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## Approaching One Law Controversies 2010/2016 Sorting Through the Legalism

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Today's broad Messianic movement has many admirable qualities for which it should feel most spiritually gratified.<sup>1</sup> The Messianic movement has been used mightily by the Lord to see many Jewish people come to saving faith in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus), and it has also helped many evangelical Christians appreciate their Hebraic and Jewish Roots and the Torah. The Messianic movement definitely stands against the common, yet errant thought in much of modern Christian theology, that the Law of Moses was exclusively for the era prior to the Messiah, and has now been nullified with His arrival.<sup>2</sup>

While it is safe to say that most of the broad Messianic community believes that God's Torah is valid instruction in a general sense, and that we should all be studying the Torah and be educated by its principles of holiness—there are varied degrees of praxis and *halachah* to be certain. There are a number of Messianic congregations which are quite close to following an Orthodox Jewish level of Torah keeping, others which shun a great deal of Jewish tradition and custom, and then others which stand somewhere in the middle. If there is anything that all congregations or fellowships have in common, it is that there is a panoply of different interpretations and applications of commandments. The order of the *Shabbat* service could be very different from one assembly to another, the way kosher is kept is probably not going to be the same, and the way people dress and groom themselves will certainly not be uniform.

Because of the uniqueness of Messianic congregations, which in the North American Diaspora are mixed assemblies of Jewish *and* non-Jewish Believers, a significant discussion and debate is ongoing about the relevance of Moses' Teaching to the broad Body of Messiah. While it is only natural to expect Messianic Jews to keep the seventh-day Sabbath or remember the appointed times of Leviticus 23, being a definite part of their ethnic and cultural heritage, are these practices—and various others—things that non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic community should also be following, as they

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally titled "One Law for All: From the Mosaic Texts to the Work of the Holy Spirit" (2010). It has been renamed and updated, to reflect some of the negative encounters that the author has had since that time, with people identifying themselves as "One Law" or "One Torah."

<sup>2</sup> The author has thoroughly defended this in his book *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?*, and in various volumes of his *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series.

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mature in the Lord? There are, to be certain, a wide selection of views present within today's Messianic Judaism, regarding non-Jewish Believers and their relationship to Torah practices like remembering *Shabbat* or the appointed times. Some leaders are very welcoming of non-Jewish Believers being Torah observant, others are not so welcoming, some are indifferent, and some are hostile.

Throughout much of the 2000s and into the 2010s, anyone who would be found discussing the issue of non-Jewish Believers and God's Torah, was likely pulled—in one way or another—into discussions and debates where Torah passages employing terms such as "one law" or "one statute" were featured. Frequently, from Torah passages such as Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16, 29-30, it has been advocated that there was one basic law to be followed by the native Israelite and welcome sojourner within the community of Ancient Israel, and thus non-Jewish Believers drawn by God into the Messianic community should not be discouraged from keeping God's Torah. An entire sub-movement within the Messianic community, labeling itself as either "One Law" or "One Torah," makes Torah declarations of there being "one law" its principal focus of theological and spiritual attention. The One Law/One Torah sub-movement has advocated that there is "one law" for Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and hence that all should be Torah observant.

As the 2000s came to a close, one could witness a selection of writings defending a One Law/One Torah theology,<sup>3</sup> as well as those being negatively disposed toward it.<sup>4</sup> It was very hard not to be influenced by some of the ministry posturing and denominational politics likely to manifest when Torah passages employing terms such as "one law" or "one statute" would be quoted. Sadly, in all of the years that I have witnessed a great deal of debate and division emerge over what "one law" means as a matter of Torah jurisprudence, **there has not been a huge amount of attention focused on the relevant Bible verses themselves**, in spite of them being liberally (mis)quoted. There has been much written about the One Law/One Torah sub-movement in the forms of position papers, refutations, and counter responses—but hopelessly absent has been a way that today's Messianic people can have some fair resolution as we each desire to serve the Lord and obey Him *out of a love for Him*.

I believe that all of today's followers of Israel's Messiah should be educated in the Torah, just as all of those in the community of Ancient Israel were to be gathered together, hear from Moses' Teaching, and follow it (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). In today's Messianic movement, if you are a Jewish Believer in Yeshua—and especially one who was

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Hegg (2003). *Is the Torah Only for Jews? Torah Resource*. Available online via <<http://torahresource.com>>; (2009). *An Assessment of the "Divine Invitation" Teaching*. *Torah Resource*. Available online via <<http://torahresource.com>>; Rick Spurlock (2010). *Biblical Unity Versus Divine Invitation Theology*. *Bereans Online*. Available online via <<http://www.bereansonline.org>>.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik (2005). *One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community*. *Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations*. Available online via <<http://umjc.org>>; Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster. "'One Law' and the Messianic Gentile" *Messiah Journal* Issue 101, Summer 2009/5769; Aaron Eby, Toby Janicki, Daniel Lancaster, and Boaz Michael. (2009). *Divine Invitation: An Apostolic Call to Torah*. *First Fruits of Zion*. Available online via <<http://ffoz.org>>; Toby Janicki. "We are the God-Fearers" *Messiah Journal* Issue 103, Spring 2010/5770; "One Law for All" *Messiah Journal* Issue 105, Fall 2010/5771; Boaz Michael. "Messianic Judaism: Reconsidering the One Law, Two-House Trajectories" *Messiah Journal* Issue 111, Fall 2012/5773.

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raised in a rather liberal Reform Judaism, where participation in a life of Torah was nominal—you should be encouraged to follow the Torah as a part of your ethnic and cultural heritage, and not just your spiritual heritage. Messianic Judaism has been right to emphasize that Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah do not have to assimilate into a non-Jewish Christianity, which would often see them dismiss with Moses' Teaching. Today's Messianic Jews have a responsibility to follow the Torah.

Over the past few decades, as the numbers of Messianic Jews have grown, the Lord has also sovereignly moved upon many non-Jewish Believers to embrace their Hebrew Roots in the Tanach and Jewish Roots in the Second Temple era, and they have become an important part of the Messianic movement as well. The Lord has been drawing the nations to Zion to be taught the Torah, as has been prophesied (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4). *This is an observable reality throughout the Messianic movement.* Torah passages emphasizing "one law" or "one statute" for the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel, were presented by some as the answer for how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to relate to each other within the Body of Messiah. But rather than bringing unity, mutual honor, and mutual respect to those in the Messianic community—proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology were instead too often responsible for judgmentalism and a fundamentalist mode of operation to prevail.

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27) promises not only a permanent cleansing from sins, but a supernatural transcription of the Torah's commandments onto the redeemed hearts and minds of God's own. Growing in grace and being sanctified, does not just involve learning how to love 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) more profoundly—but should also be thought to involve taking direction from Torah institutions such as the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*,<sup>5</sup> appointed times or *moedim*,<sup>6</sup> and kosher dietary laws.<sup>7</sup> Our ministry has a steady track record of encouraging all Believers to pursue a life of Torah obedience via the thrust of the New Covenant: **God's Spirit supernaturally transcribing God's Torah onto the human psyche.**

While there were a number of differences between the native Israelite and sojourner within the community of Ancient Israel—and we should never be led into simplistically thinking that the native Israelite and sojourner were *exactly* the same—such differences were nominal, in view of the commonality between native and sojourner within Ancient Israel. A religious community which emphasizes the common faith and salvation that we all possess in Israel's Messiah as being *the most important thing*, will have far less divisions and suspicions among its members, and will be able to have a positive impact on the world around it—than a religious community which primarily emphasizes differences among God's people, where rivalry and mistrust will too frequently manifest.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>6</sup> Consult the author's publication *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers*, and the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*, *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*, and *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*.

<sup>7</sup> Consult the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>8</sup> Consult the author's article "The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah," appearing in his book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

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While it is difficult at times not to get engulfed in the politics of our broad Messianic faith community, we must strive as best as we can to remain above them. We have to act like mature Believers whose loyalty is to the Scriptures and the legitimate mission of God, and not a particular sub-movement or clique. It is most surprising to me that given the significance or importance that some have given to various Torah passages emphasizing “one law” or “one statute,” that there has been very little engagement with them. There has definitely been an avoidance of these Bible passages by those who are critical of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement—but there has also been an avoidance of these Bible passages by those who would identify as members of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement. What did various assertions in the Pentateuch, stressing “one law” or “one statute” for the native and sojourner, mean to the community of Ancient Israel? There has not been a great deal of evaluation incorporating a reasonable range of current Biblical scholarship, including not only Jewish opinions, but also those of evangelical Christian and critical/liberal interpreters.

I know that Torah verses which use the terms “one law” or “one statute” stir a great deal of emotions when people read them. It is my intention in this investigation to provide an analysis for you of the different verses, engaged with the Biblical text, the opinions of a spectrum of respected commentators, and what they communicate.

In order for us to have a good handle on what “one law” really means, we need to make sure that we have done our homework. What we are going to find, is that the emphasis seen on Torah passages which employ “one law” or “one statute,” has actually been *the wrong emphasis* for people in today’s Messianic movement. **The One Law/One Torah sub-movement has been the cause of a great deal of legalism, judgmentalism, and condemnatory attitudes that we should not want to see present among born again Believers.** The One Law/One Torah sub-movement, while having rightly encouraged non-Jewish Believers to pay attention to the Torah’s Instruction, has been responsible for invoking spiritual dynamics from various Torah passages—which we do not want to see present in our Messianic congregations and assemblies. The One Law/One Torah sub-movement has been responsible for wrongly mandating Torah observance onto all Believers, instead of stressing Torah observance as an anticipated part of Believers’ growth in holiness, via the supernatural compulsion of the Holy Spirit *and* on the timetable of the Holy Spirit for individuals’ lives.

### Legal and Spiritual Perspectives Involving “One Law”

I consider myself to have a unique vantage point concerning the different Torah passages which employ the terms “one law” or “one statute,” because while I hold a master’s degree in Biblical Studies (2009), I first attained a bachelor’s degree in political science (2003). As a matter of Torah jurisprudence, Bible readers certainly need to philosophically weigh what the native Israelite and sojourner in the community of Ancient Israel, being affected by “one law,” likely meant in contrast to the law codes of their Ancient Near Eastern neighbors. At the same time, as a matter of spirituality, after the legal components of “one law” or “one statute” are evaluated, are Pentateuchal passages which detail these concepts what we truly want the Messianic movement to focus its attention upon? Or, has the One Law/One Torah sub-movement made a spiritual error which needs correcting?

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When I was a junior at the University of Oklahoma (2001-2002), I had the privilege of taking several of Prof. Donald Maletz' classes on political theory and philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Understandably, much of what I studied pertained to the different ideologies and worldviews that affected the development of modern politics, in particular the political structures and institutions of Western Europe, and most importantly the United States. We did read a great deal of the classical Greek and Roman figures, as well as some Medieval Roman Catholic philosophers, Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin, and on to various academic voices from the Enlightenment and important people today whose philosophy influences the political realm.<sup>10</sup>

If you can believe it, in one these political science classes, we were actually required to read through sections of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and some of Deuteronomy in the Holy Bible. (The Bible was the one textbook most of the students did not have to go and buy!) We read from the Scriptures not just to understand their influence on kings, generals, or civic leaders who would come many centuries later, but we read from the Law of Moses to see how its injunctions were to regulate an ancient society to which all in the West are undeniably indebted. Looking at instructions such as a king writing out the Law of God were clearly noted (Deuteronomy 17:19), and we compared it to the figure of the American president and whether he has even read, *in full*, the U.S. Constitution, and has understood the oath of office.

A noticeable area that generated some, and when I look back on it, important class reflection, occurred when Prof. Maletz' students read Pentateuchal instructions regarding "one law" or "one statute" to apply to the native of Israel and the sojourner within Israel. *Various injunctions where "one law" was stressed, undoubtedly helped lay the foundation of Western civilization and democracy.* In various instances where an outsider had entered into the community of Israel, readers of the Holy Scriptures encounter how there were specific places—where instead of being taken advantage of, or treated more harshly or in an unreasonable manner—that there would be uniform treatment of the sojourner, the same as the native. One witnesses how "one law" clearly applies to the native or the sojourner who commits blasphemy against the God of Israel, or who murders another human (Leviticus 24:14-17, 22), in that both the native and sojourner were to be executed. It is not as though the native of Israel had the opportunity to instead pay a fine and not be executed, whereas the sojourner could only expect execution.

From a legal standpoint, in examining various Torah passages which stress "one law" or "one statute," it is not difficult to extrapolate what the principle of there being the same basic law for people within a society would mean, particularly for the Judeo-Christian West. In American jurisprudence, for sure, there is not supposed to be one standard of law for the king or aristocracy to be loosely held to (who in the Ancient Near East were often considered divine or semi-divine), and then another standard for the general populace (or peasantry) to be rigidly held to. **All people within a country with a definite constitution will be held accountable to the same basic law.**

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<sup>9</sup> Prof. Maletz' curriculum vitae is available online at <[ou.edu/cas/psc/Maletz/maletzhome.htm](http://ou.edu/cas/psc/Maletz/maletzhome.htm)>.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mitchell Cohen and Nicole Fermon, eds., *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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Of course, within the Torah, there are sub-divisions within its commandments, which might be more relevant to groups such as males, females, priests, farmers, fishermen, business owners, merchants, the military, etc.—to which a tribunal of judges or a supreme court would be able to issue rulings and provide interpretations for people—but there are not two totally different standards for those within the community. The native of Israel and the sojourner welcomed into Israel, were not exactly the same, but there are scores of references in the Tanach that physical non-Israelites, who join themselves to Israel and Israel's God, are to be treated with honor and afforded the same basic rights as the native born.<sup>11</sup>

While theologically and philosophically, Torah passages which stress “one law” or “one statute” do stress the fair and equal treatment of the native of Israel and sojourner in Israel in matters of jurisprudence—surely a radical concept for much of the Ancient Near East—spiritually it has to be asked if these Torah passages are worthwhile enough to focus the main activities of a Messianic congregation or fellowship of Believers upon now in the Twenty-First Century. When evaluating the original context of Torah passages noting “one law” or “one statute,” it cannot be overlooked how the subjects involve male circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49), capital punishment and laws of damages (Leviticus 24:10-22), and animal sacrifice (Numbers 15:1-15, 17-28). While many proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology may disagree, these three areas have all been affected by the new spiritual dynamics of the post-resurrection era.

Male circumcision, while not abolished, does not have the same significance as it once did.<sup>12</sup> The Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifice have been set aside until the Millennium (Hebrews 7:18). And, the capital penalties of the Torah were absorbed by Yeshua's own execution on the tree (Colossians 2:14). **Recognizing that we live in a post-resurrection era, is not something that those of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement tend to do.**<sup>13</sup> Because their spiritual focus might be on Bible passages which stress uniform capital punishment for the native and sojourner within the community of Ancient Israel, it should *hardly be a surprise* for the spiritually discerning to deduce why legalism and a judgmental attitude abound among proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology.

To be sure, each of the Torah passages which employ the terms “one law” or “one statute,” have to be examined on their own. There are important principles to be recognized from these passages. Yet, as Believers in Yeshua the Messiah, we have to keep these principles in view of the ongoing plan of salvation history, and within the expectations of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12) inaugurated in His own blood (Luke 22:20). Should our focus as Messianic Believers today really be on “one law” or “one statute,” or instead on Torah education for all of God's people (cf. Deuteronomy 31:10-14), as hearts and minds are transformed by His Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28)?

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<sup>11</sup> Exodus 12:48-49; 20:10; 22:21; 23:9, 12; Leviticus 17:8, 10, 12; 19:33-34; 20:2; 22:18; 24:16, 22; 25:6; Numbers 9:14; 15:30, 15-16, 29; 35:15; Joshua 20:9; Ezekiel 47:22; Malachi 3:5; Psalm 146:9.

<sup>12</sup> Consult the author's article “Is Circumcision for Everyone?”, appearing in his book *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

<sup>13</sup> These three areas are discussed in the article “The Significance of the Messiah Event” by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee.

## Exodus 12:48-49

**“But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.”**

Exodus. ch. 12 includes the Biblical record of how the Passover was to be established as the festival commemorating God’s judgment over the Egyptians, and how the Ancient Israelites were finally freed from bondage. As Israel leaves Egypt, it is clear that not only do many hundreds of thousands of native Israelites make the trek out (Exodus 12:37), but also “A mixed multitude [*eirev rav*, עִרְבַּיִם רַב] also went up with them” (Exodus 12:38). Every astute Bible reader recognizes the significance that the Exodus plays for Scriptural history afterward, as it helps to form a consistent pattern of how the Lord enacts His salvation, interjecting Himself into a situation where there is no hope.<sup>14</sup> Within the narrative, after the slavery of Israel in Egypt has ended (Exodus 12:40-41), instructions detailing the ordinance of the Passover are given (Exodus 12:42-51). They include what to do with one who is a sojourner, somehow residing within the community of Israel, when it is time to remember the Passover.

Who would have composed the “ethnically diverse crowd” (Exodus 12:38, HCSB) that left Egypt? Many Egyptians had doubtlessly seen God’s judgment on their country, and made the right decision in choosing to follow Israel’s God. Also, as a superpower of the Ancient Near East, the Egyptians would have had other slaves, perhaps including Nubians and Ethiopians and Hyksos and other subjugated peoples, who could have joined the Israelites when they were being released. Recognizing the God of Israel as their object of worship, was His freeing of Israel something that was to only affect Israel—or was it to affect them as well? As Walter C. Kaiser describes, “With the mention of the night and the requirement that it be remembered by all future generations, it did bring to mind, especially in this context, the question of the ‘mixed multitude’ who came out of Egypt with Israel and all such persons who might join them from time to time. Were they to keep the Passover also?”<sup>15</sup>

What is to be made of the circumstances when Israel is finally resident in the Promised Land? Peter Enns points out how in Exodus 12:43-49, “these regulations are future-oriented. For example, mention of foreign slaves, temporary residents, and hired workers is not applicable to the Israelites while they are slaves themselves.”<sup>16</sup> It is to be noted that there is a difference made between a foreigner (*ben-neikar*, בֶּן־נֵיקָר) in Israel, and a temporary resident (*toshav*, תּוֹשָׁב) in Israel:

- “The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner [*ben-neikar*] is to eat of it; but every man’s slave purchased with

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<sup>14</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Message of Exodus,” appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

<sup>15</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “Exodus,” in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:380.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 252.

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money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it” (Exodus 12:43-44).

- “A sojourner [*toshav*] or a hired servant [*sakir*, שָׂכִיר] shall not eat of it” (Exodus 12:45).

Ancient Israel might be a “welcoming” community in that outsiders are allowed in to work, and play a role within its economy. Yet, the commemoration of the Passover is to be a home affair for the Israelites, as “It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. All the congregation of Israel<sup>17</sup> are to celebrate this” (Exodus 12:46-47). Immediately following the prescription that “The whole community of Israel must celebrate it” (NIV), a third category of persons is introduced: the *ger* (גֵּר), defined as “sojourner, alien” (*CHALOT*).<sup>18</sup> The *ger* (plural: *gerim*, גֵּרִים) is different from the foreigner or temporary resident, who might be a traveler through or a worker who will eventually leave, because an opportunity to be considered a formal part of the community of Israel along with the native is only offered to the *ger*:

“And when a stranger [*ger*] shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it” (Exodus 12:48, RSV).

In communicating *v'ki-yagur itekha ger* (וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵּר), there is an expectation that an “alien” (NIV/NRSV) or “immigrant” (Common English Bible) will keep and eat of the Passover, and the prescription for doing so—and thus becoming like an *eizrach ha'eret* (אִזְרַח הָאֶרֶץ) or “a native of the land,” with some level of rights to property inheritance in Canaan—is to go through the rite of circumcision. John I. Durham details, “Slaves bought and paid for, that is, owned outright and without question, must be circumcised before they can keep Passover. Those passing through, even those engaged for temporary work, are not to keep Passover. An outsider may be allowed to keep Passover only if he and his entire family are circumcised, that is admitted to the covenant community. One rule applies to all: circumcision.”<sup>19</sup>

Following this it is asserted, “The same law [one law, RSV/NJPS/ATS/ESV] shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Exodus 12:49), *torah achat yih'yeh l'eizrach v'l'ger hagar b'tokkhem* (תּוֹרַה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לְאִזְרַח וּלְגֵר הָגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם). All who were to eat of the Passover sacrifice are to be circumcised, given the assertion “No uncircumcised male may eat of it” (Exodus 12:48). The summarizing statement about *torah achat* directly concerns how there are not two separate standards by which people are reckoned as Israelites here; physical circumcision reckons one as a “native of the land,” ready to fully participate in Passover. In order for the native-born male to be a real “Israelite” ready to eat the Passover, he had to be circumcised; and in order for the *ger* to be reckoned as a native and keep the Passover, he had to be circumcised. It was not as though the *ger* had to be circumcised, and *also* pay an exorbitant amount of gold or silver. The same standard applies.

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<sup>17</sup> Heb. *kol-adat Yisrael* (כָּל־עַדַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל).

<sup>18</sup> William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 64.

<sup>19</sup> John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, Vol 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 173.

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Beyond the specific issue of circumcision being the cause for either natives or sojourners fully participating in the Passover, what might *torah achat* represent for the wider jurisprudence of the Torah, in regard to natives and sojourners? In the estimation of Richard Elliot Friedman, at least, "The context here concerns the Passover statute, but this principle of treating a resident alien the same as any citizen will be repeated many (about fifteen) times in the Torah."<sup>20</sup>

Nahum M. Sarna also thinks that if a *ger* underwent circumcision, "Having done so, no discrimination between him and the citizen was allowed," and he is also right to confirm, "Just like an uncircumcised non-Israelite, so an uncircumcised Israelite was also excluded."<sup>21</sup> So, in a manner of speaking, it is theoretically possible in the Pentateuch for a number of non-ethnic Israelites to be more "Israelite" in following the direction to keep Passover, if any ethnic Israelites are found to dismiss it, in finding themselves uncircumcised.

Anyone not native born of Israel, but who would be a sojourner in the community, would be in a rather odd predicament when it came time in the course of the year for the people to observe the Passover. Native male Israelites who were circumcised from the time of birth would be able to eat the Passover lamb without any problems. A family of sojourners, who had fully recognized and confessed faith in the God of Israel and His goodness, and were by no means idolaters, might stand out—if the males had not undergone circumcision—in not being able to fully participate in eating of the Passover.

Exodus 12:19 previously does state, "Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien [*ger*] or a native of the land [*eizrach ha'eretz*]," indicating that during the season of Passover, a family of sojourners would have been able to partake of the unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Yet, even if so, they would have been incapable of entirely commemorating the focal point of salvation that delivered the chosen nation from bondage: the Passover lamb. If fully committed to Israel's God, circumcision of the male sojourners would need to be in order, so that they could partake of the Passover fully. Given the national significance that the Passover held for Israel, it would not seem very likely for sojourners within the community to always disregard full participation in it, with many committed to the One True God being aware of the prescription to be circumcised. That sojourners should be circumcised to fully participate in Passover is an impetus detected from Exodus 12:48-49. Many such sojourners undoubtedly, in becoming circumcised, went through a useful status change that permanently bound their progeny to the community of Israel.

What is circumcision *primarily for* in relation to Exodus 12:48-49? Is it for being a member of the community of Israel? Or is it for fully partaking of the Passover and eating of the Passover sacrifice?<sup>22</sup> It is easy to see how the central theme of Exodus 12:48-49 is not circumcision of the *ger/sojourner*, but rather *v'asah Pesach l'ADONAI* (וַעֲשֶׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה),

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 212.

<sup>21</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 64.

<sup>22</sup> While *pesach* (פֶסַח) is often associated with the commemoration of Ancient Israel's deliverance from Egypt, let us not forget that the term can also be used in relation to "lambs *pesah*" or "sacrificial animals for *pesah*" (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001], 2:948).

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“and would keep the passover to the LORD” (Exodus 12:4, RSV)—**the full observance of the Passover**. While it is tempting to think that Exodus 12:48-49 presents circumcision as the entryway for the *ger*/sojourner into Ancient Israel; it is actually the commemoration of the Passover and remembrance of the Exodus which defines Israel and God’s salvation activity on Israel’s behalf, and is the real issue here. Full participation in the Passover requires circumcision, and then results in “native of the land” status being granted to the sojourner. *Passover is actually to be the central focus of national identity in Ancient Israel*, of which being circumcised has a part.

In undergoing circumcision to fully observe the Passover, an outsider to Ancient Israel would undeniably be considered an Israelite, who could participate in all of the rights and privileges of being a member of the chosen nation, notably including the possibility of tribal inheritance (although this would require marrying into one of the tribes). Walter Bruggemann observes, “what matters is a readiness and willingness to be counted an Israelite, and that is signified by a readiness to be circumcised. Thus the regulation is inclusive (though obviously gender specific), but it is not careless or casual.”<sup>23</sup> The stipulation of circumcision is also not that cumbersome. But be aware of how the Exodus 12:48-49 circumcision is not the later, sometimes rigorous, post-Maccabean process of a Greek or Roman proselytizing to Second Temple Judaism (b.*Keritot* 9a), encountered in the Apostolic Scriptures (discussed further). Furthermore, circumcision in the Ancient Near East<sup>24</sup> was not as taboo as it was for the later classical civilizations of Greece and Rome.

What is the significance of circumcision here? Why is it that the males who would partake of the Passover have to be circumcised? Why not simply specify that anyone wanting to eat the Passover wash themselves thoroughly, or wear clothing a certain color, or put on a special hat or an accessory like some sash made from the Passover lamb’s wool?

The narrative has provided an important clue as to why the Ancient Israelite males were to make sure they were circumcised before eating of the Passover. Leaving Egypt we see, “at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:41), an affirmation that Abraham’s descendants would only be in Egypt for a limited time (Genesis 15:13). God was faithful to make sure that Israel’s bondage to Egypt eventually ended, and so being circumcised to keep the Passover, commemorating their freedom from oppression, would allow them to remember how He has kept His word to Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:10). With Israel having departed from Egypt, Bible readers witness the beginning of a singular community of God. Terence E. Fretheim observes,

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<sup>23</sup> Walter Bruggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 783.

<sup>24</sup> “[C]ircumcision was not an exclusively Israelite practice. Rather, the rite was common among most of those with whom Israel had direct contact...practiced in one form or another from at least the third millennium B.C....In these other ancient Near Eastern cultures, circumcision seems to have been chiefly a marriage or fertility rite, carried out either at puberty or as part of the prenuptial ceremony” (P.R. Williamson, “Circumcision,” in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 122).

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"Circumcision is the distinctive factor because that is a sign of membership in the community of faith which confesses the God of the passover. This is not a new level of exclusivism but a recognition that passover is a festival for persons who have faith in this God. These others are invited to join that community by being circumcised, a sign that they have made the confession of this 'congregation' as their own. The experience of freedom is hereby integrated with the confession of faith in the God who liberates."<sup>25</sup>

Enns also astutely notes,

"The appeal to circumcision also emphasizes that, although the meal is to be celebrated inside the home, it is more properly considered a community affair. This is not private worship. It is a community of believers bound by circumcision to their covenant God."<sup>26</sup>

We should all agree with J.A. Motyer, who concludes, "That this is a community with two components, not two degrees or levels of membership, is rather more explicit in the Hebrew,"<sup>27</sup> making light of Exodus 12:47, which says *kol-adat Yisrael* (כָּל־עַרְתּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל) are to remember the Passover, and we do not see any sort of discouragement for the sojourner to keep the Passover. Motyer squarely associates the sojourner as being a part of the assembly of Israel, stating, "The circumcised alien is able to come into full membership under the same principle as the native-born."<sup>28</sup> Israel is to be a people principally defined by the Passover and its theme of deliverance, though, *not* circumcision. In the analysis of Brian D. Russell,

"God's people are an inclusive community, not merely defined by ethnicity. God's people were created and sustained by God's gracious actions [like the Passover/Exodus]. The inclusion of a mixed group serves as a reminder that God's ultimate purpose for God's people is for them to serve as God's human's agents to extend God's salvation to all peoples and nations (cf. Gen 12:3; Exo 19:5-6; Matt 28:18-20)."<sup>29</sup>

Moving forward in salvation history, and noting Exodus 12:49, Motyer makes reference<sup>30</sup> to Ephesians 3:6 speaking of the nations' being "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel." In Messiah Yeshua, all Believers should remember the Passover for what it teaches not only about the deliverance of Ancient Israel from Egypt, but also our Lord's Last Supper, His sacrifice for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7).<sup>31</sup> Such a Passover in Messiah is much more deep and significant for us to commemorate as Believers today, than what the Israelites of old were able to do, as *important as that was*.

The degree by which Yeshua's being offered up as our Passover sacrifice has changed some of the orientation of Exodus 12:48-49, inaugurating the era of New Covenant (Luke

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<sup>25</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 143.

<sup>26</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 251.

<sup>27</sup> J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 148.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>29</sup> Brian D. Russell, "Exodus," in Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, eds., *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 84.

<sup>30</sup> Motyer, *Exodus*, 149.

<sup>31</sup> Consult the relevant chapters in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

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22:20; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), and perhaps altering the emphasis of how an outsider enters into the community of Israel (cf. Ephesians 2:11)—can be a debated issue among today’s Messianic Believers. It can be easily recognized how various proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology, might suggest that physical circumcision of males is required to commemorate the Passover *seder* (which frequently lacks any lamb today). Many other people in the Messianic community, though, would conclude that with the Second Temple destroyed, and with the *seder* now reoriented for Messiah followers to memorialize not only the Exodus but also the Last Supper and Yeshua’s sacrifice,<sup>32</sup> that some post-resurrection era realities need to be factored in.

It is clear from the Apostolic Scriptures that male circumcision does not have the same significance, this side of Yeshua’s sacrifice, as it did in the pre-resurrection era (cf. Deuteronomy 30:6; Philippians 3:3). The Passover commemoration of the Corinthians, for example (1 Corinthians 5:7), likely included many uncircumcised Greek and Roman Believers. While it is true that such a Passover commemoration would have lacked a lamb, which could only have been slaughtered at the Temple complex in Jerusalem—more important to recognize is how such a Passover commemoration would have been focused on themes of both the Exodus *and* the work of the Messiah as Passover Lamb.

Ancient Israel’s observance of the Passover, with the availability for the *ger* or sojourner to be circumcised, eat the Passover lamb, and thus be considered not only a full member of the community *but* a native of the land, can be recognized as supportive of the legal fairness present within the Law of God, involving diverse sectors of people. Recognizing how the terminology *torah achat* or “one law” is first mentioned in association with Passover circumcision, we should recognize how both native Israelites and welcome sojourners had to both be circumcised in order to eat the Passover. Sojourners who entered in to the community did not have to be circumcised *and* do something else, while natives had to only be circumcised.

But when we see Exodus 12:49, “There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you” (RSV), quoted liberally by various supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology—do they think that today only those who are circumcised can participate in Messianic Passover *seders*? Or are they willing to concede that there are indeed some new spiritual dynamics in play, in this post-resurrection era, which have directly affected Torah institutions such as male circumcision? While we should not think that circumcision has been abolished as a rite (in addition to being a valuable medical procedure), recognize how the venerable Apostle Paul had to focus many of his fellow Jewish Believers on the greater necessity of being circumcised in heart (Romans 2:29).

When invoking Exodus 12:49 as a credo for stressing the importance of all of God’s people paying attention to His Instruction, those of the One Torah/One Law sub-movement have, perhaps unknowingly, been also stressing male circumcision—an institution which has been affected by the new realities inaugurated by Yeshua’s sacrifice. This is something which they either fail to recognize, or have not fully processed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For an evaluation of the Last Supper, consult the article “The Last Seder and Yeshua’s Passover Chronology” by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

<sup>33</sup> For a further discussion, consult the article “Is Circumcision for Everyone?” by J.K. McKee, appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

# Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism

## Leviticus 7:7

**"The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is one law for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it."**

When surveying the Book of Leviticus, it is quite easy to detect various targeted, specific uses of the Hebrew term *torah* (תּוֹרָה), which do not speak of Moses' Teaching or the Pentateuch as a whole. Samuel E. Balentine notes how "The book of Leviticus contains ten *tôrôt*...Five of these are concerned with sacrifice...Five are concerned with impurity,"<sup>34</sup> which he proceeds to categorize:

### SACRIFICE

- the burnt offering (Leviticus 6:9)
- the cereal offering (Leviticus 6:14)
- the purification offering (Leviticus 6:24)
- the reparation offering (Leviticus 7:1)
- the well-being offering (Leviticus 7:11)

### IMPURITY

- animals (Leviticus 11:46)
- childbirth (Leviticus 12:7)
- skin disease (Leviticus 13:59; 14:54-57)
- purification of skin disease (Leviticus 14:2, 32)
- genital discharge (Leviticus 15:32)<sup>35</sup>

In Leviticus 7:7 we see the assertion *torah achat l'hem* (תּוֹרָה אַחַת לָהֶם) or "there is one law for them" (RSV/NASU), here serving as a summary remark of the preceding instructions of the reparation/guilt offering and the sin offering. There is no doubt when reviewing Leviticus 7:1-7 that *torah achat* relates to commandments given to the Levitical priests who were to perform an important service on behalf of the wider community of Ancient Israel:

"Now this is the law of the guilt offering; it is most holy. In the place where they slay the burnt offering they are to slay the guilt offering, and he shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. Then he shall offer from it all its fat: the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe on the liver he shall remove with the kidneys. The priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy. The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is one law for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it" (Leviticus 7:1-7).

The Levitical priests are to offer up the *asham* (אַשָׁם) or "guilt offering" as an *olah* (עֹלָה) or whole burnt offering to the Lord. Leviticus 7:7 states that the *asham* is the same

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Leviticus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

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as the *chattat* (חַטָּאת) or "sin offering." The employment of *torah achat* or "one law," the "same rule" (NJPS), "one standard" (*WBC*),<sup>36</sup> or "the same ritual" (NRSV), applies for both the *asham* and *chattat*,<sup>37</sup> the latter having been previously mentioned (Leviticus 6:25-30; cf. 4:1-35). The same basic procedure is in force for the guilt offering and sin offering: "The same law applies to both the sin offering and the guilt offering" (Leviticus 7:7a, NIV). Martin Noth says, "v. 7a expressly states that the same directions are valid for sin offering and guilt offering,"<sup>38</sup> although Kaiser does clarify, "The rites for the guilt offering are the same as those for the sin offering, except for the way in which the blood is disposed."<sup>39</sup> The blood of the guilt offering or *asham* was to be sprinkled around the altar (Leviticus 7:2), whereas the blood of the sin offering or *chattat* was to be put on the horns of the altar (Leviticus 4:34).

In Leviticus 7:7 the terminology of "one law" is used to represent a considerable overlap of instructions between the guilt offering and the sin offering. Kaiser observes that "No mention is made of the laying on of hands as appears in the sin offering (4:4), but since these two offerings are treated as having the same law (7:7), presuming its presence here as well is reasonable."<sup>40</sup> We are also on safe ground to conclude that *torah achat* or "one law" is used to emphasize the sacredness of both the sin offering and guilt offering.

That there is "one law" claimed for the sin offering and guilt offering is also important in view of Leviticus 7:7b, which need not be overlooked: "the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it." Baruch A. Levine makes the point, "This statement is significant because it indicates that the expiatory sacrifices eaten by the priests are actually their property."<sup>41</sup> The meat of either the sin offering or guilt offering is actually the property of the Levitical priests, as it composed a part of their remuneration. The thought of R.K. Harrison is, "These constitute their livelihood, and enable them to devote their time and energies to the Lord's service rather than to lesser pursuits."<sup>42</sup>

*Torah achat* or "one law" is used in Leviticus 7:7 for instruction that directly applies for the order of the Levitical priests, who made up a significant subgroup within the population of Ancient Israel, and specifically how the instructions detailing the sin offering and guilt offering were basically identical. Given the actual usage of *torah achat* or "one law," we see that here textually it actually regards two sets of similar instructions regarding animal sacrifice; "one law" here does not concern people as much as it concerns the listing of some Torah commandments.

Reading Leviticus 7:7 in context should alert some Messianic people who identify themselves as holding to a One Law/One Torah theology, that they need to be very cautious in the manner in which they refer to or quote various "there is one law..." statements is seen in the Torah. Leviticus 7:7 concerns how the reparation/guilt offering

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<sup>36</sup> John E. Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus*, Vol 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 87.

<sup>37</sup> Linguistically, "there is one law for them," the plural *l'hem* applies to the two different sacrifices, and not "for them" applying to the priest, especially as *ha'kohen* (הַכֹּהֵן) is singular.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 58.

<sup>39</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," in *NIB*, 1:1049.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 41.

<sup>42</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 78.

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and sin offering were to be categorized. As has been my experience in interacting with many people who hold to a One Law/One Torah theology, statements which speak of “one law” get thrown around too much, without enough responsible attention given to their original context or usage.

### Leviticus 24:22

**“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 actually asserts *mishpat echad yih'yeh* (מִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד יִהְיֶה), employing the term *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט), which has a range of meanings throughout the Hebrew Scriptures: “decision, judgement,” “legal claim,” “measure,” or “law” (*HALOT*).<sup>43</sup> *Mishpat echad* is rendered in modern versions as “one standard” (NASU/NJPS), “the same rule” (ESV), “the same standard of judgment” (CJB), “the same law” (NIV), and “one law” (RSV/NRSV). Even though *mishpat* is used here and not the term *torah* (תּוֹרָה), we should not consider this to be a problem. That there is to be *mishpat echad*, appears within a series of regulations pertaining to the execution of criminals, and in seeing how restitution is to be made to a plaintiff for a variety of crimes (often referred to by the Latin *lex talionis* or law of retaliation). The idea of one standard of rules to be applicable within Ancient Israel for both the *ezrach*/native and *ger*/sojourner, is substantiated in Leviticus 24:10-23 by some very important examples:

“Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp. The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed. So they brought him to Moses. (Now his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) They put him in custody so that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him. You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. 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. If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. 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.”’ Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and they brought the one who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him with stones. Thus the sons of Israel did, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Leviticus 24:10-23).

Admittedly, much more attention in this passage may be given by some Christian commentators and interpreters to the statement “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” and the

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<sup>43</sup> *HALOT*, 1:651-652.

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instruction regarding damages (Leviticus 24:17-21), given its reference present in Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount teaching (Matthew 5:38ff), than what "one standard" or "one rule" meant in terms of regulating Ancient Israel.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the law of retaliation is a definite part of how *mishpat echad* is to be understood for the native and sojourner within Israel.

The ruling that *mishpat echad* is to apply is primarily made because of a severe incident that occurred within the broad populace of Ancient Israel. The wilderness camp of Israel is undeniably mixed (Exodus 12:38; Deuteronomy 23:7-8), a crime is committed, and there is doubt regarding how proper punishment is to be issued. One, whose father was an Egyptian and mother was an Israelite, cursed the name of the God of Israel while in a fight. What was to be done? He was placed into custody until a decision could be made (Leviticus 24:10-12).

As is typical in jurisprudence, high crimes—and not necessarily lesser issues—set the precedent for rulings, practices, and even social norms that will affect an entire scope of legal and ethical matters, and the way a culture acts toward its law. Serious and severe situations here like blasphemy against the Divine Name, or even significant compensation for another's property lost or injuries made, create the need for overarching precedents to be established.

Notable to be considered here is not that this half-Egyptian, half-Israelite person could have been considered exempt from punishment for blasphemy. He was guilty of blasphemy. But, as John E. Hartley points out, "The question before the community was not the guilt of the half-breed, but what was the appropriate penalty by reason of his ambivalent social standing."<sup>45</sup> Could this man, because he was not a fully-born Israelite, possibly be given a lesser, or more likely a severer, sentence for his crime? The Divine injunction issued by God to Moses, was that there was to be no difference in the penalty for blaspheming the Divine Name, as both the native Israelite as well as the sojourner were to be stoned to death (Numbers 24:13-16).

The need for a uniform penalty in this instance is rather obvious, given the magnitude of the offense. Derek Tidball states how, "Full Israelite, half-Israelite, or alien, the brazen insolence shown to the sacred name of God and all that it stood for could in no way be tolerated."<sup>46</sup> We are not exactly told in which way the half-Egyptian, half-Israelite man actually blasphemed the Lord, even though the verb *nqv* (נָקַו), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), can mean "to slander" (*HALOT*)<sup>47</sup> or "curse, execrate" (*CHALOT*).<sup>48</sup> Details of what might have been said are left out, but we could speculate on how someone with a partial Egyptian heritage might have claimed something about the LORD being a God of slaves or rabble, or how He was somehow weak and impotent for leading His people into the desert to rot (cf. Exodus 14:11-12), equating to a kind of curse.<sup>49</sup> Still, what is more likely in a fit of rage was the usage of the Divine Name as a

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), pp 289-291.

<sup>45</sup> Hartley, 409.

<sup>46</sup> Tidball, *Leviticus*, 289.

<sup>47</sup> *HALOT*, 1:719.

<sup>48</sup> *CHALOT*, 244.

<sup>49</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 311 points out how "The same verb *qillēl* [קִלְלָה] is used in Exod. 22 and this

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slur, via the employment of some ancient equivalent of “g\*\*d\*\*\*\*.” Regardless of how the crime was actually committed, there can be no disputing that the same death penalty was applicable *for anyone* within the camp of Israel. Noth explains,

“The special feature of the case in Lev. 24:10ff consists in this: a ‘foreigner’ has cursed the name of God, and the decision goes forth that there is the same law for foreigners and natives, and that ‘cursing the name of God’ is for a foreigner, too, an ‘offence worthy of death’.”<sup>50</sup>

Not to be overlooked in this scene is whether this blasphemer even claimed to follow Israel’s God, or whether he was just in the community of Israel because of his mother’s Israelite heritage. Hartley indicates, “Blasphemy against foreign gods was not considered a serious matter in ancient Israel,”<sup>51</sup> an example of which is some of the speech witnessed in Judges 6:25-32 and the mockery made against the Canaanite god Baal. It might have been that if the half-Egyptian, half-Israelite had cursed and said something like “May Ra/Horus/Osirus (or some other Egyptian god) strike you down you!” he could have gotten off with some kind of a lesser sentence like having to go perform some manual labor, garbage collection, or dig latrines and gather up animal waste—as these false gods were humiliated by the Lord in the judgment on Egypt, and the man would only look stupid. *But because the God of the Exodus was somehow invoked improperly*, capital punishment was necessary. Among interpreters, Hartley’s conclusion is, “this group of laws [24:10-23] was to underscore the standard that those of mixed blood and foreigners living in Israel are subject to the laws of blasphemy, whether or not they worship Yahweh as their God.”<sup>52</sup> Certainly for the community of Ancient Israel wandering in the desert, no person needed to hear *any curse* issued against Him or in His name go unpunished—regardless of who said it. As Levine astutely explains,

“Non-Israelites are responsible for acts considered vital to maintaining the religious character of the community. Therefore, offenses that threaten the overall religious character are punishable, even when committed by non-Israelite residents.”<sup>53</sup>

If the half-Egyptian, half-Israelite man here were really not as true a follower of the LORD as most others in the community—and he was to be executed for blasphemy—then how significant would it have been for true followers of the LORD, whether native born or sojourner, to have been shown the same standard if they were to blaspheme?<sup>54</sup> *Kol-ha’eidah* (כֹּל־הָעֵדָה) or “all the congregation” (Leviticus 24:14) was required to see that a blasphemer was stoned to death, and no statement is made here about only the native born being a part of the “real assembly”; the sojourners within the community of Israel are treated as though they already acknowledge the LORD as the One True God and they have to enact the capital punishment as well. Everyone, whether native or sojourner, had

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verse, also of cursing parents in Lev. 20:9,” which may shed some light on how the blasphemy of Leviticus 24:11 took place.

<sup>50</sup> Noth, *Leviticus*, 179.

Do recognize that as an adherent of the JEDP documentary hypothesis, Noth further concludes, “the phrasing...points to exilic or post-exilic times” (Ibid.).

<sup>51</sup> Hartley, 410.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Levine, 167.

<sup>54</sup> Hartley, 411 explains further developments into the Second Temple era on how the subject of blasphemy was viewed by the Jewish religious authorities (cf. m.*Sanhedrin* 7:5; b.*Sanhedrin* 56).

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something to lose if blasphemy against the Lord were allowed to persist in the camp of Ancient Israel.

The severity of blasphemy is something witnessed not only in the Pentateuch, being condemned by the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7) and how cursing God is clearly prohibited (Exodus 22:28), but how capital punishment was employed later in the Tanach (1 Kings 21:10, 13). In the Apostolic Scriptures, we see how false charges of blasphemy were issued against Yeshua the Messiah and the martyr Stephen, for which they were unjustly murdered (Matthew 26:65-66; Acts 6:11ff).

Immediately after the instructions detailing the execution of the half-Egyptian, half-Israelite blasphemer are given (Leviticus 24:10-16), laws regarding retaliation (*lex talionis*) are seen. With the exception of capital punishment for murder issued first, these were to largely regulate lesser crimes or negative actions that may manifest themselves in Ancient Israel (Leviticus 24:17-21). What need not elude us between this “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” instruction in the Torah, is how capital punishment is *not prescribed* for every offense. If an animal kills a human being, its owner is not to be executed, although in making “restitution” (Leviticus 24:21, NIV/NJPS/NRSV)<sup>55</sup> it may be that not only is the animal to be put to death, but some kind of material reparation is offered to the deceased’s family (only the exact circumstances could tell). Gordon J. Wenham is keen to explain to us how this runs contrary to much of what would be seen in the contemporary bodies of law in the Ancient Near East. He says,

“Throughout the ancient Orient the death penalty was imposed for a wider variety of crimes than currently in western society. This applies to the OT as much as the Mesopotamian systems, but whereas the laws of Hammurabi regard property offenses and similar crimes as capital, the OT does not. In its [OT’s] eyes, sins against the family and religion are the most serious, and hence often attract the death penalty, whereas economic matters are treated more lightly.”<sup>56</sup>

What makes the Torah’s instruction on the laws of damages so significant, although there would have been variance within the other law codes of the ANE, is that there is no blanket capital punishment specified for all offenses. Within the *lex talionis* of Leviticus 24:17-21, there are instances beyond that of executing a murderer, which would have had to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Leviticus 24:18-21, in particular, may be considered some ad hoc examples of where just restitution is to be provided to an offender.

With Moses having told the Ancient Israelites that the half-Egyptian, half-Israelite man is to be stoned for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16), and having delivered instruction on restitution for damages, he then speaks forth the Lord’s word, “You are to have the same law [*mishpat echad*] for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 24:22, NIV). Following this, the blasphemer is stoned to death (Leviticus 24:23).

There is no indication in Leviticus 24:22 that the *ger* or sojourner is to be held to a different standard than the native born of Israel, certainly as it involved serious matters such as those detailed in Leviticus 24:10-21. Outsiders who entered into the community of

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<sup>55</sup> Heb. *shalem* (שלם).

<sup>56</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, 311; consult W.W. Davies, *The Codes of Hammurabi and Moses* (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2006), pp 85-86 for a selection from the Code of Hammurabi.

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Ancient Israel faced the same responsibilities and penalties as anyone else, especially in terms of capital offenses. In Friedman's estimation of this scene, "the account therefore has the value of not only dramatizing the law concerning blasphemy, but also of dramatizing the principle of equality before the law."<sup>57</sup> The equality that native and sojourner within Ancient Israel have before the Torah, would have been most significant, because as Levine argues, the term *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט) regards a "norm of justice," describing, "The stipulation must be made specific because of the practice, in certain legal systems, of judging resident aliens by a different law."<sup>58</sup> There is to be no uncertainty present in terms of what measure of law the *ger* is to be held accountable to; he or she is not going to be held to a completely different scale—be that scale more harsh or more lenient. The further thoughts of J.H. Hertz should also be well taken:

"In no other code was there one and the same law for native-born and alien alike. Even in Roman law, every alien was originally classified as an enemy, and therefore devoid of any rights. Only gradually was the protection of the law extended to him. It is not so very long ago {Hertz' 1960 edition of *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*} that aliens in European states were incapable of owning landed property. In many countries, the denial by the dominant race of civic and politic rights to 'aliens', though these may have lived for generations in a land of their sojourn, is a matter of contemporary history."<sup>59</sup>

Realizing that the Torah is indeed going to hold all within the community of God to the same basic standard—whether native of Israel or sojourner—would have gone a long way in an ancient time, when generally speaking, there would be at least two sets of standards in place for the natives of a country, and then any outsiders who had entered in, even just to temporarily work. And, not only would the native born and outsider be held to different standards, but most likely "natives" within ANE societies would have different scales of law for the aristocracy, the rich, and the poor—and the different monarchies, perceived as divine or semi-divine, might not have even been accountable to the law in some cases.<sup>60</sup> Balentine lauds the significance of the Leviticus 24 instruction for both its theological and civic contributions:

"Legal statutes that demanded penalties commensurate with the damage done effectively erased the inequalities of the rich and the poor, the person of rank and the commoner, thus enabling a more egalitarian judicial system. Those with wealth could not pay their way out of punishment by compensating their victims; those without could not claim special exemption simply because they could not make a monetary restitution for their offense. The author of Leviticus 24 may have seized on this egalitarian legal principle to buttress the theological conviction that the same law must apply to the native Israelite and the resident alien."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Friedman, 399.

<sup>58</sup> Levine, 168.

<sup>59</sup> J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 527.

<sup>60</sup> This is why Moses' murder of the Egyptian taskmaster (Exodus 2:12, 14) was really not the major controversy, as being a prince of Egypt he could probably have murdered an entire order of taskmasters or sent a legion of soldiers to death with little more than a censure; the issue was Moses' self-awareness of being an Israelite, and not an Egyptian.

<sup>61</sup> Balentine, 190.

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Recognizing the significance of *mishpat echad* or “one standard” being held, is key for any reading of the Pentateuch. Harrison is most correct in informing us, “These regulations applied uniformly to all members of the nation, whatever their racial origin, and like other enactments carried the assurance of God’s imprimatur.”<sup>62</sup> In the case of Leviticus 24:10-21 and the issues in view, the only disadvantage to the *ger* would probably have been that some sojourners who had entered into Ancient Israel, at a later point in life, were less likely to know what the code of conduct was, than those native born who had been exposed to it their entire lives (although in some circumstances there were probably native-born Israelites who knew the Torah’s legal code less than some sojourners). This is why righteous judges would have to be appointed in the towns of Israel (Deuteronomy 16:18; 25:1), so that when crimes were committed a proper investigation could be conducted. If this was done properly, then those truly ignorant of the Law or the Law’s lesser known injunctions, could still be dealt with fairly. Still, the job of all people within a society—especially that of Ancient Israel which was given the Torah, preparing to enter into the Promised Land—is not to be ignorant of the statutes that govern it.

When supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology quote Leviticus 24:22, “You shall have one law for the sojourner and for the native; for I am the LORD your God” (RSV), the principle of equality for the native and sojourner before the jurisprudence of God’s Torah should not fear us. Leviticus 24:10-21 lists a series of instances where in societies contemporary to Ancient Israel, natives to an Ancient Near Eastern state and sojourners who had entered in, were likely to be held to very different standards in the law codes. The God of Israel, quite contrary to this, was fair and just to those within His community.

However, in emphasizing that all of God’s people should be studying and heeding God’s Torah, those of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement have made a mistake in invoking Leviticus 24:22 as a prime verse for us to focus our attention around. Leviticus 24:22 is given as a summarizing remark in view of blasphemy committed in Ancient Israel, for which capital punishment would be issued equally, as well as various damages, for which serious rulings for sure would have been decided. For the spiritually discerning among us, it is not difficult for us to see how in centering spiritual attention around passages like Leviticus 24:22, why legalism, judgmentalism, and a condemnatory spirit tend to persist in the One Law/One Torah sub-movement.

While Leviticus 24:10-22 surely includes important legal principles which Bible readers need to take serious note of, today’s born again Believers in Messiah Yeshua also need to seriously factor in His completed work for us—especially in being sacrificed for the capital crimes of the Torah (cf. Colossians 2:14). This is why there is a definite advantage at focusing our spiritual attention instead around passages like Jeremiah 31:31-34 or Ezekiel 36:25-27—which promise not just a supernatural transcription of God’s Torah onto the heart, but most imperatively a permanent forgiveness and cleansing from transgressions!

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<sup>62</sup> Harrison, *Leviticus*, 222.

# Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism

## Numbers 9:14

“If an alien sojourns among you and observes the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he shall do; you shall have one statute, both for the alien and for the native of the land.”

Numbers 9:14 appears in a wider context where a series of instructions regarding the Passover is given (Numbers 9:1-14), as Ancient Israel enters into its second year in the wilderness, and the people observe the Passover (Numbers 9:1-2). It is specifically stated, “you shall observe it at its appointed time; you shall observe it according to all its statutes and according to all its ordinances...[I]n the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did” (Numbers 9:3, 5).

The main focus, we see, of the Numbers 9:1-14 instruction, is to clarify what to do if one is unclean or *tamei* (טָמֵא) as a result of being in contact with a dead body (Numbers 9:6), as all natives within the community of Ancient Israel were surely expected to remember the Passover. It is inquired of Moses, “*Though* we are unclean because of the dead person, why are we restrained from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?” (Numbers 9:7). Moses goes before the Lord, because there is no purposeful omission of keeping the Passover. Moses receives a response, and the statues which are detailed indicate what needs to be done if there is someone unclean because of contact with a corpse, or if there is one who fails to keep the Passover out of willful omission:

“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If any one of you or of your generations becomes unclean because of a *dead* person, or is on a distant journey, he may, however, observe the Passover to the LORD. In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall observe it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it. But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the LORD at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin” (Numbers 9:10-13).

Far be it from those contaminated by a corpse being prohibited from keeping the Passover entirely, they are to remember the Passover one month after the standard Passover for the rest of the community. It is also explained how one who is clean or *tahor* (טָהוֹר), and is not away on a long journey, will be “cut off” and suffer (at least) some kind of social and/or spiritual excision. Such a willful omission of Passover, without any special circumstances to consider, is sin.

Is it at all important that nothing is specified in regard to males being circumcised to eat of the Passover lamb, as was stated previously in Exodus 12:48? Those of the critical tradition might claim that the Exodus instruction originates from either the J and/or E sources of the Pentateuch, and the Leviticus instruction from the P source, whereas conservatives who hold to a Mosaic origin would not claim that there is any difference of sources here. What is asserted in Numbers 9:3 is *k’kol-chuqotayv u’k’kol-mishpatayv ta’asu oto* (כְּכֹל-חֻקֹּתָיו וְכְכֹל-מִשְׁפָּטָיו תַּעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ), “according to all its statutes and all its regulations you shall keep it” (NRSV). This would be a reference back to the previous Exodus 12

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instructions, delivered as Ancient Israel left Egypt, which should certainly be in the mind of the Torah reader.

Just so that there is no confusion about the allowance for a second Passover to be observed a month later, for those who are contaminated by a corpse, the Lord directs that "If an alien sojourns among you and observes the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he shall do; you shall have one statute, both for the alien and for the native of the land" (Numbers 9:14). Let us not overlook how while the opening two conjunctions *v'ki-* (וְכִי-) can be rendered as "And if..." (RSV/NASB/ESV), they can also be rendered as "And when..." (NJPS), as though it is inevitable that the *ger*/sojourner will keep the Passover, even if it is not upon his immediate entry into the community of Israel: *v'ki-yagur itekhem ger* (וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּכֶם גֵּר).

As has been previously witnessed (Exodus 12:48-49), there are not to be multiple sets of requirements, detailing how either the *ezrach*/native or *ger*/sojourner eat of the Passover, as both were to be circumcised. Numbers 9:14 does not employ the term *torah*, but instead uses *chuqah achat* (חֻקָּה אַחַת): "one statute" (RSV/NASU/ESV), "the same statute" (HCSB), "the same regulations" (NIV), "the same law" (CJB), or "one law" (NJPS). *Chuqah* (חֻקָּה) means "something prescribed, enactment, statute" (BDB).<sup>63</sup> In this instance *chuqah achat* draws the reader's attention to how the native and sojourner alike, in Ancient Israel, will be observing the Passover, *k'chuqat ha'Pesach u'k'mishpatu* (כְּחֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח וְכַמִּשְׁפָּטוֹ), "in accordance with its rules and regulations" (NIV) or "in accordance with the rules and rites of the passover sacrifice" (NJPS).

Thomas B. Dozeman's remarks might need to be considered here, as he draws our attention to the fact that within the Torah's narrative where this instruction appears, "There could be no resident aliens in the wilderness, since all Israel would fall under this category. The emphasis on the resident alien signifies that membership in the congregation is open to outsiders."<sup>64</sup> Numbers 9:13-14 is more of an expectation, similar to Exodus 12:48-49, of what is to govern Israel's Passover observance once Israel is firmly planted within the Promised Land. When Moses tells Ancient Israel that *chuqah achat* is to be followed by both the native and sojourner regarding the Passover, while previous instruction should be remembered, the Numbers 9:10-13 regulations about an unclean person or a willful omission of the Passover are more in view. The *ger*/sojourner within the community of Israel does not have to wait two or three months if contaminated by a corpse to keep the Passover, nor will he experience something more or less serious than a cutting off if Passover is ignored. The instruction is the same across the board. Harrison further states,

"The provision for the resident alien (MT גֵּר, *gēr*) summarizes the legislation in Ex. 12:43-49. In Num. 9:14, however, the resident alien is the only kind of non-Israelite mentioned, the omitted groups being the foreigner (MT בֶּן־נֶכָר, *ben-nēkār*), the temporary resident (תוֹשָׁב, *tōšāb*), and the hired laborer (שָׂכִיר, *śākîr*). The *gēr* and the native Israelite

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<sup>63</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 349.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 87.

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were to be treated equally, since the Israelites were once in the same condition themselves (Deut. 23:8 [MT 23:7]).”<sup>65</sup>

If there is any substantial difference to be observed between Exodus 12:43-49 and Numbers 9:14, it is not that the keeping of Passover is open to the *ger*/sojourner as well as the native Israelite. The key difference to be aware of is that Numbers 9:13 assigns that the willful omission of Passover—with this *chuqah achat* applying to both native and sojourner—merits a cutting off. What this all means for the community of Ancient Israel is obvious, if one does not want to be “cut off” and severely penalized. Dennis T. Olson explains, “the Passover is so significant that even foreigners who live among the Israelites should celebrate it.”<sup>66</sup> Nili S. Fox is even more direct, in actually asserting, “Observance of the Passover is mandatory both for Israelites and resident aliens,”<sup>67</sup> which would seemingly indicate that many of the *gerim*/sojourners within Ancient Israel might not have been such sojourners for too long, upon entering into the community. Although there is debate over what *karat* (כָּרַת) can specifically mean<sup>68</sup> (discussed further), the Passover as Israel’s feast of freedom and deliverance is something that must be taken very seriously, and the *ger*/sojourner within Israel was widely expected to recognize it along with the *ezrach*/native.

Today’s broad Messianic movement is widely encouraging of Jewish *and* non-Jewish Believers participating in the memorial of the Passover *seder*. In fact, congregational *seder* events tend to draw in large numbers of evangelical Christian people, looking for enrichment from their Hebraic and Jewish Roots. However, rather than emphasize the importance of the Passover from a pre-resurrection era standpoint of Numbers 9:14 specifying that those who do not keep it be “cut off,” Messianic people tend to more readily emphasize the importance of the Passover from Paul’s instructions of “let us celebrate the feast...” (1 Corinthians 5:8), and most especially Yeshua the Messiah’s own words of, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Messianic people today widely emphasize the importance of Passover from a post-resurrection era standpoint of how the sacrifice of the Passover lamb during the Ancient Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt, typifies the ultimate sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah at Golgotha (Calvary)—which surely provides permanent restitution for the cutting off of Numbers 9:14.

While there are many proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology who are seen as supporting a Messiah-centric Passover remembrance, how many of them may be witnessed over-emphasizing that those who do not keep Passover will be “cut off” via some sort of serious (physical) consequences—instead of how those who dismiss the

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<sup>65</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 161.

<sup>66</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching: Numbers* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>67</sup> Nili S. Fox, “Numbers,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 303.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Timothy R. Ashley, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp 180-181.

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Passover, particularly evangelical Christian people, are dismissing great blessings and spiritual enlightenment?<sup>69</sup>

### Numbers 15:15-16

**“As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.”**

Numbers 15 includes two passages that use the terminology “one statute” and “one law and one ordinance” (Numbers 15:15-16), and also “one law” (Numbers 15:29-30). While close together, both of these occurrences appear as two sets of specific legislation are delivered.

Our first selection, Numbers 15:15-16, appears at the end of instruction detailing how various offerings are to be made, including: the *olah* (עֹלָה) or burnt offering, the *minchah* (מִנְחָה) or cereal/grain offering, and the *neseq* (נֶסֶק) or drink offering. These different offerings were to be made by the Israelites once they were established in Canaan, and could have applied for a variety of circumstances including “special vows or freewill offerings or festival offerings” (Numbers 15:3, NIV). Important to be acknowledged in this is that the Promised Land was to be very rich in produce (Numbers 13:27; 14:7), and the people would surely want to offer their thanks to God for His provision. Numbers 15:1-13 details,

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “When you enter the land where you are to live, which I am giving you, then make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a special vow, or as a freewill offering or in your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to the LORD, from the herd or from the flock. The one who presents his offering shall present to the LORD a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil, and you shall prepare wine for the drink offering, one-fourth of a hin, with the burnt offering or for the sacrifice, for each lamb. Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; and for the drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a soothing aroma to the LORD. When you prepare a bull as a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a special vow, or for peace offerings to the LORD, then you shall offer with the bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-half a hin of oil; and you shall offer as the drink offering one-half a hin of wine as an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus it shall be done for each ox, or for each ram, or for each of the male lambs, or of the goats. According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do for everyone according to their number. All who are native shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD” (Leviticus 15:1-13).

At the end of this instruction, we see the assertion *kol-ha’ezrach ya’aseh-k’kah et-eileh* (כָּל־הָאֲזָרָח יַעֲשֶׂה־כְּכַה אֶת־אֵלֶּה), as “Every native shall do so with them” (ATS). Given the

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<sup>69</sup> For a further review, consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

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orientation of Ancient Israel implanted within the Land, those who are *ezech* or born there should naturally—out of the blessed territory in which they have lived their whole lives—want to demonstrate their gratitude to the Lord in some tangible way, whether this be an offering made during one of the appointed times or a freewill offering.

These instructions are not only applicable to the *ezech*/native, though, but also to the *ger*/sojourner. Numbers 15:14 anticipates that there will be those, originally outside of Israel, who will join His assembly, beginning with the two conjunctions *v'ki-* (וְכִי), “And when...” (NJPS). When this occurs, the *ger*/sojourner is to make his offering before God as well: “For the generations to come, whenever an alien or anyone else living among you presents an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, he must do exactly as you do” (Numbers 15:14, NIV). The way that the *ger*/sojourner within the Land of Israel is to make a burnt offering, grain/cereal offering, or drink offering, is the same way that any *ezech*/native has done it.

Numbers 15:15-16 actually makes two summarizing remarks after it is specified how those within the Land are to make the different offerings. V. 15 says, *chuqah achat l'khem v'l'ger hagar chuqat olam* (חֻקָּה אַחַת לְכֶם וְלַגֵּר הַגֵּר חֻקָּה עוֹלָם), “For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute” (RSV). It is made quite clear, “You and the stranger shall be alike before the LORD” (NJPS), as *chuqah achat* applies. When either the *ezech*/native or *ger*/sojourner went before the Lord to present an offering, both were to offer the same measurement; it is not as though one had to offer a smaller or greater amount in order for an offering to be acceptable before Him. Sojourners in Ancient Israel, for example, did not have to offer *more* than native Israelites, for their sacrifice to be acceptable before God. Roy Gane concludes, “The same rules for sacrificial accompaniments apply to resident aliens (15:13-16). Verses 15-16 emphasize remarkable equality: Resident aliens share the same legal status before the Lord as other Israelites.”<sup>70</sup>

V. 16 makes a further statement, which does appear to be more general in scope, than just pertaining to how burnt, grain/cereal, and drink offerings are to be made. What is said is that *torah achat u'mishpat echad* (תּוֹרָה אַחַת וּמִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד) is in place: “The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you” (CJB). To Friedman this implies, “Israelites are not privileged over anyone else. A country must treat everyone who lives in it fairly, with equality...”<sup>71</sup> Dozeman also observes, “The laws concerning the resident alien provide a social and theological window into Israel’s self-identity, because the Israelites viewed themselves as resident aliens in a land that God owned (Lev 25:23).”<sup>72</sup> The way that the Lord was to bless Ancient Israel, by giving them and welcoming them into the Land of Canaan as a possession, was to in turn instill within the Israelites the impetus to welcome sojourners in among them, who were not native born, but who would be represented equally before the jurisprudence of the Torah.

Against some of these conclusions would be Jewish commentator Jacob Milgrom, who only thinks, “Although the stranger is placed on an equal footing with the citizen in

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<sup>70</sup> Roy Gane, *NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 620.

<sup>71</sup> Friedman, 577.

<sup>72</sup> Dozeman, in *NIB*, 2:127.

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civil law, there are a few significant differences between them in religious law.”<sup>73</sup> Such perceived differences between the native and the sojourner, perhaps the most notable one referred to being Deuteronomy 14:21, do need to be considered. Proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology, frequently argue that the native-born of Israel and the sojourner in Israel, were *exactly* the same, when they certainly were not—although the differences between the native-born and the sojourner in the community of Ancient Israel were nominal. But, why Milgrom would classify Numbers 15:1-16 as equality in “civil law” here, when this passage specifically pertains to offerings made to God and is most especially “religious,” is a bit odd.

The scene of how this Numbers instruction would have originally been given to the Israelites in the wilderness, who had non-Israelite sojourners in the camp, should be recognized. Olson details how for the immediate narrative of the Torah, “offerings are made at the tent of meeting at the heart and center of the camp. Any non-Israelite groups within the holy war camp of Israel were apparently located on the fringes of Israel’s camp, since no designated place was assigned to them in the camp’s arrangement in Numbers 2.”<sup>74</sup> Far be it from the Lord wanting sojourners, who had no tribal home of their own, to be left out on the distant edges, Olson concludes that given the tenor of Numbers 15:14-16, “these non-Israelite groups are welcomed into the center to offer their sacrifices and offerings. In this way, they are given the same status as native Israelites before God.”<sup>75</sup> Considering how both the native and sojourner were welcome in the camp of Ancient Israel, Olson actually thinks that “One hears echoes of a later affirmation...,”<sup>76</sup> and then quotes Paul in Galatians 3:28.<sup>77</sup> More immediate for the Tanach are appeals made to sentiments expressing the desire that foreign outsiders acknowledge the God of Israel in His Holy Place:

“Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as *do* Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name” (1 Kings 8:41-43).

“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 121.

<sup>74</sup> Olson, 93.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua” (Galatians 3:28).

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Referring to the Genesis 12:3 promise of Abrahamic blessing,<sup>78</sup> Harrison draws the conclusion, "While the ancient Israelites did not seem to have 'evangelized' in the modern Christian sense, their faith was nevertheless deemed to be a legitimate sphere of participation for potential" adherents.<sup>79</sup> If Ancient Israel was to demonstrate a proper obedience to the Lord, and a fair system of statutes governed its society, then would the result truly be seeing outsiders recognize the wisdom of His Law and a desire on their part to acknowledge Him as the Supreme Deity (cf. Deuteronomy 4:6)?

Proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology, to be sure, will quote liberally from Numbers 15:15, "there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you" (ESV), and Numbers 15:16, "One law and one rule shall be for you" (ESV). From a legal standpoint, it is most appreciable from Numbers 15:1-16 to see that both native and sojourner in Ancient Israel were to offer the same amount before the Lord in sacrifice, with the former not being required to offer more, in order for a sacrifice to be acceptable before Him. From a spiritual standpoint, though, should Numbers 15:15-16 be something that today's Messianic Believers use as a credo? It is undeniable that the sacrificial system does not have the same significance today in the post-resurrection era, subsequent to the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah, as it once did in the pre-resurrection era. When supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology invoke Numbers 15:15-16 in various teachings, what spiritual dynamics are they focusing their attention upon? As Hebrews 13:15 directs, Messiah followers are to focus their attention mainly on offering up a sacrifice of praise: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

### Numbers 15:29-30

**"You shall have one law for him who does *anything* unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people."**

The second usage of the terminology "one law," appearing in Numbers ch. 15, occurs after instruction is detailed regarding what to do to cover communal or individual unintentional sin. The specific example of unintentional sin, provided by the text, is forgetting to present the first of one's dough to the Lord. Yet, this example is extended out to include all of the other unintentional sins committed by the general population of Ancient Israel. A mechanism is in place so that specific offerings, either for the congregation or an individual, can be made before the Lord for restitution:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "When you enter the land where I bring you, then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the LORD. Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it

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<sup>78</sup> "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

<sup>79</sup> Harrison, *Numbers*, 224.

He does use the actual description "potential converts," which can be confusing given the debate over *ger* meaning either "sojourner" or "proselyte" (discussed further).

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up. From the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD an offering throughout your generations. But when you unwittingly fail and do not observe all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken to Moses, *even* all that the LORD has commanded you through Moses, from the day when the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations, then it shall be, if it is done unintentionally, without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one bull for a burnt offering, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin offering. Then the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they will be forgiven; for it was an error, and they have brought their offering, an offering by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their error. So all the congregation of the sons of Israel will be forgiven, with the alien who sojourns among them, *for it happened* to all the people through error. Also if one person sins unintentionally, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven”” (Numbers 15:17-28).

The most significant part of these directions **to be sure** is how there is a sacrifice available for sin that has been committed “unintentionally” (Numbers 15:22, 24) or “unwittingly” (NJPS). This concept is represented by the verb *shagah* (שָׁגָה) and the noun *shegahah* (שִׁגְגָה), and how “a sin of this type may result from two causes: negligence or ignorance” (*TWOT*).<sup>80</sup> When a congregational offering is made for an unintentional sin committed, it would have a result affecting the entire community of Ancient Israel (Numbers 15:26), both the *b'nei Yisrael* (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) or “children of Israel,” and “the stranger who sojourns among them” (RSV) or *ger hagar b'tokham* (גֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם). The offense is, in fact, so broad sweeping, that Numbers 15:26 makes the point to say that *kol-ha'am* (כָּל־הָעָם) or “all the people” are affected by it. It is right to recognize that the presence of such a sacrifice is **a definite sign of God's grace**.

Recognizing that committing unintentional sin applies to all within Israel, be the person *ezech*/native or *ger*/sojourner, is clear from how the sacrifices offered affect both groups equally; both the *ezech*/native or *ger*/sojourner are penalized “when you unwittingly fail and do not observe all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken to Moses, *even* all that the LORD has commanded you through Moses, from the day when the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations” (Numbers 15:22-23). While there are specific instructions in the Torah to be sure, such as those given to the Levitical priesthood or the leaders of Israel, or other classes and sub-classes of people, the consequences of not keeping *kol-ha'mitzvot* (כָּל־הַמִּצְוֹת) or all the instructions applicable to the general population should be recognized as being in view. Both the native and sojourner, the two main groups who composed the general population of Ancient Israel, were liable for keeping “all the commandments.” This would by necessity require both the native and the sojourner to be educated in the Torah's instruction, as what encompasses unintentional sin for the native, would seemingly also encompass unintentional sin for the sojourner.

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<sup>80</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׁגָה/שִׁגְגָה,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:904.

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The summarizing remark about *torah achat* (תּוֹרָה אַחַת) or “one law” in Numbers 15:29 specifically concerned the offering up of the animal sacrifices to cover the unintentional sins for both the native born and sojourner: “One and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally, whether he is a native-born Israelite or an alien” (NIV). *Torah achat* here details how the sojourner did not have to have a larger quantity of sacrifices presented before the Lord in order to receive forgiveness.

The directions that could have been violated by either the *ezrach*/native or *ger*/sojourner involved more than just forgetting to offer the first of one’s dough to the Lord (cf. Numbers 15:18-21); it is specified to involve all that Moses had commanded (Numbers 15:22-23). It is reasonable to note that a considerable bulk of the Torah’s instructions are not only in view, but would necessarily apply to all within the broad community of Israel—and with this is a sure implication and impetus that all, whether native or sojourner, are to learn to keep as many commandments as they legitimately can (cf. Deuteronomy 31:12). One gets the distinct impression for a sojourner firmly embedded within the community, that he was widely indistinguishable from the native Israelite in terms of overall, daily adherence to the Torah. Yet, for a sojourner in Ancient Israel still learning what His Instruction was, God’s grace was there in an animal sacrifice to cover any inadvertent or unintentional wrongs, covering what are relatively minor infractions—the same as any native who might also overlook various commandments. And, those who commit wrong are, when it is pointed out, to receive the necessary correction, direction, and strive not to err again.

It is likely that in some cases when unintentional sin was committed, a native Israelite who had heard Moses’ Teaching his entire life, would have more readily remembered it once the sin was pointed out—than a sojourner who had joined the community of Israel in later life, and steadily adopted adherence to commandments as he was acculturated into it. But the need for the sacrifice to cover unintentional sin is the same, and in the estimation of Harrison, “Once again, the principle of impartiality applied where a resident alien had been involved.”<sup>81</sup> To this, Noth adds that sojourners “are part of ‘the whole population’ and on this account shared in the ‘guilt’ incurred by all and therefore had to be included in the atonement.”<sup>82</sup> Even Milgrom has to acknowledge, “The *ger* who commits an inadvertent wrong is equally liable as the citizen to bring the required expiatory sacrifice,” further describing, “The implicit reason is that the Holy Land will become polluted by sins committed upon it, be they ritual or ethical, whether by citizen or stranger”<sup>83</sup> (cf. Leviticus 18:24-30). Given the fact that corporate atonement is in view, the common need for all of the community of Israel, whether native or sojourner, male and female, to adhere to and learn from the Torah is apparent.

There is, however, **no sacrifice specified for the intentional sin of anyone**. While the *ezrach*/native and *ger*/sojourner in Ancient Israel could be cleared of unintentional sin via an offering, if the same persons blatantly disregarded the Law and Word of God *b’yad ramah* (בְּיַד רָמָה) or “with a high hand” (Numbers 15:30, RSV), then this would incur the consequence of being cut off and having to bear the guilt of sin:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 117.

<sup>83</sup> Milgrom, pp 124-125.

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"But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien [*min-ha'ezrach u'min-ha'ger*, וּמִן־הָעֶזְרָח וּמִן־הַגֵּר, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *will be on him*" (Numbers 15:30-31).

Deliberate dereliction from keeping God's Torah is considered to be "blaspheming," "reviling" (RSV), or "affront[ing]" (NRSV) Him.<sup>84</sup> The consequence of this is *v'nik'retah ha'nefesh ha'hiv m'qerev ammah* (וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִקְרֵב עִמָּה), "that person shall be cut off from among his people" (ATS). **Not only does the native born of Israel face a cutting off, but so does the sojourner.** A sin such as blasphemy, idolatry, or some other grave affront to the sanctity of the Lord and His holiness is in view here.

What does the penalty of *karat* (כָּרַת) really involve? There is an array of potential uses of this verb, as "In addition to the literal meaning of this root, 'to cut off' (Exo 4:25; 1Sam 5:4) and 'to cut down' (a 'woodcutter' in Isa 14:8) there is the metaphorical meaning to root out, eliminate, remove, excommunicate or destroy by a violent act of man or nature" (*TWOT*).<sup>85</sup> The verb *karat* might be vague at times, given that it has a variety of potential applications, but the penalty for intentional sin against the Lord is most likely capital punishment.<sup>86</sup> If *karat* is not intended to be capital punishment, though, and is instead exile, then Olson adequately describes how it "was considered a kind of death itself."<sup>87</sup> Dozeman's observations are also useful to keep in mind:

"The exact meaning of this phrase...is not clear. It may have a collective sense, meaning a family line is discontinued. This meaning would qualify the more individual focus of 14:26-38. But it may also be more individual in its meaning, in which case it would signify a loss of status, excommunication, death, or even a judgment by God after death. The bad report of the land by the leaders of Israel (who die instantly) and the murmuring of the people (who are condemned to die in the wilderness) are instances of premeditated transgression that fall under the final category."<sup>88</sup>

Those who are cut off for intentional sins against the Lord are cut off regardless of their bloodline: the *ezrach*/native and *ger*/sojourner within Ancient Israel stand equally accountable before Moses' Teaching (Numbers 15:22). While sojourners who had once acknowledged foreign gods could be more apt to rebel against the LORD, there could likely have been sojourners who were more faithful to Him than native Israelites who were lured by sin.

It is not uncommon to see Numbers 15:29 quoted by supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology: "You shall have one law for him...for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them" (ESV). However, is this really the appropriate passage to stress all of God's people studying God's Torah, or embracing

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<sup>84</sup> The verb *gadaf* (גָּדַף), appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), means "revile, blaspheme" (*BDB*, 154).

<sup>85</sup> Elmer B. Smick, "כָּרַת," in *TWOT*, 1:457.

<sup>86</sup> Ashley, 289.

<sup>87</sup> Olson, 95.

<sup>88</sup> Dozeman, in *NIB*, 2:128.

Note how he has fully said "The exact meaning of this phrase in priestly tradition is not clear," being an advocate of the JEDP documentary hypothesis.

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a Sabbath rest, remembering the appointed times, or eating a kosher-style of diet—things that are being witnessed today among non-Jewish Believers entering into the Messianic movement? The stress of Numbers 15:29-30 and *torah achat* is having to offer animal sacrifices for unintentional sins, “the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally” (Numbers 15:29, TNIV), and how those who committed intentional sins against the Lord would suffer a cutting off (Numbers 15:30), with no sacrifice available.

**What is most significant to recognize from Numbers 15:29-30, is that both the native and sojourner within Ancient Israel had a problem with intentional sin for which the Torah provides no remedy.** It may be important to recognize that the same sacrifice offers restitution equally for the native and sojourner, regarding their unintentional sin. But, it is *far more important* to recognize how only the Messiah to come would be able, by the sacrifice of Himself, to offer complete redemption and forgiveness for both unintentional *and* intentional sins. Supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology are, to be sure, right to emphasize that God’s people today need to be educated in the principles of Moses’ Teaching. We should pay attention to what is stated in Numbers 15:29-30. But what we should never do, is focus our constant spiritual attention around Numbers 15:29-30, as though people living in the post-resurrection era have no access to a sacrifice that can cover unintentional sin. Such a sacrifice has been provided in the completed work of Yeshua the Messiah, and mature Believers in Him should be able to move beyond some of the negative spiritual dynamics represented by Numbers 15:17-30.

### Similarities Between the Native and Sojourner in Ancient Israel

What principles are communicated by the different Torah passages which employ the terms “one law” or “one statute”? They are important for Bible readers to be aware of, as a matter of Torah jurisprudence for the community of Ancient Israel, particularly as it regards the fair treatment of the *ger*/sojourner:

- Eating of the Passover lamb, and thus being considered a “native of the land,” requires either the native born of Israel or a sojourner to be circumcised, as *torah achat* applies to both. This means that a native born of Israel uncircumcised may not eat the Passover, as much as an uncircumcised sojourner may not eat. The key issue, though, is the full remembrance of the Passover, and not circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49).
- The terminology *torah achat* can be used to describe a considerable overlap of Pentateuchal instructions, such as those regulating the guilt offering and sin offering (Leviticus 7:7).
- Whether it be capital punishment for blasphemy, or the same instructions for repayment of damages, *mishpat echad* applies to the native and sojourner in Israel (Leviticus 24:22), as opposed to the common ANE occurrence when natives and strangers in a society would be held to two different standards, with also the presence of different levels of “natives” such as the monarchy/ruling or commoner/peasant class.
- The same statute or *chugah achat* is to be followed whether a native or sojourner keeps the Passover, or fails to observe the Passover (Numbers 9:14).

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- When burnt offerings, cereal/grain offerings, or drink offerings are made before the Lord, the same standard of measurement is to be held, because *chuqah achat* is to be followed by the native or sojourner making the offering (Numbers 15:15-16).
- The same law or *torah achat* applies when a sacrifice for unintentional sin needs to be offered for either the native or sojourner in Israel, with the severe penalty of *karat* looming for intentional sin (Numbers 15:29-30). Such unintentional sin, though, regards adherence to all of the instructions delivered via Moses to the general population (Numbers 15:22-23).

Many of us have witnessed the terminology of “one law” or “one statute,” thrown around a bit too much, without enough careful thought or attention to what these passages meant in context for Ancient Israel. From a standpoint of Torah jurisprudence, each of these Pentateuchal passages are certainly supportive of an ethos where both the *ezrach*/native and *ger*/sojourner in Ancient Israel, were to be treated fair and equally before God’s Law. Different Torah passages where “one law” or “one statute” was to be demonstrated to those within Ancient Israel, certainly ran subversive to other Ancient Near Eastern law codes where a double or triple or quadruple standard was likely to be present among different sectors of a population.

Knowing that societies contemporary to Ancient Israel would not have held both their natives and resident aliens/immigrants to the same basic code of conduct, is most serious for how these Torah passages affected later codes of civil justice. Considering the widespread influence of these passages not only in the course of human history, but also salvation history, Milgrom’s thought, “It applies only to the case given in context; it is not to be taken as a generalization,”<sup>89</sup> is surely limiting of these verses’ overall philosophical significance. While there were going to be some differences in Ancient Israel between those who were natives or sojourners within the community, and other internal differences—we should not think that the differences are as stark or drastic as various Jewish interpreters may have wanted them to be. From a standpoint of jurisprudence, the tenor of the different passages emphasizing “one law” or “one statute,” is not to draw readers’ attention to rigid distinctions between people or groups or sub-groups within Ancient Israel, but rather the commonality among them. Proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology, however, tend to widely advocate that the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel were exactly the same, with no differences—something unsustainable from the text of the Torah.

Torah readers should not think that the native Israelite and *ger*/sojourner were exactly the same, although the native Israelite and sojourner had far more in common than not. R.J.D. Knauth astutely observes in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* how “The resident alien in pentateuchal law would seem generally to be envisioned to be subject to Israelite law, just as a native Israelite would be....[O]ne 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.”<sup>90</sup> A similar conclusion can be witnessed in other theological reference

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<sup>89</sup> Milgrom, 399.

<sup>90</sup> R.J.D. Knauth, “Alien, Foreign Resident,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 30, 31.

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sources.<sup>91</sup> In the entry for "Sojourner" in *ABD*, John R. Spencer says, for example, "Often these foreigners are subject to the same laws as the Israelites (Exod 12:49; Num 15:16)...Only occasionally is there a law which makes a distinction between Israelite and sojourner (cf. Deut 14:21)."<sup>92</sup>

The Torah includes a number of important places which demonstrate a considerable degree of equivalence between the *ezrach*/native and *ger*/sojourner within Ancient Israel, which do concern the sojourner's adherence to Moses' Teaching:

- **Both native and sojourner were to keep the Sabbath:** "[B]ut the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you" (Exodus 12:10; cf. 23:10; Deuteronomy 5:14).
- **Both native and sojourner deserve a fair trial:** "Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear *the cases* between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him'" (Deuteronomy 1:16).
- **Both native and sojourner have access to cities of refuge:** "These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there" (Numbers 35:15).
- **Both native and sojourner were to observe the Day of Atonement:** "*This* shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you" (Leviticus 16:29).
- **Both native and sojourner were to follow the same purification rites after eating meat from an animal that died of natural causes:** "When any person eats *an animal* which dies or is torn *by beasts*, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean" (Leviticus 17:15).
- **Both native and sojourner were to adhere to a most serious sexual purity:** "But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you" (Leviticus 18:26).<sup>93</sup>
- **Everyone in the community of Israel, from the men and women, to the children, to the sojourner, was to hear and follow Moses' Teaching:** "[W]hen all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their

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<sup>91</sup> T.M. Mauch, "Sojourner," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:398 expresses how the sojourner "is almost an Israelite," and D.I. Block, "Sojourner; Alien; Stranger," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:562 indicates, "sojourners were to be treated for the most part just like ordinary Israelites."

<sup>92</sup> John R. Spencer, "Sojourner," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:104.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Block, "Sojourner," in *ISBE*, 4:562.

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hearing. 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<sup>94</sup>” (Deuteronomy 31:11-12).

- **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).

**There is not an exactness between the *ger*/sojourner and *ezrach*/native**—as supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology tend to frequently conclude—but **there is an approximate equivalence for these groups within Ancient Israel**. If we were to employ mathematical symbols, the *ger*/sojourner  $\neq$  *ezrach*/native, but the *ger*/sojourner  $\approx$  *ezrach*/native. But, while it may be witnessed that the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel had a great deal of commonality as co-members of the community, the *ger*/sojourner entering into the community could never totally be the same as the *ezrach*/native. Only a native born of Israel could legitimately claim the story of the Exodus and wilderness journey not just as a part of his spiritual heritage, but also his ethnic and cultural heritage. And, even though it is most obvious, the native, who was raised in a culture and environment of Torah adherence his entire life, had definite advantages over a sojourner who entered into the community of Israel in later life.

### *Ger* and *Proselutos*:

#### Who should be submitted to Moses' Teaching?

In the discussion regarding the relationship of the *ger* or sojourner within Ancient Israel to Moses' Teaching, it is witnessed in various Jewish theological sources that the *ger* is not so much a sojourner or alien, an outsider welcomed into Ancient Israel, but instead is a “proselyte.” The Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Tanach* most notably renders the Hebrew *ger* as “proselyte” in Exodus 12:48; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:15, 29; and as “convert” in Numbers 9:14. Does *ger* really mean “proselyte”? Is it as though the Torah only has significant application for the native born of Israel, and those who have gone through some sort of formal, proselyte conversion procedure? Is it proper to look at the Hebrew term *ger* as a formal proselyte convert? And, what is communicated in those places where the Hebrew *ger* is translated in the Greek Septuagint as *prosēlutos*?

What we must immediately pause and note, especially in weighing what is intended by the Pentateuch employing the term *ger*, is how in Biblical Studies and in modern-day Judaism the English word “proselyte” can have different connotations. In Biblical Studies, using the term “proselyte” can have a general meaning more consistent with what *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines as, “one who has been converted from one religion, sect, etc. to another,”<sup>95</sup> with many of the details left either open-ended

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<sup>94</sup> Heb. *kol-divrei ha'Torah ha'zot* (כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת).

<sup>95</sup> *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, second edition (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2002), 509.

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or undefined. Judaism and Christianity and other religions all have “proselytes” in this sense. When a theologian like Kaiser comments on Leviticus 24:10-23, and speaks of how “the blasphemer’s father was a proselyte...,”<sup>96</sup> he is largely concerned with someone who has committed himself to following Israel’s God. But as the *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* indicates for us, “Later rabbinic material...describes a conversion process that requires study of the law, circumcision for males, baptism by immersion, and sacrifice,”<sup>97</sup> which is definitely what ATS and various other Jewish works have more in mind in translating *ger* as “proselyte.” Although such a process was present in Second Temple Judaism, is this what was originally intended or implied by the term *ger*?

### *The Ger*

Knauth provides us with the following summary of the Hebrew noun *ger* (גֵּר), its root *gwr* (גִּיר), and related Semitic terms, from the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*:

“*Gēr* is a noun deriving from the Hebrew root *gwr* (‘to sojourn, tarry as a sojourner’), with likely cognates in Arabic (‘neighbor, patron, protector’), Ethiopic (‘neighbor’), Ugaritic (‘dweller?’) and Aramaic (‘client’; later Christian Palestinian usage associates it with proselytes or neighbors and in some cases with adultery). A connection with the Akkadian *gerû* (‘to be hostile’) and its participial form *gārû* (‘enemy’) is also possible, arguably tying in with Hebrew roots *gwr* II (= *grh* [גִּרָה]: ‘to attack, strive’) and *gwr* III (= *ygr* [יִיר]: ‘to be afraid’). The root is also attested in Phoenician personal names, where it would seem to denote dependence or client status in relation to a deity, as in ‘client/protégé of [deity].’ In a Moabite inscription (the Mesha Stela) it appears to designate a distinct people-group, male and female, within Israel.”<sup>98</sup>

The *ger* in the Torah is largely someone who traveled alongside of the Ancient Israelites in the wilderness, and other than a difference of ethnicity, was to be treated basically the same as any native born of Israel.<sup>99</sup> Such *gerim* were anticipated to join the population of Israel, once the Promised Land had been subdued and settled. Knauth details how the “*gēr* refers generally to a person not native to the local area and thus usually without family ties or landed property.”<sup>100</sup> The legal status of a *ger* was much closer to that of a native Israelite than not, and for the Thirteenth Century B.C.E. would have been a feature of Israel’s Law that stood in contrast to other contemporary codes. However, we do see that the ancient *ger* is given a few allowances that native born Israelites did not have. Among these are included how the *ger* could face permanent slavery as inherited property (Leviticus 25:39-43, 46, 54-55) unlike the native, and how a *ger* could be allowed

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<sup>96</sup> Kaiser, in *NIB*, 2:1164.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur G. Patzia & Anthony G. Petrota, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 95.

<sup>98</sup> R.J.D. Knauth, “Alien, Foreign Resident,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 27. *HALOT*, 1:201, notes the Aramaic term *giorah* (גִּיִּרָה) or “proselyte.”

Also to be recognized is how a Greek form of *ger*, *geiōras* (γεἰώρας), appears once in the Septuagint (Exodus 12:19).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp 29-30.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

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to eat an animal that died of natural causes (Deuteronomy 14:21). In Knauth's estimation, at least in some targeted places, "the 'alien' was clearly treated differently as a 'second-class citizen.'"<sup>101</sup>

Both of these examples might be more easily understood not in terms of two tiers of citizenship somehow depicted in the Torah, but rather how most sojourners within Ancient Israel were often very poor people in need of considerable aid, who would probably have not had large extended families like native Israelites most often had to help them (and perhaps the provision allotted to sojourners would be a feature that attracted many into Israel). The possibility of being a perpetual slave in the house of a master with his provision, as unpleasant as we might think it is today, could be better than being almost completely without. Being shown a bit of kindness by being allowed to eat an animal that died of natural causes (in many cases likely due to an accidental death), as stomach wrenching as it may be, is surely better than starving to death.<sup>102</sup> Milgrom describes the most likely economic reality, "Although some *gerim* did manage to amass wealth (Lev. 25:37), most were poor and were bracketed with the poor as recipients of welfare (cf. Lev. 19:10; 23:22; 25:6)."<sup>103</sup> No Bible reader can easily overlook how the Torah is most concerned with the *ger*, along with the needy or destitute:

- "Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger [*ger*]. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:10).
- "When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien [*ger*]. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 23:22).
- "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien [*ger*] by giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18).

If there were exceptions for the *ger*, in terms of "You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it..." (Deuteronomy 14:21), then these are to be understood principally in terms of the relatively common, low economic status of the sojourner. Knauth considers the *ger* to be among "particularly vulnerable groups in Israelite society...and [is] thus afforded a number of special protections in pentateuchal law."<sup>104</sup> Also not to be overlooked is how in Deuteronomy 14:21, the *ger asher-b'sh'areykha* (גֵר אֲשֶׁר-בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ) or "the alien who is within your gates" (NKJV), could be an anticipation of a "Canaanite subject in Israel/Judah" (*HALOT*),<sup>105</sup> having been conquered and deserving of some mercy with being given an animal for eating.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>102</sup> *IVPBBC* actually says on Deuteronomy 14:21, "In a protein-starved area such as ancient Israel, it would have been almost criminal to let good meat go to waste" (John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 184).

This is evaluated more fully in the entry on Deuteronomy 14:1-21, in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>103</sup> Milgrom, pp 398-399.

<sup>104</sup> Knauth, "Alien, Foreign Resident," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 32.

<sup>105</sup> *HALOT*, 1:201.

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The thrust of the Torah is that the *ger* is to not only be allowed into the community of Israel, but is to be treated essentially as no different than a native Israelite, although it is also true that the *ger* is not exactly the same. In Deuteronomy 1:16, Moses admonishes, "Hear *the cases* between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien [*ger*] who is with him." All persons within the community of Ancient Israel were to be instructed by the Law (Deuteronomy 31:12). But while such fair and equal treatment was a major thrust of the Torah as originally given, the history of the Tanach is often a testament to how once established within the Promised Land, its instructions were not often remembered. The *ger/sojourner* was originally counted within the broad community of Israel (Deuteronomy 29:10-13; cf. Joshua 8:33), but as D.I. Block observes, "Second-class treatment of sojourners may...be documented from later history. The *gêrîm* noted separately in David's census (2 Ch. 2:17 [MT 16])<sup>106</sup> became the basis of Solomon's work crews, some of which consisted entirely of sojourners (cf. 1 Ch. 22:2)."<sup>107</sup>

### *The Proselyte*

Is there a textual basis to support the idea that within Ancient Israel, those who were to be afforded equal and fair treatment before the jurisprudence of the Torah, were not native-born Israelites and sojourners—but instead native-born Israelites and those who had undergone the formal ritual of a proselyte? This could leave a third group, various non-Israelite non-proselytes, within the community, who should not have expected an equal and fair treatment in matters of Torah jurisprudence. Before examining how the ritual of a proselyte developed in Second Temple Judaism, we should acknowledge that there are commentators, who to some degree or another, would closely associate the role of the *ger/sojourner*, and the later class of the proselyte to Judaism, as being essentially identical.

Referencing Exodus 12:48-49 in his Numbers commentary, the instructions on how to keep the Passover and how a *ger* circumcised could be reckoned as a native, Noth states, this "deal[s] specifically with the right of participation in the Passover celebration, [and] that by 'stranger' [*ger*] is meant someone who does not belong to the circle of fully privileged Israelites, but who yet, by acceptance of circumcision, has given himself to the service of the God of Israel."<sup>108</sup> We have largely concurred with this conclusion in our previous examination of Exodus 12:48-49. But Noth goes further, remarking that the *ger* who underwent circumcision "is a 'proselyte' in the terminology of a later period."<sup>109</sup> And indeed, it is really not until one arrives in the much later Rabbinical materials, that the term *ger* (גֵּר) is applied to "a *proselyte, convert to Judaism*" (*Jastrow*).<sup>110</sup> Commenting

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<sup>106</sup> "Solomon numbered all the aliens who *were* in the land of Israel, following the census which his father David had taken; and 153,600 were found" (2 Chronicles 2:17).

<sup>107</sup> Block, "Sojourner," in *ISBE*, 4:562.

<sup>108</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 72.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 263.

While *BDB*, 158 does include the definition of "*proselyte*" for the Hebrew *ger*, this is likely an employment of the more general usage of "*proselyte*" in theological language, than the Jewish proselyte of the Second Temple period.

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later on Numbers 15:1-16, it is clear that Noth's conclusions are a bit clouded by his commitment to the critical tradition and Leviticus-Numbers being the product of a so-called Priestly writer who is many centuries removed from Moses:

"This would suggest that by 'strangers who sojourn with you' is meant 'proselytes', i.e. people of non-Israelite origin who have attached themselves to **the Jerusalem cult...**"<sup>111</sup> (emphasis mine).

Milgrom, as a Jewish commentator and an adherent to the critical view as well (but probably less so than Noth), is a bit more careful. He legitimately recognizes how within the Torah, "It must be remembered that the *ger*, the resident alien of biblical times, is a far remove from the *ger*, the convert of rabbinic times."<sup>112</sup> Yet, examining how later centuries of Jewish tradition interpreted the Torah passages of a *ger* entering into Israel, he concludes, "the Jews of the third century B.C.E. were not in violation of the Torah for by then they had reinterpreted the Torah's *ger* to denote the convert."<sup>113</sup> He is most likely making reference to the fact that in the Greek Septuagint, *ger* (γῆρ) is most frequently rendered as *prosēlutos* (προσήλυτος), from which we obviously get the English term "proselyte." The different passages we have previously addressed from the Hebrew Torah have are seen to have rendered *ger* with the Greek *prosēlutos* in the Septuagint:

"But if any guest should draw near to you [*tis proselthē pros humas prosēlutos*, τὶς προσέλθη πρὸς ὑμᾶς προσήλυτος] to keep the pascha to the Lord, you shall circumcise every male of his, and then he shall draw near to keep it, and he shall be like a native of the land. No uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the local inhabitant and for the guest among you who has drawn near [*tō proselthonti prosēlutō en humin*, τῷ προσελθόντι προσηλύτῳ ἐν ὑμῖν]" (Exodus 12:48-49, NETS).

"There shall be one judgment for the guest [*tō prosēlutō*, τῷ προσηλύτῳ] and for the inhabitant of the country; for it is I who am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 24:22, NETS).

"Now if a guest comes to you [*proselthē pros humas prosēlutos*, προσέλθη πρὸς ὑμᾶς προσήλυτος] in your land, he also shall keep the pascha to the Lord; according to the law of the pascha and according to its organization, so shall he keep it; there shall be one law for you and for the guest [*tō prosēlutō*, τῷ προσηλύτῳ] and for the native of the land" (Numbers 9:14, NETS).

"One law shall be for you and for the guests [*tois prosēlutois*, τοῖς προσηλύτοις] who associate themselves among you, an everlasting law for your generations; as you are, also the guest shall be before the Lord. There shall be one law and one statute for you and for the guest [*tō prosēlutō*, τῷ προσηλύτῳ] who attaches himself to you" (Numbers 15:15-16, NETS).

"For the local inhabitant among Israel's sons and for the guest who associates himself among them [*tō prosēlutō tō proskeimenō en autois*, τῷ προσηλύτῳ τῷ προσκειμένῳ ἐν

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<sup>111</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 115.

<sup>112</sup> Milgrom, 401.

Also Jeffrey H. Tigay: "In later halakhic exegesis, when 'ger' ('stranger') is understood as 'proselyte,' this v. is understood as prescribing equality between proselytes and born Jews..." (*Jewish Study Bible*, 131).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

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αὐτοῖς], there shall be one law for them, whoever might have acted unintentionally. And a soul that shall act with a hand of arrogance, from the natives or from the guests [*τῶν προσελεύτων*], this one provokes God; that soul shall be completely destroyed from his people" (Numbers 15:29-30, NETS).

In the First Century period, when the Greek-speaking Jewish community would read *prosēlutos* from the LXX, it would most likely be understood in terms of someone who had gone through the formal process of becoming a convert to Judaism, like a Greek or Roman in their midst could have done. The First Century B.C.E. Jewish philosopher Philo expresses his view of how Moses calls those who cross into the community of Israel "proselytes":

"And these last he calls proselytes (*prosēlytos*), from the fact of their having come over (*proselēlythenai* [προσελελυθέναι]) to a new and God-fearing constitution, learning to disregard the fabulous inventions of other nations, and clinging to unalloyed truth" (*Special Laws* 1.51).<sup>114</sup>

There should be no question that many of those Greeks and Romans who became proselytes to ancient Judaism (before the arrival of Yeshua) were good people, who made the right choice. Becoming proselytes enabled them to completely cut themselves off from a paganism that had once kept them in darkness and ignorant of the One True God. It kept them devoted and anchored to a community of people who were chosen to represent the goodness of the Creator to the nations.

The question that does not often get asked, though, is whether the Septuagint translators—two to three centuries before the ministry of Yeshua—actually intended *prosēlutos* to mean a formal convert to Judaism. When *prosēlutos* appears in the Apostolic Scriptures (Matthew 23:15; Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43), a formal convert to ancient Judaism is intended. However, there are some terms which appear in the Greek LXX, though, which do not always correspond to later meanings witnessed in the Greek New Testament.

The term *prosēlutos* (προσήλυτος) can have a different meaning in the Greek Septuagint from its usage in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, given the three centuries between them. The *LS* lexicon, primarily interested in classical uses, actually has "one that has arrived at a place, a sojourner"<sup>115</sup> as its first definition of *prosēlutos*. The *Thayer* lexicon has its first definition of *prosēlutos* as "a stranger, alien," noting how it is the frequent LXX rendering for *ger* (גֵר).<sup>116</sup> The noted lexicographer Frederick W. Danker details that literally *prosēlutos* is "'one who has arrived at a place,' therefore 'a stranger,'"<sup>117</sup> and then discusses the later development of the proselytization process in Second Temple Judaism. The correspondence of the Greek *prosēlutos* as a kind of sojourner or traveler, just as the Hebrew *ger* was, aligns with the related verb *proserchomai* (προσερχομαι), simply meaning "to move towards" (*BDAG*).<sup>118</sup> The New

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<sup>114</sup> Philo Judeaus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 538.

<sup>115</sup> *LS*, 691.

<sup>116</sup> *Thayer*, 546.

<sup>117</sup> Frederick W. Danker, "Proselyte, Proselytism," in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 425.

<sup>118</sup> *BDAG*, 879.

*AMG* further notes, as its first description for *prosēlutos*,

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English Translation of the Septuagint, in the passages we have focused upon, actually renders *prosēlutos* as “guest.”

So is it at all possible for *prosēlutos* in the Greek LXX, to mean something **other** than a formal convert-proselyte to Judaism, as *prosēlutos* is used in the Apostolic Scriptures? In the estimation of at least one scholar, David M. Moffitt of Duke University, previous lexicographers and interpreters have largely had to only consult the Septuagint, Philo’s works, and the New Testament to derive the (theological) meaning of *prosēlutos*. He acknowledges, “In the context of early Judaism, the word גַּר plainly was applied to Jewish converts. Additionally, the term προσήλυτος bears the meaning ‘convert’ in Hellenistic Jewish texts from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century C.E. By the end of the Second Temple period προσήλυτος and probably גַּר could refer to converts to Judaism.” Yet, he does issue a stern caution about how far back this can be pushed: “Whether or not one can conclude that those translating the LXX centuries earlier rendered גַּר as προσήλυτος because they already understood גַּר to mean ‘convert’ is a different question entirely.”<sup>119</sup> He goes on to describe how within the archives at Duke, a Third Century B.C.E. manuscript fragment (P.Duk.inv. 727), has demonstrated a non-religious, secular usage of *prosēlutos* to simply designate “foreigners” or “sojourners,” in this case those participating in a monetary transaction. The main conclusion of Moffitt, regarding this fragmentary evidence, is,

“[T]his is a draft of a legal document (corrections in a second hand are evident throughout) addressing some kind of transaction and/or dispute. Second, the date and location of the papyrus indicates that the text comes from roughly the time period in which the first portion of the LXX was translated in Alexandria. That is to say, the papyrus proves that the word προσήλυτος was in use in Egypt around the time that the Torah was translated into Greek.”<sup>120</sup>

While more research and investigation into *prosēlutos* needs to be conducted, it is becoming likely that prior to the popularization of the Septuagint in Greek-speaking Jewish communities, and with terms taking on a more theological focus—that a word like *prosēlutos* originally had a neutral meaning for those in Ptolemaic Egypt. *Prosēlutos* simply meaning a sojourner or resident, **without** any sense of implying a formal convert to Judaism, would certainly be implied by the LXX uses which describe Israel as being a sojourning or a so-called “proselyte” nation in Egypt (Exodus 22:20[21]; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:9).

Moving ahead to the broad First Century B.C.E.-C.E. period, what would it have actually meant for a Greek or Roman person to become a Jewish proselyte? Is the proselytization procedure actually outlined in the Pentateuch, or derived from it? Is it something that was intended all the way back at Mount Sinai, or is it the reflection of

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“[M]asc. noun from *prosérchomai*...to come near, come to. A stranger, foreigner, one who comes from his own people to another” (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993], 1231).

<sup>119</sup> David M. Moffitt (2009). *P.Duk.inv. 727: New Evidence for the Meaning and Provenance of the Word Προσήλυτος*. Available upon request via his curriculum vitae at <duke.edu/~dmm20/curriculum\_vitae.html>.

(Since 2009, Dr. Moffitt has moved to the faculty of Campbell University Divinity School <<http://divinity.campbell.edu/Academics/FacultyStaff/DrDavidMoffitt.aspx>>.)

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

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later generations of Jews, wishing to closely preserve their ethnicity and protect their people from outside assimilation?

There is no agreement as to when real “proselytes” started emerging on the scene within Second Temple Judaism. The range of opinions one may encounter express views that a procedure for becoming a proselyte goes back to not just figures like the Moabitess Ruth, but as indicated by the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, “Many of the sages...favored accepting converts into the community, describing Abraham as the first Jew to seek converts and teaching that all Jews should follow his lead by attempting to win over Gentiles to the worship of YHWH.”<sup>121</sup> Yet in this entry’s estimation, “The Bible [meaning, the Tanach] does not have a concept of conversion. The idea arose around the first century C.E.”<sup>122</sup> The references that Scot McKnight provides on favorable attitudes toward proselytes, in his entry for the *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, all come from the broad First Century B.C.E.-C.E. and the time immediately after.<sup>123</sup> He also indicates how “The evidence from antiquity reveals a rather diverse set of requirements that differ from time and place so that it is no longer accurate to speak of Judaism requiring circumcision, baptism [or, immersion] and a sacrifice in the temple.”<sup>124</sup> His thought is, “all Jews would have expected repentance, obedience and social integration into the Jewish community if one wanted to become a proselyte,”<sup>125</sup> but the degrees of how fast or slow this took place are varied.

The main summary of what was required for ancient proselytes to Judaism is actually seen in the Talmud:

“Just as your forefathers entered the covenant only with circumcision and immersion and sprinkling of blood through the sacrifices, so they will enter the covenant only through circumcision, immersion, and sprinkling of blood on the altar” (b.*Keritot* 9a).<sup>126</sup>

It is very true that each one of these elements is seen in the Torah, so it was not unreasonable for the ancient Sages to place them together as the main components of what would constitute proselytization. (Those in the Diaspora would make some kind of monetary offering in place of a sacrifice.) But again, when did these procedures really take on significance and force? *Not in the Exodus*. The discussions about proselytes to ancient Judaism largely occurred contemporary to the ministry of Yeshua.

Of all of the elements listed, circumcision of males would have been the most important, and history certainly bears out the close association between circumcision and Jewish proselytes (especially given the tenor of Paul’s letter to the Galatians). Most

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<sup>121</sup> “ger,” in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 249.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> S. McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), pp 840-841.

Among his references include: Tobit 1:7-8; *Testament of Levi* 14:4; *Testament of Naphtali* 1:10; Philo *Special Laws* 1.51-53; *On Rewards and Punishments* 61; Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 7.45; b.*Shabbat* 31a.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 844.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 845.

<sup>126</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

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critically not to be overlooked would be how circumcision was made illegal on threat of death during the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E. (1 Maccabees 1:60-61; 2 Maccabees 6:10). The Pentateuch itself specifically requires circumcision of the *ger* to eat the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:48-49), which in turn results in “native of the land” status being afforded. The Pentateuch defines a people whose God has delivered them via the Exodus and His judgments on Egypt. After the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., though, something like circumcision easily took on a significantly nationalistic interest for the Jewish people—and was a bit over-extended at that—something although entirely understandable as many had fought and died for it.<sup>127</sup>

While outsiders had always been allowed into the community of either Ancient Israel or Second Temple Judaism, the fallout of the Maccabean crisis really would have forced the issue of how it was to formally take place, especially as the Jewish people would have been most concerned with maintaining their ethnic cohesion and resisting much of the surrounding Hellenism and Romanism. Quickly, being “circumcised” was synonymous with “being Jewish.” Its significance became much inflated, beyond that of either being the memorial sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:10) or a useful procedure for good health. In McKnight’s estimation, “Circumcision as a conversion ritual becomes confused with how Jews perceived the nation: the act and national identity are not easy to separate.”<sup>128</sup> He makes a reference from Josephus to a Roman general named Metilius caught in battle, “for when he entreated for mercy, and promised that he would turn Jew, and be circumcised, they saved him alive” (*Wars of the Jews* 17.454).<sup>129</sup>

What were the social ramifications of becoming a Jewish proselyte in the Second Temple era? Some of them were quite good, because Yeshua’s word to Nicodemus “unless one is born again” (John 3:3) is appropriated directly from how a proselyte who had turned his back on paganism was thought to be like a newborn baby (b.*Yevamot* 48b)—now something true of the Messiah’s followers. At the same time, it was not always easy for those of the period who wanted to proselytize to do so.

Josephus records a scene of a King Izates, ruler of Adiabene, who was converted to Judaism via the teaching of the Jewish merchant Ananias. Izates had first seen how his mother eagerly embraced Judaism, and then he followed. He stopped short, though, of undergoing circumcision, as if his subjects heard of it, Izates’ life might be in danger. The record indicates that Ananias agreed on how undergoing circumcision would be life-threatening, and how God would forgive him for this oversight (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.38-42).<sup>130</sup>

We should never think that all Jews of the First Century C.E. had a rigid view of circumcision, actually placing circumcision status ahead of belief in God. McKnight concurs, “there were dissenting voices at different times for special reasons.”<sup>131</sup> For a

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<sup>127</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism,” appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>128</sup> McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 845.

<sup>129</sup> Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 626.

<sup>130</sup> The further record does indicate, however, that Izates went through with the rite (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.43-48).

<sup>131</sup> McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 845.

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season between the Maccabean crisis and the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah, we should recognize that the making of many Greek and Roman proselytes was a good thing, especially given some of the criticism levied against them by their own people, laced with anti-Semitism (i.e., Tacitus *The Histories* 5.5; Juvenal *Satires* 14.95-104). Yet at the same time, how much paranoia and xenophobia were present within the Jewish world, at least in the Land of Israel, given the presence of: the Roman occupation, the Essenes secluded off to themselves readying for the final battle, various Zealot groups and uprisings, and the two major schools of Pharisees? Given how the Maccabean crisis had promoted Hellenistic integration and assimilation, to what degree would Greek and Roman proselytes to the Synagogue be truly welcomed into the Jewish community and not treated with some suspicion? Philo's observation was that it took three generations for proselytes to really become Jews (*On the Virtues* 108), and we are probably all familiar with the classic example of Shammai who refuses to teach a non-Jew the Torah on one foot, versus Hillel who taught him to do no harm to neighbor (b.*Shabbat* 31a).

In the First Century world of Yeshua and the Apostles, we are probably safe to think how the proselyte procedure, in various degrees, was quite rigorous involving much more than the specified circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice. Some significant education and some social scrutiny by the Jewish community the proselyte would enter into, came along with the package. **So why did the Apostles frequently oppose new, non-Jewish Believers becoming proselytes?** Surely, it would not have been over simply being circumcised, immersed in water, and then at least giving alms. These are all features of the Torah, even if the formula together is not specified.

The main reason we see circumcision of the new, non-Jewish Believers often opposed in the Apostolic Scriptures has nothing to do with it being a Torah-prescribed practice, or even a medical procedure. Those Greeks and Romans who were already proselytes to Judaism before hearing about Yeshua and the gospel (cf. Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43), and genuinely became Believers, were accepted as-is. This was done on a circumstantial basis, though. The main reason that circumcision of any more non-Jewish Believers was opposed was because of the sociological factors surrounding it.<sup>132</sup> There were precedents in post-Maccabean Jewish history, for example, of forced conversions. McKnight summarizes how "Hyrcanus, Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus each forced Gentiles to convert and be circumcised, even if they saw such as part of an eschatological program or political purgation."<sup>133</sup>

Forcing or ordering *any Believers* to do things ran entirely contrary to Yeshua's teaching, "when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth..." (John 16:13). The common focus of identity for Messiah followers was to be His sacrificial work, and the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit He promised to send, to then guide individuals' lives. All obedience to the Lord and His commandments comes via the compulsion of His presence inside of human vessels (discussed further), not demanding mortals. This was not what a group of hyper-conservative Pharisees advocated: "It is

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<sup>132</sup> The young disciple Timothy was circumcised by Paul, specifically because he was half-Jewish and half-Greek, and it could have caused some problems when witnessing the gospel to Jewish non-Believers (Acts 16:1-3).

<sup>133</sup> McKnight, "Proselytism and Godfearers," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 844. Also to be considered could be a much earlier scene in Esther 8:17.

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necessary to circumcise them and to order<sup>134</sup> them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5, ESV).

We see an opposition to proselyte circumcision, which is against the will of the Spirit (cf. Acts 15:8)—not because of circumcision as an operation—but because it would give quarter to, or would help feed, the widespread and errant idea in much of Second Temple Judaism that Jewish ethnicity guaranteed one eternal redemption. The Mishnah includes the sentiment, “All Israelites have a share in the world to come...” (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1),<sup>135</sup> and in order to be a true “Israelite” in this sense, an outsider had to be circumcised as a proselyte. But the way true inclusion within God’s people has always been assured has been via faithful trust in Him (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6)! Faith in Israel’s Messiah reckoned the non-Jewish Believers a part of God’s own (Galatians 3:9), and was to be the common denominator of unity and cohesion.

The Apostles would also have nothing to do with the common occurrence of a Jewish proselyte having to pray “God of your fathers” (m.*Bikkurim* 1:4)<sup>136</sup> in a public service. Paul strongly asserted in 1 Corinthians 10:1, “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all<sup>137</sup> under the cloud and all passed through the sea.” This was written to a mixed Corinthian assembly of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, who were to equally view the heritage of God’s Torah as their own. This is especially true in recognizing that what occurred to Ancient Israel in the wilderness was “written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). In the thought of Richard B. Hays, at least, “the story of Israel is for the Gentile Corinthians not somebody else’s story; it is the story of their own authentic spiritual ancestors.”<sup>138</sup> All Messiah followers are to use the discernment granted to them by God’s Spirit to know how to properly approach and apply the messages of His Torah.

Paul’s thrust in his letters was largely the reconciliation of all human beings “in one body to God through the cross” (Ephesians 2:16), and not a group of Jews and proselytes on one side, and everyone else on another. But while he is negative toward non-Jewish Believers becoming proselytes, Yeshua the Messiah Himself is **even more so** in His evaluation of what the First Century proselyte-making process had largely become in His day. Among His direct words to the Pharisaical leaders, included, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15). The Lord actually did say that many proselytes were “twice as fit for Gei-Hinnom as you are!” (CJB).

We should not forget how there were many intramural debates among the different sects of Pharisees within Second Temple Judaism, which often used very stern and tough language, which would not be found academic or theological debate today. What we see in Matthew 23:15 is really, really bad, though. It cannot be disputed that *huion geennēs* (υἱὸν

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<sup>134</sup> Grk. *parangellō* (παράγγελλω); “generally, to give the word, give orders, of the general” (LS, 594).

<sup>135</sup> Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 604.

<sup>136</sup> Margaret Wenig Rubenstein and David Weiner, trans., in *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>137</sup> Grk. *hoi pateres hēmōn pantes* (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες); “our ancestors...all” (NRSV/TNIV).

<sup>138</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 160.

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γέεννης) or *ben-geihinnom* (בְּנֵי גֵי הִנּוֹם, Salkinson-Ginsburg) is something most severe—being associated with the place of final damnation. Being a “child of hell” (NRSV/ESV) really is a **much worse designation** than just being, as we might encounter in more modern speech, a “son of a bitch” (as insulting as that is). It is a testament to how much of the proselyte-making process had gone sour and putrid. The observation of Craig S. Keener is, “Presumably by exposing converts to the truth of God’s standards while allowing hypocrisy through their own bad example (23:3, 13), these Pharisees were leading their own converts to be doubly damned.”<sup>139</sup>

Becoming a Jewish proselyte, as beneficial as it had probably been for previous persons, was not necessary in the First Century Messianic community. Being instructed from God’s Torah would indeed be important, but it would be done with the Messiah’s teachings and example in mind, which would guide the way via the Spirit. Non-Jewish Believers the world over since (including the theological background and traditions found in my own family), have widely looked to being guided by the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses in an effort to follow our Lord and Savior. With the arrival of today’s Messianic movement on the scene of history, this is being accomplished with much more of a targeted focus in mind, and with many of us eagerly awaiting the full restoration of Israel and God’s Kingdom.

### The One Law/One Torah Sub-Movement: Sorting Through the Legalism

Since the early 2000s, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement has brought various passages in the Torah or Pentateuch to the attention of many Bible readers, which surely have needed to be probed and analyzed. Yet, the analysis that has been offered in this article, which has focused not only on various Hebrew or Greek issues—but has also quoted from different commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers—is not the kind often witnessed by proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology. What instead tends to be witnessed are haphazard quotations from Exodus 12:49, “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you,” or Numbers 15:29, “You shall have one law for him who does *anything* unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them,” **without any quantitative consideration for their wider context, or the (negative) circumstances in Ancient Israel requiring for such statements to be made.**

These statements have been frequently invoked by non-Jewish Messianic Believers to emphasize that within the community of Ancient Israel, both the native and welcome sojourner were supposed to adhere to the same basic Torah instruction. No one in the general population of Ancient Israel was surely going to be discouraged from obeying as much of God’s Instruction as they legitimately could. However, as we have witnessed in this analysis, strident One Law/One Torah proponents have not done a very good job at assessing what various statements involving “one law” or “one statute,” meant in terms of their original context. It cannot be denied how at least one of the “one law” passages pertains to uniform execution of sinners (Leviticus 24:22). What is this supposed to mean

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<sup>139</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 336.

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for us in a post-resurrection era where capital punishment has been decisively absorbed by Yeshua's sacrifice (Colossians 2:14)? When "one law" is emphasized among people in various groups, what spiritual dynamics are being invoked? **These are factors which do not at all tend to be considered by proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology.**

It is true that within the community of Ancient Israel, that direction is witnessed involving how all—native and sojourner alike—were to come together at the Feast of Tabernacles, listen to, and heed Moses' Teaching (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). *That all of God's people today should be educated in the Torah, and be applying its principles of holiness to their lives, should hardly be a problem.* It is unavoidable, for example, how in Ancient Israel, an institution such as the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* was inclusive, with not only natives and sojourners—but even animals—to be afforded rest (Exodus 20:10; 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14). In the Messianic Age, all of humanity will be decisively keeping the Sabbath (Isaiah 66:23), and we live in a time when the realities of the Messianic Age should already be breaking into our present faith experience.<sup>140</sup>

For many individual adherents of a "One Law" point of view, the emphasis is on today's Jewish and non-Jewish Believers both taking instruction from Moses' Teaching, and being united together in Israel's Messiah as brothers and sisters, as fellow members of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13; 3:6).<sup>141</sup> Many have used Torah passages emphasizing "one law" or "one statute" to stress the equality of God's people (cf. Galatians 3:28), and how a relatively uniform standard of jurisprudence for all within the community of Ancient Israel, was certainly contrary to the different law codes of the Ancient Near East—where different classes of people were not all held to the same standard before the law. For many individual adherents of a "One Law" point of view, you have a "Torah for all" ethos rightly promoted, but with the wrong Biblical texts promoting it.

In practice, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement is not broadly facilitating assemblies and fellowships where study of the Torah and being disciplined in its precepts—as a person grows in the Messiah and His love—is what is emphasized. What people too frequently encounter from the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, is a great deal of legalism, judgmentalism, pride and superiority, a condemnatory spirit, and stifling environments widely devoid of the presence of God's grace. Assemblies where "one law" or "one statute" is emphasized, hardly tend to be places where the Holy Spirit can easily write the Torah's commandments on hearts and minds at the Holy Spirit's pace onto a redeemed man or woman (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). **Instead, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement is place where rigidity and fundamentalism tend to abound, and even be encouraged.** The One Law/One Torah sub-movement, because of its fundamentalist orientation, is hardly in a position to deal with the complicated theological and spiritual issues which will hit the Messianic world in the 2020s—many of them dealing with Biblical historicity and reliability (as well as scientific criticism against the Scriptures).<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> These, and related passages, are evaluated in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>141</sup> If necessary, review the author's publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, which is most critical of Messianic Jewish bilateral ecclesiology models.

<sup>142</sup> Consult the FAQ, "Creationism."

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Problems with the Torah being something relevant for all of God's people today, have principally erupted not by non-Jewish Believers studying the weekly Torah portions or reading the Old Testament more frequently, or even keeping a Sabbath rest. *Problems have erupted when a rigid, legalistic attitude is allowed to fester*, and bad attitudes are not challenged and confronted. I myself, in my ministry interactions with various, strident proponents of a One Law/One Torah theology, have had a number of (serious) altercations. Most of these altercations involve a failure on the part of One Law/One Torah proponents to consider post-resurrection era realities, resultant from the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah for human sins. Disagreements abound from an inflexibility on the part of many when it comes to the application of the Torah in modern, Twenty-First Century settings—particularly in those venues when life “intervenes.” *Little, if any troubleshooting, has been conducted on their part.* What if there are a few times when one has to work on the Sabbath? What if a family member serves pork or shellfish to you as a guest? This is where many supporters of a One Law/One Torah theology will, unfortunately, be found to often cause a scene—rather than quietly ask God to forgive them because of various circumstances, recognizing that Yeshua's salvation is certainly there to cover their infraction.

A ministry like Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics recognizes that today's Messianic movement is a profoundly important, end-time move of God.<sup>143</sup> We most definitely advocate that we all need to be paying close attention to how the Messianic movement has (1) been responsible for seeing a generation of Jewish people come to saving faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel, and (2) has been responsible for seeing many evangelical Protestant Believers exposed to their Hebraic Roots in the Tanach and Jewish Roots in the Second Temple era. Messianic congregations, where Jewish and non-Jewish Believers come together as “one new man/humanity” (Ephesians 2:15), are places where the shared spiritual virtues of Judaism and evangelical Protestantism, get to interact, as we contemplate a grand future involving the trajectory of “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26) and the return of Israel's Messiah and King to reign over Planet Earth.

Given our wide array of writings and publications, our ministry does believe that all of God's people—Jewish *and* non-Jewish—should be following God's Torah, as we all grow in God's grace and holiness. This includes today's Believers honoring the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*,<sup>144</sup> appointed times of Leviticus 23,<sup>145</sup> and eating a kosher style of diet.<sup>146</sup> While there are issues of Torah jurisprudence to be evaluated regarding each of these topics, especially as they can regard the expectations of the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel—rather than emphasize “one law” needing to be (strictly) followed, our approach to matters of Torah observance **today in the post-resurrection era** must

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<sup>143</sup> Consult the articles “An End-Time Move of the Holy Spirit” by Mark Huey, appearing in the December 2013 issue of Outreach Israel News; “A Messianic Worldview,” appearing in the May 2016 issue of Outreach Israel News; “A Messianic Vision,” appearing in the July 2016 issue of Outreach Israel News; “A Messianic Orientation,” appearing in the August 2016 issue of Outreach Israel News.

<sup>144</sup> Consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>145</sup> Consult the author's publication *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers*, and the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*, *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*, and *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*.

<sup>146</sup> Consult the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

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instead be to stress the work of the promised New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17), and in the Holy Spirit supernaturally transcribing God's commandments onto a redeemed heart and mind. As this happens, while there should be changes witnessed in terms of various outward commandments being observed—there should also be a substantially greater implementation of the critical Torah commands to love 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).

Far from emphasizing Torah passages which employ terms such as "one law" or "one statute," it is much better and more spiritually profitable for us to focus our attention around the thrust of a passage like Deuteronomy 31:12, "Assemble the people...so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law." Here, all within the community of God would learn and appreciate and follow the Instruction of God. This kind of statement invokes very positive, educative dynamics. But beyond this, and more critical for our Twenty-First Century Messianic movement, is how the Prophets anticipated a massive turning toward Zion, by the nations of the Earth, to be taught the Torah (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4), resulting in worldwide peace.

If we are to give the Torah its proper place in our Messianic faith practice, then it is most advisable that we focus our attention around edifying Biblical promises like that of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; cf. Hebrews 8:8-12), where the Lord will not only cleanse the sins of His people, but supernaturally transcribe His Law onto their hearts. It is prophesied that in the Last Days the nations will come to Zion to be instructed from the Torah (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4), something which makes the Law most relevant to be heeded by non-Jewish Believers. Couple this with an emphasis on God's grace superabounding (Romans 5:20), and I believe that our approach to the Torah will not only be very healthy—but we will be forced to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit as key. Such a sanctification ethos will make Torah observant people really consider the love and mercy of God at work in their hearts (cf. Ephesians 2:4-5), and they will be less prone to judge others, who at present do not live the same way that they do. They will be more consciously aware of the need for their obedience to reflect God's goodness and blessing (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

Our primary emphasis as born again Believers should not be "one law" or "one statute"—**but should instead be focused in what Messiah Yeshua has accomplished for us all, in being sacrificed for our sins and resurrected from the dead.** As a result of following our Messiah, we should be educated in Moses' Teaching, and recognize how important and relevant many of its commandments and directions truly are for human life in the Twenty-First Century.

## Sanctifying Grace: A Supernatural Compulsion to Obey God More and More

It is inappropriate for any of us to advocate that the Torah should or must be "mandated" upon any of God's people—be they non-Jewish or Jewish—because mandating, dictating, obligating, impressing, or ordering (or even inflicting) the commandments onto someone is not consistent with the ethos of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17). **We live in a post-**

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resurrection era where obedience to the Lord is undeniably to be guided by His people having received His forgiveness via the Messiah's atoning sacrifice (Luke 22:20), and where the activity of the Holy Spirit inside a regenerated human heart compels people to heed and obey the Scriptures. We need to recognize how salvation history has progressed forward, and we live in a time which is to be definitively dominated by the work of the Spirit in the lives of all Messiah followers.

In considering the role of God's Torah in the lives of today's born again, I have found that my own Wesleyan upbringing might offer us the best theological framework to consider. Within Wesleyan theology, one will find the terminology "sanctifying grace" frequently employed, to describe a born again Believer's life following the moment of salvation (which itself is often called "justifying grace"), as the Holy Spirit moves on the hearts of God's people throughout their lifetimes, continually molding them to be more and more like Jesus in the way that they love others and obey Him. Addressing Romans 3:31<sup>147</sup> in his sermon "The Law Established by Faith," John Wesley probably gives many of today's Messianic Believers some useful direction on how to approach the Torah:

"Let us thus endeavour to establish the law in ourselves; not sinning, 'because we are under grace,' but rather using all the power we receive thereby, 'to fulfil all righteousness.' Calling to mind what light we received from God while his Spirit was convincing us of sin, let us beware we do not put out that light; what we had then attained let us hold fast. Let nothing induce us to build again what we have destroyed; to resume any thing, small or great, which we then clearly saw was not for the glory of God, or the profit of our own soul; or to neglect any thing, small or great, which we could not then neglect, without a check from our own conscience. To increase and perfect the light which we had before, let us now add the light of faith. Confirm we the former gift of God, by a deeper sense of whatever he had then shown us; by a greater tendency of conscience, and a more exquisite sensibility of sin. Walking now with joy, and not with fear, in a clear, steady sight of things eternal, we shall look on with pleasure, wealth, praise, all things of earth, as on bubbles upon the water; counting nothing important, nothing desirable, nothing worth a deliberate thought, but only what is 'within the veil,' where Jesus 'sitteth at the right hand of God.'"<sup>148</sup>

Men and women, who are guided by God's grace and mercy to no longer commit sin and violate His Law, have placed at the very center of their being Yeshua the Messiah exalted and reigning as King. They recognize that salvation is by grace, but that actions reflective of such salvation are to be required (Ephesians 2:8-10). In establishing or upholding the Law of God in their lives, they desire to accomplish the good works that He requires of us, *particularly* actions of kindness and mercy (James 1:27). Obeying the Lord is neither an option to be dismissed nor a legalistic mandate; obeying the Lord is a **supernatural compulsion** enacted by the perfecting activity of the Holy Spirit on the human soul. The more we obey the Lord and submit ourselves to His will, the more we are able to experience His presence and communion in our hearts, being conformed to the

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<sup>147</sup> "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish [uphold, RSV/NIV] the Law" (Romans 3:31).

<sup>148</sup> N. Burwash, ed., *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes* (Salem, OH: Schmull Publishing, 1988), 368.

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image of Yeshua (Romans 8:29), and become repelled by not only the presence of sin, but even the mention of it (cf. Ephesians 5:3). The desire to obey is innately connected with the desire to know the Lord more and more intimately.

A position of **Supernatural Compulsion**, for all of God's people today following the Torah, can help us avoid the pitfalls of either thinking that obedience is not really expected of us, or that the Law is going to be forced down upon us as some heavy anvil to drag around. A position of Supernatural Compulsion, emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit, is undoubtedly guided by a motive of love for God and neighbor, the most important of the Torah's commandments.<sup>149</sup>

A position of **Supernatural Compulsion** does advocate that a Torah submissive walk of faith is *expected* of all of God's people, but it is to be found as an individual grows in holiness and spiritual maturity, and is not to be legalistically imposed or coerced by outside forces. The speed that one heeds the message of some commandments might be faster for some and slower for others. Nevertheless, if there are Messianic congregations and assemblies which are full of loving people who recognize the centrality of Yeshua to our faith, they will facilitate an environment where a steady Torah obedience is manifested. It will not be the job of individuals to "play the role of the Holy Spirit" as it were, but rather be there to patiently and lovingly, mentor and guide newer people—be they evangelical Christians embracing their Hebraic Roots or Messianic Jews rediscovering their Jewish heritage—to become everything they can be in the Lord. No one in the Messianic movement should ever allow themselves to be denigrated over how much or how little of the Torah they are able to follow, yet at the same time we should all take a helping interest in those who appear to remain perpetual spiritual plebeians, and are struggling disciples.

One of the understandable questions, that might be raised about a Supernatural Compulsion position for keeping the Torah, is that if the New Covenant promise is to not only cleanse people from sin, but also Divinely transcribe the Torah onto hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12)<sup>150</sup>—then what do we do about the millions of Christians in the world who claim to know Jesus but do not expel a huge effort to keep the Law? Are they not filled with the Holy Spirit?

God as the Eternal Creator is the ultimate Judge of any human being, and only He knows for certain whether Christians or Jews really have a heart for obeying Him. Likewise, only God as the Eternal Creator knows how to orchestrate the circumstances and timing in the lives of different Christian people, and possibly also their religious communities, to expose them to Messianic things. For many of us in today's Messianic movement at present—and most especially in a North American Diaspora Messianic movement—we represent some of the early people exposed to what the Lord is doing in the final stretch of history. Others are coming.

As Paul clearly attests in Romans 5:20, "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." God's grace will always superabound, and is able to overcome the power or influence of sin. Many

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<sup>149</sup> 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.

<sup>150</sup> Consult the author's article "What is the New Covenant?", appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

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Christians today are genuinely saved people, but are often just uninformed or under-informed as to what the Torah teaches. Many of them keep a considerable bulk of the Law, and do not even consciously realize it. Yet, in those areas where they are not in obedience—most of which are relatively minor—if they truly know the Lord Yeshua, **His shed blood and permanent atonement definitely covers their transgressions.**

Our ministry has never advocated that today's evangelical Protestantism is some kind of illegitimate imposter religion, more in touch with accomplishing the objectives of the Adversary than in achieving the mission of God. We have advocated that the Church has flaws to be certain, **but** that it is the responsibility of Messianic Believers to build on the positive legacy of faithful Protestant men and women who have preceded us in the faith, every bit as much as it is our duty to build on the positive legacy of Judaism. My own personal family background in both Methodism and Presbyterianism is full of significant examples of men and women who followed, to the best of their knowledge and understanding, the Mosaic Law, and were hard workers who made a difference in their generations. **They certainly believed in the importance of the Ten Commandments for Christian living.** I am easily reminded of my great-great grandfather or my great-grandmother, who once they "found religion," were rather rigid "Sunday Sabbath" keepers—and who were probably more serious about the Fourth Commandment than many of today's Messianics!<sup>151</sup> I believe myself to be continuing much of what they have left me with, because what their lives and legacy have imparted down to me is not at all "meaningless." *They were certainly not "lawless" people!*

It was not that difficult for a family like mine—who never believed that the Law was "abolished" by Christ—to be convicted by the Holy Spirit that we needed to consider a Messianic walk of faith, and that we needed to consider how we could more fully live like Jesus. Via a series of unique life circumstances, **we were supernaturally compelled to do this**, and we know it is God's intention for us to faithfully serve the Messianic community in teaching Yeshua-centered discipleship.<sup>152</sup> Many of you reading this, who are non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement, have a similar testimony of embracing a Messianic lifestyle. Some of you who are Jewish Believers may even have a special testimony of how you discovered the Messiah, and how you personally know that something unique and different is going on in the Messianic world.

Our ministry does very much believe that we are to all hear and follow Moses' Teaching. But, Torah observance is not the beginning and end to one's faith, and ritual or outward holiness is largely meaningless if it is unaccompanied by ethical and moral holiness. *If we do not know how to love God and neighbor by submitting ourselves to a more targeted obedience to the Law, then what have we done?* If we hit others with a hard stick of legalism, rather than welcome them into our homes and fellowships with a carrot of generosity to experience the blessings of God's Torah firsthand, then we misrepresent the gracious Heavenly Father we serve. If we do not emphasize mutual respect and honor for Judaism and Christianity, and the positive ways that they have both

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<sup>151</sup> The issue of "Sunday Sabbath" keeping by Christians over the centuries is explored in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

<sup>152</sup> Please note that it is our plan, at the appropriate moment sometime in the future, to write about the various experiences that our family has undergone leading us into the Messianic movement, *and* in keeping us in the Messianic movement.

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employed the Law of Moses over the centuries (as incomplete as some of them may have been), then how do we ever hope to see diverse groups of people today, who look to the Holy One of Israel, to come closer together?

*Let us commit ourselves to be men and women of God, empowered by His Spirit, guided by the love of Yeshua—and keep His commandments while spreading His goodness to all!*