

# CHAPTER 6

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF TORAH



### What is Torah?

Torah means “teaching,” or “instruction.” It is derived from the Hebrew word “yara,” meaning “to shoot an arrow,” or “to hit the mark.” Most translations of the Bible miss this point when they translate it as “law.” Torah not only contains laws and decrees, but it also contains history, blessings, curses, poetry, and narrative. To translate the word as “law” is only partially correct.

Moses’ five books (B’resheet/Genesis, Sh’mot/Exodus, Vayikra/Leviticus, B’midbar/Numbers, and D’varim/Deuteronomy) are named Torah. These books include the history of the earth, man, the nations, the patriarchs (Abraham [Avraham], Isaac [Yitzhak], Jacob [Ya’akov]) and Israel. They also contain laws and decrees for the sons of Noah (Noach) (Genesis [B’resheet] 9:1-7), as well as for the nation of Israel. They contain provisions for blessings and curses. These five books comprise God’s instruction and direction to Israel, and to everyone who embraces Israel’s God.

The covenant God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus [Sh’mot] 34:27; Deuteronomy [D’varim] 29:1) is Torah.

The Tanakh (the Torah, Nevi’im/Prophets, and K’tuvim/Writings) is sometimes referred to in the New Covenant Scriptures as Torah. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:21 states, “In the Torah it is written: ‘With men of other tongues and other lips, I will speak to this people; and yet for all that, they will not hear me.’” The writer quotes the prophet Isaiah [Yesha’yahu] 28:11-12 yet refers to it as Torah.

Since Torah means “instruction,” any teaching based on the five books of Moses (Moshe) can be called Torah. Yeshua’s teaching in Matthew (Mattityahu) chapters 5-7, and elsewhere, can be considered Torah. In fact, we should consider Yeshua’s teaching His Torah to us.

Torah can be viewed as a “Ketubah,” a wedding contract, between God and Israel. God said to Israel in Exodus (Sh’mot) 6:6-7, “I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.” The verb “will take” is also used in Deuteronomy (D’varim) 24:1, in the context of “taking” a wife. The passage from Exodus (Sh’mot) 6 translates as a promise of betrothal itself. Exodus (Sh’mot) 20 contains the gift of the Torah, when God appeared on Mt. Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel.

The Torah serves as the covenant between God and His people Israel. The book of Deuteronomy (D'varim) closely follows the format of the covenant or a contract..

- The **preamble** introduces the great king. This occurs in Deuteronomy (D'varim) 1:1-5.
- The **historical prologue** retells the story of what God did for his people, Israel. We see this section in Deuteronomy (D'varim) 1:6-4:49.
- The **stipulations** spell out the covenant expectations and lifestyle. We see this in the commandments given in 5:1-26:19.
- The **blessings and curses** indicate the reward for covenant faithfulness, and punishments for being unfaithful. Chapters 27-30 provide these details.
- The king would have a **witness** sign the treaty. In Deuteronomy (D'varim) 30:19, God calls heaven and earth to witness the covenant.
- In the **succession** section, we find the instructions for the continuity of Israel's leadership. Deuteronomy (D'varim) 31:1-8 describes Joshua's appointment to take Moses' place upon the latter's demise. The Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant.

## What is the purpose of Torah?

One purpose for the Torah is to bring us to Messiah Yeshua (Galatians 3:24; Romans 10:4; Luke 24:44-45). One must interpret the Torah, Prophets, and Writings through Messianic lens to reveal Yeshua in them.

Another purpose for the Torah is to be a guidebook for the redeemed community (Romans 7:25, 8:3-4, 6-8, 10:5-6; 1 Timothy 1:8-10; Jacob<sup>1</sup> [Ya'akov/James] 2:10). In the Exodus (Sh'mot) story, we learn that God first brought the children of Israel out of bondage, out of the house of slavery in Egypt. Then He gave them rules to follow. In other words, He first redeemed them, and then taught the redeemed community how to behave. The same is true for New Covenant participants. First God redeems us from a life of slavery to sin, then gives us the Torah as our guide. This pattern teaches us that following Torah without first being redeemed is futile.

A point of clarification needs to be made regarding Romans 10:5-6. Most translations render these verses as follows:

<sup>5</sup>“For Moses (Moshe) writes about the righteousness which is of the Torah, ‘The man who does these things shall live by them.’ <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart . . .’”

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Jacob is otherwise known as James. For unknown reasons, the 1611 translators of the King James Bible chose to translate the name as James. Rather than perpetuate the error, this paper consistently uses the correct rendering.

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Verse 6 seems to contrast with verse 5. However, the word “but” should be translated, “and” or “moreover.” In this light, verse 6 complements the thought of verse 5. This one seemingly insignificant word changes the whole interpretation of the verse. Instead of interpreting the “righteousness which is of the Torah” as one thing, and the “righteousness of faith” as another, the two complement each other.

Another point of clarification needs to be made regarding Jacob [Ya’akov] (James) 2:10. Most translations render this verse, “For whoever shall keep the whole Torah, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”

Most believers interpret this verse to mean that if someone breaks even one commandment, he is guilty of breaking the entire Law of Moses (Moshe). Such an interpretation misses the whole point of the verse. What Jacob (Ya’akov/James) is saying is that if someone rejects a single commandment for whatever reason (too difficult, too inconvenient, not believed to be divine in origin, etc.), he is guilty of rejecting the authority of all Scripture. Interpreting the verse this way, the context implies we should accept the authority of all Scripture, both old and new.

Torah also instructs us in the ways of God (Deuteronomy [D’varim] 4:36). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us that “all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” “All Scripture” certainly includes the Torah.

Torah helps us recognize our own sinfulness (Romans 3:20, 4:15).

Torah protects us. Galatians 3:24 states, “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.” The word “custodian” is derived from the Hebrew word “ohmen,” which is “tutor,” or “teacher.” His job is to teach us the truth while protecting us along the way..

Torah provides us with blessings (Deuteronomy [D’varim] 4:40, 5:29, 33, 6:2-3).

Torah shows the world the wisdom and knowledge of the one true God (Deuteronomy [D’varim] 4:6-8).

Torah reveals God’s holiness (Exodus [Sh’mot] 19:5-6; Leviticus [Vayikra] 20:22-26, 22:31-32; Numbers [B’midbar] 15:37-40; Deuteronomy [D’varim] 26:17-19, 28:9).

### **What Torah is NOT:**

The Torah should not be confused with legalism. In various places, Rabbi Sha’ul uses the Greek word “nomos” (normally translated as law) to refer not to Torah, but to legalism. Romans 6:14 provides a good example. It says, “. . . sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace.” Many well-meaning Biblical teachers frequently take this verse out of context. The context actually calls for “nomos”

to be translated as “legalism,” “you are not controlled by legalism.” Other verses where nomos should also be translated as legalism include:

- Romans 3:28 - “a man is justified by faith apart from legalism.”
- Romans 9:32 - “they did not seek [the righteousness of God] by faith, but . . . by legalism.”
- Galatians 2:16 - “a man is not justified by legalism” and “by legalism, no one will be justified.”
- Galatians 3:2 - “receive the Spirit through legalism or by . . . faith?”
- Galatians 3:10 - “as many as are of legalism are under a curse.”
- Galatians 3:13 - “Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of legalism.”
- Galatians 5:18 - “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not controlled by legalism.”

Torah is also not to be equated with death (Romans 7:12-13). Leviticus (Vayikra) 18:5 says, “You shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them.” From this verse, we can reasonably conclude that the opposite will not occur by a person’s keeping the commandments. In other words, a man will not die if he keeps them. We can take the conclusion one step further and say that if a man will not die by keeping the commandments, his keeping them should not be to his, or anyone else’s, detriment. For example, if someone were drowning on the Shabbat, the commandment to save that that person’s life overrides the commandment to rest. Therefore, we conclude that the commandment to rest on the Sabbath was meant to bring life to us, not death. Put another way, the commandments were given that we might live by them, not that we might die by them.

Seen in this light, we can better understand the meaning of Romans 10:5, “For Moses writes about the righteousness of the Torah, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’” The meaning is not that a person attains redemption by keeping the commandments; rather a redeemed person “lives” a holy life by keeping the commandments.

Torah does not impart life to sinful man (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:21, 3:21). Instead, it is life for those already alive in Messiah Yeshua. Put another way, Torah is not a means of redemption, but a rule of life for those already redeemed. From this, we see that Torah is not the center of a believer’s life. Rather, Yeshua the Messiah is the one who takes center stage in His followers’ life.

Remember, first we are redeemed from slavery, and then we receive the guidebook for the redeemed community.

Torah is not to be confused with faith. Keeping Torah demonstrates faithfulness on the part of the one keeping it.

The word “faith” derives from the Hebrew word “emunah.” It is sometimes translated as “faith,” but this is only partially correct. The word mostly refers to faithfulness. Hence,

the “just shall live by his faith [in God and his faithfulness to God]” (Habakkuk [Havakuk] 2:4).

Torah is not to be confused with the so-called Oral Law. Rabbinical Judaism believes that in addition to the written Torah given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, God also gave an oral Torah. As the teaching follows, God gave the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai, Moses gave it to Joshua, Joshua gave it to the elders, the elders gave it to the prophets, and the prophets gave it to the men of the Great Assembly.<sup>4</sup> This rabbinical teaching is founded on Leviticus 26:46. The Hebrew word “Torah” in this verse is plural — “These are the statutes and judgments and torahs . . .” They accordingly interpreted the verse to be affirming two Torahs, and oral and a written.<sup>5</sup> Support for this concept may also be based on such passages as Numbers (B’midbar) 12:8, “I speak with [Moses] face to face” (literally, “mouth to mouth”).

Today, we refer to this oral law as the Mishnah, or Talmud. In Yeshua’s time, it was known as the Tradition of the Elders. He refers to this “tradition” in Matthew (Mattityahu) 15:1-6:

“Then some scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem came to Yeshua and asked him, ‘Why is it that your disciples break the Tradition of the Elders? They don’t do the ritual hand washing before they eat!’ He answered, ‘Indeed, why do you break the command of God by your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If anyone says to his father or mother, ‘I have promised to give to God what I might have used to help you,’ then he is rid of his duty to honor his father or mother.’ Thus, by your tradition, you make null and void the word of God!’”

Yeshua seemed to be relegating the Tradition of the Elders to a place of authority less than that of Scripture, much like commentary. Thus, Messianic Judaism believes that the written Torah was given by God, not the oral.

## Who is Torah for?

The Torah is not only for the natural descendants of Jacob, i.e., the nation of Israel, but also for those from foreign nations who would join themselves to the God of Jacob. Perhaps the strongest evidence for the fact that non-Jews who embrace the One True God are to follow the commandments along with the Jews derives from Deuteronomy (D’varim) 29:10-15. These verses state:

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<sup>4</sup> The Men of the Great Assembly spanned over 100 years, beginning with Ezra (‘Ezra) and Nehemiah (Nechemyah) , and concluding with Simon the Just.

<sup>5</sup> Siffra on Leviticus (Vayikra) 26:46, as cited in Brad Young, *The Parables*, p. 108, 1998, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts.

“All of you stand today before The LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives — also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water — that you may enter into covenant with The LORD your God and into His oath, which The LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but also with him who stands here with us today before The LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.”

Notice that “the stranger [who has joined himself to the people of Israel]” is included with the Jews. Notice also that the phrase in verse 15, “with him who is not here with us today” refers to future generations. No one would dispute the fact that the natural descendants of Israel are referred to in this verse. One additional group being referenced is non-Jews. If the Lord included non-Jews who were present (i.e. “all of you stand today”), does not the context call for them to be included with those “not here with us today?”

Deuteronomy (D’varim) 31:12 tells us that the Torah is for men, women, children, and the strangers who have joined themselves to the Jews. The full text of the passage, beginning with verse 9, reads:

“So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of The LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying: ‘At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the feast of Sukkot, when all Israel comes to appear before The LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this Torah before all Israel in their hearing. Gather your people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear The LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this Torah.’”

Notice the verse says that all the words of this Torah apply to everyone — men, women, children, and Gentiles who have joined themselves to The LORD.

Deuteronomy (D’varim) 5:3 states, “The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.” The covenant referenced in this verse is the Torah of Moses. The phrase “all of us” includes not only the descendants of Jacob, but also the children of the mixed multitude who came out of Egypt with Israel, as well as any Gentiles who may have joined themselves to Israel since their exodus.

The Torah provides additional Scriptures that explicitly teach that non-Jews who embrace the One True God are to follow the commandments with the Jews. These include:

- The commandment to observe the Shabbat (Exodus [Sh’mot] 20:9-10, 23:12).
- The commandment to observe Yom Kippur (Leviticus [Vayikra] 16:29).

- The commandment to sacrifice a burnt offering or other animal sacrifices to the proper place – the door of the tabernacle of meeting (Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:8-9).
- The commandment to abstain from eating blood (Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:10-12).
- The commandment to drain the blood from hunted animals and cover it with earth (Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:13).
- The prohibition against eating an animal that was not properly slaughtered, and the procedure for getting clean in case one did not eat (Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:15-16).
- The prohibition against idolatry (Leviticus [Vayikra] 18:3, 26).
- The laws of forbidden relationships (Leviticus [Vayikra] 18:6-20, 22-23, 26).
- The prohibition against sacrificing children to Molech (Leviticus [Vayikra] 18:21, 26, 20:2).
- The prohibition against blaspheming the name of God (Leviticus [Vayikra] 24:16).
- The prohibition against murder (Leviticus [Vayikra] 24:17, 22).
- The laws of restitution (Leviticus [Vayikra] 24:18-22).
- The commandment to observe the shemitah, the seventh year rest (Leviticus [Vayikra] 25:5-6).
- The laws regarding the voluntary sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow, or for observing any of the festival days (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:1-16).
- The laws governing the procedure for bringing a sacrifice to atone for the unintentional sins of the whole community state that the non-Jews attached to the Jewish people are included in the community (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:22-26).
- The laws governing the procedure for bringing a sacrifice as a sin offering for an individual's unintentional sin (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:27-29).
- The statute regarding the fate of the individual who intentionally sins (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:30-31).
- The laws regarding the six cities of refuge for someone who accidentally kills another (Numbers [B'midbar] 35:9-15).
- The laws of justice (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 1:16, 24:17).
- The commandment to keep the feast of Shavuot (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 16:9-11).
- The commandment to keep the feast of Sukkot (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 16:13-14).

When we take these verses in context, we can only conclude that the entire Torah was designed for everyone who would follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### **How is the Torah a covenant?**

Scripture declares that Torah is a covenant. Deuteronomy (D'varim) 5:2 says, "God made a covenant with us in Horeb." Since Horeb is Mount Sinai, the verse is referring to the Torah given at Sinai. Deuteronomy (D'varim) 9:9 refers to the two tablets the Ten Commandments were written on as the "tablets of the covenant."

Torah is a legally binding agreement between God and His people. Exodus (Sh'mot) 34:27 states, "Then The LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words, I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'" We are also told in Deuteronomy (D'varim) 29:1, "These are the words of the covenant which The LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." Both parties to a covenant have certain obligations. God binds Himself to keep His word in the covenant. By accepting the terms of the covenant, Israel is also bound by it. Seen in this light, the Torah serves as the national constitution for Greater Israel, Jew and non-Jew alike.

### **Did you know the Torah assists the redeemed community by providing regularly-scheduled reminders?**

The Torah assists the redeemed of both Israel – proper and Greater-Israel by providing regularly scheduled reminders of the covenant.

- Daily reminders — tzitzit (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:38-40).
- Weekly reminders — Shabbat (Exodus 20:8-11, 31:16-17; Deuteronomy (D'varim) 5:12-15).
- Monthly reminders — Rosh Hodesh, i.e., the new moon and the beginning of a new month (Numbers [B'midbar] 10:10, 28:11-15; Isaiah [Yesha'yahu] 66:23).
- Annual reminders — the holidays (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesach, Shavuot (Exodus [Sh'mot] 23:14-17; Leviticus [Vayikra] 23:4-44; Numbers [B'midbar] 28:16-29, 39).

### **How does the Torah fit in the New Covenant?**

The New Covenant is actually a renewal of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. These covenants are unconditional, in the sense that God made an oath to Abraham and David. Neither of these two men did anything to deserve the covenants. God, in His grace, made them with the two men. They could only receive. Faith was the expected covenant response from both Abraham and David.

The Torah of Moses, on the other hand, is not an unconditional covenant. It spells out the stipulations for both parties to remain faithful to the covenant. The expected covenant response is not faith, but obedience, however, the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in accordance with Genesis (B'reshet) 16.

In the same way that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are promises and received by faith, so is the New Covenant. Hardly anyone would argue that point. If the Mosaic Covenant was later given to those in the Abrahamic covenant as a guide for living the holy life expected of those in it, can we not say the same for those in the New Covenant?

If so, then we can conclude that the New Covenant is really a renewal of all three – the Abrahamic, Davidic, and Mosaic.

Using this line of thought, let's carry the concept one step further. Hebrews 8:6 states, "But now [Yeshua] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established **AS TORAH** on better promises" (emphasis by the writer). With the exception of the Complete Jewish Bible and the New English Bible, practically every single translation omits the words "as Torah." This is more than an oversight. The compound Greek word in this verse, "nenomothetetai," appears in identical form in Hebrews 7:11. The word in that verse is usually translated as "received the law [Torah]." The implication of Hebrews 8:6 is that the New Covenant was given as Torah from Mount Zion in the same way as the Mosaic Covenant was given as Torah from Mount Sinai. The difference is that the Torah would now be written on men's hearts rather than tablets of stone. In addition, the New Covenant would not only be a covenant requiring faith, it would also require obedience. We can do nothing on our own to earn God's mercy. We can only receive it by having faith in the atoning sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua and His resurrection. Once we believe in Yeshua, we must live our lives accordingly. How does one do so? Through obedience to the Torah. Therefore, the New Covenant is received by faith, and one demonstrates his faithfulness as a New Covenant participant by obeying the Torah.

### **Doesn't the New Covenant teach that the Torah is no longer applicable for believers?**

In a number of New Covenant Scriptures, the Torah seems to be equated with death and bondage, as something to be avoided. These passages include, but are not limited to:

- Mark 7:19 — "He thus declared all foods clean."
- Acts 10:9-17 — "In [the sheet] were all kinds of 4-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.'"
- Romans 3:28 — "A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Torah."
- Romans 6:14 — "You are not under law, but under grace."
- Romans 7:1-6 — "We have been delivered from Torah, having died to what we were held by."
- Romans 10:4 — "Messiah is the end of the Torah."
- 2 Corinthians 3:7 — "The ministry of death, written and engraved on stones."
- Galatians 2:16 — "A man is not justified by the works of the Torah."
- Galatians 4:21-31 — "We are not children of the bond of women, but of the free."
- Ephesians 2:15 — "Having abolished in his flesh . . . the law of commandments."
- Colossians 2:16-17 — "Let no one judge you . . . regarding a festival or new moon or Sabbats."
- 1 Timothy 1:9 — "The Torah is not made for a righteous person . . ."
- Jacob [Ya'akov] (James) 2:10 — "Whoever keeps the whole Torah, and yet stumbles in one point, is guilty of all."

On the other hand, other New Covenant Scriptures seem to write about the Torah in a positive light. These Scriptures include, but are not limited to:

- John (Yochanan) 14:15 — “If you love me, keep my commandments.”
- John (Yochanan) 15:10 — “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father’s commandments and abide in his love.”
- Romans 3:2 — “To [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God [i.e., the Torah].”
- Romans 3:31 — “Do we make void the Torah . . . [No], we establish the Torah.”
- Romans 7:12 — “The Torah is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good.”
- Romans 7:14 — “The Torah is spiritual.”
- Romans 7:16 — “I agree with the Torah that it is good.”
- Romans 7:22 — “I delight in the Torah of God according to the inward man.”
- Romans 7:25 — “With the mind I . . . serve the Torah of God.”
- Romans 8:3-4 — “[Yeshua] condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us.”
- Romans 13:8 — “He who loves another has fulfilled the Torah.”
- 1 Corinthians 7:19 — “[Circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing], but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.”
- Ephesians 6:2-3 — “‘Honor your mother and father,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’”
- 1 Timothy 1:5 — “The goal of the commandment is love from a pure heart.”
- 1 Timothy 1:8 — “The Torah is good if one uses it [correctly].”
- 1 John (Yochanan) 2:3 — “We know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

How can such a dual concept of Torah be rectified? The simple answer is to examine the context these verses were given. Some of the “negative verses” are not negative at all. They are simply taken out of context. Others are responding to attempts to keep the Torah as a means of salvation. In such cases, the New Covenant Scriptures make clear that the Torah is useless. However, when the context holds the Torah as the proper conduct for the believer’s life, the Scriptures speak very highly of Torah.

Let’s examine a few “negative verses.” The context of the first half of Mark 7 deals with ritual purity on the Pharisees’ part. In verse 2, they found fault with Yeshua’s disciples because they ate with unwashed hands. The hand washing followed a prescribed ritual. Seeing the chapter in this light, we understand verse 19 to say that touching food with unwashed hands does not render it unclean. In this sense, Yeshua purified all foods. The “foods” spoken of here can only mean what the Torah considers food. If Yeshua had meant otherwise, surely the religious leaders of His day would have found fault with Him on such grounds.

Romans 6:14 seems to pit Torah and grace against each other, as if the two were mutually exclusive. Seen in this light, people must choose between life (grace) and death (Torah). Accordingly, believers have left Torah behind and have entered into the grace of God. As Dan Juster rightly points out, “the key word is *under*. The Law is no longer a tyrant of

condemnation to us. We are not *under* the condemnation of the Law.”<sup>7</sup> Author David Stern interprets law here to mean legalism.<sup>8</sup> Putting these two concepts together, we can interpret the verse to mean that we are longer *under* the condemnation of *legalism*.

Romans 10:4 seems to proclaim that Messiah put an end to the Torah. By examining the Greek word for “end,” we can easily refute this notion. The Greek word “telos” means “termination,” but in this context, the meaning is “goal” or “purpose.” Moreover, the Hebrew text says “the final goal of the Torah for righteousness to everyone who believes in Him.”

A casual reading of Colossians 2:16-17 might cause the reader to believe that Rabbi Sha’ul is condemning the practice of keeping Biblical holidays, observing the Sabbath, and eating kosher foods. Samuele Bacchiocchi explains these verses in his book, *God’s Festivals*. He writes, “The statement, ‘Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you . . .’ has been interpreted as a Pauline condemnation of the observance of Old Testament holy days. In spite of its antiquity and popularity, this interpretation is totally wrong, because in this passage Paul is . . . warning the Colossians not against the observances of the five mentioned practices (eating, drinking, feasts, new moon, and Sabbaths), but against ‘anyone’ who passes judgment on HOW to observe them.”<sup>9</sup>

Many have interpreted Jacob [Ya’akov] (James) 2:10 to mean a person can try to keep the Torah as best he can, but as soon as he breaks a single commandment, he is forever lost in sin. Although the concept has some merit, the verse is not following these lines. Taken too far, one might think the Torah is impossible to keep. Such an idea is grossly in error. David Stern explains the verse is saying, “If one withholds one’s willingness to accept the authority of any part of the Torah, one has abrogated the authority of the whole Torah.”<sup>10</sup>

For a proper understanding of the remaining verses, the *Bibliography* section at the end of this paper provides some excellent follow-up material for you to research.

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Juster, *Jewish Roots*, p. 95 (1995, Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA).

<sup>8</sup> David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 374 (1992, Jewish New Testament Publications, Clarksville, Maryland). Stern contends that the Greek word “nomos” can mean law of man, law of God, decree, or even legalism, as in the present verse. In Sha’ul’s day, the Greek language had no such convenient word. Stern points out that Sha’ul uses two technical terms to express the concept of legalism. These were “upo nomon,” or “under law,” and “erga nomou,” “works of law.” For additional information on this difficult topic, see pp. 536-537 of his commentary.

<sup>9</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals*, pp. 89-90 (1995, Biblical Perspectives, Berrien Springs, MI)-emphasis the author. Bacchiocchi contends that to understand the passage, one must realize who is passing judgment. He explains that it is the false teachers who impose regulations on **how** to observe these practices. The fact that the Colossians were keeping these holidays did not concern these false teachers, but rather the manner in which they kept them. Sha’ul is thus challenging the authority of these teachers “to legislate the manner of their observance.”

<sup>10</sup> David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 731 (1992, Jewish New Testament Publications, Clarksville, Maryland.).

## How did Yeshua uphold Torah?

Yeshua emphatically stated His purpose was to uphold Torah, not render it obsolete. In Matthew (Mattityahu) 5:17-19 He declared,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until Heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud<sup>11</sup> or a stroke<sup>12</sup> will pass from the Torah – not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so [probably by his actions] will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches [likewise, probably by his actions] will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

We need to understand that in the first century, one abolished the Torah simply by misinterpreting it. One completed or fulfilled it by giving a proper interpretation of it. Yeshua made such a declaration in Matthew (Mattityahu) 5 because He was about to demonstrate that some of the popular Torah teachings were invalid. He was bringing the proper understanding, thereby restoring its original meaning. Without such a bold declaration, people might have thought He was abolishing it through an improper interpretation.

He corrected the false teachings by using the familiar formula, “you have heard it said [false Torah teaching], but I say [correct teaching].”

From Matthew (Mattityahu) 5, we can conclude that Yeshua’s followers are to keep the Torah. If we are not to do so, as some boldly claim, this passage in Matthew (Mattityahu) would have been the logical place to introduce that concept. The fact remains, however, that He taught no such doctrine in these verses.

By observing His lifestyle through Scripture, we can see clearly that Yeshua kept the Torah. He was circumcised on the eighth day after His birth (Luke 2:21). His mother offered a sacrifice after the 40 days of purification had ended (Leviticus [Vayikra] 12:1-8; Luke 2:22, 24). Yeshua was consecrated to God as the firstborn son according to the commandment (Exodus [Sh’mot] 13:2, 15; Luke 2:23). Even as a boy, Scripture tells us that Yeshua went with His family every year to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Passover (Luke 2:41-42).

During His adult life, Yeshua rested on the Shabbat (Matthew [Mattityahu] 12:1) and regularly went to synagogue (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16, 6:6, 13:10). He also kept the feasts of Pesach (Passover) (John [Yochanan] 2:13, 23), Sukkot (John [Yochanan] 7:2-10), Hanukkah (John [Yochanan] 10:22), and one unidentified feast (John [Yochanan] 5:1).

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<sup>11</sup> A yud is the smallest Hebrew letter, and looks much like an apostrophe ( ‘ ).

<sup>12</sup> The word “stroke” is translated as “tittle” in other translations. This probably refers to “taggim,” the little decorations placed on Hebrew letters by scribes.

In a word, Yeshua was covenantally faithful to God.

### **Which Torah commandments are applicable today?**

Before answering this question, one must realize that not all Torah commandments apply to all people. For instance, the Torah contains commandments for women only, others pertain to priests, some to landowners, and still others apply only to kings.

An easy answer to this question would be determining whether Yeshua's redeeming act nullified any commandments. Many teach that because of Yeshua's supreme sacrifice, the commandments pertaining to sacrifices have been rendered obsolete. This doctrine is true in regard to the purpose of the sacrifices. However, such teaching does not mean that animal sacrifices will never again be offered. It simply means their purpose has changed.

Leviticus (Vayikra) describes five types of sacrifices: the olah, or burnt offering (1:3), the minchah, or grain offering (2:1), the shalem, or peace offering (3:1), the hataat, or sin offering (4:3), and the asham, or guilt offering (5:15). In addition, the Passover lamb could also be considered another type of sacrifice, since it really doesn't fall into any of the previous categories.

Before discussing this issue further, one must realize that the laws of the sacrifices require the existence of a Temple in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 12:5-9; Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:8-9), or at least the existence of an altar in the same location (Exodus [Sh'mot] 20:24-26; Ezra ['Ezra] 3:1-6). In our time, the Temple has not yet been rebuilt, nor does Israel have a say in the spiritual administration of the Temple Mount. Therefore, we can discontinue sacrifices on this basis alone. However, it's a likely possibility that the Temple Mount could once again come under Israel's spiritual control in our generation. Therefore, let us examine the matter more closely. Hebrews 10:18 states "an offering for sins is no longer needed." This verse probably refers to the sin and guilt offering. Using this line of reasoning, one could conclude the burnt offering and peace offering are still valid, but not sin offerings. However, we are told in Acts 21:23-26 that Rabbi Sha'ul went to fulfill his Nazirite vow in the Temple. Numbers 6:14 states that part of the requirements for completing the vow include making a sin offering. Furthermore, Ezekiel (Yechezk'el) 43:19-25 prophecies that in the coming third Temple, which will be built when Messiah returns, sacrifices will once again be offered (see also Ezekiel [Yechezk'el] 45:17). These include sin offerings.

Using this line of reasoning, we could conclude that Yeshua's supreme sacrifice did not put an end to the ACT of sacrificing animals in the Temple. Rather, His deed changed the role of these far lesser sacrifices. Formerly, these sacrifices looked forward, pointing to the coming Messiah. Now they point backward, helping us better understand what Yeshua accomplished for us.

So, we conclude that sacrifices are no longer necessary, but offering them in a future Temple would not be considered a sin, so long as the one bringing the offering clearly

understands that it is nothing more than a remembrance of the price Yeshua paid to redeem us.

Since the Temple currently does not exist, sacrifices cannot be offered. Since they can't be offered, the commandments pertaining to the sacrifices, as well as the commandments for the priesthood as they relate to sacrifices, are no longer enforceable. Similarly, the commandments pertaining to the Temple are also no longer applicable.

Some commandments are only valid in the Land of Israel. Even some of these require the existence of a Temple in Jerusalem, since a landowner would bring his produce there.

In reviewing these commandments, one might also determine the decrees regarding the cleansing of those with tzaraat<sup>13</sup> are no longer applicable. Yeshua did not become unclean when He touched tzaraat-afflicted persons (Matthew [Mattityahu] 8:3), as the Torah implies.<sup>14</sup> Rather, He cleansed the afflicted individuals. Would not the same apply to modern-day believers? In other words, would not the presence of the Ruach HaKodesh living inside a believer cleanse that person, so ceremonial cleansing is not required? Perhaps, but Scripture is not clear on the issue.

The same argument might also be made for those who come in contact with a dead body,<sup>15</sup> and for women in the midst of their monthly cycles.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Hebrews 6:2 tells us that one of the fundamental doctrines for the believing community regards immersions. The Greek word is plural, and is a slightly different word than the word used to describe the immersion of a new believer upon accepting Yeshua. The word speaks of the kinds of immersions specified for those who are becoming ritually clean. Should we conclude from this verse that believers can undergo ritual purification after touching one with tzaraat, a dead person, etc.? Again, Scripture is hazy on this issue.

If we disregard all of the above commandments, since their validity is certainly debatable, we can assume the remaining commandments are still applicable today.

These include:

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<sup>13</sup> Tzarrat indicates an unclean skin condition, and is usually translated as leprosy. The laws of tzaraat are found in Leviticus (Vayikra) 13. A person who contracted tzaraat is called a "metzarah," and is usually translated as "leper." The laws of cleansing a metzarah are found in Leviticus (Vayikra) 14.

<sup>14</sup> The implication is found in Leviticus (Vayikra) 14:46. In this verse, the person who enters a house that has been quarantined for suspicion of tzaraat becomes unclean. We deduce that a person is made unclean by coming into contact with a person afflicted with tzaraat through a kal v'khomer argument (i.e., from the lesser to the greater). If a *house* afflicted with tzaraat renders a person unclean, how much more can a *person* with tzaraat render another unclean by touching him?

<sup>15</sup> In Matthew (Mattityahu) 9:25, Yeshua touched a dead girl and brought her back to life. Rather than becoming unclean, as Numbers (B'midbar) 19:11 teaches, He imparted life.

<sup>16</sup> In Matthew (Mattityahu) 9:20, a woman with a flow of blood touched the tzit-tzit on Yeshua's garment. He did not become unclean, as the Torah commands in Leviticus (Vayikra) 15:19-27. Rather, He imparted cleanness.

- The Ten Commandments (Exodus [Sh'mot] 20, Deuteronomy [D'varim] 5).
- The commandment to study Torah regularly and teach others (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 6:7).
- Ordinances commanding observance of the Biblical holidays and the Sabbath (Leviticus [Vayikra] 23; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 16).
- The commandment to rest on festival days (Leviticus [Vayikra] 23; Numbers [B'midbar] 28:16-29:35).
- The commandment to remove the leaven from one's home just prior to the feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus [Sh'mot] 12:15, 18-20).
- The commandment to fast on Yom Kippur (Leviticus [Vayikra] 23:27; Isaiah [Yesha'yahu] 58:3).
- The commandment to count the 50 days and 7 weeks from Passover to Shavuot (Leviticus [Vayikra] 23:15-16).
- Laws pertaining to justice (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 1:16; 24:17).
- The prohibition against cheating anyone in monetary transactions (Leviticus [Vayikra] 25:14).
- The prohibition against unequal weights and measures (Leviticus [Vayikra] 19:35-36; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 25:13-16).
- The commandment to keep one's vows (Numbers [B'midbar] 30:3[2]; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 23:24[23]).
- The laws of marriage and divorce (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 24:1-4).
- The commandment pertaining to tithing. We can argue that this commandment has been changed with the coming of Yeshua. The Scripture declares that the tithe is to be given to the Levites (Numbers [B'midbar] 18:24). The Levites, in turn, give a tithe to the cohanim or priests. Since Hebrews 4:14 states that Yeshua is now our high priest, our tithes would accordingly go to him. By giving to our local congregations, we are, in a sense, fulfilling that commandment.
- The injunctions related to our generosity toward those less fortunate (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 15:7).
- The commandment to help one's fellow man when he needs assistance (Exodus [Sh'mot] 23:5; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 22:4).
- The prohibition against harboring hatred against another (Leviticus [Vayikra] 19:18).
- The prohibition against taking revenge on someone (Leviticus [Vayikra] 19:18).
- The prohibition against gossiping (Leviticus [Vayikra] 19:16).
- The commandment for men to wear tzitzit (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:38; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 22:12).
- The ordinances which forbid the wearing of linen and wool at the same time (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 6:9).
- The commandment to affix a mezuzah on each doorpost of one's house (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 6:9). [Traditional Jews and many Messianic Jews take this verse literally. Hence, they put mezzuzot on their doorposts. Others interpret the verse figuratively; hence, they may choose not to do so.
- The commandment to redeem first born sons (Numbers [B'midbar] 18:15-16).
- The decrees pertaining to the eating of kosher animals (Leviticus [Vayikra] 11; Deuteronomy [D'varim] 14:21; Exodus [Sh'mot] 22:30[31]).
- The commandment to give thanks (grace) after meals (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 8:10).
- All of the commandments listed earlier under "Who is the Torah for?" with the exception of those contingent upon the Land and those pertaining to sacrifices and the priesthood.

- Others. For a detailed listing of all 613 commandments in the Torah and their application today, see Appendix I of Dan Juster's book, *Jewish Roots*.

### **Are believers required to keep the Torah?**

A person asking this question reveals his improper view of Torah. Such a person sees Torah as a set of rigid do's and don'ts. Maybe he sees the practice of keeping the Torah as a vain attempt to attain righteousness through one's own efforts.

Such a person has a gross misunderstanding of Torah. A person who truly understands Torah would never ask such a question. If anything, he might ask, "Why wouldn't I want to keep Torah?"