

One Law/One Torah, Status of Movement

How would you describe the current status of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement? What is your relationship as a ministry toward it?

The following material has been adapted and expanded from J.K. McKee, *The Messianic Walk: The End-Time Move of God* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2020), pp 127-128.

In the early 2000s, a prominent movement which broke off of Messianic Judaism, became frequently known by the label of **One Law/One Torah**. To its credit, it honestly sought an answer for the place of non-Jewish Believers within the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) as co-heirs with Jewish Believers (Ephesians 3:6). It did stay away from much of the unnecessary Lost Tribes speculation and mythology promoted by the Two-House sub-movement.¹ It usefully decided that non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement are like the sojourners or *gerim* who entered into Ancient Israel, professing belief in Israel's God, and entering into the community.

Because sojourners or *gerim* in Ancient Israel could be among those easily taken advantage of, the Torah included explicit instruction to the native Israelites that they were to be shown hospitality. The sojourner in Ancient Israel was to actually be treated by the native born as though he were native born: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34, NASU). It was hardly unreasonable or unfair to suggest that non-Jewish Believers, in today's Messianic movement, be shown the same welcome which sojourners in Ancient Israel were to be demonstrated.

Much of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement's ideology is focused around a number of Torah passages which stress either "one law" or "one statute" to be followed by those within the community of Ancient Israel (i.e., Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16). A statement such as "There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 24:22, NASU), would be applied by proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology as a universal statement for all in the community of Ancient Israel following the same basic Torah law. As passages which use terminology such as "one law" or "one statute" are examined for what they mean within Torah jurisprudence—are such remarks involving "one law" or "one statute" statements of universal Torah adherence, or principally statements regarding the legislation immediately detailed? This kind of attention to detail has not been frequently demonstrated by supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology.

¹ If necessary, do consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Two-House Teaching."

Leviticus 24:22, for example, is immediately preceded by how natives and sojourners, equally within Ancient Israel, were to be stoned to death for blasphemy: “Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death” (Leviticus 24:16, NASU). When an act of blasphemy was committed within Ancient Israel, by either a native or a sojourner, the uniform penalty of capital punishment was to be enacted (“one standard”). It was not as though a native born could be issued a corporal punishment such as a flogging, or have to pay a heavy fine—with the sojourner only subject to capital punishment. In high legal matters where the native born of Israel might have been shown preferential treatment or special favors, there was to be a uniform standard.

The Torah’s instruction includes a number of significant areas detailing both the native born Israelite’s, and well as the sojourner’s, obedience and standing (Exodus 12:19; Leviticus 16:29; 17:15; 18:26; Numbers 35:15; Deuteronomy 1:16). But, while sojourners were a part of the broad community or population of Ancient Israel—it was hardly as though there were no differences of any kind between native Israelites and sojourners. Sojourners, unless being circumcised and intermarrying into one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, did not have any sort of ancestral claim on the Promised Land. Likewise, due to their frequently low economic status, sojourners in Ancient Israel were often recipients of welfare (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:21). While sojourners and natives in the community of Ancient Israel had a great deal in common, there were also differences as well. Advocates of a One Law/One Torah theology, do not tend to be willing to acknowledge those differences. **A significant problem many have had with advocates of a One Law/One Torah theology, has been how many of its strident proponents may insist that native and sojourner in Ancient Israel had virtually no differences of any kind, and were nearly one-hundred percent identical.**

While there are well-meaning and sincere advocates of a One Law/One Torah theology, who have made useful theological contributions in the past,² there is a deep ideological problem with emphasizing Bible passages which use the terminology “one law” or “one statute” as a credo. Each one of these passages involves an original setting in Ancient Israel which has been *directly affected* by the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah—and the post-resurrection era in which we now live. A frequent criticism of those who identify as One Law/One Torah, is that they are very legalistic and rigid in their approach to Moses’ Teaching. This is hardly a surprise if “one law” originally involved settings such as uniform capital punishment for those in Ancient Israel! Yeshua the Messiah, via His sacrifice on the tree, absorbed the capital penalties of the Torah onto Himself (Colossians 2:14).

Rather than emphasize passages which employ “one law” terminology, it is far better for teachers and leaders to stress education and training in Moses’ Teaching, for the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers who make up today’s Messianic movement. As it was witnessed for the broad community of Ancient Israel, “Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 31:12, NASU). An educational model, of receiving Torah instruction, will facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit via the power of the New Covenant, which is to supernaturally transcribe God’s commandments onto a redeemed heart and

² It would be improper if we did not recognize some of the legitimate contributions we have gleaned from Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer: Paul’s Background and Torah Perspective* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2002); *A Study of Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002); *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 1-8* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2005); *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 9-16* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007).

mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). A redeemed heart and mind are not rigid and inflexible when it comes to implementing God's Instruction in complicated Twenty-First Century circumstances, and in a still-developing and maturing Messianic movement—with a primary mission of facilitating Jewish outreach and evangelism.

What might our relationship be to the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, now in the 2020s? In 2013, our ministry made the following observations:

“The **One Law/One Torah sub-movement**, while rightly emphasizing that God's Torah should be heeded by all of His people, is going to have to decisively recognize some post-resurrection era realities and changes, which have been directly affected by Yeshua's sacrificial work, and recognize much of the judgmental legalism it has been responsible for promoting.”³

Each one of us who composes the broad Messianic sphere of influence, has implemented various modifications and changes to our theology within the past decade (2013-2023). And, we have not only been required to adapt to new information and situations, but we have also had various experiences and encounters which have caused these changes to be implemented. New information and situations affect a ministry like Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics, as well as they affect proponents and supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology. Suffice it to say, our observations in 2013, for the One Law/One Torah sub-movement needing to moderate in various ways, have not at all been met with satisfaction.

Because our preference has always been to focus on commonality first and not differences, our ministry has not readily discussed or emphasized a number of our problems with a One Law/One Torah theology. Many of the people who follow Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics, also follow various teachers who strongly identify as One Law/One Torah. It would have been our hope that many would simply have been able to pick up on some of the noticeable differences, without us having to really say anything, as we do recognize how there is far too much unnecessary division and rivalry in the Body of Messiah.⁴

Our ministry has actually had very uneasy, strained, and difficult relations with One Law/One Torah, for over a decade (2010-present). This is in no small part due to what we would consider some of the fundamentalist theological tendencies of One Law/One Torah.⁵ On a number of theological issues, it is not difficult to detect how Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics have actually sat to the hard Left of various One Law/One Torah advocates. Much of this is due to what we consider to be some of their inflexible and rigid approaches to Torah application, in the modern world, which we have witnessed over many years. One Law/One Torah, rather than being seen to properly confront and troubleshoot legalism, instead may be seen to, at least indirectly, encourage legalism and a judgmental spirit.

What are a number of the notable theological differences with One Law/One Torah—which we have actually had for many years—which some following our ministry may have missed?

- **While we teach that natives and sojourners in Ancient Israel had more in common than not, we do not teach that natives and sojourners in Ancient**

³ J.K. McKee, *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2013/2016), 188 fn#290.

⁴ The article “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism” (2010, updated 2016), did actually address some of these things.

⁵ To our knowledge, proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology have not sufficiently addressed some of the criticisms lodged against their position, from either Galatians 5:3 or 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

These passages are addressed in the Messianic Apologetics FAQs, “Galatians 5:2-3” and “1 Corinthians 7:17-24.”

Israel were virtually identical. There were indeed various differences between the two groups.

- We do teach that today's Jewish people have a different relationship to God's Torah than non-Jewish people, if for any other reason that the Torah composes the ethnic and cultural heritage of today's Jewish people and Believers in Yeshua the Messiah. Non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua the Messiah can only partake of the Torah as their spiritual heritage (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1), as they do have a heritage from their own native cultures which also affects their identity.
- We teach that only native ethnic Israelites had a responsibility to circumcise infant males on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:1-2), whereas the issue regarding circumcision of the sojourner in Ancient Israel was most likely to be prompted by their handling of the Passover (Exodus 12:48).⁶
- We do not teach that the only difference between native Israelites and sojourners in Ancient Israel, is that the former had/has some sort of temporal land rights this side of the Second Coming; the inheritance of sojourners depicted in the future Millennial Kingdom (Ezekiel 47:22-23) is not universal to all followers of Israel's God or Believers in Israel's Messiah, but is restricted.⁷
- We do recognize how among various differences between native and sojourner in Ancient Israel, sojourners could eat animals which died of natural causes (Deuteronomy 14:21), likely as an ancient form of welfare.⁸
- (Various other significant differences with One Law/One Torah exist, such as evaluating the intentions of Acts 15:21⁹ and the actual success rate of implementing the Apostolic Decree as witnessed in Acts and the Pauline letters. Also, the viability of capital punishment in the post-resurrection era and intentions of Colossians 2:14.)¹⁰

It is witnessed in the Torah, that while the native Israelite and sojourner were not exactly the same, there were certainly many areas of commonality. The sojourner who entered into the community of Ancient Israel, was actually anticipated to keep a considerable bulk of the Torah's commandments. A variety of Torah instructions, where the *ger* or sojourner was specifically enjoined to Torah adherence, notably include:

- Sabbath rest (Exodus 20:10; 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14)
- a fair trial (Deuteronomy 1:16)

⁶ A further discussion is available in the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Circumcision."

⁷ If necessary, consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Inheritance in the Holy Land, Non-Jews."

⁸ Deuteronomy 14:1-21 is addressed in further detail in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁹ The most important verse of the entire deliberations of the Jerusalem Council, is the frequently overlooked Acts 15:15, which stresses "the words of the Prophets" taking place. Even our ministry has made the past mistake, of overplaying the short term Acts 15:21 (to the 40s-50s C.E.), to the long term Acts 15:15 and the likely Tanach passages connected to it: Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:16-18); Isaiah 2:2; 45:20-23; Jeremiah 12:15-16; Zechariah 8:22 (cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 638 fn#35). Rather than being ordered to be circumcised and keep the Torah of Moses for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5), the Jerusalem Council recognized the organic fulfillment of Tanach prophecy by the guiding of God's Spirit (Acts 15:15), which would involve the co-participation of Believers from the nations, with Jewish Believers, in the restoration of Israel.

¹⁰ A number of other disagreements we have had with a great deal of One Law/One Torah should also be noted, but these could also be applied to people in various positions within the Messianic Jewish movement as well (i.e., a Calvinist soteriology, the role of the charismatic gifts, complementarianism, Genesis 1-11 perspectives, handling issues of modernity and post-modernity).

- access to cities of refuge (Numbers 35:11; cf. Joshua 20:9)
- participation in the Festival of *Sukkot*/Tabernacles and the Festival of *Shavuot*/Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14)
- observance of the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 16:29)
- some expectation to observe the Passover (Exodus 12:49; Numbers 9:14)
- observance of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:19)
- observance of sacrificial procedures (Leviticus 17:8; 22:18; Numbers 15:14-16)
- atonement for unintentional and intentional sin (Numbers 15:16-31)
- purification rites after eating unclean meat (Leviticus 17:15)
- prohibition on offering sacrifices to Molech (Leviticus 20:2)
- penalties for blaspheming the name of the Lord (Leviticus 24:16)
- adherence to sexual and moral purity (Leviticus 18:26)
- observance of the law of damages or *lex talionis* (Leviticus 24:20-22)
- the option of being circumcised to keep the Passover, and consequently being regarded as a native (Exodus 12:43-47)

While the stress of One Law/One Torah has been to approach the presence of non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic community as though they were *gerim* or sojourners, one inconvenient reality has to be recognized: **non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement are not the *gerim* present in the community of Ancient Israel.** For that same matter, today's Jewish Believers in Yeshua, while the descendants of the native Israelites at Mount Sinai, are not the people who stood at Mount Sinai. *None of us living today are the direct recipients of the Torah's commandments.* How much theological navigating and negotiation needs to take place, in future studies and examinations, regarding reading the Torah for its original audience first, and then deducing principles and application for today (as well as considering factors like the work of the Messiah on the tree, etc.)? Many of the Torah studies witnessed in the Messianic movement *just assume* that the Torah was written directly to Twenty-First Century people, when it was not. While the Torah is relevant as God's Word and its commandments are holy (cf. Romans 7:12), understanding its Instruction much better for the community of Ancient Israel within the Ancient Near East *first*, is something all Messianic people will need to be committed to doing better.

It is useful for Bible readers to keep in mind that the *gerim* or sojourners in Ancient Israel were to be following a considerable amount of Moses' Teaching—and perhaps that their daily, overall adherence to commandments was not too different from native Israelites.¹¹ This can be used to support the premise that the modern Messianic movement should be welcoming to non-Jewish Believers in its midst (cf. Leviticus 19:34), and not be harshly restrictive on those who have been prompted by the Lord to keep various aspects of God's Torah which historical Christianity has widely dismissed (i.e., the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times, dietary laws). Yet, the modern Messianic Jewish movement has also tended to properly stress that non-Jewish Believers **need to be specially called by the Lord into this faith community.** While it will frequently involve them first connecting to their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel (cf. Ephesians 2:12; 3:6), it must also involve them participating as co-laborers with their fellow Jewish Believers in

¹¹ R.J.D. Knauth, "Alien, Foreign Resident," in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 31 notes how "one gains the distinct general impression that resident aliens were envisioned as being accorded equal treatment [by] the law (Lev 19:33-34; cf. Deut 24:14-15, 17-18), with only a few exceptions."

matters of Jewish outreach and evangelism.¹² It is easily witnessed how such a Messianic mission, of Jewish outreach and evangelism, is quantitatively absent from the spiritual and theological praxis of most identifying with a One Law/One Torah theology.

Throughout most of our ministry history, Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics have stressed that matters of Torah are to be steadfastly focused on the prompting of the Holy Spirit via the sanctification of the individual, via the supernatural compulsion promised in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12). It will first manifest itself in a much better and more concentrated manifestation of love for God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Unfortunately, many who stridently identify as One Law/One Torah, do not often demonstrate a great demeanor of love or compassion, but instead they do demonstrate a great deal of religious pride and judgmentalism.

Over the past decade, since our ministry relocated from Central Florida to North Texas (2012-2023), those who have been paying attention to our activities, should have been able to easily see how we have not been working in association with One Law/One Torah advocates. Instead, our ministry and family have been reintegrated into the Messianic Jewish community, at both local and national levels.¹³ Within the next decade, we do know that a number of our older ministry publications and materials will need to be updated, reflecting a number of the significant experiences which we have had. Doors have been opened to us by the Lord, which have remained closed to others.¹⁴

It was indeed our sincere hope and prayer to have seen many strident proponents of One Law/One Torah moderate in the 2010s and early 2020s, but present circumstances in 2023 require us to be more public about our negative inclinations toward One Law/One Torah. As previously noted, during the past decade, each one of us has had new experiences and encounters. As our ministry and family have been welcomed within the Messianic Jewish community, some of the well-known proponents of One Law/One Torah have become negatively inclined toward a great deal of extra-Biblical Jewish literature like the Mishnah and Talmud as mainly being unreliable lore, and the place of various mainline Jewish traditions.¹⁵ While Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics have become more active in the Messianic Jewish mission involving evangelism and support for the State of Israel, much of One Law/One Torah has been caught in a state of flux regarding its own future and successors. This is a future probably now tied up with the emergence of Pronomian Christianity, and the questions which Pronomianism will have to wrestle with regarding Judaism, Jewish tradition, Israel, Zionism, and Messianic Judaism.¹⁶

¹² Consult the January 2023 issue of Outreach Israel News, "Are You Truly Called Into the Messianic Movement?"

¹³ This includes Outreach Israel Ministries director Mark Huey being ordained as an elder at Eitz Chaim Messianic Jewish Congregation in 2015 (ecdallas.org), and Messianic Apologetics editor J.K. McKee being ordained as a Messianic Teacher by the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS) in 2022 (iamcs.org).

¹⁴ Some of this can already be accessed in the article "My Family's Messianic Experience: 1995-2022" by J.K. McKee (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*, 2022 update).

¹⁵ We do not at all believe the Mishnah and Talmud to be Divinely inspired, but do consider it to contain valuable history, philosophy, commentary. Consult the general article "The Role of History in Messianic Biblical Interpretation" by J.K. McKee (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).

¹⁶ As of 2023, our ministry has released two video podcast teachings on the issue of Pronomianism: "What is Pronomianism Going to Be? Will it be Messianic?" (15 December, 2021); "Pronomian: A Short Observation - Today's McKee Moment" (05 November, 2022).

Over the past several years, it is also to be witnessed from a few, within the Messianic Jewish community, various fluctuating definitions of what One Law/One Torah actually is.¹⁷ Does being labeled as supportive of a One Law/One Torah theology apply to one's interpretation of various Pentateuchal passages (i.e., Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16), and whether they speak of a universal Torah observance or not? Does being labeled as One Law/One Torah concern a theology which stresses that non-Jewish Believers should be encouraged to partake of things like the Sabbath, appointed times, or kosher? Does it concern an opinion that non-Jewish Believers may wish to consider the importance of these things as they grow in holiness? Could being labeled (pejoratively) as One Law/One Torah be applied to any non-Jewish Believer who has a high view of Torah practices such as *Shabbat*, the *moedim*, or kosher, as worthwhile matters for sincere Believers to consider? *The goalposts, as it were, keep getting moved*—and could even be applied to many Messianic Jewish Believers who consider various Torah practices as worthwhile for non-Jewish Believers to partake of, as they are called to participate in the Messianic community.

Overall, however, it is seen that the Messianic Jewish movement stresses that non-Jewish Believers have to be specially called into this faith community, in a manner similar to Ruth joining with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). **Our ministry absolutely affirms how non-Jewish Believers have to be specially called by the Lord into the Messianic movement.**¹⁸ Certainly, while we would like to see many more families, from evangelical Protestant backgrounds like our own, partake of the Messianic lifestyle as we have—it is all contingent on the plan of God and prompting of the Holy Spirit for them. *And the timetable of the Holy Spirit is not our timetable.* If non-Jewish Believers are being truly called of the Lord to partake of their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, and various outward matters of Torah—it must also lead to them serving as co-laborers with Jewish Believers in matters of Jewish outreach and evangelism, something fully consistent with the Apostle Paul's message of Romans 9-11.¹⁹ We believe it is far better and more spiritually viable, for non-Jewish Believers not called into the Messianic movement, to find a conservative evangelical church which has a high view of the Old Testament's moral principles, and supports Israel and the Jewish people—than to be a part of some of the independent One Law/One Torah groups, which are likely to be legalistic and stifling of the Spirit (and may even support various forms of replacement theology).

We know that our experiences with One Law/One Torah proponents may have been different from some of your experiences. **It is safe to say that in the future you will be seeing Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics, and One Law/One Torah, moving further and further apart.** Yet, we will always continue to do our best to focus on the commonality we have with all of those who claim Yeshua as Lord, first, before we discuss any spiritual or theological differences. (We are sensitive to how many who identify or self-label as One Law/One Torah, do follow our ministry and teachings.) We would encourage today's non-Jewish Believers who would identify as being Torah observant, to begin most especially to ask themselves how they can better participate in the Messianic Jewish mission of Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity.

¹⁷ Some of this may be witnessed in David Rudolph. (2021). *One New Man, Hebrew Roots, Replacement Theology*. Available online via <<http://tku.edu>>; Dan Juster. (2021). *Messianic Jewish Movement Compared to Gentile Jewish Roots One Law Movement. Restoration from Zion*. Available online via <<http://restorationfromzion.com>>.

¹⁸ Consult the article "The Calling of Ruth and Non-Jewish Believers in Today's Messianic Movement" by J.K. McKee (appearing in *The Messianic Walk*).

¹⁹ Consult the article "What Contribution Are You Making to Jewish Evangelism" by J.K. McKee (appearing in *Messianic Beginnings: An Introductory Study*).