*, Kindle, 78.

³³¹ Eisenbaum, Kindle, 247.

³³² Blaising & Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Kindle, 219 and 270.

³³³ Stern, 108.

and responsa.”³³⁴ *Pirkei Avot* 1:1 of the Mishnah explains the Oral Law tradition: “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly.”³³⁵ The Great Assembly was an assembly of 120 prophets, scribes and sages, who under the original tutelage of Ezra, ruled the Jewish people from the time of the Second Temple until the early Hellenistic period. The basis of rabbinic law is found in Deuteronomy 17:9 which says, “Go to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict.” According to Saul Kaatz, “Every interpretation of the Torah given by a universally recognized authority [such as a Levitical priest or judge] is regarded as divine and given on Sinai, in the sense that it is taken as the original divinely willed (*gott gewollte*) interpretation of the text.”³³⁶

In Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus says, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” “Moses’ seat” was the physical place in the synagogue where the TaNaK was read. At the archaeological ruins of the synagogue at Chorazin, excavators, in the 1920’s, found a stone seat, which is now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, that is known as the “Seat of Moses.”³³⁷ It was important for the Jewish people to listen to the Bible as it was being read, because the Scriptures pointed to Jesus. In Matthew 23:3, Jesus warns his hearers, “but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” Their lifestyle was not to be emulated, because in the

³³⁴ David Stern, *Messianic Judaism* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 138.

³³⁵ The Sefaria Library, “Pirkei Avot,” accessed 30 November 2021, https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

³³⁶ George Horowitz, *The Spirit of the Jewish Law* (New York: Central Book Company, 1973), 92.

³³⁷ Waynestiles.com, “Chorazin – Sitting in the Seat but Missing the Message,” accessed 30 November 2021, <https://waynestiles.com/chorazin-sitting-in-the-seat-but-missing-the-message>.

same chapter Jesus pronounces seven “woes” upon them for being “hypocrites” (v.15), “blind fools” (v.17), “like whitewashed tombs” (v.27), “sons of those who murdered the prophets” (v.31), “serpents” (v.33), and a “brood of vipers” (v.33). While Messianic Jews should obey the TaNaK, they are under no obligation to follow the Oral Law, because there are many places where it deviates from New Testament teachings. First and foremost, the William Davidson Talmud, *Gittin 57a* says concerning Jesus, “He is punished [in the next world] with boiling excrement.”³³⁸ Juster’s comments about the Oral Law are insightful: “We respect Halakah as ancient, but never as Scripture’s equal. We must also note that the Halakic tradition is a ‘mixed-bag.’ Sometimes there are brilliant applications of the Scriptural heart intent of the Law. At other times, however, the tradition seeks to maintain the letter and multiples structures and directions that tend to contradict the very intent of Scripture.”³³⁹

The problem with claims about an “Oral Law” is that there is nothing in the Bible that would support this contention. Exodus 34:27 says, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” Only the written Law forms the foundation of God’s covenant. God says to Joshua, “This Book of the Law ... you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it” (Josh 1:8). There is no mention of an Oral Law, only a written one. Postell, Bar and Soref say:

The case is the same with Ezra the scribe, and any prophet or king in the Hebrew Scriptures: no one ever mentions that term or implies the existence of such a God-given Oral Law. If an Oral Law did exist, it was not a part of God’s covenant with Israel ... The term Oral Law actually appears for the very first time approximately 1,500 years after the time of Moses! Interestingly, the Qumran (Dead Sea) scrolls and the Jewish Apocrypha (200– 100 BCE) never mention or even imply the existence of a God-given Oral Law.

³³⁸ The Sefaria Library, “Gittin 57a,” accessed 30 November 2021, <https://www.sefaria.org/Gittin.57a.4?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>.

³³⁹ Juster, *Kindle*, 3869-3873.

The Cyrus Cylinder (sixth century BCE) that describes the Jews of Babylon and their lifestyle not only fails to mention any existence of a God-given “Oral Law,” but actually sheds light in the other direction ... the Jews of Ethiopia returned to Israel after thousands of years in exile, and from relative isolation. These Ethiopian Jews did not recognize the authority of the rabbis. They did not recognize the rabbinic traditions, and they had never heard of the rabbis’ invention of the Oral Law.³⁴⁰

Even though the Gospel writers are sometimes accused of being anti-Semitic, according to Amy-Jill Levine,³⁴¹ the Gospels can be considered an example of Prophetic anti-Judaism, and Jesus’ harsh words against the Jewish religious leaders can be compared to those of other Jewish prophets in the TaNaK, and do not imply that they are in any way “un-Jewish” – by way of contrast, his words can be understood as an “in-house debate.” When reading the Gospels, it is important to remember that Jesus does not have any problems with the Law itself, but simply with how the religious leaders are interpreting the Law. “Yeshua seeks to bring out the inner implications of the Law in terms of its deepest intent ... when tradition went against God’s Word and when religious leaders missed the true essence of Torah, Yeshua was severe in His criticism. Yeshua never hinted that the Torah, in its role as a reflection of God’s eternal standard of righteousness, would be invalidated.”³⁴²

Many of Jesus’ Conflicts with the Jewish Religious Leadership Revolved Around the Oral Law, not the Written Torah

Within some circles of Judaism, הוֹמְרָה (*homrah*) is practiced, namely, efforts to "build a fence around the Torah," by adding additional commands and obligations, which exceed those found in Torah, to avoid inadvertently violating one of the commands. An example of this can be seen in Mark 7:1-23. In Mark 7, a delegation of Jewish religious leaders came from Jerusalem to

³⁴⁰ Postell, Bar and Soref, Kindle, 2059-2597.

³⁴¹ Amy-Jill Levine, “Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels* (Salem: Trinity Press International, 1999), 16.

³⁴² Juster, Kindle, 1048-1160.

the Galilee region, where Jesus had been healing people, to investigate Jesus. Some of the Pharisees and scribes questioned Jesus [after they noticed that Jesus' disciples were eating food with hands which had not been washed in a ceremonial manner]: 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders? Instead, they eat with defiled hands'" (Mark 7:5)? Mark adds an explanation to this narrative which demonstrates that the hand washing which is being discussed is part of oral law: "Now in holding to the tradition of the elders, the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat until they wash their hands ceremonially. And on returning from the market, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions for them to observe, including the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and couches for dining" (Mark 7:3-4). Bock provides some background to this tradition:

The fact that Mark has to explain this practice shows that his audience is Gentile. Oral law was seen as a "fence around the Torah" to protect it being faithfully kept (m. 'Abot 3.14' m. *Yadim* deals with this custom) ... The practice is rooted in priests washing their hands before offering a sacrifice and being clean at the temple (Exod 30:19; 40:13; Lev 22:1-6; Num 18:8-13), a practice extended to the home for all by the Pharisees and Essenes, perhaps with the view that the home was a small version of the temple (m. Hag 2.5). Most of the traditions we have noting this view are late, from the fifth or sixth century (b. *Hullin* 105a; b. *Shab* 13b-14b). The reference to the fist means either that a fistful of water was used, that the water was poured onto hands cupped at the fist, or that the hands were washed up to the fist (m. *Yad* 1.1; 2.3).²⁸³ The Mishnah notes that the amount of water is compared to an egg and a half. Contracting uncleanness from the marketplace among other locales is in view (y. *Shev* 6.1, 36c).²⁸⁴ Other possibilities include from uncleanness include lepers (Mark 1:40), contact with tax collectors, and women during their periods or dead bodies. The range of washings is covered in Lev 11-15, which is why Mark notes various objects (cups, pots, bronze vessels, and dining couches) covered for cleanliness (v 4). Jewish tradition came to expand this practice to discuss the specific objects washed in detail so as to protect a person from uncleanness. This raised issues of *teharot* (cleannesses) for the Jews. This practice was seen as an important expression of faithfulness to being Jewish in a context where Hellenistic practices risked overwhelming Jewish distinctiveness.³⁴³

In his response to the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus says, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: 'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are

³⁴³ Bock, *Mark (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)*, Kindle, 221-222.

far from Me. They worship Me in vain; they teach as doctrine the precepts of men.’ You have disregarded the commandment of God to keep the tradition of men. He went on to say, ‘You neatly set aside the command of God to maintain your own tradition’” (Mark 7:6-9). The problem, according to Jesus, is that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had “disregarded the commandment of God [the Mosaic Law]” and were “keep[ing] the tradition of men.” Moses had issued several warnings about doing this. Moses commanded, “You must not add to or subtract from what I command you, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am giving you” (Deut 4:2). Furthermore, he said, “See that you do everything I command you; do not add to it or subtract from it” (Deut 12:32). Jesus’ issue with the religious leaders did not pertain to the Mosaic Law, but it regarded the Oral Law. The leaders were “hypocrites” (Mark 7:6), their honor given to God was “with their lips” (Mark 7:6), but their “heart[s were] ... far from” (Mark 7:6) God, they “worship Me [God] in vain” (Mark 7:7) because they were “teach as doctrine the precepts of men [the Oral Law]” (Mark 7:7), they had “disregarded the commandment of God [the Mosaic Law]”(Mark 7:8), but “keep the tradition of men [the Oral Law]” (Mark 7:8), they “neatly set aside the command of God [the Mosaic Law]” (Mark 7:9), “to maintain your own tradition [the Oral Law]” (Mark 7:9). They were failing in the one thing that was demanded, namely, the observance of God’s commands.

Bock says of these verses, “Josephus notes how much of what the Pharisees practiced was not in the Law (*Ant* 13.297) ... In citing Isaiah, Jesus compares the current generation to a failure in Israel from long ago ... What was set up to protect the keeping of the Law now ends up nullifying it. Tradition that does not lead to following God’s will is worthless.”³⁴⁴ Furthermore, he adds, “[Concerning ‘tradition’] Jewish *halakhah* (from the verb for ‘go’ or ‘walk’) taught

³⁴⁴ Bock, *Mark (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)*, Kindle, 222.

about the walk of actual religious life and practice ... [pertaining to the ‘tradition of men’] Jesus demoted the ‘elders’ ... [i]f they did not act in accord with God’s will, then their authority is worthless ... [r]eligious authority is derived from God and from following him; it is not a matter of appointment or appearances.”³⁴⁵

In verses 10-13, Jesus gives an example of a way in which his critics were elevating human tradition above God’s commands in the Torah. He says, “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever you would have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), he is no longer permitted to do anything for his father or mother. Thus, you nullify the word of God by the tradition you have handed down. And you do so in many such matters” (Mark 7:10-13). The fifth commandment, as found in Exodus 20:12, says, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” In Judaism, the Ten Commandments are fundamental – they are the basis or the universal standard upon which all the other commands are built. Nevertheless, in how the Jewish leaders were handling קָרְבָּן (*qrbān* – “offering,” “sacrifice,” “oblation”), according to Jesus, they were violating the fifth commandment.

Messianic Jews Should Adopt a Hillelite Perspective

Jesus ate kosher – he followed the Levitical food laws, and abstained from eating prohibited foods, but he did not adopt a hyper-halakhic perspective on food and defilement which was common in the Tannaitic era. In other words, Jesus held to a Pharisaic-Hillelite understanding of food and defilement. Paul, likewise, took a Hillelite approach to ceremonial impurity – Gamaliel trained the Apostle Paul. Gamaliel was the son of Simeon ben Hillel and the

³⁴⁵ Bock, *The Gospel of Mark (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary)*, 458.

grandson of Hillel the Elder, the Jewish scholar associated with the development of the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the House of Hillel school of Tannaim. Neither Jesus, nor Paul, violated biblical dietary laws, but both “became all things to all people” – they ate with Pharisees and “sinners” alike. Both Jesus and Paul adhered to “a lifestyle of flexibility within the contours of Jewish law.”³⁴⁶ In a similar way, Messianic Jews should submit themselves to the dietary laws of *kashrut*, but not hesitate to share meals with Gentiles (all the while eating kosher) and enjoy fellowship in the church assembly with them recognizing that Gentiles are “clean” in the Messiah.

How Did Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” Remain Torah-Observant in Predominately Non-Kosher Environments?

In his book, *They Loved the Torah*, Dr. David Friedman provides some helpful insight into how the Apostle Paul remained Torah-observant as he traveled into Gentile territories, planting churches, and evangelizing. After Lydia became a believer, Acts 16:15 says, “And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.” Friedman says,

Questions have been raised as to whether Sha’ul and his entourage could have kept ritually clean while staying at Lydia’s house. Many people will say that Sha’ul had to compromise his Jewish lifestyle and would have been forced to stop eating only kosher food (as found in Lev 11). However, as I will discuss later, Lydia was called a *σεβομενη του θεου* (Greek, *sebomene ton Theon*) in Acts 16:14b. The meaning of this Greek phrase, Godfearer (Hebrew, גר' השער, *gery hasha'ar*), is crucial to our understanding of both Lydia’s identity and of Sha’ul’s Torah observance ... Patrice Fischer identified this term as referring to “that special group of Gentiles who worshipped in synagogues and adopted a Jewish belief system and a Jewish lifestyle for themselves, stopping just short of formal conversion” ... Powlison also noted that there is no recorded protest from the Jewish community of Philippi, or the surrounding area, over their (Sha’ul and his

³⁴⁶ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, -182-196.

entourage's) behavior ... Additionally, why would Lydia have been one of those gathered at the riverside on the Sabbath if she were not Torah-observant?³⁴⁷

According to Friedman, one of the Apostle Paul's practices, which allowed him to say, with a clear conscience, "I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers" (Acts 28:17), was that he would immediately go to a synagogue when he entered a fresh territory. While the primary reason for this was, he wanted to present the gospel, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16), "[a]s a side benefit of going to the synagogue, they were often invited to Jewish homes, which provided a ritually fit environment (as with Jason in Acts 17:7 and the previously mentioned Lydia in Acts 13)."³⁴⁸ Friedman says,

In Corinth, his destination after Athens, this pattern continued. He "stayed on" with the Messianic couple Priscilla and Aquila (see 18:3). The Greek word used for "stayed on" is *ἔμεινεν* (*hemenen*), giving the sense of "dwelling with" or "living with." By having the same trade (see 18:3b) and Messianic Jewish faith, Sha'ul was able to have a ritually kosher environment by living and working with Priscilla and Aquila. In Corinth, also, Sha'ul kept his Torah-observant lifestyle. We read in 18:4, "[Sha'ul held] discussions every Shabbat in the synagogue." Verse 7 of this same chapter reveals Sha'ul's concern for living in a ritually kosher environment: "So he left them and went into the home of a 'God-fearer' named Titus Justus, whose house was right next door to the synagogue." The Greek word for "next door" in verse 7, is *συνομορῶσα* (*sunomoroussa*). It means to "border on (something)." In the Mediterranean world of that day (as today), it was common for a synagogue to adjoin another building. I suspect that is the case here. If *sunomoroussa* has its cognate in the Hebrew word, (*samukh*), then Justus was a Godfearer who lived right next to the synagogue. Additionally, Justus would have lived as a Jew and kept the mitzvot. Note the Greek term applied to Justus: *sebomenou ton Theon* (see 18:7). This is the same category to which Lydia and Cornelius belonged - Gentiles who lived as Jews in ritually fit environments ... Justus provided a ritually fit environment for Sha'ul during his year and a half stay in that city. As Powlison noted, "Justus' house was next to the synagogue." Second, Sha'ul and his party stayed there for a year and a half with no recorded objections to their conduct [from the Corinthian Jewish community]."³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ David Friedman, *They Loved the Torah: What Yeshua's First Followers Really Thought About the Law* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2001), Kindle, 75-76.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 78.

³⁴⁹ Friedman, *They Loved the Torah*, Kindle, 78-79.

Friedman draws the logical conclusion that would have held true when the Apostle Paul entered synagogues: “If Sha’ul had not observed the Torah, he would not have been invited back to speak and teach as a rabbi.”³⁵⁰

H.L. Ellison clarifies that when it comes to Paul, we only have two options:

There were really only two possibilities open to Paul. Either he did not observe the law at all, or he was strict in its observance at all times. A casual example of the latter is his keeping of the Day of Atonement under conditions when it might not have been expected. Yet Luke reports it in such a way as to show that he saw nothing remarkable in it (Acts 27:9). So, we are justified in thinking that throughout his missionary activity Paul lived in a way that would have called for no adverse comment from a Pharisee who might have met him however much he would have rejected his teaching.³⁵¹

David Rudolph compares the view that Paul was sometimes Torah observant/sometimes not,” to a seminary professor who, “sign[s] the statement of faith and conduct but privately reinterpret[s] the language in a way that violated the intent of the document ... Would it be ethical to sign the statement to conciliate the seminary’s board of directors, or as an act of accommodation (for the sake of Christ and the gospel) to help the seminary grow to spiritual maturity by subverting its doctrinal and moral standards? Most people (certainly the seminaries!) would consider such conduct unethical.”³⁵² Rudolph builds a persuasive case for the unfeasibility of part-time Torah observance:

By definition, one does not keep the Law part of the time. If a Jew kept the Law while he was in the presence of Jews but abandoned the law when with Gentiles, he was not a keeper of the Law but a breaker of the Law. If this was not the case, none of the Jewish believers would have been convinced by Paul’s actions. Consistency is a necessary component of the concept of keeping the Law ... a selective approach to the law was unthinkable. Christian expositors of Paul sometimes seem to assume that as long as some

³⁵⁰ Friedman, *They Loved the Torah*, Kindle, 79.

³⁵¹ H.L. Ellison, “Paul and the Law – ‘All Things to All Men’ in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, edited by W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 199.

³⁵² Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 71.

aspect of the law remains important to Paul, he cannot be charged with annulling it. But, for a Jew, to be selective about the Torah meant to disobey it, indeed, to reject it. Bruce concedes that an indifference or optional approach to the law would have been considered “apostasy from Moses” ... If Paul privately interpreted his actions to mean that he observed the law only when dealing with Jews (i.e., to the Jews he became as a Jew), but he allowed James and everyone else to think something entirely different, then the implication of the accommodation argument once again is that Paul deceived the Jerusalem congregation.³⁵³

Gordon Fee remarks about Paul’s rule, in all the churches he visits:

The thought is similar to Paul’s description of his call to vocation in 1:1, in which he was called [καλέω] to be Christ’s apostle ... through the prior will of God ... [V]arious social situations are to be understood as something Christ ‘assigned’ [μερίζω] to them at the time God called them to salvation ... Paul means that by calling a person within a given situation, that situation itself is taken up in the call and thus sanctified to him or her. Similarly, by saving a person in that setting, Christ thereby “assigned” it to him/her as his/her place of living out life in Christ.³⁵⁴

Rudolph says,

Since this text [I Cor 7:17-24] describes “circumcision” and “foreskin” ... as enduring callings and not merely temporary situations in life, it adds strength to the argument that I Cor 9:19-23 does not preclude a Torah-observant Paul ... Adolf von Harnack held that Paul in I Cor 7:20 was encouraging Jesus-believing Jews to view their Jewishness as a divine calling ... Harnack viewed Paul’s “rule in all the churches” (v.17b) - μὴ ἐπισπάσθω (do not assimilate or Gentilize yourself) – as an imperatival instruction to “remain faithful to the customs and ordinances of the fathers.” Since the law was fundamental to Jewish identity, Harnack held that, by implication, Paul encouraged Jesus-believing Jews to remain law observant ... Harnack’s interpretation of I Cor 7:18 and 20 is strengthened by Paul’s use of nomistic language in I Cor 7:19 – “obeying the commandments of God” (τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ). Frank Thielman has shown that the expression “obeying the commandments of God” occurs in various forms throughout Second Temple Jewish literature and consistently means “keeping the law of Moses” ... Markus Bockmuehl [says] ... in his book *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: The apostle himself in I Corinthians 7:17-20 makes clear that his “rule for all the churches” is for Jews to keep the Torah (indeed Gal 5:3, too, may mean that they are obliged to do so) and for Gentiles to keep what pertains to them – and only that.*³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews* 72.

³⁵⁴ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 310.

³⁵⁵ Rudolph, 79-84.

According to Friedman, an example can be seen of Paul applying his “rule” in Acts 16:3, when he circumcises Timothy. Friedman says, “In I Corinthians 7:17–18, Sha’ul called upon believers to continue being a part of their people after coming to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. For Timothy to do this, circumcision was required ... In this act of circumcision alone, we see Sha’ul’s continued observance of the Torah.”³⁵⁶

Do Not Throw Out the Baby with the Bathwater³⁵⁷

Some Messianic Jews, such as Bar, Soref and Postell say, “[M]ost of the commandments are impossible to keep even if we wanted to try. The commandments chosen to be observed are cherry-picked, with most being ignored, and only a few followed.”³⁵⁸ The author of this dissertation believes that Bar, Soref and Postell make a logical fallacy when they contend:

Therefore, anyone who is of physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and a follower of Yeshua is part of the remnant concerning which Paul testified (i.e., a messianic Jew). Does following the Law and the Jewish traditions make a Jewish follower of Yeshua more Jewish? Perhaps we can answer the question by asking another question: Does eating Chinese food make a Chinese person more Chinese? The answer is clear: No!³⁵⁹

The researcher does not believe that commandments given in the Torah, as part of the Sinaitic covenant, should be equated with Chinese traditions – God did not enter a covenant with the Chinese regarding their traditions. Some also argue that in the 21st century, the temple does not presently exist, so Jews could not be “fully” Torah observant even if they wanted to. Kinzer responds:

³⁵⁶ Friedman, Kindle, 75.

³⁵⁷ This is an idiomatic expression meaning that one should avoid the error of throwing out something good or of value with another thing that is unwanted.

³⁵⁸ Seth Postell, Eitan Bar and Erez Soref, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills its Goal in Yeshua* (Ashland: Weaver Book Company, 2018), Kindle, 2078.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., Kindle, 2597.

When speaking of changes in the Torah, the author deals exclusively with the tabernacle/temple and its associated institutions (the priesthood and the sacrifices). As Jewish history has shown, these elements of the Torah—while important—could be eliminated from Jewish life without the loss of the Torah or of the distinctive Jewish existence ordained in the Torah. The centralized worship institutions of Israel constituted a self-contained component of the Torah that was not required for the continuance of Jewish life. The destruction of the temple in 70 CE did not prevent Jews from circumcising their sons, resting on the Sabbath, or eating kosher food.³⁶⁰

Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” Some may argue that Torah observance is impossible, beyond man’s ability to do. Craigie, in his comment on these verses, says,

The commandment did not impress on the people conditions that were totally impossible to fulfil: *it is not too difficult for you, nor is it beyond your grasp* (v.11) ... Somewhat more literally, the implication is that the law was given or revealed to man; it was particularly designed for man’s living and not a part of the mystery of God that man could not approach ... Moses set before them: *it is in your mouth and in your mind* (lit. “heart”), *so that you may do it*. With these words on the very essence or purpose of the law, Moses then concludes with a call for decision.³⁶¹

What are Some Dangers That Messianic Jews Need to Avoid?

Dual Covenant Theology is Heretical

There is a heretical pluralistic theology which says that Jews do not need to believe in Jesus to receive eternal life because of the Mosaic Covenant. David Stern writes,

³⁶⁰ Kinzer, Kindle, 1547-1551.

³⁶¹ Craigie, 364-365.

[T]wo-covenant theology began not in Christianity but in Judaism, since it provides a Jewish defense against the Gospel. The Rambam (“Rambam” is an acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben-Maimon, known as Maimonides, 1135-1204), functioning in an environment wherein Christendom controlled the state and all major institutions, developed the theory that Christianity was right for Gentiles, since it enabled them to stop worshipping idols and to worship instead the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their worship was imperfect because it was mixed with worshipping a man as well as God; but imperfect worship of God was better than idolatry.³⁶²

Stern also says that those who hold to a “Dual Covenant” theology would understand John 14:6 like this: “I am the way, the truth and the life; and no Gentile comes to the father except through me.”³⁶³ Dr. David Mishkin defines Dual Covenant theology like this: “Jews and Christians each have a separate and equally valid covenant with God (or, perhaps a different version of the same covenant).”³⁶⁴ Mishkin gives a helpful summary of the Jewish position saying,

Traditional Judaism provides a different solution [to the issue of forgiveness of sins/atonement], as summarized here by the Encyclopedia Judaica, “After the destruction of the Temple and the consequent cessation of sacrifices, the rabbis declared: ‘Prayer, repentance, and charity avert the evil decree’ (TJ, *Ta’an.* 2:1, 65b). Suffering is also regarded as a means of atonement and is considered more effective than sacrifice to win God’s favor (Ber. 5a). Exile and the destruction of the Temple (*Sanh.* 37b, Ex. R. 31:10) were also reputed to bring about the same effect.” Given this, the traditional Jewish response to the New Testament’s central claim is quite understandable. Amy-Jill Levile explains: “For Jews, Jesus is unnecessary or a redundancy; he is not needed to save from sin or death, since Judaism proclaims a deity ready to forgive repentant sinners” ... David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, both Orthodox Jewish scholars ... do not condemn the sacrificial system but see its efficacy as situational. They write: “When sacrifice is possible it is necessary, though useless without repentance (the ‘broken spirit’ and ‘wounded heart’). When sacrifice is not possible, God forgives those who sincerely repent.”³⁶⁵

³⁶² Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel: A Message for Christians*, Kindle, 1064-1068.

³⁶³ David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., 1992), 196.

³⁶⁴ Mishkin, 104.

³⁶⁵ Mishkin, 105.

Phillip Sigal writes that the “eligibility of the Jew for salvation derives from at least three sources: a) deeds which are atoned on Yom Kippur; b) God’s grace; and c) in the eyes of some, from the merits of the patriarchs and ancestors.”³⁶⁶ Daniel 12:2 says, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” In Judaism, salvation means that a person will experience a resurrection to eternal life. There is a well-known story among Jews, about Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, the primary contributor to the Mishnah, which summarizes the Jewish notion of atonement. One day,

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua [were] walking by the ruins of the Temple (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 4:21). Rabbi Joshua said, "Woe to us that the place where the atonement for the sins of Israel was made has been destroyed!" But Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai replied, "Do you not know that we have a means of making atonement that is as good as this? And what is it? *Gemilut hasadim* - acts of loving-kindness, as it is said, 'For I desire *hesed* - loving-kindness - and not sacrifice!'" (Hos 6:6).³⁶⁷

There is a widely held concept held among Jews today, that in the absence of the Temple, the ritual requirements given in the Torah are not necessary for atonement, but repentance alone is sufficient. Sigal writes:

Philo tells us God does not delight in the “blazing altar fires fed by the unhallowed sacrifices of men whose hearts sacrifice is unknown.” This view is also clear in the rabbinic tradition (*M Yom* 8:8), where repentance is the key to atonement, or as we would say, salvation. In the light of this teaching concerning the importance of contrition, and its entry into the *halakhah* surrounding Yom Kippur, it is no surprise that John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth taught the repentance should be undertaken immediately lest the sinners perish in the last days that precede the advent of God’s kingship, the eschaton which will admit only the living righteous and the resurrected righteous into the “world to come.” Salvation as understood by John and Jesus was the salvation offered by Judaism: the world to come, the time of God’s sovereignty or *malkhut shamayim*. For this salvation repentance was a prerequisite. God’s grace would be extended only to the penitent. Even Mark’s curious version referring to “the gospel of God,” and adding “the time has been

³⁶⁶ Phillip Sigal, “Aspects of Dual Covenant Theology: Salvation,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 5, no. 2 (1 Dec. 1983): 7.

³⁶⁷ Reuven Hammer, “The Blood of Atonement,” *The Jerusalem Post*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Judaism/The-blood-of-atonement>.

fulfilled,” preserves the essential doctrine: repent, for the *basileia tou theou*, the time of the kingship of God, is near (Mark 1:14 f).³⁶⁸

There are three other passages of Scripture that Jews typically turn to when they want to demonstrate that blood sacrifices are not necessary for atonement. In Daniel, when the Temple was destroyed, kept praying in the direction of Jerusalem. Daniel 6:10 says, “When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” Many Orthodox Jews claim that Daniel is here demonstrating “that prayer replaced sacrifice, pointing out that he prayed toward Jerusalem (and therefore, toward the site of the Temple) and that he did this three times daily, in place of the daily Temple sacrifices.”³⁶⁹ Traditional Jews also look to the exilic prophet Ezekiel, who appears to tell Jews living in exile that even though there is no Temple, good works and repentance are sufficient for forgiveness of sin. Ezekiel 18:21-22 says, “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him.” Finally, many Jews point to Jonah 3:10, where Nineveh repents, and “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.” Many point out that God forgave them without any blood offering or sacrifice. Morna Hooker gives a strong response to those who adhere to dual covenant theology:

It would appear that the author's message to his readers was not "Do not fall back into Judaism," but rather, "It is time to move on, and to leave behind your former understanding of Judaism." They must not cling to the past, but grasp what is new, for the old was meant to point forward to what has now taken place. That means that they must

³⁶⁸ Sigal, 11-12.

³⁶⁹ Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, vol. 2, Kindle, 2969.

both acknowledge the superiority of Jesus as Son of God to previous revelation, and trust in what he has achieved by his death. The author's argument ... has set out that significance by showing that Christ has "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (10:12). At the same time, he has demonstrated that the Jewish sacrifices were ineffective and have been rendered redundant. If his readers persist in continuing to set store by the sacrifices prescribed in the law, therefore, they will, in effect, be rejecting what Christ has now achieved. In other words, they will be spurning the Son of God, and holding him up to contempt. If Jewish Christians assume that it is necessary to go on repeating sacrifices, what are they implying about the sacrifice of Christ? By failing to comprehend that his death was effective for all time, they are in danger of behaving as though it were necessary to crucify him again.³⁷⁰

Craig Blaising points out the obvious problem with Dual Covenant theology:

[T]he biggest problem with two covenant theology as it concerns evangelicalism is its claim that Israel is related to God by covenant apart from Jesus the Messiah ... Jesus was not the Messiah of the Jews simply because he did not bring in the Messianic age. He may become that Messiah in the future, but he is not at present. Consequently, Jews cannot be said to be saved through faith in Jesus. Rather, they have their own covenant relationship with God apart from Jesus ... The obvious problem with this for evangelical theology is its being entirely contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. The Gospels uniformly present Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, from the angelic announcement to Mary and Joseph to the sign that was nailed to his cross (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38). After his ascension, the apostles proclaimed in Jerusalem that Israel should know that God had made Jesus Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36), and that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:10, 12). As Peter declared to the Council of Israel, "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).³⁷¹

In John 5:46, Jesus said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me." Jesus had told the people of Israelites that God would one day send another Prophet like him, and when He came, they would need to listen to Him. Moses never said that the Law was an end in itself – Moses pointed to the Messiah, and if the Jewish nation had been careful to heed what Moses said, they would have gladly received Jesus as their Savior. Despite Jesus' Jewish roots, He did not extend to the Jews any alternative means of salvation, other than faith in Himself. Jesus told Nicodemus, a Pharisee, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again,

³⁷⁰ Hooker, "Christ, the 'End' of the Cult," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, Kindle, 2367-2375.

³⁷¹ Craig Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Kindle, 1244-1273.

he cannot see the kingdom of God ... And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:3-15). Jesus taught that whoever did not believe in Him would be condemned: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already” (John 3:18). In John 11:25, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” Jesus also claimed to be the exclusive way to the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In similar words that exclude other methods of salvation, Peter said, “[S]alvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). What the scribe knew that the TaNaK needed to be supplemented by Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom – they were not contradictory but worked in tandem. Both contain treasure. Two of Jesus’ early disciples, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus were members of the elite Sanhedrin – they were among the seventy rabbis who ruled over Israel. Acts 6:7 also says that “a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” Jews do not have a separate means of accessing God, other than through Jesus Christ. “[T]here is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim 2:5).

Danger #2 – Viewing Torah Observance as Being in Conflict with the Baptism/Filling of the Holy Spirit

A Post-New Perspective theology needs to be robustly pneumatic. There is, “not a conflict between Law and Spirit but between flesh and spirit.”³⁷² “The New Covenant is ... not

³⁷² Craig Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Kindle, 167.

an abrogation of Torah but an ability to walk in Torah!”³⁷³ “The new covenant was to be better than the old one because the people would be enabled to keep it ... the problem resides not with the covenant, promises or Torah, but with man.”³⁷⁴ As Rudolph notes, being “in Christ,” was more important to Paul than being ethnically Jewish, but this did not negate the importance of being a Jew – it was just a matter of degree.

What are Some Other Implications of This Study?

The New Testament is not Antisemitic

There are many verses in the New Testament which could lead one to the false conclusion that it is antisemitic. Jewish leaders are referred to as vipers, hypocrites, thieves and robbers, blind leading the blind, children of Satan, and as being hard-hearted. Scribes were experts in the study of the Hebrew Scriptures - Jesus encourages us to put ourselves in the position of a scribe and familiarize ourselves with the Torah because Jesus is the one who has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets: “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt 13:52). Ezekiel 10 and 11 record YHWH’s departure from the temple, whereas Ezekiel 43 records YHWH’s return from the east during the millennium. Likewise, Jesus said of Jerusalem, “See, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt 23:38), but in the next breath he prophesies about his return to Jerusalem, “you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt 23:39). In an allusion to how YHWH longs to shelter his chosen

³⁷³ Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Kindle, Kindle, 21.

³⁷⁴ Fischer, 54.

people, the Jews, Jesus says, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Matt 23:37).

No one can accuse Jesus of being antisemitic. Jesus was circumcised and presented in the Temple as a baby. He was trained in the law. From the time of His infancy, He participated in Jewish pilgrimages and feasts. Jesus regularly taught in Synagogues. In Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus says, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” Brown writes about the often-confused relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees:

In keeping with this, many scholars believe that Jesus and the first disciples, all of whom, of course, were Jews, lived within the basic parameters of Pharisaic halakha ... [Jesus] could simply have been acknowledging Pharisaic dominance and reminding his disciples that their legal authority was to be obeyed, but within limit ... Jesus does affirm the authority of the Pharisees and that for this reason he endorses their exposition of the Torah and their halachic teachings in principle. This is not a blanket endorsement of all their teachings, but a qualified affirmation of the Pharisees in their role as teachers of the Law of Moses ... The disciples are to follow the teachings of the Pharisees in principle, but they are not to follow a particular teaching that clearly contradicts the expressed or implied intent of Scripture ... Jesus does recognize the teaching authority of the Pharisees but repudiates their hypocrisy and legalism ... Traditions intended to safeguard God's commandments became the source of their [the Jewish religious leaders] violation ... that [the scribes and Pharisees] occupy in a world where most people are illiterate and copies of the Torah are not plentiful ... that the scribes and the Pharisees were walking copies of the Law. What they did with it might be suspect, but not their knowledge of it. They could be relied on to report the Law of Moses with care and accuracy.³⁷⁵

Despite Jesus' Jewish roots, He did not extend to the Jews any alternative means of salvation, other than faith in Himself. Jesus told Nicodemus, a Pharisee, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God ... as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:3-15). Jesus taught that whoever did not believe in Him would be condemned: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is

³⁷⁵ Brown, vol. 5, Kindle, 5879-5918.

condemned already” (John 3:18). In John 11:25, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” Jesus also claimed to be the exclusive way to the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In similar words that exclude other methods of salvation, Peter said, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In Matthew 13:52, Jesus says, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” What the scribe knew from the TaNaK needed to be supplemented by Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom – they were not contradictory but worked in tandem. Both contain treasure. Two of Jesus’ early disciples, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus were members of the elite Sanhedrin – they were among the 70 rabbis who ruled over Israel. Acts 6:7 also says, “a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” Jews do not have a separate means of accessing God, other than through Jesus Christ. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). In Matthew 21:43, Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” The authority of the Jewish religious leaders ended when they failed to acknowledge God’s appointed means of salvation, the Messiah.

Christianity Should not be Understood as an Independent Religion, Separate from Judaism

Up until the mid-20th century, most Bible commentaries portrayed the Law as something evil, that had the only purpose of condemning people, and needed to be done away with for salvation to come about for mankind. Things are often times oversimplified in this manner: 1) God gave the law to save people 2) People failed to keep the law 3) God then resorted to “plan

B,” that is, “faith,” to make it easier for sinners to “get in.” Most modern scholarship recognizes that, “Jesus and the first Christians were Jews, and remained Jews.”³⁷⁶ Christianity developed as a movement within Second Temple Judaism. According to Nanos, Paul did not start a new religion, but he was acting like, “Isaiah or Jeremiah [who went] ... to their fellow Israelites or Judahites with a new message, but not with a new religion.”³⁷⁷

Krister Stendahl makes a compelling case that the Apostle Paul did not convert from one “religion” to another, but instead he underwent a “call” that was similar to that of the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, “to a specific vocation – to be God’s appointed Apostle to the Gentiles.”³⁷⁸ Galatians 1:15-16 says, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.” Stendahl writes,

The prophet Isaiah writes, "The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name" (Isa.49:1) ... The call of the prophet Jeremiah is similar, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" i.e., the Gentiles, *goyim* (Jer. 1:5). Thus, in Galatians Paul describes his experience in terms of a prophetic call similar to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah ... Furthermore, what Paul is to accomplish for the Gentiles (Acts 26:18) is a reflection of the prophecies that the eyes of the blind shall be opened (Isa. 35:5; 42:7, 16) and that salvation will come (Isa. 61:1).³⁷⁹

Stern discourses about the irony of talking of “contextualizing” regarding Jews:

Nevertheless, there is something strange, even wrong, in talking about contextualizing the Gospel for Jews; because the Gospel was completely Jewish in the first place! If Christianity’s roots are Jewish, if the Gospel itself is Jewish in its very essence, why should it need to be contextualized for Jews? The answer is that it doesn’t need to be—

³⁷⁶ Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 348-349.

³⁷⁷ Mark Nanos, “A Jewish View,” in *Four Views on the Apostle Paul (Counterpoints: Bible & Theology)*, eds. Stanley Gundry and Michael Bird (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle, 3210-3211.

³⁷⁸ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), Kindle, 183.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 182-154.

provided the New Testament Gospel is actually being proclaimed! In fact, the Gospel had to be contextualized for Gentiles! ... The subsequent history leading to the outcome that Jews were required to be Gentilized in order to become Messianic shows how far practice strayed from the principles Paul had set forth in the New Testament. It also signaled that something very strange had happened to the Jewish Gospel along the way!³⁸⁰

What Stern calls for is what he calls “Type IV” evangelism, that is, “not a Gentilized Gospel contextualized for Jews, but a restoration of the Jewishness, which is in fact present in the Gospel, but which has become obscured.”³⁸¹

Acts 6:7 demonstrates the Jewish nature of the early church. In Acts 6:7, Luke wrote, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” Bock comments: “The size of the priesthood for this period has been estimated to be as many as eighteen thousand: eight thousand priests and ten thousand Levites.”³⁸² Furthermore, Bock contends that the conversion of such a large number of priests to faith in Jesus Christ would have been a powerful testimony for the Jewish people:

The conversion of a “large group of priests” has important apologetics value. The priests came to Jesus as previous opponents, so they must have assessed the claims of the apostles and found them convincing. Second, they would have checked the Scriptures carefully before deciding that the claims the apostles made about Jesus and God’s salvation program were true. Third, they would have been aware of the harsh view Jewish officials took on Jesus, and so their daring to come to faith indicates their conviction was strong enough that they were willing to suffer the scorn their conversion would invite. Finally, in converting from the camp of opposition, the priests were able to supply the faith community with insider information on the official priestly assessment of Jesus and his followers. Such information supports the conclusion that the NT accurately represents what the Jewish leadership thought of Jesus and the church.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*, Kindle, 260-268.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Kindle, 295-296.

³⁸² Kinzer, Kindle, 264-265.

³⁸³ Darrell Bock. “Apologetics Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.” in *The Gospel and Acts (The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible)*, Kindle, 18091-18101.

As Boccaccini says, “The Jesus movement was born a messianic and apocalyptic movement within Judaism; it was a variety of Second Temple Judaism.”³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ Boccaccini, *Kindle*, 31.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Researchers

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that Torah observance by Messianic Jews is not an evangelistic strategy, a way of practicing contextualization, or a means of doing outreach to ethnic Jews. Messianic Jews are to be Torah observant out of faithfulness to the covenant God made with them at Sinai. Christianity needs to be contextualized for Jews, so that the gospel is incarnated within their unique cultural and historical situation; nevertheless, Jewish forms and practice are more than a means of contextualization – they are also tied to the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant was not just made with the Exodus generation of Israelites, but was also applicable to each succeeding generation of Jews:

Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, “At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” (Deut 31:9-13).

Both Bock and the researcher would agree that first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant after the Day of Pentecost. An excellent example of this can be seen in Acts 21. In Acts 21, as Paul had done previously, he gives the elders a report of what God had done during his missionary journey among the Gentiles (“James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry” [Acts 21:18-19]). After James and the elders “heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who

have believed. They are all zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). After having delivered his report, the elders informed Paul that many Jews (πόσαι μυριάδες [*posai myriades*] – lit. “how great a myriad”) had become believers. While the word μυριάς (*myrias*) literally means “ten thousand,” it is more often used in a figurative sense to mean “a very large number, not exactly defined.”³⁸⁵

Bock writes:

A strong contingent of thousands (μυριάδες, *myriades*) of Jewish believers also respect the law, being zealous for it. This is probably hyperbole for a significant response. The phrase “zealous of the law” (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου, *zēlōtai tou nomou*) has a rich background, as it was used in I Maccabees of faithful Jews who stood up against the increasing Hellenization of Judaism (I Macc. 2:42; 2 Macc. 4:2; 1QS 1.7; 6.13-14; Fitzmyer 1998:693). The Jewish population in the Jerusalem church is significant. Acts 2-6 records thousands of Jews responding (2:41; 4:4; 6:7). In other words, the church has made inroads in the city, whose population is estimated to have been about thirty to fifty thousand.³⁸⁶

In Acts 11, Peter defends his evangelization of Gentiles before “members of the circumcision party,” saying that God was the one who took the initiative in the outreach by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles. The Jerusalem Council was convened, based upon the assumption that Jews would continue to be circumcised and walk in the commands of Moses, but questioning whether Gentiles should likewise. The Apostle Paul followed the Torah practices of circumcising Timothy in Acts 16 and undergoing a Jewish purification rite in Acts 21. Bock and the author of this dissertation agree that the early Jewish believers were Torah observant, but we disagree over “why?” For Bock, it was for the reason of being culturally sensitive, in an effort to minister cross-culturally, to contextualize the gospel (and to avoid offense).

If first-century Messianic Jews were Torah observant, then why did this cease to be the case over time? For Bock, this was because the Mosaic Law had reached its end and was no

³⁸⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 529.

³⁸⁶ Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 646-647.

longer central like it was prior to Christ's coming. In the researcher's opinion, one cannot prove from the Bible that Torah observance for Messianic Jews was intended to be temporary. Torah observance gradually faded from the church as the leadership became Gentile, and as Gentile Church leaders adopted a condescending attitude towards Jews. The researcher does not believe that the New Covenant terminated or usurped the Torah, but only brought about a qualitative newness stemming from the baptism/filling of the Holy Spirit. Only specific, targeted aspects of the Law were abrogated, namely, the Day of Atonement sacrifice and the high priesthood.

Twenty-first century Messianic Jews should follow Paul's "rule in all the churches" (I Cor 7:17) and be Torah observant. Gentiles, likewise, should follow the same rule, and not seek to undergo Jewish conversion by becoming circumcised and becoming Torah observant. Instead, Gentiles should follow the four prohibitions for Gentiles that were decided by the Jerusalem Council, and consistent with the laws for "foreigners in your midst" in Leviticus 17-18.

In his incarnation, Jesus came as a Jew. He is presently seated at the Father's right hand, and his Jewish ethnic identity remains intact. In the Millennium, Jesus will reign as a Jew. Antisemitism is an abomination and a direct attack on our Lord. Spiritually speaking, Messianic Jews and believing Gentiles have the same spiritual status as children of God. Nonetheless, there remains a permanent, eschatological distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The primary way Messianic Jews can maintain their unique Jewish identity and avoid assimilation is via Torah observance. Messianic Jews have a glorious future in the eschaton, and certain national and territorial promises which were given to the Jewish patriarchs will be realized. Torah observance should be limited to commands found in the Written Law, and hyper-halakhic perspectives about food and defilement should be avoided. In the words of Rudolph, following the examples of both

Jesus and Paul, Messianic Jews should adopt “a lifestyle of flexibility within the contours of Jewish law.”

Jesus is the only way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike (John 14:6). What Jesus told Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, holds true today for all Jews worldwide: “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Messianic Jews should be Torah observant, but observant in the baptism, filling, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. To hear the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to reject it, leaves one without an atoning sacrifice; Hebrews 10:26 says, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.” When a Jew hears the gospel message, and yet they willfully suppress the truth about Christ, they blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Matthew 12:31-32 says, “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Anyone who rejects Jesus rejects the only means of atonement God has provided – for this reason there is no forgiveness, because there is no other sacrifice that is acceptable to God. When the Holy Spirit convicts an unsaved Jew concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), and that Jew remains in a state of unbelief, willfully remaining unrepentant, he “blasphemes” the Holy Spirit by rejecting his promptings. John 3:36 states the choice plainly: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

Christianity does not need to be contextualized for Jews; it needs to be restored to its original Jewishness. An accurate exposition of the Bible, true to its message, will be categorically Jewish. Jesus and his followers came with a new message, not a new religion.

Christianity should not be divorced from its Jewish roots. Fisher, in beautiful words, expresses the relationship between the New Covenant and Sinaitic Covenant:

[In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”] The word “fulfill” (*pleroo*) carries a variety of nuances: (a) make full, fill full, fill our fully (b) make complete, confirm; (c) show forth in its true meaning, bring to full expression ... The old law remains. The New Testament does not bring any new law, but does apply the old in the light of the fulfillment of the salvation-history ... the Bible presents fulfillment as cumulative, not disjunctive. The passage conveys the image of a crown. A crown shows something off in its full radiance. The whole Jewish system foreshadows Yeshua and highlights him, emphasizing his brilliance and glory. He, in turn, takes it up in himself and crowns it; he fills it and gives it meaning. He shows it off in its full radiance and significance. We can conclude, then, that Yeshua came as the fullest expression of the Jewish system, thoroughly consistent with it in its pure form, as the central, integral, and essential part of it. He shows us its true meaning and lifted it to new heights ... He crammed it full to the brim.³⁸⁷

Recommendations for Future Researchers

First, it is recommended that further research be done on the topic of whether the entire priestly/sacrificial system was terminated with the advent of the New Covenant, as opposed to only targeted aspects of the system, such as the high priesthood, and the Day of Atonement sacrifice.

Second, further research needs to be conducted on the subject of how the New Covenant, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and being born-again, should not be viewed as being antithetical to Torah observance, but rather the enablement for Messianic Jews to adhere to the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the deficiency of the Mosaic Covenant was not the covenant itself, but the ability of the Jews to keep it. “Spirit” and “Law” should not be viewed as an oppositional binary.

³⁸⁷ Dr. John Fischer, “Covenant, Fulfillment, and Judaism in Hebrews,” in *The Enduring Paradox*, 49.

Third, the author of this dissertation believes that future researchers should focus on the topic of how Torah observance is tied to, “being Jewish.” God has made an eternal covenant with Messianic Jews, and their identity remains forever distinct. Maintaining Torah observance keeps ethnic Jews from assimilating and losing their unique identities.

Fourth, the researcher would like to see additional research done on the connection between the decision of the Jerusalem Council pertaining to Gentile believers (in Acts 15), and the “laws for foreigners” in Leviticus 17-21.

Fifth, the researcher believes ongoing research needs to be conducted on the topic of how Torah observance is not necessarily tied to the Jerusalem cult system. It has been often argued that Titus’ destruction of the temple in AD 70 has made it impossible for Jews to be fully Torah observant. The researcher, by way of contrast, believes that a Messianic Jew can be entirely Torah observant in the absence of the temple cult, and that the priestly/sacrificial aspects of Torah observance ebb and flow with the absence/presence of the temple. Fischer says, “the fact that some details of the Torah cannot later, or today, be carried out is no indication that the law has been done away with. Ezekiel and Ezra certainly would not have argued so for their time, even though an essential part of the Torah – the sacrifices – had been circumstantially suspended.”³⁸⁸

Finally, further research needs to be done on whether it is realistic to think the Apostle Paul was “part-time” Torah observant or not. Chameleon-like Torah observance would be interpreted by any observant Jew as being “non-Torah observant.” In the author of this dissertation’s opinion, Paul observed the Torah out of covenantal fidelity, not out of expediency.

³⁸⁸ Fischer, 133.

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