

The Torah of Messianic Judaism

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Delivered to Ohev Yisrael May 27, 2017

For some time, I have thought that “Messianic Judaism” is not a good name for our religion because all Judaism is and always has been Messianic, the only question being: Who is the real Messiah? Judaism’s history has produced a number of false Messiah’s that include Simon Bar Kokhba in the 2nd century, Shabbetai Zevi in the 17th century, and Menachem Mendel Schneerson of the *Chabad* most recently. But we know that Yeshua is the real Messiah, so perhaps “Yeshuic Judaism” or even “New Covenant Judaism” would be better terms for who we are but alas, we are stuck with “Messianic Judaism.”

More important than what we are called is what we believe as distinguished from other Judaisms. The most common differences spoken of are that we believe in Yeshua, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe that the New Testament is Scripture, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe we are in a New Covenant, and the other Judaisms do not. We also believe that the *Ru’ach Hakodesh* (the Holy Spirit) is active in our lives today, and the other Judaisms do not. Finally, most of the other Judaisms believe that God gave Moses an Oral *Torah* (known today as the *Mishnah*), and Messianic Judaism does not. Well, those are a lot of differences, but there is even one more that is related to the New Testament, and that is what we “Messianics” consider *Torah* (i.e. the teaching or law of God), and how we handle *Torah* that was given to us ages ago.

This latter matter of the *Torah* or law of God is also one of the things that distinguishes Messianic Judaism from most of modern Christianity. A key Scripture (often wrongly understood) that defines today’s Christianity, is Romans 6:14 which (rendered in the New King James and similar translations) reads:

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

And here are a few other Scriptures that are similarly misunderstood (also in the New King James):

Romans 7:6: *“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

Galatians 2:19: *“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.”*

Galatians 3:10a: *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; ..”*

So now that I have turned you all into non-Messianic Christians by showing you these Scriptures, let’s see if I can rehabilitate you. How do I know that these passages of Scripture have been misinterpreted? It is because Yeshua himself exhorts us to keep the law of God – the *Torah*:

Matthew 5:17-19: *“Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (CJB)*

Matthew 23:23: *“Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim [Pharisees]! You pay your tithes of mint, dill and cumin; but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah- justice, mercy, trust. These are the things you should have attended to- without neglecting the others!” (CJB)*

And Yeshua told this parable after “A man approached Yeshua and said, "Rabbi, what good thing should I do in order to have eternal life? Yeshua said to him (Matthew 19:16):”

Matthew 19:17-19 *““Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good! But if you want to obtain eternal life, observe the mitzvot [i.e. the commandments of Torah.]” The man asked him, "Which ones?" and Yeshua said, "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't give false testimony, honor father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.”” (CJB)*

Why then do Yeshua’s words appear to contradict Paul’s words? Paul seems to be saying that we are no longer under the *Torah*, and Yeshua seems to be saying that obedience to the *Torah* is a component of our salvation. The answer is that I have

switched translations on you – from the New King James Version to the Complete Jewish Bible.

Whereas the New King James translates Romans 6:14:

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

The Complete Jewish Bible translates Romans 6:14:

“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace.”

Stern’s CJB translation of νόμον (*nomon*) as “legalism” rather than “law” is not accidental, nor is it inappropriately self-serving. It recognizes a frequent misuse of another Greek word in the verse, which is ὑπὸ (*hupo*) that is commonly translated “under.” The English word “under” is peculiar in that it has two meanings. One of them, “subject to,” is not the right meaning here because then Romans 6:14 would be saying that we are not subject to God’s law. The right meaning here is “underneath,” so that Romans 6:14 is more correctly translated:

“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not underneath [the umbrella of] law, but underneath [the umbrella of] grace [for the forgiveness of sin and salvation].”

In other words, while we are subject to God’s law, our salvation is no longer dependent upon it, which is a good thing because we have never fully complied with God’s law (nor can we ever). Instead, God has graciously provided His son Yeshua, our Messiah, whose sacrifice of himself takes away our sin when we fail to obey God’s law and subsequently repent. Hebrews 9:22 speaks to this as well, when it says:

“In fact, according to the Torah, almost everything is purified with blood; indeed, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

I have had an interest in the commandments of *Torah* in the New Covenant for some time and have, in fact, been writing a book co-authored with our *Shaliach* Dr. Dan Juster, titled: “New Covenant *Torah*: The Law of Messiah Compiled as *Mitzvot*” (*mitzvot* are commandments). I had just finished covering the *mitzvot* listed by Maimonides and was beginning to search for *mitzvot* in the New

Testament when I encountered a great surprise. I had long suspected that the New Covenant Scriptures contain law, but what I did not suspect was how much law there actually is. To date I have only gotten through the Book of Matthew and already I have identified eighty-nine commandments stated either explicitly or implicitly. Although I have read through the New Testament several times, it did not hit me that I was reading law, probably because I was not looking for law. For example, Matthew 5:13 states:

“You are salt for the Land. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on.”

What is the difference between that and the constructed *mitzvah* “*We are to be salt for the earth and not lose our saltiness?*” Or Matthew 5:22 stating:

“But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be subject to judgment; that whoever calls his brother, 'You good-for-nothing!' will be brought before the Sanhedrin; that whoever says, 'Fool!' incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of Gei-Hinnom!”

What is the difference between that and the constructed *mitzvah* “*We are not to nurse anger against nor despise our brother?*” There is no difference, and that is exactly how Maimonides and others compiled their 613 *mitzvot* – by going verse-by-verse, Genesis through Deuteronomy.

I still have a few more minutes for giving this message, so let me astound you by sharing with you the eighty-nine commandments that I found in the Book of Matthew – a book of the Bible that ostensibly tells us that we are no longer under law:

Chapter 1

- We are to know that our salvation is in Yeshua. 1:19-21
- We are to know that Yeshua was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of a Virgin. 1:19-23

Chapters 3 & 4

- We are to repent of our sins and be immersed. 3:1-6; 4:17

Chapter 4

- We are to live according to the Word of God 4:2-4
- We are not to test the Lord our God. 4:5-7

- We are to worship the Lord our God and serve only Him. 4:8-10
- We are to be fishers of men. 4:18-19

Chapter 5

- We are to be merciful to others. 5:7
- We are to pursue being pure in heart. 5:8
- We are to be makers of peace. 5:9
- We are to be salt for the earth and not lose our saltiness. 5:13
- We are to obey the *Torah* and teach *Torah*-obedience to others. 5:17-19
- We are not to commit murder. 5:21
- We are not to nurse anger against nor despise our brother. 5:22
- We are to seek reconciliation with a brother who believes we have sinned against him. 5:23-24
- We are not to commit adultery. 5:27
- We are not to lust after a person of the opposite sex who is not our spouse. 5:27-29
- We are not to divorce our spouse without first acquiring a *get*. 5:31
- We are to keep our vows to the Lord. 5:33
- We are not to swear oaths, but rather let our ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and our ‘no’ be ‘no.’ 5:33-37
- We are to bless our enemies, and not take vengeance for wrongs they have done to us. 5:38-42
- We are to love our enemy. 5:43-47
- We are to aspire to God’s perfection. 5:48

Chapters 5 & 6

- We are to be a light for the world and not allow our light to be hidden. 5:14-16; 6:22-23

Chapters 5 & 7

- We are to pursue righteousness. 5:6, 10, 20; 7:13-14

Chapters 5 & 19

- We may not divorce our spouse except on the ground of sexual immorality. 5:31-32; 19:3-9

Chapter 6

- We are not to give *tzedakah* for the purpose of being seen. 6:1-4
- We are not to pray in public in order to be seen. 6:5-6
- We are not to pray as do the pagans. 6:7-13
- We are to forgive those who have sinned against us. 6:14-15
- When we fast, we are not to allow our discomfort to be seen. 6:16-18

- We are not allow money to become our idol on earth; instead, we are to store up wealth in heaven. 6:19-24
- We are to be generous and not withholding. 6:22-23
- We are to trust God for our provisions. 6:25-34
- We are to seek first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all else will follow. 6:33

Chapter 7

- We are to judge ourselves and repent of our own sins before seeking to correct others. 7:1-5
- We are not to preach holiness to those who are closed to it, and who will use what is preached to commit sin. 7:6
- We are to be persistent in our prayers of petition to God. 7:7-11
- We are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. 7:12
- We are to judge prophets according to their fruit. 7:15-20

Chapters 7 & 17

- We must hear and act on Yeshua's words if we wish to enter the Kingdom of God. 7:21-27, 17:4-5

Chapter 8

- We are to trust Yeshua in both His words and in who He is. 8:5-13
- We are to become disciples of Yeshua and follow Him. 8:21-22
- We are to overcome fear by trusting God. 8:23-27

Chapter 9

- We are to have compassion for, and not to isolate ourselves from, those we are called to help. 9:10-13

Chapters 9 & 27

- We are to have faith in Yeshua for our healing. 9:20-22, 27-30

Chapter 10

- We are to act on the authority we have been given by Yeshua to cast out demons and to heal. 10:1
- We are to embrace the "Great Commission" we have been given to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel." 10:5-14
- We are to expect and accept that we will be persecuted on account of our faith in Yeshua. 10:17-23; 24:9
- We are not to deny our faith in Yeshua because we fear that men will harm us. 10:28-33
- We are to love the Lord Yeshua before all others. 10:37
- We are to receive true disciples of Yeshua in the same way as we receive Yeshua and God the Father. 10:40

Chapter 11

- We are to come to Yeshua for spiritual rest. 11:28-30

Chapter 12

- We are to know that Yeshua is Lord of the Sabbath. 12:8
- We are not to withhold healing and other compassionate ministry because it is the Sabbath. 12:9-13
- We are not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. 12:30-32
- We are not to cast out demons from persons who are unrepentant or of little faith and are therefore vulnerable to the demons' return. 12:43-45
- We are to consider fellow believers as family. 12:46-50

Chapter 15

- We are not to make void the Word of God by our man-made rules and traditions. 15:1-9
- We are to judge the cleanness of our hearts by how we speak and by what we say. 15:18-20

Chapter 16

- We are to know that Yeshua is the Messiah, the son of God. 16:13-17, 20
- We are to die to our self-interests and follow Yeshua. 16:24

Chapters 16 & 18

- We are to know that the Messianic Community has authority to make decisions on earth that are reflected in heaven. 16:18-19; 18:18-20

Chapters 16 & 20

- We are to know that Yeshua's death and resurrection were preplanned and were not accidental. 16:21; 20:17-19

Chapter 17

- We are to have faith for the power and authority that God has given us. 17:18-21 *

Chapter 18

- We must aspire to the innocence and humility of little children. 18:1-4
- We are to bless and not do harm to the faith of children. 18:4-6, 10-14
- We are not to allow our bodies (or parts thereof) to lead us into sin. 18:7-9
- If our brother sins against us, we are to first go to him alone, then with witnesses, and then, if necessary, seek adjudication by the *ekklesia*. 18:15-17
- We are to forgive our brother each time he sins against us; there is no limit to the number of times. 18:21-22

Chapter 19

- If we want to assure our salvation, we must obey *Torah*, die to self, and become a follower of Yeshua. 19:16-30

Chapter 20

- We are to seek to serve – not be served. 20:26-28; 23:11

Chapter 21

- We are to have faith for the things for which we pray. 21:18-22

Chapter 22

- We are to give to our secular authorities that which belongs to them, and to God that which belongs to God. 22:15-21
- We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength, and love our neighbor as our self. 22:33-40

Chapter 23

- We are not to call anyone on earth our supreme teacher, father, or leader. We are to acknowledge God the Father as our supreme father, and Messiah Yeshua as our supreme leader. 23:8-10
- We are to be humble and not self-promoting. 23:11-12
- We are to comply with the physical things required of us by the *Torah* while not neglecting *Torah's* weightier matters such as mercy, justice, and faith. 23:23
- We are to give greater attention to being clean of spirit than being clean of grime and of appearance. 23:25-28
- We are to unhesitatingly say of Yeshua: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” 23:39

Chapter 24

- We are to escape the disasters and turmoil that are prophesied will occur in the end-times. 24:1-22
- We are not to be beguiled by end-time false Messiahs and false prophets. 24:23-26
- We are to expect and look for the Messiah's return following the great tribulation. 24:29-33

Chapters 24 & 25

- We are to be alert, expectant, and ready for Messiah's return, and being among those taken up to be with the Lord. 24:37-44; 25:1-13

Chapter 25

- We are to be good stewards of the little or the much that we are given. 25:14-30
- We are to devote ourselves to loving, protecting, and providing for our fellow man. 25:31-46

Chapter 26

- We are to commemorate Yeshua's broken body with unleavened bread, and his blood shed for us for forgiveness of our sins with wine. 26:26-29

Chapter 28

- We are to know that Yeshua has risen from the dead. 28:1-6
- We are to make disciples of Yeshua from the peoples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Yeshua commanded. 28:16-20

Well, there you are – all eighty-nine of them. So I ask you: “Are we who are New Covenant believers no longer subject to God’s law and given a free pass to heaven?” Jeremiah prophesied:

“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” (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-32(33)).

The New Covenant law referred to by Jeremiah consists of every word in the Bible that instructs us, and that is applicable to us. That notwithstanding, we understand that some commandments are applicable to Jews and not to Gentiles, some only to women and not to men, some only to parents and not to children, and some are not applicable to anyone today literally, because today we have no working Levitical priesthood, and no Temple in which we are able to conduct animal sacrifices.

To summarize, the purpose of this message has been two-fold – (1) to put the lie to the prevalent Christian understanding that obedience to God’s law (*Torah*) is not required of today’s believers in Yeshua, and (2) to highlight the New Covenant distinctive of Messianic Judaism that it is still entrusted for preserving and disseminating the “oracles of God.”