

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES

© 2021, 2024 John Kimball McKee

All rights reserved. With the exception of quotations for academic purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

Cover Image: nullplus via Istockphoto

ISBN 979-8317009786 (paperback)

ASIN B09F1MWGB7 (eBook)

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

P.O. Box 516

McKinney, Texas 75070

(407) 933-2002

outreachisrael.net / outreachisrael.blog

messianicapologetics.net / messianicapologetics.blog

Fair Use Notice: This publication contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We make use of this material as a matter of teaching, scholarship, research, and commentary. We believe in good faith that this constitutes a “fair use” of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law, and is in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. For more information go to: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/17/107>

Outreach Israel Ministries is a non-profit 501(c)3. All prices listed on the publications of Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics are suggested donations.

Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

Torah, division of commandments

How am I to appropriately understand the division of the Torah's commandments?

Yeshua the Messiah did teach that there were “weightier provisions of the law,” such as “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23, NASU). He affirmed that the greatest of the Torah’s commandments were the admonitions to love the Lord God and to love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). It is a fact that there is a prioritization among the Torah’s commandments between those which carry more weight and those which may be considered “least” (Matthew 5:19), especially as there are differing penalties for the violation of various regulations. The teaching of Yeshua does indicate that the Torah’s commandments were divided in some way. Determining what this way is, however, has been a matter of theological discussion and debate for millennia.

Greg L. Bahnsen makes the important remark in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*,

“Christians throughout the history of the church who have advocated the authority of the Old Testament law in Christian moral instruction, such as the Reformers or Puritans, have not...done so because they make Moses the locus of their authority! Rather and more realistically, they have done so only because their true Lord and Authority, Jesus Christ, directs them to honor and obey the moral commandments of Moses.”¹

In Reformed Christian theology (and to a lesser extent historic Wesleyan theology) the commandments of the Law of Moses have been traditionally classified under the broad categories of: moral, civil, and ceremonial. It is believed that with the coming of Jesus and His sacrifice, the civil and ceremonial laws of Ancient Israel have been abolished. This does not include the commandments regulating ethics and morality, which are to remain true for all people of all times. Reformed expositors have often interpreted passages such as Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:14 as relating to the annulment of not the Law of Moses as a whole, but rather the ceremonial and civil law.

In the Twenty-First Century when evangelical Protestantism has largely cast aside any of the Torah as relevant instruction for Believers today, Messianics people should appreciate the benefit of a theological tradition which has *always* held the Torah’s ethical commands as having relevance! The same Biblical passages we look to for the post-resurrection era validity of the Torah, are the same passages they look to for the importance of the “moral law.” However, is the classification of the Torah’s commandments into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws something which is entirely accurate? No one would doubt that there are Torah commandments which appear to be moral, civil, or ceremonial—but does the Torah itself divide its commandments this way? This may be a place where the Jewish theological tradition can step in and provide us with another perspective.

Of the 613 categorized commandments in the Chumash/Pentateuch, it is held that there are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. The negative commandments would largely relate to various prohibitions placed upon God’s people (i.e., the Sixth Commandment which forbids murder), but positive commandments could largely relate to things that would help God’s people and others in the larger community, such as allowing the poor to glean from one’s field. Within the Torah, readers often see its *mitzvot* often classified among three distinct categories:

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, “Response to Douglas Moo,” in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 391.

1. *edot*: “**warning signs, reminders, urgings**” (CHALOT).²
2. *chuqim*: “divine statute[s]” (CHALOT).³
3. *mishpatim*: “**decision by arbitration, legal decision**” (CHALOT).⁴

Each one of these various divisions denotes a degree of significance for a Torah commandment. *Edot* would be those things God has placed for His people to be safe and for their well-being. *Chuqim* are often likened to things which do not make logical sense to the human mind, but God has told His people to follow them to demonstrate proper obedience. *Mishpatim* would be the closest thing to what we would call case laws, things which one can turn to when trying to evaluate what would be the best decision in a situation, in line with God’s will and character.

While these are three broad categories of commandments, seen within the Torah itself, the Oral Torah as seen in the Mishnah and Talmud demonstrates how the Rabbis have spent considerable time into classifying the commandments (and their application/non-application) even further. The six significant divisions in the Mishnah, from the Second Century C.E., include:

1. Agriculture
2. Appointed times
3. Women
4. Order of Damages
5. Holy things
6. Purities⁵

From those broad headings the Torah’s commandments are often further divided into various sub-categories as titled by the Mishnah tractates, and the Talmud which is essentially commentary on the Mishnah.

The division of commandments seen in the Mishnah does appear to be much more natural from a reading of the Torah, than the traditional Reformed Christian division of moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law. We would suggest that considering the Torah’s commandments from the classifications offered by the Mishnah would be better for today’s Messianic movement, especially as it is a major part of our Jewish theological heritage.

Of course, determining what part (if any) the Oral Torah and its commentary would play in one’s Messianic theology and Torah *halachah* is another issue altogether. Many believe it should not be considered. But we think that it should not be removed from the conversation of our Biblical Studies, as we wrestle with how to properly live out the Torah today. Yet, this conversation should also include linguistic and historical analysis, comparison of the Pentateuch with other Ancient Near Eastern law codes, and most significantly the life example of Yeshua and His Apostles. Along with such analysis will come a realization of which commandments are “greater” compared to commandments that are “least.” And as always, when tradition is considered we must not forget the instruction given by Paul in Philippians 4:8:

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8, NASU).⁶

² William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 266.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵ English titles are taken from the Table of Contents in Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁶ Some useful resources to further consult, include: Abraham Chill, *The Mitzvot: The Commandments and Their Rationale* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1974); Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen (The Chafetz Chayim), *The Concise Book of Mitzvot: The Commandments Which Can Be Observed Today* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1990); Ronald H. Isaacs, *Mitzvot: A Sourcebook for the 613 Commandments* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996); Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism* (Rockville, MD: Schreiber Publishing, 2021).