

A Torah Foundation

When people attend a Messianic congregation, they are immediately struck with a connection to traditions and practices of not only today's Jewish Synagogue, but of antiquity long standing. For Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, entering into a Messianic congregation for a Saturday morning *Shabbat* service—there is an instant connection not only to one's Biblical heritage, but also one's ethnic and cultural heritage going back millennia. When the traditional liturgy and prayers are recited—which incorporates Scripture, hymns once sung in the Temple, and compositions from post-Second Temple Judaism lauding the Creator—Jewish Believers feel a strong comfort level, as they seek to live out their Messiah faith by embracing and not rejecting their Jewish heritage.

Non-Jewish Believers from Protestant backgrounds, visiting or attending a Messianic congregation, have varied reactions to the traditions of the *Shabbat* service. Many are sincerely intrigued, and they appreciate the structure and reverence of a worship time with Hebrew and English liturgy. Many indeed appreciate the ancient tradition of reading from the Torah scroll, seeing that canting the Hebrew aloud to the assembly is an ancient art to be greatly cherished. Others, however, do not see the value of liturgy or canting from a Torah scroll, considering these to be vain human practices. In fact, many—visiting a Messianic congregation almost entirely out of curiosity—are actually quite negative toward anything having to do with the Torah.

There is no question when reading the historical record of the Tanach (Old Testament) that obedience to God's Instruction is required of His people. Israel's obedience to the commandments of God's Torah or Law was to bring it great blessings and fame (Deuteronomy 4:5-10), but disobedience would bring judgment (Deuteronomy 30:1-2). The history of Israel throughout the Tanach is, unfortunately, one of frequent disobedience—and Bible readers often witness the required punishment or chastisement of Israel by God (Deuteronomy 27:26). As soon as the Ancient Israelites entered into the Promised Land, one encounters how the period of the Judges was one where "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, ESV). The Kingdom of Israel was split in two by the disobedience of King Solomon to God's Law (involving incessant polygamy, idolatry, and child sacrifice!), although there was a period of critical reform during the reign of King Josiah, which saw a renewed appreciation for God's Torah (2 Kings 22:1-23:28; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27). Following the Southern Kingdom's return from Babylonian exile, the custom of publicly reading the Scriptures to the community became established (Nehemiah 8:1-3). If the exile was caused by disobedience to God's Word, then

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it is logical that the Jewish community assemble to hear God's Word, so that such disobedience would never take place again.

The Torah Cycle

In today's Messianic community, just as in today's Jewish Synagogue, a major feature of the *Shabbat* service is reading from the weekly Torah portion. While Jewish history indicates that there have been different ways that the Synagogue has approached reading the Torah, with both annual and triennial cycles employed¹—the practice of the Jewish community reading through the Torah *is ancient*. In fact, the oblique statement appearing in Acts 15:21, "For from the earliest times, Moshe has had in every city those who proclaim him, with his words being read in the synagogues every *Shabbat*" (CJB/CJSB), is an historical attestation of the Torah being read and discussed in the ancient Synagogue.

Two significant Jewish figures from the First Century indicate how important it was for members of the Jewish community to come together, hear the Torah declared, and for it to be the centerpiece of education in holy conduct. The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived in Alexandria and was contemporary to Yeshua and Paul, stated, "And would you still sit down in your synagogues, collecting your ordinary assemblies, and reading your sacred volumes in security, and explaining whatever is not quite clear, and devoting all your time and leisure with long discussions to the philosophy of your ancestors?" (*On Dreams* 2.127).² The historian Josephus recorded how members of the Jewish community were permitted "to leave off their other employments, and to assemble together for the hearing of the law, and learning it exactly, and this not once or twice, or oftener, but every week; which thing all the other legislators seem to have neglected" (*Against Apion* 2.175).³

It is seen in the evangelistic efforts of Paul, that after the public reading of the Torah and Prophets (Acts 13:15), that he would use the opportunity to speak of the salvation of Yeshua the Messiah. Within today's Messianic movement, the weekly Torah portion, and its associated Haftarah reading from the Prophets, frequently tends to be a venue for considering the work of Israel's Messiah. This is an excellent way to testify of Yeshua to Jewish non-Believers, and to see evangelical Protestant Believers drawn to Messianic things, significantly connect with their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel. Today's Messianic movement, on the whole, follows an annual Torah cycle, divided into 54 Torah portions. In addition to the associated Haftarah from the Prophets, Messianics also have tended to incorporate associated readings from the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament).

¹ Consult Louis Jacobs. "Torah, Reading of," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

² Flavius Josephus: trans. William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 805.

³ Philo Judeaus: trans. C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 397.

The Bible of Yeshua

One of the significant pulls for many evangelical Protestant people, drawn by the Lord into the Messianic movement, is reconnecting with the Tanach or Old Testament Scriptures. As obvious as it may be, **the Tanach was the Bible of Yeshua and His Disciples**. Yeshua Himself spoke of how “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44, NASU). When a figure like Paul speaks of how “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV), much of what we today call the “New Testament” had yet to be collected together or even written. The Scriptures to which Paul was referring would have composed the “Old Testament.” Theologian John Goldingay emphasizes,

“One of the New Testament’s own convictions is that the Old Testament is part of the Scriptures (indeed, *is* the Scriptures). . . and that the Old Testament provides the theological framework within which Jesus needs to be understood. The New Testament is then a series of Christian and ecclesial footnotes to the Old Testament, and one cannot produce a theology out of footnotes.”⁴

The Tanach Scriptures, and consequently also the Messianic Writings, are built upon the foundation of the Torah (the Pentateuch or Chumash). If you do not understand the Torah, you are liable to misunderstand what is being said in the remainder of Scripture. You have to understand the foundational stories of the Patriarchs of the faith: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the formation of Ancient Israel as a nation. **Understanding the Exodus is imperative to properly appreciating one’s salvation and the sacrifice of Yeshua as the Lamb of God.** You have to understand that the theological patterns established in the Torah are repeated in the remainder of the Tanach, and indeed also, in the Apostolic Scriptures. The Torah forms the foundation of the Bible and Scripture progressively builds upon it as God’s plan of salvation history unfolds. The ethical and moral values of the Torah, for certain, affected the worldview and perspectives of Yeshua and His Disciples!

As Jon D. Levenson remarks in *The Jewish Study Bible*, “both Jewish and Christian traditions view the books Genesis through Deuteronomy in this order as a single unit, standing first in the Bible. The unanimity of tradition and the initial placement of these five books reflect their significant place within religious life. In Judaism, the Torah is accorded the highest level of sanctity, above that of the other books of the Bible.”⁵ Even though Christianity does accord the Torah some strong status, this status is not as high as it is in Judaism. W.D. Davies notes in *IDB* that “The coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new order in which, in some sense, the law is superseded.”⁶ While the Messiah Yeshua is always to be our primary focus of faith as Believers, and Yeshua as God in the flesh and thus our “Lawgiver” (James 4:12) must by necessity exceed the Torah itself in importance, does Yeshua supersede and make the Torah to none effect? Or, is the Torah fully realized in Yeshua, who has final authority?

⁴ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 24.

⁵ Jon D. Levenson, “Torah,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

⁶ W.D. Davies, “Law in the NT,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:96.

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How should we approach the Torah of Moses?

While the Torah of Moses is the foundation of the rest of Scripture—and all Bible readers should have a good understanding of it—it would be a mistake to say that with the coming of the Messiah, there have not been some changes resultant of His sacrifice for human sins. In Protestant theology, for certain, there are varied approaches witnessed to the role that the Law of Moses plays in the life of a Believer. There are theological traditions such as Lutheranism which see a strong contrast between the law and grace of God, considering the Torah to be a part of a previous time. There are other theological traditions such as Calvinism and Wesleyanism, which have historically sub-divided the Torah's commandments into the civil law, ceremonial law, and moral law. It is thought that now with the arrival of the Messiah, that only the moral law remains to be followed by God's people. (My own family, with mixed Presbyterian and Methodist roots, comes from a heritage which emphasized the "moral law" of God remaining valid for God's people.)

Within today's broad Messianic movement, different perspectives are witnessed as they involve the ongoing relevance of the Torah or Moses' Teaching for God's people. For sure, it is agreed that the Torah composes the ethnic and cultural heritage of today's Jewish people, to which they should be faithful. Yet, how do we approach the Torah as our spiritual heritage?

As far as it involves the continuity of the Torah for the Body of Messiah, there are those who believe, often following dispensational theology, that the Law of Moses was for a previous era. There are others—perhaps or perhaps not influenced by theological traditions that have emphasized the so-called "moral law" as continuing—which have thought that a review of practices believed abolished such as the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times or *moedim* of Leviticus 23, and the kosher dietary laws, is important. Those who believe in a widespread continuity of Torah practices in the post-resurrection era, tend to focus on the themes of the prophesied New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, and how God's commandments are to be written on the heart, **and is a decisive work of the Holy Spirit**. Concurrent with this would be the necessity for God's people today to recapture a proper understanding of how "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), the need to be holy (Deuteronomy 14:2; 28:9), and how blessings are given to those who obey the Lord (Deuteronomy 30:9-10). Unfortunately, given the great importance of a Torah foundation for those in Messiah, there are those who we will encounter, who can be very legalistic and inflexible.

Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?

Today's broad Messianic movement does adhere to some form of post-resurrection era validity to the Torah of Moses. At the very least, today's Messianic people believe that the weekly Torah portions should be read and contemplated, as we let its accounts inform our understanding of how God works in history, and how we need the salvation of Yeshua the Messiah. By virtue of holding its main worship services on *Shabbat* or the seventh-day Sabbath, observing holidays and festivals not adhered to by most of today's Messiah followers, and being concerned about clean and unclean meats—today's Messianic people do inevitably have some conflict with a great deal of contemporary Christian thought and theology, which teaches that the Torah or Law of

Moses has been abolished. In the minds of many Messianics, the idea that the Law has been abolished, has not only been a significant cause of many (claiming) Christians today being engrossed in great sins—ranging from abortion, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality—but has also caused many to be *utterly anemic* in their approach to the Scriptures, and how relevant the Bible is for their lives.

What did Yeshua the Messiah say about the Torah? In His famed words of the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord communicated, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19, TLV). Many people in today’s Messianic community, either Jewish Believers who originally came to faith via an evangelical Christian experience—and especially non-Jewish Believers who have been drawn into Messianic things—can testify to being convicted by these words. Yeshua the Messiah says that the Torah or Law of Moses remains in effect until our present universe passes away. And, the venerable Apostle Paul, whose writings are often purported to say that the Torah has been abolished, notably did say that proper doctrine must “agree with sound words, those of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and with the instruction in keeping with godliness” (1 Timothy 6:3, TLV).

If Yeshua says that the Torah is to be regarded as valid instruction for His followers, and if Paul says that proper doctrine must be in alignment with the Messiah’s words—then some necessary reevaluation of many Bible passages is in order. Today’s Messianic movement, in addition to simply wanting to have a *fully Biblical and holistically Scriptural view*, has to have a high view of the Torah of Moses for God’s people today, given its mission involving Jewish outreach and evangelism. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 specifically warned Ancient Israel against any figure who would come and perform signs and wonders for the people, and then teach against God’s commandments. Such a person was to be regarded as a false prophet. Unfortunately, this is precisely how much of Christianity has historically presented Yeshua the Messiah:

“Whatever I command you, you must take care to do—you are not to add to it or take away from it. Suppose a prophet or a dreamer of dreams rises up among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder he spoke to you comes true, while saying, ‘Let’s follow other gods’—that you have not known, and—‘Let’s serve them!’ You must not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams—for *ADONAI* your God is testing you, to find out whether you love *ADONAI* your God with all your heart and with all your soul. *ADONAI* your God you will follow and Him you will fear. His *mitzvot* you will keep, to His voice you will listen, Him you will serve and to Him you will cling” (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, TLV).

Many of us, whether we be Jewish or non-Jewish Believers, can testify to how when we informed various friends, acquaintances, or even family members *that we were simply attending a Messianic congregation that held its worship service on Saturday*, that we were in danger of falling from grace, committed some kind of sacrilege, or at the very least were trying to earn our salvation via works. We have each been confronted with a

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barrage of accusations, mainly quoting texts from the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, about why the Torah or significant aspects of it, are no longer relevant for today's Messiah followers. Few are aware of how debated the issue of the Law of Moses has been, for the holiness and sanctification of born again Believers, in Protestant theology over the past three centuries.⁷ But more importantly, too many people have been subjected to sub-standard interpretations and approaches to Bible passages, which were issued in a specific ancient context, and to which there might be various transmission debates from the source text into English.

Does the New Testament really do away with the Law? Our ministry has actually produced a substantial book (764 pages) on this issue, ***The New Testament Validates Torah MAXIMUM EDITION***. The bulk of this resource examines fifty Bible passages, mainly from the Apostolic Scriptures, which are frequently invoked to claim that the Torah of Moses is no longer relevant for God's people today. Certainly, while we do stress that we live in a post-resurrection era with new realities that have been inaugurated by the sacrifice of the Messiah,⁸ a widescale dismissal of the Torah is untenable—not only given Yeshua's own words about the matter (Matthew 5:17-19), but also the steadfast reality that the New Covenant He has brought about (Luke 22:20) involves the supernatural writing of the commandments onto the new hearts of those cleansed by His work (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The following is an abbreviated synopsis of the fifty Bible passages examined in *The New Testament Validates Torah MAXIMUM EDITION*, addressing common Christian approaches which see the Torah as something for a previous time:

Isaiah 1:13-14: "God hates the Jewish feasts of the Old Testament"

The Lord actually says that He hates people who sacrifice and pray to Him, whose hands are covered with the blood of the innocent (Isaiah 1:15-17). The festivals and observances in view are notably labeled as "yours," which places a huge burden of proof on the human people observing them inappropriately, not that they have all of a sudden been rejected by God as having value as instructions given by Him. Going through external religious motions, while at the same time facilitating injustice, is the problem.

Ezekiel 20:12-26: "God actually gave His people bad laws that they could not follow"

The Prophet Ezekiel describes the challenges that existed with the Israelites delivered from Egypt via the Exodus, and their children, in their difficulties with obeying God's Instruction to them (Ezekiel 20:12-24). Their descendants, being engrossed by sin and rebellion against God, were turned over to bad laws (Ezekiel 20:25) such as child sacrifice (Ezekiel 20:26). Such bad laws involved either outright paganism, or a perversion of a good Biblical commandment, such as the dedication of the firstborn (Exodus 22:9).

⁷ Consult the varied perspectives presented in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

⁸ Consult the article "The Significance of the Messiah Event" by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

Hosea 2:11: "God has put an end to the Old Testament Sabbath and feast days"

The Northern Kingdom of Israel practiced syncretism, where Biblical practices such as the Sabbath were kept in conjunction with the worship of pagan deities. Its disloyalty to God is depicted as an act of harlotry (Hosea 2:1-7), with the people not realizing how their prosperity came from the Lord and not Baal (Hosea 2:12-13). The religious observances that will cease are notably labeled as "her new moons, her Sabbaths" (Hosea 2:11), an indication how they had been taken up into the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom.

Matthew 5:17: "Jesus fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law"

The Messiah's expressed purpose in association with the Torah of Moses was precisely not "to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, NKJV). Whether Yeshua's fulfillment of the Torah be viewed as His proper interpretation of Moses' Teaching, and/or His fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, our Lord says that "not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass" (Matthew 5:18, TLV), and that the present Heaven and Earth must disappear in order for the Torah to be regarded as unimportant.

Matthew 11:13: "The Law of Moses was only in effect until John the Baptist"

What is actually said is, "For all the prophets and the Torah prophesied until John" (Matthew 11:13, PME). With the arrival of John the Immerser, a shift in salvation history was taking place. The arrival of John was prophesied, and subsequently the Messiah and the new realities He would inaugurate would follow (Matthew 11:12). No disparagement of the Tanach Scriptures or Torah of Moses is intended here, but what is intended is that they are incomplete without the Messiah they anticipate.

Mark 7:1-23: "Jesus Christ declared the dietary laws to be obsolete"

There was a controversy present because Yeshua's Disciples did not ritually wash their hands before eating, as did various Pharisees (Mark 7:1-5). Yeshua highlights some significant hypocrisy present here (Mark 7:6-13), and then addresses how what enters into a person does not defile him (Mark 7:14-15), as what is spoken by someone is what truly defiles (Mark 7:20-23). In informing His Disciples that what proceeds from a person is what truly defiles (Mark 7:18), Yeshua said, as is properly translated from the Greek of Mark 7:19, "because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and goes out into the latrine, purging all the foods [*katharizōn panta ta brōmata*, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα]" (PME). Ultimately, what is eaten is excreted from the human body.

John 1:17: "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth realized through Christ"

Speaking of the arrival of the Messiah on the scene of history, John 1:16 narrates, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (NASU). It is then stated, "Torah was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah" (John 1:17, TLV). The Torah of Moses is actually to be regarded as a revelation of God's grace, but its grace has now been surpassed—as God's grace is continuous—with the grace

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available in the work of the Messiah. This does not abrogate the Torah of Moses, but does reveal its incompleteness without the presence of Yeshua.

John 13:34: "Jesus Christ gave us a new law of love to replace the laws of the Old Testament"

Responsible Bible readers are aware that the commands to love God and neighbor are actually a part of the Tanach or Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). When Yeshua directed, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you must love one another" (John 13:34, TLV), this can be taken as either (a) a new quality of demonstrating love for others, as seen in the Messiah's own ministry, or (b) a love manifested via the power of the prophesied New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Acts 10:1-48: "Peter was shown a vision nullifying the dietary laws"

Peter did see a vision of a sheet of unclean animals, which he was commanded to eat (Acts 10:9-13). God told Peter not to regard as unholy that which He cleansed (Acts 10:14-15). Following this, Peter goes to declare the good news to the Roman centurion Cornelius, informing him, per his vision, that "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (Acts 10:28, ESV). The main intention of Peter's vision was to communicate how all human beings have been made clean by the sacrifice of Israel's Messiah, and that as a Jew Peter should not fear interacting with those of the nations.

Acts 15:19-21: "The Apostolic decree says nothing about new Christians observing the Mosaic Law"

The Jerusalem Council specifically met to answer the claim of some hyper-conservative Jewish Believers, that the new, non-Jewish Believers had to be circumcised and keep the Torah of Moses to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5). Peter made it clear that all are saved by God's grace (Acts 15:7-9, 11), and that a heavy yoke or burden was being unnecessarily imposed (Acts 15:10). James the Just testified that the salvation of the nations was prophesied in the Tanach, per the restoration of the Tabernacle of David (Acts 15:14-18; Amos 9:11-12). The Apostolic decree mandated only four things, which could have been construed as a "burden" (Acts 15:28), requiring immediate changes from those turning to the Messiah of Israel (Acts 15:20). When followed, these new Believers would be cut off from their spheres of social and religious influence in Greco-Roman paganism. Far from these people being "order[ed]...to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, ESV) by demanding mortals, Tanach prophecy and the plan of God were to instead be facilitated (Acts 15:15). This would necessarily involve the nations coming to Zion to be taught God's Instruction (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4), a work that could only take place at the prompting of the Holy Spirit per the Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 New Covenant.

Acts 20:7: "The early Christians met on the first day of the week, a clear abolishment of the Jewish Sabbath"

Scholars debate what is intended by "first of the week" (Acts 20:7, PME), as to whether this was a meeting "on Sunday to worship" (The Message) or "On the Saturday night" (NEB/REB) after the Sabbath or *Shabbat* had closed. This could make the meeting in

Troas "*Motza'ei-Shabbat*" (CJB/CJSB), a get together of the Believers remembering the departure of the Sabbath.

**Romans 3:19-22: "Through the works of the Law
no one will be justified."**

Traditionally, Romans 3:19-22 has been interpreted as meaning that human action in association with the Law of Moses will not bring one a status of redemption. Alternatively, various scholars have proposed that "works of the Law" involves ancient Jewish *halachah*, and that "justification" here primarily involves membership among God's people. The actual purpose of the Torah is not justification; instead "through the Torah comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20b, PME).

Romans 3:28: "Justified by faith apart from works of the Law"

Even with components of "justification" likely involving membership among God's people, the purpose of the Torah is not to provide justification. Justification is to take place via faith, for both Jewish people and those of the nations (Romans 3:29-30). Yet as Paul also asserts, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31, RSV).

Romans 4:5: "God justifies those who do not work"

A bad interpretation of Romans 4:5 would conclude that God is not concerned about born again Believers demonstrating good works resultant of their faith. The issue instead is people thinking that their human actions will merit some kind of justification, forgiveness, and a declaration of innocence before God—like a laborer would receive his wages (Romans 4:4).

Romans 6:14: "We are not under law, but under grace"

Born again Believers not being "under the law" is commonly interpreted as meaning that they should not concern themselves with the commandments of God's Torah. The actual status of "under the law" is something contrary to being "under grace," meaning being forgiven and remitted of sins. Many Protestant theologians throughout history have advocated that being "under the law" is a status possessed by non-Believers, who stand condemned as unrighteous sinners by God's Torah—a clear antithesis to being "under grace."

Romans 6:23: "Eternal life is a free gift"

Salvation is a free gift that human actions cannot earn. Debates always ensue about the behavior and obedience required of those who receive salvation—activities which are to result because of the supernatural action of God's Spirit on the hearts of the redeemed.

**Romans 7:1-25: "We were made to die to the Law
through the body of Christ"**

The main bulk of the discussion in Romans 7:7-25 describes the status of someone who recognizes the high value of God's Torah, but cannot quite seem to keep it due to innate human limitations. Paul says that born again Believers have been "made dead to the Torah through the body of Messiah" (Romans 7:4, PME), which is like how a widow "is discharged from the law concerning the husband" (Romans 7:2, PME; cf. Numbers 5:20, 29). The relationship of the unredeemed person is like the law of marriage being

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applicable to a wife. When the husband dies the law or instruction pertaining to marriage is no longer applicable to the wife—but this hardly means a widescale abandonment of the Torah's code in other matters. Just like the law of marriage is not applicable to a widow, so is the Torah's condemnation of sinners no longer applicable to the redeemed, and what Believers are actually "made dead" to is the Torah's condemnation, which was taken upon Yeshua the Messiah.

Romans 8:1-4: "The law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death"

"The law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua" is a spiritual law or constant demonstrated within a person, who recognizes Yeshua as Lord, is declared free of guilt and condemnation from Torah disobedience, is spiritually regenerated, and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. A second spiritual law or constant, "the law of sin and death," is that once a person commits sin, he or she will die spiritually and experience a condition of exile from the Creator, and exist in a permanent state of condemnation and punishment if never rectified. A definite purpose of being saved and set free from sin is "that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Romans 8:4, NIV).

Romans 10:4: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes"

Longstanding theological debates have ensued over the word *telos* (τέλος) in Romans 10:4, a term which can also mean aim, purpose, or goal, as witnessed in various alternative translations: "Christ is the goal of the Law, which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God" (Common English Bible).

Romans 11:6: "Grace is no longer on the basis of works"

It is a common misunderstanding among many contemporary evangelical people that grace was not present in the period of the "Old Testament." Paul actually references a number of Tanach passages (1 Kings 19:10, 14, 18; cf. Romans 11:1-5) in emphasizing how God's gracious choice has always allowed for a remnant of righteous. The statement, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (NASU) should be taken as a logical argument, demonstrating how God's grace has always been present in all time periods, not that there was once a time when grace could be actually earned from human works.

Romans 14: "God does not care about what days people celebrate or what food they eat"

The information in Romans ch. 14 is often applied to matters of *adiaphora* in contemporary religious settings today, such as the music people listen to or the movies people watch. In all probability, Paul's instruction to the Romans about eating and sacred days (Romans 14:2-6) involved unnecessary criticism of those who would only eat vegetables at fellowship meal times, and not "common" (Romans 14:14, LITV) meat that others would eat, Biblically clean but not ceremonially acceptable to some. These people were not to be looked down upon. There is a long-standing alternative opinion that the religious "days" in view (Romans 14:5-6) were times of traditional Jewish fasting. If one should not be criticized for fasting on a particular day—likely remembering or memorializing a tragic event in Israel's history—then one should surely not be criticized for not eating certain things at a communal fellowship meal.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20: "All things are now lawful"

A correct translation of *Panta mou exestin* (Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν) in 1 Corinthians 6:12 would be "Everything is permitted for me" (TLV). Numerous versions place this clause in quotation marks " ", reflecting the opinion of most scholars that this was a slogan used by a particular group in the Corinthian assembly. When Paul says, "Everything is permitted for me—but not everything is helpful. 'Everything is permitted for me'—but I will not be controlled by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12, TLV), he is actually cross-examining and refuting something said by a group of Corinthians; this is not reflective of his own personal beliefs.

1 Corinthians 8: "Paul permitted Gentile Christians to eat idol food, a clear violation of the Mosaic Law"

Paul did not permit any of the Corinthians to knowingly eat meat sacrificed to idols, and was critical toward those who thought that they had the freedom to do so (1 Corinthians 8:9). He focused his admonitions heavily toward those who thought that given the supremacy of the One God, that it did not matter if they ate meat sacrificed to idols, given how idols were dead objects (1 Corinthians 8:4). Their actions could have had grossly negative consequences, as there were new Believers who once ate their meals as an act of reverence or worship to idols (1 Corinthians 8:7), and eating meat sacrificed to idols could cause them to relapse back into paganism (1 Corinthians 8:10).

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: "It is only necessary to keep the Old Testament law to convert Jews to Christ"

If Paul only taught that some adherence to the Torah or Law of Moses was necessary for Jewish evangelism, then Paul could rightly be accused of violating his own words about not bringing the good news in a manner of craftiness (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). When Paul communicates "To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews" (1 Corinthians 9:20a, NASU), among the other groups he lists (1 Corinthians 9:20b-23), this is best taken as a statement of rhetoric. Paul self-identifies with the position of the diverse groups in the First Century Mediterranean, in order to best communicate the good news of salvation to them. Paul never stopped being a Jew after coming to Messiah faith. But, there were certainly aspects of the First Century Jewish experience and recent history—among other groups' experiences—that he had to be quite conscious of, in going to synagogues and declaring that Yeshua was the Messiah of Israel.

1 Corinthians 10:14-33: "Paul says to eat whatever is set before you"

The specific context of Paul saying to eat what is set before you, involves the acceptance of an invitation to eat at a non-Believer's home (1 Corinthians 10:27). What is set before a Believer on his or her plate, is to be graciously received as a matter of the host's hospitality. Should it become public knowledge that any meat had been offered to idols, then it is to not be eaten (1 Corinthians 10:28), as it would be a bad witness of one's faith in the One God of Israel.

The Messianic Walk

1 Corinthians 16:2: "The early Christians met on the first day of the week, a clear abolishment of the Jewish Sabbath."

The reference to the Corinthians meeting "on the first of the week" has been traditionally approached as Sunday worship services replacing the seventh-day Sabbath. There have, at times, been some dissenting opinions from this, given how this meeting on the first of the week was specifically for collecting monies. This would not be a permissible activity for the Sabbath. Also, in view of the Biblical day beginning in the evening, it has been usefully proposed that what is in view is *Motza'ei-Shabbat* (CJB/CJSB), or a special time closing off the Sabbath on Saturday evening.

2 Corinthians 3: "The veil of the old covenant has been removed."

The Old Covenant is specifically labeled by Paul to be "the ministry of death" (2 Corinthians 3:7) or "condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:9). It involves the Torah, at most, being delivered on lifeless stones, only able to condemn people as sinners. The supernatural work of "the ministry of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 3:9) involves activity of Divine principles being written onto human hearts and manifest to others (2 Corinthians 3:3). This is language taken from the New Covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, which speak of the commandments of God written by His Spirit onto new hearts of flesh. The reading of the Old Covenant ministry of condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:14), the Torah operative for a non-Believer, should convict people of their sins. Unfortunately, a veil lies over the heart of many, especially Jewish non-Believers, when the Torah can only operate as Old Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:15-16). The veil that separated Moses' face from Ancient Israel (Exodus 34:34) was not unlike the curtain separating out the Holy of Holies in the Temple complex—which was split in two at the Messiah's death (Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:45). The veil over a non-Believer's heart, prohibiting God's salvation and sanctification to take place, is what is removed. The Torah no longer functions in a condemnatory fashion, but in principles imbued on a redeemed psyche by the Spirit.

Galatians 2:11-21: "By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

Whether "works of the law" is approached from its traditional vantage point of being "observing the law" (Galatians 2:16, NIV)—or "works of the law" is approached in association with various sectarian deeds involving formal proselyte conversion to Judaism (cf. 4QMMT)—justification comes only through belief in Yeshua the Messiah and what He has accomplished. Who we are as redeemed human beings is to be focused around the work of Yeshua, and not any human action. We are to obey the Lord's Instructions as a result of the Divine work of Yeshua in our lives.

Galatians 3:12-14: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law."

Those who disobey God's Instruction are cursed, and the Messiah's death on the tree (Deuteronomy 21:23) is what merits those who believe in Him a redemption from the effects of sin. Obedience to God's Instruction, however, is to bring with it a high quality of life lived on Earth (Leviticus 18:5).

Galatians 3:23-25: "The Law is our tutor to lead us to Christ."

It is said, "Therefore the Torah became our guardian to lead us to Messiah, so that we might be made right based on trusting" (Galatians 3:24, TLV). Salvation does not come by

any human actions involving the Torah. But, the Torah's Instruction is to convict people of their sins, so that they might come to a point of realizing that only the work of Yeshua can provide salvation. The Torah's pre-salvation role is one of instruction and harsh discipline, revealing the human limitations and faults of people

Galatians 4:8-11: "The Sabbath and Old Testament feast days are weak and worthless principles."

Paul specifically told the Galatians, "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits?" (Galatians 4:9, RSV). The non-Jewish Galatians, in being errantly influenced to be circumcised as proselytes to Judaism to be truly reckoned as God's own, were returning to practices they left behind in Greco-Roman paganism. Has Paul associated Biblical commandments in God's Torah, such as those involved with the appointed times, and paganism, as being quantitatively indifferent? Or, in becoming formal converts to Judaism, did the Galatians feel that they could still participate in the Roman Emperor cult as good citizens? Alternatively, were the Judaizers/Influencers who had been persuading the Galatians, practitioners of any proto-Gnostic or mystical errors, with superstitions infused into their observance of their appointed times? A variety of interpretations are available at a reader's disposal, all of which have been proposed in Galatians scholarship over the past few decades.

Galatians 5:1-4: "Those who try to keep the Law of Moses have fallen from grace."

It is actually stated by Paul, "You have been severed from Messiah, you who would be justified by the Torah; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4, PME). This specifically involved non-Jewish Believers seeking some kind of right-status before God, originating in the Torah and not the Messiah. It also involved whatever commitments they made in undergoing formal proselyte circumcision, where one would make himself "a debtor to do the whole law" (Galatians 5:3, YLT), a negative condition to be sure. Born again Believers, reliant upon the work of Yeshua of Nazareth, are not to be debtors of any kind to perform the Torah, but are rather to fulfill its righteous requirements via the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit inside of them (Romans 8:4), something resultant of the justification they have experienced.

Ephesians 2:8-10: "We are saved by grace, not as a result of works."

No one true to the Scriptures can deny the clear imperative, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV). Eternal salvation does not result from any human activity—be that activity general works, or actions in association with the Torah of Moses. Yet, it is also absolutely true, that "we are His workmanship—created in Messiah Yeshua for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so we might walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, TLV). Those who have received the salvation of Yeshua, are to walk in good works of obedience, serving as definite external proof of the internal change which has occurred within them.

The Messianic Walk

Ephesians 2:14-15: "The Law was abolished in the flesh of Christ."

The breaking down of the barrier wall (Ephesians 2:14) has frequently been interpreted by Christians, as meaning that the Torah of Moses had to be abolished in order to bring unity to Jewish and non-Jewish Believers. While there was a dividing wall present in the Second Temple, designed to keep pagans and non-proselytes out on threat of death (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.417; *Wars of the Jews* 5.194), such a wall is nowhere specified in the Torah itself. Some Protestant traditions, favorable to the moral instructions of the Law, conclude that Ephesians 2:15 is only speaking of ceremonial instructions of the Law, and not the Torah as a whole. The Greek clause *ton nomon ton entolon en dogmasin* (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν) specifies a kind of direction that has been abolished: *dogma* (δόγμα). This term appears nowhere in the Septuagint translation of the Tanach in regard to any Biblical commandments, but instead in regard to regal decrees of the Babylonians and Persians (Daniel 2:13; 6:8; Esther 3:9) or Jewish ancestral traditions (3 Maccabees 1:3; 4 Maccabees 10:2). What was abolished by Yeshua were various extra-Biblical dogmas or decrees responsible for erecting the barrier of the dividing wall in the Temple complex—passing themselves off as "Torah"—and resulted in an inappropriate spiritual culture where people from the nations were being kept out of God's Kingdom, rather than being welcomed into it.

Philippians 3:2-11: "Righteousness is not derived by the Law."

In spite of Paul's significant Jewish pedigree (Philippians 3:5), he recognized that his human achievements were meaningless in view of Yeshua (Philippians 3:7-8). He emphasizes how as a Believer, that he be "found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the Torah, but that which is through the faithfulness of Messiah, the righteousness which is from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9, PME). Paul's identity is centered and focused around placing his faith or trust in what Yeshua the Messiah has accomplished in being sacrificed for human sin. Messianic Believers today, who place a high emphasis on following the Torah, do so because they want to emulate the Messiah who followed the Torah—while steadfastly recognizing that their righteousness is to be found in His atoning work.

Colossians 2:14: "The Law of Moses was nailed to the cross of Christ."

That something was nailed to the execution-stake or wooden scaffold of the Messiah, is clear enough from Colossians 2:14: "He wiped away the bill of charges against us. Because of the regulations, it stood as a testimony against us; but he removed it by nailing it to the execution-stake" (CJB/CJSB). Many have interpreted what was nailed to the execution-stake of Yeshua as the Torah of Moses in its entirety. Throughout Protestant history, though, many others have been more tempered in their conclusions. Instead of the Torah as a whole being "nailed to the cross," the most frequent alternative has been to conclude that the capital penalties and condemnation of the Torah were absorbed onto Yeshua.

Colossians 2:16-23: "Christians are not to be judged for not keeping the Sabbath and Old Testament feast days."

Unnecessary or unfair judgment of people, for what they do or do not do, is certainly not warranted from mature Believers. However, the statement "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" (Colossians 2:16, NASU), is directly connected to a false philosophy that

denigrated the Divinity of Yeshua (Colossians 2:8-9), and involved self-abasement and asceticism (Colossians 2:18, 20-22). Torah instructions involving *Shabbat* or the appointed times are supposed to reveal a significant Messianic substance to them (Colossians 2:17), something which adherents of the Colossian false teaching were not able to comprehend. Frequently, Colossians 2:16 is read out of context with what the judging actually involved per the situation being faced: What did various Torah practices mean, when caught up in association with the false teaching or false philosophy?

1 Timothy 1:8-9: "The Law is not made for a righteous man."

The verb *keimai* (κείμαι) correctly means "to lie upon," and appears in Yeshua's teaching about the ax that is laid at the root of the trees (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9). 1 Timothy 1:9 is correctly translated with "the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners" (RSV). This is speaking of the penalties and condemnation of the Torah being used against those who violate it. Those who are redeemed in the Messiah do not have such harsh condemnation used against them.

1 Timothy 4:1-5: "Those who observe the dietary laws have committed apostasy against Jesus."

The false teaching encountered in 1&2 Timothy, not only involved some kind of abstinence from eating meat, but also sexual relations (1 Timothy 4:3), as well as the errant belief that the general resurrection of the dead had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18). True spirituality for initiates was believed to involve a return to a pre-Fall condition, where humans only ate a vegetarian diet and presumably did not engage in intercourse. The issue in 1 Timothy 4:3 involves a total abstention from eating all forms of meat, not the kosher dietary laws separating out clean and unclean meats.

2 Timothy 1:9: "Salvation is not according to works."

"He has saved us and called us with a holy calling—not because of our deeds but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Messiah Yeshua before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9, TLV). People in today's Messianic community who give an importance to the Torah for God's people in the post-resurrection era, do so because of the need to live a life in accordance with His holiness *resultant* of their salvation—because human actions, deeds, or works cannot merit one eternal salvation.

2 Timothy 2:15: "The Word of God is to be rightly divided between the Old and New Testaments, Israel and the Church."

While one needs to understand Holy Scripture in its ancient context(s) for sure, and recognize that Biblical books were not written directly to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century people, the KJV rendering of 2 Timothy 2:15 has led to some bad conclusions: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The idea that Holy Scripture needs to be rigidly split up, as it were, between the Tanach and Messianic Writings, is not sustainable. More modern versions correctly render the verb *orthotomeō* (ὀρθοτομέω) as "rightly handling" (RSV), "accurately handling" (NASU), "correctly handles" (NIV), or even "keep strictly" (REB).

The Messianic Walk

Titus 1:14: “The Old Testament law is to be regarded as nothing more than Jewish myth”

The troublemakers on Crete are said to have been pushing “Jewish myths or...merely human commands” (Titus 1:14, TNIV). Is this actually to be regarded as the Tanach Scriptures, or instead something outside the mainstream? Given the later reference to “genealogies” (Titus 3:9; cf. 1 Timothy 1:4), various exaggerations and embellishments on various minor characters in the Tanach, for which fringe branches of Ancient Judaism offered much speculation and lore, is more likely in view.

Titus 3:5-8: “He did not save us according to our deeds, but according to His mercy”

God indeed does save people according to His mercy, and not according to their deeds or works. This takes place “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5, NASU). Yet, it is also true that the promise of the New Covenant is that God will cleanse His people from their sins, and by His Spirit supernaturally empower them to keep His commandments (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Titus 3:9: “We are not to be concerned about obedience to Jewish laws”

Titus 3:9 actually says, “avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about Torah, for they are unprofitable and useless” (TLV). For the circumstances addressed in Crete, this involved an irresponsible usage of the Torah, as a responsible usage is to reveal and condemn sin (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

Hebrews 4:1-10: “Jesus is our Sabbath rest now”

There is little doubting that for those who have received salvation in the Messiah, that they do experience a rest from the guilt incurred by sin. Surely, however, given the future realities to be anticipated in salvation history, the institution and significance of the seventh-day Sabbath should not be haphazardly dismissed. The complete Sabbath rest that is to be experienced by born again Believers involves nothing less than the complete establishment of the Kingdom of God in eternity. Some Protestant theological traditions, while errantly thinking that the Sabbath was transferred to Sunday, have rightly emphasized that the Messianic rest of the future cannot be properly understood unless a Believer partakes of a day of rest once a week. The weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat* is to teach God’s people important principles about the rest of the Messiah—which we already partake of now via our salvation from sins, but which we are to anticipate more of at the culmination of the age.

Hebrews 7:11-12, 18-19: “A change of law has taken place, because it was weak and worthless”

Due to the sacrifice and resurrection of the Messiah, “a change of the Torah” has taken place, but this is specified to involve “the priesthood being changed” (Hebrews 7:12, PME). The overall context of Hebrews 7:11-12 and 18-19 makes it clear that it is not the ethical code of the Torah, or even institutions such as the appointed times or *moedim*, which are in view of being affected some sort of change or alteration. Changes which have been affected to the Torah involve the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices. The animal sacrifices could not provide permanent atonement and forgiveness for human

sin, whereas Yeshua's sacrifice could. Yeshua's priestly service before the Father in Heaven is not Levitical, but instead is after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11).

Hebrews 8: "The New Covenant makes the Old Covenant obsolete"

No one denies that the work of Yeshua the Messiah has inaugurated the New Covenant. However, Hebrews 8:8-12, includes the longest quotation in the Messianic Scriptures from the Tanach, that of the New Covenant or *b'rit chadashah* (בְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה) from Jeremiah 31:31-34. It is a mistake to think that the New Covenant has nothing to do with the Torah, when the promise includes the explicit word, "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10, ESV). The transcription of the Torah's commandments onto the hearts and minds of God's people, for sure, can only come about because they have received Yeshua into their lives. It is also a supernatural work that can only take place via the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 10:1: "The Law was only a shadow of good things to come"

A Bible version like the New American Standard Update, which employs *italics* for words added, indicates how "only" has been added: "For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near." The source text of Hebrews 10:1 says *Skian gar echōn ho nomos tōn mellontōn agathōn* (Σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων), "For the law having a shadow of the coming good things" (YLT). While it is true that the Torah and its ordinances do include types and shadows of the substantive reality of the Messiah, the addition of "only" is intended to downplay the importance of those types and shadows. The Torah is incomplete without the revelation of Yeshua of Nazareth, but none of us can have confirmation of who He is, without knowledge of the Torah's Instruction and expectations.

Hebrews 10:9: "God takes away the first covenant to establish the second"

The overall context of Hebrews 10:2-8 makes it clear that the issue in view is the limitation of the animal sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood, compared and contrasted to the final sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah. As the author of Hebrews inquires, "The Torah has a shadow of the good things to come—not the form itself of the realities. For this reason it can never, by means of the same sacrifices they offer constantly year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers—cleansed once and for all—would no longer have consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices is a reminder of sins year after year—for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1-4, TLV). The issue in Hebrews 10:9, "He does away with the first in order to establish the second" (ESV), is restricted to the role of animal sacrifices in the atonement of sin.

Revelation 1:10: "The Sabbath has now been replaced with the Lord's Day"

Various theologians have made the case, that per the subject matter of the Book of Revelation, that John did not receive his visions on "the Lord's Day" or Sunday, as would be seen in the emerging Christianity of the Second Century. Instead, John received his visions on "the Day of the Lord" (CJB/CJSB, TLV).

The Messianic Walk

Serving the Lord as a Messianic Believer

Today's Messianic Believers, who are convinced of the validity of the Torah from the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, need to be consciously aware of how many of today's Christians will look at their lives rather critically. Whether you are a Messianic Jew or non-Jew does not matter here: such people will try to find what they perceive to be weaknesses in your life or faith practice, specifically as to whether or not Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is the central focus of your faith. ***Is the Messiah the focus of your faith?*** We have just examined many of the common verses that contemporary Christians will direct toward Messianic Believers, as self-justification for them not having to keep most, if any, of the Mosaic Law.

While we have offered some fair-minded answers for you to provide such critics, keep in mind that Messianic examination and teaching on the Apostolic Scriptures need to go *far beyond* just having answers to passages that are commonly read as being anti-Torah. Many Messianics do not spend a great deal of time considering the important message and theology that the New Testament conveys to us. We have the definite responsibility as a Messianic faith community to truly regard the Apostolic Writings as being a part of "all Scripture" (2 Timothy 3:16) too, and not *exclusively* spend our time focusing on the Torah and Tanach, as can be commonplace in some sectors. If we do not have a high regard for the value and integrity of the Messianic Scriptures, then today's Messianic community will be neutered not only from understanding the continuing plan of salvation history—but most of all from accomplishing the Heavenly Father's objectives in restoring a sense of sanctified obedience to the Body of Messiah.