

INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL RUDOLPH

The Bible can be appreciated from many points of view. It may be thought of as the biography of God in His dealings with mankind. It may be read as a treatise on the history of the world and, in particular, the history of Israel and the heathen nations. It may also be studied as a prophetic book, revealing our future here on earth and in eternity. In this work, however, it is mainly presented as a book of *Torah* law, containing God's instructions for holy, moral, and victorious living.

The term “Law of Messiah” appears only once in the Bible, and that is in Galatians 6:2. That notwithstanding, the term is extremely significant in signaling that there exists such a law, that it is related to “*Torah*” and, as we shall see, that both it and “*Torah*” are alive and well under the New Covenant.

TORAH AND THE LAW

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament defines “*Torah*” (תּוֹרָה - Strong’s number 8451) as follows:¹

“The word *tôrâ* means basically "teaching" whether it is the wise man instructing his son or God instructing Israel. The wise give insight into all aspects of life so that the young may know how to conduct themselves and to live a long blessed life (Prov 3:1f). So too God, motivated by love, reveals to man basic insight into how to live with each other and how to approach God. Through the law God shows his interest in all aspects of man's life which is to be lived under his direction and care. Law of God stands parallel to word of the Lord to signify that law is the revelation of God's will (e.g. Isa 1:10). In this capacity it becomes the nation's wisdom and understanding so that others will marvel at the quality of Israel's distinctive life style (Deut 4:6). Thus there is a very similar understanding of the role of teaching with its results in the wisdom school, in the priestly instruction, and the role of the law with its results for all the people of the covenant.”

“Specifically law refers to any set of regulations; e.g., Exo 12 contains the law in regard to observing the Passover, Some other specific laws include those for the various offerings (Lev 7:37), for leprosy (Lev 14:57) and for jealousy (Num 5:29). In this light law is often considered to consist of statutes, ordinances, precepts, commandments, and testimonies.”

“The meaning of the word gains further perspective in the light of Deut. According to Deut 1:5 Moses sets about to explain the law; law here would encompass the moral law, both in its apodictic and casuistic formulation, and the ceremonial law. The genius of Deut is that it interprets the external law in the light of its desired effect on man's inner attitudes. In addition, the book of Deut itself shows that the law has a broad meaning to encompass history, regulations and their interpretation, and exhortations. It is not merely the listing of casuistic statements as is the case in Hammurabi's code. Later the word extended to include the first five books of the Bible in all their variety.”

¹ R. Laird Harris, editor, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, TWOT No. 910, p. 404, Moody Press (Chicago, Illinois: 1980).

In addition, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon gives “direction, instruction, law”² as the primary definitions of “*Torah*”, and the Encyclopaedia Judaica states:³

“*Torah* is derived from the root **יָרָה** which in the *hifil* conjugation means “to teach” (cf. Lev. 10:11). The meaning of the word is therefore “teaching,” “doctrine,” or “instructions”; the commonly accepted “law” gives a wrong impression. The word is used in different ways but the underlying idea of “teaching” is common to all.

There are basically two ways in which “*Torah*” is used in the *Tanakh*. In one usage, “*Torah*” refers to “the Law” – God’s legal code which provides instructions on specific matters.

Examples of this usage are:

“This is the ***Torah*** of the burnt offering...” (Leviticus 6:2(9)ff);⁴ “grain offering...” (Leviticus 6:7(14)ff); “sin offering...” (Leviticus 6:18(25)ff); “trespass offering...” (Leviticus 7:1ff); “peace offering...” (Leviticus 7:11ff); “leprous plague...” (Leviticus 13:59ff); “jealousy...” (Numbers 5:29ff).

In most instances, however, “*Torah*” refers broadly to God’s teaching – His universal and eternal standard for conduct and life. Where “*Torah*” means “law,” it is usually accompanied by other Hebrew words having to do with law, such as:

מִצְוָה *mitzvah* (commandment – Strong’s 4687)⁵

חֻקָּה *khukah* (statute or ordinance (“regulation” in the CJB) – Strong’s 2708)⁶

מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat* (judgment (“ruling” in the CJB) – Strong’s 4941)⁷

The following examples contain the word “*Torah*” in addition to one or more of the above words, showing that “*Torah*” is connected to, but distinguishable from, commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments:

² Francis Brown, editor, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, “*Torah*”, p. 435-436, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

³ Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, Encyclopaedia Judaica, “*Torah*”, vol. 15, pp. 1235-36, Keter Publishing House Ltd. (Jerusalem: 1971).

⁴ Except where otherwise noted or is part of a quotation, the English translation of Scripture used in this book is from David H. Stern’s “Complete Jewish Bible (CJB),” and the *Tanakh* chapter and verse numbers cited are those of the standard Hebrew Bible (followed by the traditional English citations, in parentheses or brackets, where they are different). The copyright of “The Complete Jewish Bible” and its translation are held by “Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.,” and may not be reproduced without its permission.

⁵ “A commandment is an order from, and enforceable by, a singular authority such as a king.” Francis Brown, editor, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, “*mitzvah*”, p. 846, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

⁶ A statute is a legislated directive, generally enforceable by a branch of government. An ordinance is similar, but at a lower level.

⁷ A judgment is law created by a decision made in a case in controversy or a specific situation.

Numbers 19:2: *“This is the regulation from the Torah which Adonai has commanded.”*
Here, “Torah” cannot mean “regulation” or “ordinance.”

Numbers 31:21 : *“... This is the regulation from the Torah which Adonai has ordered Moshe.”*
Here also, “Torah” cannot mean “regulation” or “ordinance.”

Deuteronomy 30:10 : *“... so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah ...”*
Some translations of this verse speak of “statutes” rather than “regulations,” so here, “Torah” cannot mean “mitzvot (commandments)” or “regulations (statutes).”

Psalms 89:31(30)-32(31) : *“If his descendants abandon my Torah and fail to live by my rulings, if they profane my regulations and don’t obey my mitzvot, ...”*
Here, “Torah” cannot mean “rulings (judgments),” “regulations (statutes)” or “mitzvot (commandments).”

Another way of distinguishing “Torah” (teaching) from “commandment,” “statute,” “ordinance,” and “judgment” is by its context. The following Scriptures are best understood when “Torah” means “teaching”:

Exodus 13:9 : *“Moreover, it will serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder between your eyes, so that Adonai’s Torah may be on your lips; because with a strong hand Adonai brought you out of Egypt.”*

Exodus 16:4 : *“Adonai said to Moshe, ‘Here, I will cause bread to rain down from heaven for you. The people are to go out and gather a day’s ration every day. By this I will test whether they will observe my Torah or not.’”*

Psalms 1:2 : *“Their delight is in Adonai’s Torah; on his Torah they meditate day and night.”*

Psalms 37:31 : *“The Torah of his God is in his heart; his footsteps do not falter.”*

Psalms 40:9(8) : *“Doing your will, my God, is my joy; your Torah is in my inmost being.”*

Proverbs 6:23 : *“For the mitzvah is a lamp, Torah is light, and reproofs that discipline are a way to life.”*

Proverbs 7:2 : *“Obey my commandments, and live; guard my teaching like the pupil of your eye.”*

Proverbs 13:14 : *“The teaching of a wise man is a fountain of life, enabling one to avoid deadly traps.”*

TORAH IN THE NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34)⁸:

“‘Here the days are coming,’ says Adonai, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on

⁸ The CJB numbering for these verses is not standard; the majority Tanakh Hebrew verse numbering is Jer. 31:31-34.

the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,' says Adonai. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days,' says Adonai: 'I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know Adonai'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.'"

Since in the Hebrew text of this Scripture, the word for “law” is תּוֹרָה (*Torah*), Jeremiah is quoting God as saying **“I will put My Torah in their minds, and write it on their hearts.”** Handily, this Scripture is repeated in the Greek New Covenant Scriptures in Hebrews 8:8-12. There, the Greek word corresponding to “Torah” (verse 10) is “*nomos*” (Strong’s No. 3551). This word is defined as “Torah” by Friberg’s New Testament Lexicon⁹ as follows:

“νόμος, ου, ὁ w. a basic mng. of what is assigned or proper law; (1) gener. any law in the judicial sphere (RO 7.1); (2) as rule governing one’s conduct *principle, law* (RO 7.23); (3) more specif. in the NT, of the Mosaic system of legislation as revealing the divine will (**the Torah**) *the law (of Moses)* (LU 2.22); in an expanded sense, Jewish relig. laws developed fr. the Mosaic law (*Jewish*) law (JN 18.31; AC 23.29); (4) as the collection of writings considered sacred by the Jews; (a) in a narrower sense, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, as comprising *the law* (MT 12.5; GA 3.10b); (b) in a wider sense, the OT scriptures as a whole (MT 5.18; RO 3.19); (5) fig. as the Christian Gospel, the New Covenant, as furnishing a new principle to govern spiritual life law (RO 8.2a; HE 10.16). “

A word related to “*nomos*”, the Greek root word, “*nomotheteo*” (νομοθετέω – Strong’s No. 3549), occurs in Hebrews 8:6 as νενομοθέτηται. This word is translated “established” in the New King James Version:

*“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was **established** on better promises.”*

Stern recognizes the equivalence of “*nomotheteo*” and “Torah” in his translation of Hebrews 8:6 in his “Jewish New Testament”:¹⁰

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as **Torah** on the basis of better promises.”*

In support of Stern’s thesis that the root word “*nomotheteo*” and “Torah” are equivalent, consider that νομοθετήσαι (*nomothetersai* from the root *nomotheteo*) is also found in Exodus 24:12 of the Septuagint,¹¹ and that very same word in the Hebrew text is תּוֹרָה - “*v’ha-Torah*.”

⁹ Timothy & Barbara Friberg, Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament, “νόμος”, BibleWorks 4.0, Hermeneutica Bible Research Software (Big Fork, Montana: 1999).

¹⁰ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament, 1st ed., p. 302, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1991).

¹¹ George Morrish, editor, A Concordance of the Septuagint, p. 166, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1988).

Employing these definitions, one may confidently modify Hebrews 8:6 in the New King James Version to be rendered:

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was given as Torah (based) on better promises.”

Since the “better covenant” in Hebrews 8:6 is the “New Covenant” which is referred to in Jeremiah 31:31(32) and Hebrews 8:8, one must conclude that the New Covenant was given as *Torah*, and therefore is *Torah*,¹² not referring to the New Covenant Scriptures, but to the covenant itself.

WHAT MAKES THE PENTATEUCH TORAH?

Since “*Torah*” is God’s teaching, there is a sense in which all Scripture is “*Torah*.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 : “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.*”

Nevertheless, Yeshua himself recognized a distinction between the *Torah* of the *Pentateuch* and other classifications of Scriptures:

Luke 24:44 : “*Yeshua said to them, ‘This is what I meant when I was still with you and told you that everything written about me in the Torah of Moshe, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.’*”

Why then, are the first five books of the Bible traditionally classified as “*Torah*”,¹³ whereas the remaining Hebrew Scriptures are not? It cannot be their inspiration, for by definition, all Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). No, the uniqueness of the *Pentateuch* is that it contains God’s major covenants prior to Yeshua. The other books of the *Tanakh* expound on these covenants, teach about them, prophesy about them, and present their history, but they do not themselves contain the covenants.

THE GOSPELS AS TORAH

I hope by now the reader is convinced that the New Covenant is a covenant of *Torah* – God’s teaching written on our hearts. Now let us see if any of the New Covenant books are *Torah* analogous to the *Pentateuch*. If the test for “*pentateuchal*” *Torah* is whether a New Covenant book of the Bible contains the New Covenant itself – that is, the “*Torah*” put in our minds and written on our hearts – then the Gospel books – Mathew, Mark, Luke and John certainly pass the test. Consider the many similarities between the *Pentateuch* and the Gospels:

¹² ‘According to MJ 8:6&N, the New Covenant itself “has been made *Torah*.”’ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, 1st ed., p. 498, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1992). See also, p.220 and p. 466.

¹³ Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, p. 23, William Morrow and Company, Inc. (New York: 1991).

1. The *Pentateuch* contains the life of Moses who was used by God to deliver the Sinai Covenant to Israel (Exodus 34:27).¹⁴ The Gospels collectively contain the life of Yeshua, who was used by God to deliver the New Covenant to Israel (Hebrews 8:6).
2. The *Pentateuch* contains the event in which Moses proclaims the blood of the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 24:8). The Gospels collectively contain the event in which Yeshua proclaims his blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28).
3. The *Pentateuch* contains the teachings and the commandments of the Sinai Covenant conveyed through Moses (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Gospels collectively contain the teachings and the commandments of the New Covenant conveyed through Yeshua (Matthew 5:1-7:29).
4. The *Pentateuch* contains the means by which men must atone for their sins through animal Sacrifice. The Gospels collectively contain the means by which men must be forgiven for their sins through Yeshua's sacrifice.
5. The *Pentateuch* initiates a priesthood and the appointment of Aaron as High Priest (Exodus 28:1-3). The Gospels collectively initiate a new priesthood and the appointment of Yeshua as High Priest (described in Hebrews 7:20-28).¹⁵
6. The *Pentateuch* contains shadows of things to come. The Gospels collectively contain the prophetic fulfillment of those shadows.
7. The *Pentateuch* ends with the death of Moses. The Gospels collectively end with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Yeshua.

Yeshua's life and blood are the substance of the New Covenant – its "*Torah*" (John 1:14, 14:6), and Yeshua's sacrificial death and resurrection mark both the New Covenant's beginning (John 19:30) and its fulfillment. It is in the Gospel books that we find this New Covenant substance, and therefore the New Covenant itself.

THE MOSAIC LAW: RABBINICAL VIEW

According to Rabbinical understanding, the Holy Scriptures are organized into three parts – the *Torah* (*Pentateuch*, Law), the *Nev'im* (Prophets), and the *Ketuvim* (Holy Writings).¹⁶ Rabbinical Judaism does not acknowledge the current existence of the "New Covenant" prophesied in Jeremiah 31:30(31), or the inspiration of the New Covenant Scriptures. One of the ways that Judaism has historically viewed "*Torah*" has been as synonymous with the Law of Moses – the law to which it considers itself bound today. Its further understanding is that all of the Mosaic Law is contained in "the *Torah*" (*Pentateuch*), and that all remaining Scriptures of the *Tanakh*,

¹⁴ The *Pentateuch* also contains the lives of the patriarchs of earlier covenants.

¹⁵ Yeshua's priesthood begins with his resurrection.

¹⁶ This categorization, to-wit, *Torah*, *Nev'im* and *Ketuvim*, has resulted in the Rabbinical canon of the Bible being known by the acronym "*Tanakh*." It is noteworthy that Yeshua himself referred to Scripture by these categories (Luke 24:44).

while inspired, merely historicize, exemplify, and embellish. Consequently, Rabbinical Judaism devotes most of its attention to the “*Torah*” and to the oral tradition (*Talmud*), to which it looks for interpretation.

STATUTES OF THE MOSAIC LAW: DEPENDENT & TRANSCENDENT

The Commandments contained in the *Tanakh* are God's explicit directives and are, therefore, divine statutory law.¹⁷ There are two categories of statutes commanded by God under the Mosaic Covenant – those whose literal compliance depends upon the Covenant's continued existence, and those whose literal compliance does not. I call the first of these, "covenant-dependent," and the second of these, "covenant-transcendent." Recognizing these two categories is important, because Hebrews 8:13 teaches:

"By using the term, 'new,' he has made the first covenant 'old'; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether."

Hebrews 8:13 suggests a diminishing literal role for covenant-dependant statutes; consequently, such statutes are not incorporated into New Covenant law in their original form and application, while statutes that are covenant-transcendent are readily adopted without change.¹⁸ So, for example, the literal application of statutes dealing with the Levitical priesthood, the Temple, and the government of ancient Israel, are in the process of vanishing (or have already vanished)¹⁹ as has the Mosaic Covenant has been vanishing, but the principles they teach remain important,²⁰ and we must not ignore them.

Romans 7:6: *"But now we have been released from this aspect of the Torah, because we have died to that which had us in its clutches, so that we are serving in the new way provided by the Spirit and not in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law."*

It is my opinion that "oldness of the letter," as some translations read, refers to the diminishing role of covenant-dependent statutes as literal law, whereas our need for literal obedience to covenant-transcendent statutes (e.g. Exodus 20:1-17) is timeless.

In the *Tanakh*, statutes are not labeled as "covenant-dependent" or "covenant-transcendent," and so one must exercise judgment in determining which is which. A rule-of-thumb test is to ask:

¹⁷ The terms "statutory law" and "statutes", as used here, contemplate ordinances as well.

¹⁸ Mosaic statutes are not enforceable as law in the New Covenant; it is their underlying teaching (*Torah*) and not the statutes themselves that carry over (See "*Torah*" infra).

¹⁹ Some believe that the Mosaic Covenant has already “vanished” as evidenced by Israel’s two thousand-year inability to conduct the Temple sacrifices (The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.).

²⁰ The author does not believe that the temple, priesthood, and statutes prophesied in Ezekiel 40-48 indicate a revitalization of the Mosaic Covenant. This is because (1) The priests serving in that temple are limited to the sons of Zadock, (2) the High Priest in that temple is "the prince" – not the sons of Aaron – and (3) revitalization of the Mosaic Covenant would contradict Hebrews 8:13. That being the case, the statutes appearing in the Ezekiel chapters are, even where similar to Mosaic statutes, newly enacted and not continuations of those in the Mosaic Covenant.

"Can or should this statute be complied with in the New Covenant era exactly and literally as commanded?" If the answer is "yes," it is "transcendent." If "no," it is "dependent."

Sometimes, the answer to the above "test" question is obvious. No one would disagree, for example, that it is as sinful to commit murder today, as in the past. On the other hand, the question of whether Jews in the New Covenant are still required to wear fringes on the corners of their garments (Numbers 15:38-41), may evoke two opinions opposite: (1) Yes, the original reason for doing so still applies – to remind those who see the fringes of the commandments of God, and (2) No, one can comply with the commandment's principle by wearing an alternative item such as a necklace depicting two tablets. In making such decisions for myself I rely on the wisdom of a saying that is not found in Scripture: "If it isn't broken, don't try to fix it." So, if the literal commandment is as appropriately performable today as during the time of Moses, then I do not search for an alternative.

TORAH UNDERLIES THE STATUTES

Underlying each of God's commandments is *Torah*, which we have seen is broadly defined as God's essential teaching.^{21, 22} Although not all *Torah* is statutory in origin, all *torah* is God's law because it is essentially His will. Even if a commandment is covenant-dependent, its *torah* transcends the change in covenant because God's values never change (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 102:26(25)-28(27); Hebrews 13:8). You will notice that sometimes I capitalize "*Torah*" and sometimes I do not and write it "*torah*." It is just my way of indicating whether I am speaking of God's teaching generically or more specifically as His law (or do I mean "Law?"). You see? That is why you should not take my capitalizations seriously, and Hebrew is not capitalized anyway.

Torah is not only revealed through Mosaic commandments, but through all Scripture.²³ The apostle Paul expressed this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work."

And of the *Torah* that underlies covenant-dependent statutes contained in the Law of Moses, Paul wrote in Galatians 3:24-25:

"Accordingly, the Torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful. But now that the time for this trusting faithfulness has come, we are no longer under a custodian."

Finally, in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34)^{24, 25} Jeremiah prophesied that God would make a New Covenant based upon existing *Torah*:

²¹ R. Laird Harris, p. 404.

²² Francis Brown, p. 435-436.

²³ This includes New Covenant Scripture.

²⁴ Quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12.

“Here the days are coming,’ says Adonai, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,’ says Adonai. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,’ says Adonai: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know Adonai’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.’”

Thus, not only does *Torah* pass into the New Covenant, it defines it, and without it there would be no New Covenant.²⁶

THE LAW OF MESSIAH

In Galatians 6:2, Paul instructs us:

"Bear one another's burdens – in this way you will be fulfilling the Torah’s true meaning, which the Messiah upholds."

Most English translations of this verse of Scripture employ the expression “the Law of Messiah,”²⁷ which is from where I derive the title of this book.²⁸ Although this verse is the only occurrence of the term in Scripture, the Apostolic writings are replete with references to operative law in the New Covenant; for example:

Acts 1:1-2 : *“Dear Theophilos: In the first book, I wrote about everything Yeshua set out to do and teach, until the day when, after giving instructions through the Ruach HaKodesh to the emissaries whom he had chosen, he was taken up into heaven.”*

1 John 2:3-4 : *“The way we can be sure we know him is if we are obeying his commands; anyone who says ‘I know him,’ but isn’t obeying his commands is a liar.”*

1 Thessalonians 4:2 : *“For you know what instructions we gave you on the authority of the Lord Yeshua.”*

Romans 2:14-15: *"For whenever Gentiles, who have no Torah, do naturally what the Torah requires, then these, even though they don’t have the Torah, for themselves are Torah! For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts."*

²⁵ The CJB numbering for these verses is not standard; the majority Tanakh Hebrew verse numbering is Jeremiah. 31:31-34.

²⁶ "According to MJ 8:6&N, the New Covenant itself 'has been made Torah.'" David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary.

²⁷ Usually rendered “the law of Christ.”

²⁸ It is ironic that the CJB translation does not employ the term "law of Messiah" (the title of this book) in its rendering of Galatians 6:2.

Romans 8:3-4: "For what the Torah could not do by itself, because it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate, God did by sending his own Son as a human being with a nature like our own sinful one [but without sin]. God did this in order to deal with sin, and in doing so he executed the punishment against sin in human nature, so that the just requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us who do not run our lives according to what our old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants."

We have seen that there are two components of law in the *Tanakh* that are eternal; they are (1) covenant-transcendent statutes, and (2) *Torah* (teaching) that is revealed through all Scripture. Since, by definition, covenant-dependent statutes vanish along with their vanishing covenant, it is the covenant-transcendent statutes, plus all *Torah* contained in the *Tanakh*, plus all law added in the New Covenant Scriptures, which form the "Law of Messiah" to which we are accountable today. Hence, the Law of Messiah is the New Covenant counterpart of the Law of Moses.

DIBEYR, TORAH AND MITZVOT

As used in this book, a "*dibeyr*" is an explicit commandment of God in Scripture – an imperative directive (usually a statute or ordinance of the Mosaic Law) which may be either covenant-dependent or transcendent. "*Torah*" can mean several things but, in the absence of the article "the" (e.g. "the *Torah*"), it most often means God's essential and eternal teaching or instruction. As used in this book, *Torah* underlies all of God's *dibrot*,²⁹ and is revealed (explicitly or implicitly) by all Scripture – not just the Scriptures of the *Pentateuch*. A "*Mitzvah*" is an interpreted statement of God's will, derived from Scripture, and expressed in the form of a commandment. A Mosaic statute or ordinance does not become a *mitzvah* (as used herein) until it is interpreted and restated.

There have been several attempts in history to codify God's Word into numbered *mitzvot*.³⁰ The earliest of these was *Hilchot Gedolot*, a work by Simon Kairo published sometime in the 8th Century. By that time, a principle had already been established in the *Talmud*, that the total number of *mitzvot* in the *Torah* was *Taryag* (613);³¹ and of these, two hundred forty-eight (248) were positive (*mitzvot aseh*), and three hundred sixty-five (365) were negative (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*)³².

Anyone who attempts to enumerate *mitzvot* in the *Torah* soon realizes that there are decisions to be made. What, for example, should one consider to be a *mitzvah*?³³ What level of departure from the plain meaning of the Biblical text is permissible? What level of inference is allowable? How does one count similar expressions of God's will that are stated differently at different places in the Scriptures? Do we count as two *mitzvot* those that are expressed both in the

²⁹ The plural of *dibeyr*.

³⁰ The plural of *mitzvah*.

³¹ Shab. 87a.

³² Mak. 23b.

³³ I. Brull, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Commandments, the 613", vol. 4, p. 181 (ed. Isidore Singer; New York: 1901-1906). Describes the opinions of early Jewish scholars over the selection of commandments that comprise the *taryag*.

positive and in the negative in different verses of Scripture, or do we count them as one? It is not surprising that those who have attempted this work have sometimes come to different conclusions.

MAIMONIDES AND YISRAEL MEIR HAKOHEN

To bring consensus, Judaism needed a scholar of such prestige that he could define 613 *mitzvot* that would be acceptable to a majority of the Jewish community. Such a scholar emerged in the person of Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides, aka “the RAMBAM”) who, sometime prior to 1170 c.e., wrote his compilation of *Torah* law in Arabic under the title *Kitab Al-Fara'id* (The Book of Divine Precepts). He subsequently revised his work and, by the end of his life, there were two Arabic texts or versions of *Kitab Al-Fara'id* in existence. Unlike his predecessors, Maimonides was careful to follow defined principles (fourteen) to justify his conclusions. This made all the difference, and his work received almost universal acceptance.³⁴

Three contemporaries of Maimonides translated his texts into Hebrew, and these translations became known as *Sefer haMitzvot*. Abraham ibn Chasdai made his translation from Maimonides' first version.³⁵ Maimonides' second text (translated into Hebrew by Solomon ibn Job of Granada and separately by Moses ibn Tibbon) is, however, considered the “standard Arabic text” today. More recently, Dr. Chaim Heller published a “corrected” Hebrew text in which he compared and reconciled Maimonides' Arabic texts with that of ibn Job, and an even more recent translation (Jerusalem Hebrew Text) was made by Rabbi Joseph Kapach.

As an academic achievement, Maimonides' enumeration of *mitzvot* was huge. However, it was too exhaustive to be a convenient tool in the post-Temple era, when many of the *mitzvot* dealing with sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood could no longer be performed.

Enter Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen.³⁶ In 1931, Rabbi Meir published *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar* (“The Concise Book of *Mitvoth*”)³⁷ in which he extracted from Maimonides' list, Two Hundred Ninety Seven (297) *mitzvot* – Seventy-seven (77) positive, One Hundred Ninety-four (194) negative, and Twenty-six (26) applicable only in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Meir intended his book to be a compilation of *mitzvot* that could be observed by Jews in the post-Temple era and, particularly in the Diaspora.

Besides listing fewer *mitzvot* than Maimonides, Rabbi Meir differs from him in other ways as well. To begin with, the two compilers number their *mitzvot* differently and present them in a different order. As a consequence, it is not always easy to determine which one of Meir's *mitzvot* corresponds to a given *mitzvah* of Maimonides. Second, while they usually agree on the Scriptures that define a given *mitzvah*, it is not always the case (nor is it the case with other commentators). It is also important to note that, while both Maimonides and Meir quote Hebrew Scripture as proof texts for their respective *mitzvot*, neither of their original writings give

³⁴ Some critics remained, notably Moshe ben Nachman Gerondi (Nachmanides).

³⁵ *Sefer HaChinuch* and Nachmanides' criticisms are based upon Maimonides' first version.

³⁶ Known respectfully as “the *Chafetz Chayim*.”

³⁷ English adaptation & notes by Charles Wengrove, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem / New York, 1990.

supportive chapter and verse numbers,^{38, 39} and their quotations are not always of the entire verses as they appear in modern Hebrew Bibles. Translators and editors of both of their works added chapter and verse citations that did not appear in the originals⁴⁰ and, in some cases, they quoted entire verses of Scripture where the original writings quoted only parts of verses.⁴¹

Finally, Maimonides and Meir do not always agree on the statement of the *mitzvah* that they extract from a given Scripture. For example, in response to Exodus 12:18, Maimonides' Positive *Mitzvah* #RP158 states that we are to eat unleavened bread on the evening of the 15th day of *Nisan*, while Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #MP23 states that we are to eat unleavened bread on the evening of the 14th day of *Nisan*. Presumably, the interpretive difference is in whether "evening" is understood to be before or after sundown. Another example is presented by Deuteronomy 6:13. The Scripture itself states that we are to "fear the LORD your God and serve Him." That notwithstanding, Maimonides' Positive *Mitzvah* #RP5 interprets it as "worshipping" God, while Rabbi Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #MP7 says it means to "pray" to God. Clearly, the ways the two commentators interpret the Scripture and write their respective *mitzvot* reflect both their judgment and their theology.

OTHER CLASSICAL ENUMERATIONS

Codifications written after *Sefer haMitzvot* have added to our overall understanding of God's commandments, but no other codifier ever attained the prestige and influence of Maimonides. As already stated, Yisrael Meir haKohen's work *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar*, was chosen here as a major comparison to Maimonides because he attempted to limit his list of commandments to those he deemed performable in the Twentieth Century. Although a complete listing and in-depth discussion of other codes of law are beyond the scope of this book, several nevertheless deserve special mention:

- (a) *Mishneh Torah*, written by Maimonides, is a fourteen-book compilation of laws gleaned from both Scripture and Talmud. It is reputed to be complete, taking no account of a law's applicability in the post-Temple era. Maimonides built *Mishneh Torah* around his *Sefer haMitzvot*, so he reiterated all the *mitzvot* in an introductory list⁴² and the relevant ones again before each of the fourteen books. The relevance of *Mishneh Torah* for the present work is for its expansive commentary and its subject-oriented organization.

³⁸ For Maimonides, this may be confirmed (without consulting *Kitab al Fara'id* in Arabic) by consulting early copies of *Sefer haMitzvot*, all of which lack chapter and verse references.

³⁹ For Meir, see Yisrael Meir haKohen, *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar (The Concise Book of Mitzvot)*, p. VIII, (Charles Wengrove, trans. & ed.; Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1990).

⁴⁰ E.g. see Moshe ben Maimon, *Sefer haMitzvot*, vol. 1 of *Rambam L'am*, (Jerusalem: Mossad harav kook, 1957) and *ibid.* 1971 (both in Hebrew). The former contains chapter and verse references while the latter does not.

⁴¹ To see an example of this in English, compare Positive *Mitzvah* #1 appearing in Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), *The Commandments*, (Charles B. Chavel, trans. & ed.; London: The Soncino Press, 1967) with Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), *Sefer HaMitzvot (The Book of Mitzvot)*, vols. 21 & 22 in the *Mishneh Torah* series, (Shraga Silverstein, trans.; New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1993). The former contains the entire text of Exodus 20:2 while the latter contains only the few words of the verse quoted by Maimonides.

⁴² A few differences exist between this list and *Sefer haMitzvot*, particularly in the Scriptures chosen as proof texts.

- (b) *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Big Book of Commandments), Moses of Coucy (1st half of the 13th Century).
- (c) *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* (Little Book of Commandments), Isaac ben Joseph of Corveil (2nd half of the 13th Century).
- (d) *Sefer HaChinuch* (The Book of Education) is attributed to Aaron haLevi of Barcelona (c. 1257) and is still in common use today. It was most probably based upon Abraham ibn Chasdai's translation of Maimonides' first Arabic edition and, although basically organized according to the chapter and verse sequence of the *Tanakh*,⁴³ his first manuscript retained some positive and negative commandment groupings as part of its order. In contrast, the *Sefer HaChinuch* version that is in print today contains none of the positive/negative groupings. This is the result (according to Charles Wengrov)⁴⁴ of an early printer's decision to reorder the *mitzvot*, causing them to appear in exactly the same sequence as the verses in the *Tanakh*; and so it remains today. The importance of *Sefer HaChinuch* for the present work, besides its order and historical content, is its commentary on Scripture application which is superb.

Most other codifications of Jewish law such as the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* combine Scriptural and rabbinical elements, and are therefore beyond the scope and purpose of this book.

NEED FOR A NEW COVENANT CODIFICATION

For Messianic Jews and *Torah*-adherent Gentile believers (followers of Messiah Yeshua), neither Maimonides', nor Meir's, nor HaChinuch's works are a sufficient guide for daily conduct and for relating to God.⁴⁵ It is because these believers acknowledge the continuing priesthood of Yeshua, look to regular communication with and through the *Ruach Hakodesh* for personal guidance (including for applying Scripture),⁴⁶ and seek to be obedient to additional *Torah* contained in the *Kitvey B'rit Chadasha* (the New Testament Scriptures)⁴⁷ – all part of a New Covenant between God and the Jewish people.⁴⁸ Jews who do not acknowledge New Covenant realities have no sacrifice for sin, no benefits of an interceding priesthood, and therefore their approach to God is necessarily more limiting. That notwithstanding, New Covenant believers (both Jews and Gentiles) have the same need as Rabbinical Jews for a handy compilation of Scripture-based *mitzvot* to assist them in their walk of obedience.

⁴³ Alternatively the *Chumash*, which consists of the Pentateuch and selections from the remainder of the *Tanakh*.

⁴⁴ Aaron haLevi of Barcelona, *Sefer haHinnuch*, vols. 1-5, p. xiii, (Charles Wengrov, trans.; Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1978-89).

⁴⁵ Rabbinical Jews do not believe that Yeshua is the Messiah.

⁴⁶ Messianic Jews and Gentiles affiliated with them do not look to *Talmud* for authoritative interpretation.

⁴⁷ Rabbinical Jews do not consider these Apostolic Writings to be Scripture.

⁴⁸ Rabbinical Jews do not acknowledge the existence of a New Covenant.

The challenge in writing this book was to provide such a tool – one that parallels the older works in form, but which adds additional Scriptures, and provides interpretation for New Covenant usage. Under-girding this attempt is my conviction, based in Scripture, that the *Torah*, which God gave to the ancient Israelites, is relevant today for both the Jew and the non-Jew, albeit sometimes differently for each:

Exodus 12:49: *"The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you."*^{49,50}

Romans 15:4: *"For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that with the encouragement of the Tanakh we might patiently hold on to our hope."*

1 Corinthians 7:19: *"Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's commandments."*

Galatians 3:24: *"Accordingly, the Torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful."*

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work."*

Hebrews 10:1: *"For the Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them."*

CONSIDERATIONS IN WRITING THIS BOOK

The matter of proper application of Scripture looms very large. I have approached this work prayerfully, and my interpretations are derived from my sincere attempt to receive the wisdom of God through the *Ruach HaKodesh*. I began with the *mitzvot* promulgated by Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen (the Chafetz Chaiyim) in his "*Sefer haMitzvoth haKatzar*,"⁵¹ determined which *mitzvot* in Maimonides^{52, 53} and HaChinuch's⁵⁴ compilations corresponded, and then compared the Scriptures that each of them purported to interpret. As a final step, I consulted a third translator

⁴⁹ This verse of Scripture is sometimes wrongly generalized to mean that all the commandments of *Torah* are applicable to Jews and Gentiles in the same way. This is a mistaken view because the context of this Scripture is of the sojourner who desired to eat the *Pesach* and thus needed to be circumcised.

⁵⁰ Even if one generalizes the verse from its narrow context of *Pesach* and circumcision, the CJB's choice of the word "teaching" rather than "law" suggests that there may be different applications for the Jew and the Gentile.

⁵¹ Yisrael Meir haKohen, *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar (The Concise Book of Mitzvot)*, (Charles Wengrove, trans. & ed.; Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1990).

⁵² Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), *The Commandments*, (Charles B. Chavel, trans. & ed.; London: The Soncino Press, 1967).

⁵³ Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), *Sefer HaMitzvot (The Book of Mitzvot)*, vols. 21 & 22 in the Mishneh Torah series, (Shraga Silverstein, trans.; New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1993).

⁵⁴ Aaron haLevi of Barcelona, *Sefer haHinnuch*, vols. 1-5, p. xiii, (Charles Wengrov, trans.; Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1978-89).

of Maimonides,⁵⁵ as well as New Covenant Scriptures that appeared relevant. Differences in the chapter and verse citations among the various translated sources can be explained by the fact that the translators and editors – not Maimonides, Meir, or HaChinuch – placed them there.⁵⁶

Not being bound by Talmudic authority, I did not attempt to arrive at *Taryag (613) mitzvot*, and I did not follow Maimonides' practice of listing *mitzvot* in categories of positive and negative. *Mitzvot* that addressed the same or similar issues were combined, and I made independent judgments regarding their applications and preferred means of expression. All of this was done in collaboration with Dr. Daniel C. Juster whose comments are liberally included.

After merging the work of Meir and Maimonides and eliminating duplications, I reduced the resulting list by eliminating those *mitzvot* that I judged to be not literally observable in the New Covenant.⁵⁷ For example, Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #MP52 (Deuteronomy 18:4) requires that we give the *kohen* (Levitical priest) the first wool of our sheep. With the Mosaic Covenant in the process of vanishing away or having already vanished (Hebrews 8:13),⁵⁸ I conclude that there is no longer a reason to support the Levitical *kohanim* with such gifts.⁵⁹

Although the New Covenant has rendered some of the Mosaic *mitzvot* literally unobservable, it also produced new ones, and changed how some of the Mosaic *mitzvot* are to be applied today. Consider, for example, Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #MP38 (Leviticus 25:35-36 & Deuteronomy 15:8), in which he states that we are to give charity to the poor in Jewry. This limited interpretation was justified under the Mosaic Covenant because the terms "brethren" and "brother" in Leviticus referred only to fellow Israelites and *gerim*. Under the New Covenant, however, our brethren include non-Jews of the faith grafted to Israel as well (Romans 11:16-19), and so I broadened the *mitzvah* to read: "We are to give *tz'dakah* (charity) to the poor among us."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), *Sefer haMitzvot*, 10th ed., vol. 1 in the *Rambam l'Am* (Yosef Kapach, trans.; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1990).

⁵⁶ Although most Hebrew and English renderings of *Sefer haMitzvot*, *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar* and *Sefer haChinuch* contain parenthetical chapter and verse citations, they were not in Maimonides', Meir's, or Chinuch's original works. All three quoted words of Scripture to support their respective *mitzvot*, but they did not identify the chapters and verses from which the words came. This resulted in ambiguities as to which Scriptures were intended where the quoted words occur in more than one place in the *Torah*.

⁵⁷ Even commandments which are no longer observable have teaching value for our lives (Galatians 3:24; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

⁵⁸ The author believes that after Yeshua's death and prior to the 70 c.e. destruction, both the Mosaic and the New Covenant existed simultaneously, but that after the destruction, it is likely that the Mosaic Covenant, already in the process of vanishing away, finally came to an end. Even if the Mosaic Covenant has not yet fully vanished, the author's view is that we are to enthusiastically pursue where God is leading – not dwell on what He is ending.

⁵⁹ There is reference to what we understand to be a Millennial Temple in Ezekiel, that some think implies a future restoration of a functioning Levitical priesthood.

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that Maimonides' positive *Mitzvah* #RP195, the counterpart to Meir's positive *Mitzvah* #MP38, does not so clearly limit the application of charity to fellow Jews.

ORGANIZATION AND REFERENCES

The organization of this book and the Scripture verses selected to support each *mitzvah* are not necessarily the same as those of either Maimonides or Meir and, similar to their respective works, no attempt is made to reference every confirming Scripture. Indeed, some *mitzvot* are included here that were not contemplated by Maimonides or Meir – e.g. *mitzvot* that are derived from parts of the *Tanakh* other than the *Torah*, and *mitzvot* derived from the Apostolic Writings. Also, I list some Scriptures merely because they are relied on by Maimonides or Meir, and not necessarily because I deem them critical for proving the *mitzvah* under discussion. Finally, when I quote Scripture, I quote entire verses even where Maimonides or Meir quote them only in part, and even when I am only relying on part of a verse to prove or support the *mitzvah* under discussion.

Maimonides, Meir and HaChinuch are the principal classical commentator / codifiers referenced in this book. Each *Torah*-derived *mitzvah* that I list includes its Scripture proof texts as well as secondary references where pertinent. I also include comparative comments where I deem them appropriate.

There is a modern work, “The Mitzvot: The Commandments and their Rationale” by Abraham Chill,⁶¹ that I consult from time to time and that deserves special mention because, in addition to his own commentary, he includes extensive references to classical rabbinical literature. Mainly, the order of his *mitzvot* are the same as *HaChinuch*’s – organized according to the Scripture order of the *Tanakh* – and, when more than one Scripture is cited, it is the first that governs the order; unfortunately, there are several occasions in which the order of Chill’s *mitzvot* depart from this plan, but Chill’s reader is alerted where that happens. Chill’s Scripture proof texts for the various *mitzvot* he lists are more numerous and diverse than those of either Maimonides or Meir, but his *mitzvot* are not easy to reference because they are not numbered.

There is another modern work “The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism” by Ronald L. Eisenberg,⁶² that I recommend for its clarity of commentary, and its excellent indices that allow one to easily determine Maimonides’ *mitzvah* number from its Scripture citation, and vice versa.

In addition to the rabbinical commentaries that focus on the *mitzvot*, there are others of a more general character, and there are also a growing number of Messianic Jewish commentaries such as the “Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament” by David H. Stern.⁶³

The following list summarizes this book’s overall approach and content:

⁶¹ Abraham Chill, The Mitzvot: The Commandments and their Rationale, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 2000).

⁶² Ronald L. Eisenberg, The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism, (Rockville, Maryland: Schreiber Publishing, 2005).

⁶³ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary.

- Cross-references to the *mitzvot* identified by Maimonides, Meir and HaChinuch, and to additional Scriptures not referenced by them.
- *Mitzvot* identified by Maimonides, Meir and HaChinuch that I do not deem observable in the New Covenant.
- *Mitzvot* not traditionally recognized, yet which I deem relevant in the New Covenant.
- Interpretations of Scripture from a New Covenant perspective.
- A Selective commentary that includes (1) differences in Meir's, Maimonides', and HaChinuch's perspectives where differences exist; (2) New Covenant interpretation of Scripture and *mitzvot*; and (3) application of *mitzvot* to Jews and Gentiles (including *k'rovei Yisrael*) and men and women.
- *Mitzvot* organized into subject categories.
- A New Covenant Literal Application (NCLA) code designation for each *mitzvah*, assigning one of seven possible New Covenant literal compliance levels to Jewish men, Jewish women, Gentile men, and Gentile women, *K'rov Yisrael men*, and *K'rov Yisrael women*.
- A Table of Contents.
- This Introduction
- An Introduction by Daniel C. Juster
- A Subject Index.
- A Hebrew-versified Scripture Index of Hebrew Scriptures.
- An English-versified Scripture Index of Hebrew Scriptures.
- A Scripture Index of New Covenant Scriptures.
- A Maimonides *Mitzvah* Index.
- A Meir *Mitzvah* Index.
- A Chinuch *Mitzvah* Index.
- An Index of Major Codifiers' *Mitzvot* & Referenced Scriptures Arranged by HaChinuch's *Mitzvah* Numbers & Labeled by *Parashah*.
- An Index of Referenced Scriptures Arranged by *Parashah*.
- A Hebrew Word Glossary.

Finally, I should like to say a word about usage. The writings of Meir, Maimonides, HaChinuch, and my writings as well, are attempts at interpretation, codification, explanation, and application of *mitzvot* that we believe we have found in the Scriptures. Although we did not write or compose (or intend to write or compose) any new commandments, this book follows the common usage of saying that XYZ "wrote" *mitzvot*, or of referring to one of our writings as "XYZ's *mitzvah*" when talking about our compilations and explanations. I follow this

convention of usage both for the historical commentators as well as for myself within this book and by doing so, no disrespect to God (from whom these *mitzvot* are derived) is intended.

CHOICE OF TRANSLATION

The *mitzvot* which are the subject of this book derive from the original biblical languages and not from any English or other translation. Nevertheless, because this book was written with the English speaker in mind, it was necessary that I select an English translation in which the Scriptures being discussed could be displayed. I chose to use David H. Stern's 1998 translation known as the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)⁶⁴ because, more than any other, it brings out the Jewish background and nuances of the Scriptures, and this despite Dr. Stern himself stating:

*“So the Tanakh you have in this book is something between a translation and a paraphrase; since it is partly one and partly the other, I refuse to define it as either and instead call it simply a “version.” On the other hand, the books of the New Covenant are my translation from the original Greek.”*⁶⁵

COLLABORATION WITH DANIEL C. JUSTER

This book has been written in collaboration with Dr. Daniel C. Juster. Dr. Juster is a *shaliach* of *Tikkun*, an international network of Messianic Jewish congregations, and he is the author of numerous books and journal articles on Messianic Jewish theology and ministry subjects. In some cases Dr. Juster's commentary is labeled as his alone, but in many cases his and mine are integrated seamlessly.

A WORK TO BUILD UPON

The uniqueness of this book is not so much in its commentary (although I have prayerfully sought God's wisdom while writing it), but in its utility as a handbook and a framework for others to build upon. I am aware that there are some who might criticize me for publishing my personal views and interpretations of God's commandments, preferring that a work such as this be undertaken by a plurality of scholars and with the authority of a community behind it. In my defense, I will only say that this work is no different than any other commentary on Scripture, most of which have been written by individuals. Indeed, Maimonides himself came under criticism for not citing Talmudic sources to support his application of rules for deciding which *mitzvot* to codify⁶⁶ and for not disclosing the identity of scholars that declared rules on which he relied.⁶⁷

DEDICATION

I am greatly indebted to my life partner my wonderful wife Marie for her loving and sacrificial support of all my endeavors, to my son David for his advice, encouragement, and scholarly

⁶⁴ Stern, Complete Jewish Bible (CJB). The copyright of “The Complete Jewish Bible” and its translation are held by “Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.,” and may not be reproduced without its permission.

⁶⁵ Stern, CJB, p. xiv.

⁶⁶ Nahum Rakover, ed., Maimonides as Codifier of Jewish Law, p.26, in the Library of Jewish Law, (Jerusalem: The Jewish Legal Heritage Society, 1987).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.39.

example, to my son Brian for modeling how to love and serve those who are elderly, disabled, and in need, to my other children Kevin, Steve, and Patty who make being their father a joy, and to my long time mentor Dr. Daniel C. Juster for his friendship, collaboration, and his many contributions to this book to ensure its biblical and cultural Jewish accuracy.