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ANSWERING: WHAT IS THE LAW?

Pastor: The Law is a unit of 613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel. The word Law is sometimes used when referring to all Old Testament writings such as in John 10:34 and 15:25 when Jesus quotes Psalms and 1 Corinthians 14:21 when Paul quotes Isaiah. But it is important to remember that there is only one Law. When referring to the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, we are speaking of three aspects of the Law, not three laws. Those who say we must keep the Law tell us that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial and civil laws, but not the moral law.

“The Law is a unit of 613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel.”

There is only one Instruction for the people of God, and when it was codified it was given to the people of Ancient Israel. But *torah* (תּוֹרָה) as God’s Teaching or Instruction, contrary to what many contemporary Christians might know, certainly pre-dated Mount Sinai. Genesis 26:5 affirms how the Patriarch Abraham **“obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”** The Hebrew translated “laws” in most Bibles is *torotai* (תּוֹרָתַי) or “My Torahs” (ATS), also “teachings” (NJPS) or “instructions” (TNIV). Abraham surely obeyed God, and knew a wide degree of what He considered acceptable and unacceptable prior to the formal giving of the Torah to the Ancient Israelites.

In Genesis 26:5 affirming that Abraham obeyed God’s “laws,” what these various “Torahs” would have likely included would have been a series of instructions primarily relating to ethics, morality, various sorts of animal sacrifice, and other practices that would mark him out as serving the One True God and not the gods of Mesopotamia or Canaan.¹ The usage of the plural *torot* (תּוֹרוֹת) could imply that as Abraham grew in his relationship with the Creator and fellowshiped with Him, that he was taught more laws by Him as time progressed, such as the rite of circumcision and the significance it would have for his descendants.² Originally having to answer the call of the Unseen God to leave Ur (Genesis 12:1; 15:7), Abraham was surely not told everything he was to do all at once.

A common Jewish interpretation of Genesis 26:5, as the *Soncino Chumash* notes, holds that “Abraham fulfilled all the laws of the Torah before they were revealed at Sinai, arriving at a knowledge of them through inspiration.”³ In some cases, Jewish interpreters have taken the plural *torot* or “laws” to be both the Written Torah and Oral Torah,⁴ the latter of which now composes literature like the Mishnah and Talmud. While it is very possible that among the various “laws” Abraham followed could include those various oral explanations that would aid Ancient Israel with the keeping of the commandments codified at Mount Sinai, the main point to be taken from Genesis 26:5 is that Abraham’s faith in the Unseen God was in no way incompatible with him

¹ Cf. J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 95.

² Genesis 17:10-27.

³ A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983), 145.

⁴ Cf. Nosson Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 129.

being obedient to whatever instructions such a God gave him. Abraham could not remember the Passover, which is clearly rooted in the Exodus experience of the future nation of Ancient Israel from Egypt. But among those things which could be clearly given to him, Abraham was faithfully obedient. In his Genesis commentary, John Calvin correctly detected the main focus of what Abraham following God's "laws" means:

"[A]lthough laws, statutes, rites, precepts, and ceremonies, had not yet been written, Moses used these terms, that he might the more clearly show how sedulously Abraham regulated his life according to the will of God alone—how carefully he abstained from all of the impurities of the heathen—and how exactly he pursued the straight course of holiness, without turning aside to the right or to the left."⁵

John H. Sailhamer similarly concludes, "by showing Abraham to be an example of 'keeping the law,' the writer has shown the nature of the relationship between law and faith. Abraham, a man who lived in faith, could be described as one who kept the law."⁶

Of course, many readers of Genesis 26:5 do not know what to do with the assertion that Abraham followed God's "laws" or "Torahs." The critical tradition, which views the Pentateuch as being a compilation of different sources after the Babylonian exile, might view this only as a statement of the so-called J source or Yahwist,⁷ which has been read into the account and is largely fictional. While it is easy to disregard such a liberal opinion, even conservative Christian readers issue objections to the mere thought that Abraham observed any of what would later be codified as the "Mosaic Law." Objections are often made on the basis that Abraham married his half-sister, which is clearly prohibited.⁸ Later, Jacob married two sisters,⁹ and also erected a pillar to God.¹⁰ Worst of all, Abraham took his wife's handmaiden Hagar to conceive a child,¹¹ a definite practice of Ancient Near Eastern paganism which has never been viewed with the greatest of compliments in the Scriptures.¹²

The answer to much of this can elude some people, but these oversights—aside from the obvious fact that these people were limited mortals and were by no means perfect—is that there was a period when the Patriarch Abraham was an idolater, and such influences are not always easily removed. Joshua 24:2 states,

"Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods [*elohim acheirim*, אֱלֹהִים אַחֵרִים].'"

It is true that the Torah would not be formally codified or written until Mount Sinai. But, it is to definitely be noted that a large part of the Torah being given to Ancient Israel in such a written form was to help establish the Levitical priesthood (Galatians 3:19), and with it regulate atonement for sins via animal sacrifice in the Tabernacle or Temple until the arrival of the Messiah (Hebrews 10:1, 3). The plural *torotai* is undoubtedly used in Genesis 26:5 to describe the obedience of Abraham, because he had to learn all of the instructions—*mitzvotai chuqotai v'torotai* (מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי), "My commandments, My statutes and My laws"—directly from God, albeit somewhat loosely in some cases.

J.H. Hertz, in his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, suggests that the commandments (*mitzvot*, מִצְוֹת) Abraham received were "Laws dictated by the moral sense, *e.g.* against the crimes of robbery, bloodshed, etc.," that the statutes (*chuqim*, חֻקִּים) were "Laws ordained by God which we are to observe although reason cannot assign an explanation, *e.g.* the prohibition of swine's flesh," and laws (*torot*, תּוֹרוֹת) were "Customs and traditional ordinances orally transmitted from generation to generation."¹³ Passing any of this down orally to the succeeding generations would have been highly difficult, because of how various pagan, Ancient Near Eastern

⁵ John Calvin: *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 2:60.

⁶ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:187.

⁷ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp 270-271.

⁸ Genesis 20:12; prohibition: Leviticus 18:9, 11.

⁹ Genesis 29:15-35; prohibition: Leviticus 18:18.

¹⁰ Genesis 28:22; 31:13; prohibition: Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 16:22.

¹¹ Genesis 16.

¹² Cf. Galatians 4:25.

¹³ Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 95.

practices are seen interspersed within the early narratives of Genesis, and would have required an authority like Moses to finally and formally deliver via the transcription of the Pentateuch or *Chumash*.¹⁴

Generally speaking, all mature Christians agree that Abraham is an example that born again Believers are to follow (cf. Romans 4:16), but any argument that Abraham lived his life and conducted himself entirely on blind faith, *with no instructions or commandments of any kind* to follow, is most unsupportable.

Still, many of today's Believers disregard the importance of the Torah as including important instructions to be obeyed, because the Law was given to Israel and not the Church. This is resultant from the unfortunate fact that many Christians at large do not often see themselves as being grafted-in to the olive tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-18), or even being related to Israel—as Israel was to be the holy and set-apart people to whom the Torah was given (Deuteronomy 28:9). For dispensationalists especially—who hold to a view that God has *two groups* of elect, believed to be Israel or the ethnic Jewish people *and* the Church—Christian Believers who make up the second group of elect are those to whom the Torah does not apply. This is often used as a basis for their rejection of it, along with various proof texts that are offered to support a termination of its authority. Because the Law was not “given to the Church,” it is then relegated to past history, not really to be used for the spiritual guidance of the Messiah's followers today.

The analysis of *The New Testament Validates Torah* is not intended to address ecclesiology or the study of God's elect in any large detail. But the idea that God has *two* groups of elect (Israel and “the Church”), as opposed to *one* composite group of elect (Israel), is a concept that much of the Messianic movement rejects. We believe, rather, that the Lord has only one group of elect: the community of Israel. The Apostle Paul asserts something very profound in the general epistle written to the non-Jewish Believers of Asia Minor. He tells them that although they may be criticized for somehow being “uncircumcised” (cf. Ephesians 2:11),¹⁵ they are to instead “remember that you were at that time [prior to salvation] separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Paul says that these non-Jewish Believers prior their salvation were “alienated” (RSV) from “citizenship in Israel” (NIV), but because of their faith in the Messiah, that they were now a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Ephesians 3:6 lays out more fully how redeemed Believers from the nations “are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel.” **This hardly sounds like non-Jewish Believers being a part of a separate “Church” entity.**

In Ephesians 2:12, the specific Greek term *politeia* (πολιτεία)—“commonwealth” (NASU), “community” (NEB), or “citizenship” (NIV)—is to be properly viewed as “**the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity, citizenship**” (BDAG).¹⁶ This is an extremely powerful term, because, if indeed non-Jewish Believers are a part of Israel along with their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters in the Lord, *tēs politeias tou Israēl* (τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ), then as fellow citizens with them they are called to heed the Torah as relevant instruction for their lives—similar to how any Jewish person naturally would. The sojourner who entered into Ancient Israel was called to learn from and follow Moses' Teaching, as Deuteronomy 31:12 is direct to emphasize, “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 [kol-divrei ha'Torah ha'zot, כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת].”¹⁷

There is really no such thing in Scripture as a separate entity of elect known as “the Church,” which exists outside of Israel. When the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), commonly translated as “church,” is used in the

¹⁴ At least in terms of the narrative materials from Genesis 1:1-37:2, a conservative scholar like R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 548-551 holds that this material could have originally survived on eleven clay tablets that could have later been used by Moses in the composition of the Pentateuch.

¹⁵ Keep in mind that for Second Temple Judaism, “circumcision” pertained much more to one's status as an ethnic Jew or proselyte to Judaism, than to an actual medical operation.

¹⁶ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 845.

¹⁷ Some of the issues surrounding Torah passages such as Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16, 29-30, have been considered in the author's article “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*).

Apostolic Scriptures, the writers use it as a reference to the people who the Lord first called out of the world at Mount Sinai.

In the Apostolic Scriptures no reader can deny how *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and so by extension it is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. But whether this is an appropriate rendering or not is something critical to ask, because when many people encounter the word “church” they think not of a living and breathing group of Messiah followers, but instead of a building with a steeple.¹⁸ *TDNT* offers some rather important remarks on the term *ekklēsia*:

“Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic...‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly.”¹⁹

This Christian commentary says that “assembly” would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*. The Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating three centuries before Yeshua, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is one of the main Hebrew terms for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* informs us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”²⁰ When the martyr Stephen speaks of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV), *tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō* (τῆ ἐκκλησίας ἐν τῆ ἐρήμῳ), “the church” here he is speaking of is actually the assembly/congregation of Israel.

The Hebrew word *qahal* is used in the Tanach to describe the people of Israel. *TWOT* indicates that “*qāhāl* may...designate the congregation as an organized body. There is *qahal yisrā’el* [קָהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל] (Deut 31:30), *qahal YHWH* [קָהָל יְהוָה] (Num 16:3, etc.), and *qahal ʾēlohîm* [קָהָל אֱלֹהִים] (Neh 13:1) and then at other times merely ‘the assembly’ (*haqqāhāl* [הַקָּהָל]). We encounter...‘the assembly of the people of God’ (Jud 20:2). Of special interest is the phrase ‘congregation of the Lord’ (*qahal YHWH*) of which there are thirteen instances (Num 16:3; 20:4; Deut 23:2-4; Mic 2:5; 1 Chr 28:8). It is the nearest OT equivalent of ‘church of the Lord.’”²¹

When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word (ἐκκλησία), often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people removed from Israel. **They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel**, perhaps better viewed as an *Israel maximized* by the arrival of the Messiah, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). The restoration of Israel’s Kingdom, involves not only a restored Twelve Tribes at its center, but has enlarged borders welcoming in the righteous from the nations at large (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-18). Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, together, compose what might be best described as an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel.

It is not surprising by any means that one of the lexical definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” *Thayer* states that “in the Sept. [*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to קָהָל, *the assembly of the Israelites*.”²² *BDAG* further summarizes that not only does *ekklēsia* correspond to the “OT Israelites assembly, congregation,” but asserts how it was used by the early Messianic Believers “in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Gk. translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, esp. in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group.”²³ This is because in an entirely classical context *ekklēsia* could have been used to describe a civil

¹⁸ Note how there are various people one will encounter in the Messianic community, who will not use the term “church” because they somehow think it has pagan origins. **But** we do not readily use the term “church” to describe God’s people on theological grounds, and the confusion it frequently can cause. When “the Church” is typically referred to in the author’s writings, it is primarily to refer to a religious institution.

Consult the FAQ, “Church, word of pagan origin.”

¹⁹ K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

²⁰ Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” 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), 2:790.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

²³ *BDAG*, 303.

assembly, such as that of the Athenians,²⁴ or even the Roman Senate. It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation,”²⁵ with people able to have an easier time seeing that when Yeshua said that He came to “build” His assembly (Matthew 16:18), it is undoubtedly connected with the Father’s promise to “rebuild” Israel (Jeremiah 33:7).

If we conclude that those claiming Yeshua as their Personal Savior are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, as opposed to “the Church,” then indeed we can assert that the Torah or Law of Moses is relevant instruction for Believers today.²⁶

“The word Law is sometimes used when referring to all Old Testament writings such as in John 10:34 and 15:25 when Jesus quotes Psalms...”

When the Torah or Law is referred to within the Holy Scriptures, it is most often to designate the Pentateuch or *Chumash* (terms which both designate a book of five), the Biblical Books of: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Yet, no one can argue against the fact that in various places where “the Law” is referred to, it can refer to other parts of the Tanach or Old Testament, either the Prophets or the Writings.

In reviewing the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, it is important that Bible readers have a proper approach toward the term *nomos* (νόμος), representative of “law.”²⁷ *Nomos* does not always represent a body of commandments given by God to Israel which make up the Law of Moses, but can also be indicative of spiritual laws (perhaps better described as “spiritual constants”), Greek or Roman secular laws, and extra-Biblical “laws” enacted by Jewish Rabbis which today would make up the collection of Jewish religious instruction principally contained in the Mishnah and Talmud. In its ancient usage in Greek, *nomos* had a wider array of meanings, not limited to just “the Law of Moses,” which are employed in some places within the Apostolic Scriptures. The *LS* lexicon lists the array of possible applications of *nomos*: “anything assigned, a usage, custom, law, ordinance.”²⁸

L.A. Jervis states in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background* that “The Greek word usually rendered ‘law’ by the translators of the NT is *nomos*. This word meant both ‘law’ and ‘custom’ and so could refer to the laws of a society and to that society’s habits and customs.”²⁹ James H. Nichols, Jr., in his translation of Plato’s *Gorgias*, indicates that “*Nomos*, translated ‘law’ or ‘convention,’ includes written law, unwritten law, custom, and prevalent opinion.”³⁰ While *nomos* can mean “law (often of the Jewish sacred tradition),” meaning the Torah of Moses, it can also mean “principle, rule” (*CGEDNT*),³¹ which would make it not limited to the Torah or Pentateuch itself. Context always determines how *nomos* is to be properly applied.³²

In the examples given by the pastor above, he is correct in telling us that, in John 10:34 and 15:25, Yeshua speaks of the Law as involving much more than just the Mosaic Torah.

²⁴ *LS*, 239.

²⁵ Two Christian translations that render *ekklēsia* as “assembly” include Young’s Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green.

²⁶ For a further review, consult the author’s publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

²⁷ *Nómos* is pronounced properly as *nōmós*, with a short *ō* sound. It is more common, although incorrect, to hear it pronounced with a long *ō* sound, although the *omicron* (*ο*) and not the *omega* (*ω*) is the vowel used.

²⁸ *LS*, 535.

²⁹ L.A. Jervis, “Law/Nomos in the Greco-Roman World,” in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 632.

³⁰ Plato: *Gorgias*, trans., James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1998), 73, fn#69.

³¹ Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1971), 121.

³² It can probably be disputed, for example, whether the claim of the Corinthian Jews in Acts 18:13, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law,” pertains to either the Law of Moses or Roman law. Likewise in the correspondence of Claudius Lysias to the governor Felix in Acts 23:29, it is probably best to keep the rendering “their Law” in tact, as it may include more than just the Torah proper, or it may even just be the decrees issued by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

In John 10:34, we see “**Yeshua answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law, “I SAID, YOU ARE GODS”?’**” In this verse, the Messiah quotes Psalm 82:6: “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High.’” This passage was quoted to the specific effect that the Jews present had gone too far in rebuking Yeshua as a blasphemer for calling Himself the Son of God (John 10:36). A Hebrew background behind this quotation of Psalm 82:6 is certainly needed for a proper interpretation, because the title *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) can relate to various human rulers, judges, or even angels, as opposed to just the Supreme God Himself.³³ If religious leaders in Israel were to some degree be regarded with the title *elohim*³⁴ via their poor exercise of authority in using God’s Word (John 10:35; cf. Psalm 82:7), then Yeshua as the Incarnate Word (John 1:1) could certainly call Himself *ben-Elohim* (בֶּן־אֱלֹהִים), transcribed in John 10:36 as *huios tou Theou* (υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ). Yeshua being “Son of God,” sent from Heaven by the Father, is where His identity and origins are to be investigated.³⁵

Within the rebuke of these Jews, undoubtedly because of their various oversights toward and/or manipulation of the Scriptures they held so dear—for their own advantage—Yeshua uses the terminology “your Law.” This is by no means intended to deride the Divine origins of the Tanach, as the Word of God is clearly *from God* (John 10:35). Yeshua’s emphasis of “your Law” is no different than how God Himself speaks of “your people” to Moses in Exodus 32:7 during the incident of the golden calf. It was not as though the Ancient Israelites suddenly lost their status as God’s people, any more than the Torah or Tanach somehow no longer originates from God. Referring to something as “your...” in Scripture often places a responsibility **upon the people** that they may have failed to properly perform (cf. Isaiah 1:13-14).

Psalm 82:2, specifically, has God rebuking the unjust leaders of Israel for using His Word for their own gain: “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” While they are regarded as mighty beings for possessing His Instruction (Psalm 82:6), for breaking it they are to be regarded as powerless mortals (Psalm 82:7).

The second passage referenced by the pastor is John 15:25:

“But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’”

This verse includes a quotation of both Psalm 35:19 and 69:4:³⁶

- “Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously” (Psalm 35:19).
- “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; what I did not steal, I then have to restore” (Psalm 69:4).

The quotation from the Tanach offered by Yeshua is to substantiate how those, who reject Him and His works, hate the Father and His Son (John 15:23-25). The Psalm passages that are referred to are rather general, being employed to state the point that He is largely rejected for no good reason—rejection which would largely come from the Jewish religious leaders. In the example from John 15:25, Yeshua does indeed treat *torah* as comprising far more than just the Pentateuch of Genesis-Deuteronomy. But as it should be validly observed, the whole of the Bible is God’s Law, meaning His Teaching or Instruction regarding how His people are to live.

The Hebrew word *torah* (תּוֹרָה) is primarily used to represent the five Books of Moses in the Tanach Scriptures. A fairly standard lexical definition is offered by *BDB* with “direction, instruction, law.”³⁷ This is

³³ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 44 notes the range of meanings for the Hebrew *elohim*, in that it can apply to “*divine ones*, superhuman beings including God and angels” or “*rulers, judges*, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power.” The limited, and in some locations primitive vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew, needs to be kept in mind here.

³⁴ “angelic beings” (Keter Crown Bible).

³⁵ John 10:22-39 is addressed in further detail in the author’s book *Salvation on the Line, Volume I: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity—Gospels and Acts*.

³⁶ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 302; Kurt Aland, et. al., eds., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 384.

³⁷ *BDB*, 435.

mirrored by *HALOT*, which has “law, scroll of the law, holy scripture,” specifically pertaining to “**direction instruction**.”³⁸ The word *torah* is derived from the Hebrew verb *yarah* (יָרָה), meaning “to **throw, cast**” or “to **shoot...with arrows,**” regarding how it is to point to something, and can more specifically mean “to **instruct, teach**” (*HALOT*).³⁹ “What is probably most likely is a connection with...יָרָה in the sense of stretching out the finger, or the hand, to point out a route” (*HALOT*).⁴⁰ This is because God’s Torah is to point the *right way* for His people to do things. David testifies in Psalm 119:165, “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.”

The Torah is intended to be God’s Teaching or Instruction for His people, and it is for this reason why the New Jewish Press Society (NJPS) version renders the word *torah* as “Teaching,” as instead of the far more common “Law.” The Orthodox Jewish ArtScroll Tanach (ATS) simply leaves *torah* as “Torah.” (Messianic versions like the Complete Jewish Bible [CJB] and Tree of Life Version [TLV] also widely use “Torah.”) It is important to recognize that *torah* does not strictly mean “law,” construed as “rules and regulations,” in the most rigid sense of the word. The Hebrew *torah* certainly does not mean “law” in the sense of bringing people into bondage, but the Torah is intended to guide, direct, and instruct God’s people.

In the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew word *torah* (תּוֹרָה) was largely rendered as *nomos* (νόμος), a Greek term which basically does mean “law.” The Apostolic writers used the word *nomos* most often to refer to the Torah of Moses, although *nomos* is not exclusively used in the New Testament to refer to the Torah. Why those who translated the Septuagint rendered *torah* as *nomos* did this is controversial for some in the Messianic movement, but using the term “law” need not be a negative experience.⁴¹ Warren Zev Harvey comments in *EJ*, “The Septuagint rendered the Hebrew *torah* by the Greek *nomos* (‘law’) probably in the sense of a living network of traditions and customs of a people.” However, this same entry goes on and says, “The designation of the Torah by *nomos*, and by its Latin successor *lex* (whence, ‘the Law’), has historically given rise to the sad misunderstanding that Torah means legalism.”⁴²

While a Jewish version like the NJPS uses “Teaching” for *torah*, Judaism has never viewed the term “law” in a negative light as some Christians might today. The 1917 JPS version uses the word “law” for *torah*, and the word “law” (often with the term Pentateuch as well) is certainly used in many Jewish commentaries and writings. **No mature Believer thinks that being “lawless,” the antithesis to being lawful, is a good thing.** I believe that the Jewish translators who rendered *torah* as *nomos* in the LXX wanted to convey the idea that the Torah contained the ruling directives of an orderly society, as opposed to personal teaching or instruction. The Septuagint was used as authoritative Scripture in the synagogues of Greek-speaking lands, and was responsible for presenting the message of the God of Israel to many Greeks and Romans in the period before the First Coming of the Messiah, preparing the way for the spread of the gospel. The Torah was to be perceived as the “constitution” of the people of Israel, just as the *nomos* of a Greek city-state was to define the proper way of life for that group of people.⁴³

Within *The New Testament Validates Torah*, you have probably already noticed that there are a variety of terms used to describe *torah* (תּוֹרָה). This includes the rather common terms: the Torah (of Moses), the Law (of Moses), as well as the Pentateuch (the five books of Genesis-Deuteronomy). Another description employed is taken directly from John Goldingay’s *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel*,⁴⁴ where he has been most

³⁸ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1710.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:436.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:1710.

⁴¹ Due to the varied usages of the term *nomos* in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, it would be irresponsible of any Messianic person to simply cross out the word “law” in their New Testament translation and write in “Torah.” This can actually create more problems than offer solutions.

⁴² Warren Zev Harvey, “Torah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows 9x*. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

⁴³ For further review, consult the author’s article “Torah As Constitution,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*, for a more detailed discussion of why *torah* was probably rendered as *nomos* in the Septuagint.

⁴⁴ I had to use this textbook in my Old Testament Theology independent study at Asbury Theological Seminary, Spring 2008.

helpful by frequently using the terminology: Moses' Teaching.⁴⁵ This is a rather useful and valid term to use for English speakers, for whom only having to use the labels Torah and/or Law can get a little tedious and tiresome at times. I personally prefer to alternate between Torah, the Law, Moses' Teaching, and Pentateuch. Regardless of which is used, I am most concerned that born again Believers are allowing themselves to be guided, informed, and molded by the supernatural nature of God's commandments.

Concurrent with this, it does need to be noted that this publication does employ the common terminology Old and New Testaments for the familiarity of many readers, but not at all exclusively. Most Messianics prefer more neutral terms such as Tanach/Tanakh (תנ"ך) for the Hebrew Scriptures, which is an acronym for: *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings), instead of the "Old Testament." Our ministry also prefers the terms Apostolic Scriptures/Writings, or Messianic Scriptures/Writings, instead of the "New Testament."

This latter usage does notably differ from many you will encounter in the Messianic movement, who often use the terms Renewed Covenant or *B'rit Chadashah*. It is our opinion that these two terms can be misnomers for the Apostolic Scriptures, because using the term *B'rit Chadashah* for the Messianic Scriptures⁴⁶ can falsely communicate that these texts were originally written in Hebrew, when such would be most historically incorrect.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the promised *b'rit chadashah* (בְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה) or New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is actually the Lord supernaturally writing His Torah onto the redeemed hearts of His people, **not** giving them a new set of Scripture. The Apostolic Scriptures surely compose the Spirit-inspired writings of the Apostles and early followers of the Messiah whom we are to follow, but they do not make up a "covenant" as we know it.

"...and 1 Corinthians 14:21 when Paul quotes Isaiah. But it is important to remember that there is only one Law."

This statement is accurate as well. 1 Corinthians 14:21 reads, "In the Law it is written, 'BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,' says the Lord," which appears in the Apostle Paul's instruction to the Corinthians about speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1-33). This verse includes a partial quotation of Isaiah 28:11: "Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue."

The pastor is correct again in assuming that the whole of Israel's Scriptures, the Tanach or Old Testament, is to be considered *torah*. However, *torah* as God's Instruction given to His people should ultimately be considered to comprise the entirety of Holy Scripture, which also would include the Apostolic Writings or "New Testament."

One of the most inspirational passages for born again Believers, who open their Bibles for encouragement or for an answer to a pressing question in life, is 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." When this statement was made in the mid-to-late 60s C.E., the only "Scripture" that largely existed at the time was what we consider to be the "Old Testament." As Walter C. Kaiser asserts, this is "One of the strongest statements on the authority and use of the Old Testament Scriptures."⁴⁸ Many of today's evangelical Believers are beginning to rediscover how relevant the Tanach Scriptures truly are for their spiritual guidance and maturation in faith.

Not to be overlooked, though, is that earlier in 1 Timothy 5:18, in his discussion on how various elders are to be paid from the congregation (1 Timothy 5:17), Paul communicates, "For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" The first quotation that

⁴⁵ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), pp 27, 29.

⁴⁶ An exception to at times this would understandably be when one is speaking modern Hebrew, and the fact that *B'rit Chadashah* really does mean "New Testament."

⁴⁷ Consult the author's article "The Hebrew New Testament Misunderstanding," appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*.

⁴⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 354.

appears in this verse is from Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” an indication of how if concern is to be issued for animals that work, it is even more important that those who serve in a designated, full time capacity in the Body of Messiah should not be withheld support. The second quotation that appears in 1 Timothy 5:18 is notably from Luke 10:7, “for the laborer is worthy of his wages” (cf. Matthew 10:10).⁴⁹ While *pasa graphē* (πᾶσα γραφή) or “all Scripture” in 2 Timothy 3:16 is principally concerned with the right application of the Tanach or Old Testament—especially in view of how it was misused by the false teachers in Ephesus via various myths and speculations (1 Timothy 1:4, 7)—“Scripture” would have *included* any extant Apostolic writings in the mid-First Century as well (cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16).

“When referring to the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, we are speaking of three aspects of the Law, not three laws.”

The pastor is accurate in his assessment that there is only one Torah or Law, and that it would be inappropriate to sub-divide it among moral, ceremonial, and civil sub-Torahs or sub-Laws, especially in the sense that we can dispense with certain aspects of it but can continue to observe “all of it.” The division of the Torah of Moses among the moral, civil, and ceremonial law largely originated in the Protestant Reformation, and influenced the theological traditions of both Calvinism and Wesleyanism. It is believed that the civil and ceremonial law was only to regulate the nation of Ancient Israel, and now with the creation of the Christian Church after the fall of the Second Temple, only the moral law is to be followed today. Unfortunately, such an approach to the Torah has been sometimes rooted in replacement theology. Fortunately, though, while being an incomplete view of the Torah—looking to the Ten Commandments and various other instructions for the moral and ethical guidance of faithful Christians, has been *far better* than theological traditions like Lutheranism or dispensationalism which tend to not heed any of the Torah. And, it is easy to read how well over three-quarters of the Torah’s commandments do largely regulate human morality.

The division of the Torah’s commandments among the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws was actually the best that various theologians and exegetes could do some four to five centuries ago—given the likelihood of them possessing *only* the Biblical text to examine and dissect. What this would have meant to a John Calvin, for example, is that Jewish resources on the Pentateuch would probably not have been consulted. If more of the Law-positive Reformers had been able to factor ancient Jewish opinions into their deliberations, then we might have seen a classification of various Torah commandments *beyond* the categories of moral, civil, and ceremonial.

It is quite true, for example, that all parts of the Torah cannot be observed by one person, for there are commandments that apply: to men, to women, to children, to husbands, to wives, to priests, and there are those that are only applicable in the Land of Israel. Other commandments have a timestamp on them would have only pertained to a situation for Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East. *Yet, all of God’s commandments are to inform His people about His character and dealings with humanity.*

The Rabbis of Judaism have determined that there are 613 commandments in the Pentateuch, and have categorized them appropriately and methodically, *beyond those that are “moral” and “ceremonial.”* In order to have an appropriate understanding of the Torah, readers need to consider the fact that not all aspects of it directly apply to every individual. A basic rule is that even though knowledge of all the Torah is important, an individual person follows the specific commandments that are clearly applicable to him or her based on status in society. An obvious point in case is that men are to not be concerned with their menstruation cycle, nor are women to make sure that they have had their penis circumcised! Furthermore, God’s people are to do the best that they can if they are unable to observe all of the commandments in the Diaspora, recognizing that God’s

⁴⁹ Nestle and Aland, *GNT*, 547; Aland, *GNT*, 721.

mercy is present to cover them.⁵⁰ 1 John 1:9 so eloquently comforts us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Of the 613 categorized commandments in the Chumash/Pentateuch, it is traditionally held in Judaism that there are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. The negative commandments would largely relate to various prohibitions placed upon God’s people (i.e., the Sixth Commandment which forbids murder),⁵¹ but positive commandments could largely relate to things that would help God’s people and others in the larger community, such as allowing the poor to glean one’s field (Leviticus 23:22). Within the Torah, we see its *mitzvot* (מצוות) or “commandments” often classified among three distinct categories:

1. *edot* (עדות): “**warning signs, reminders, urgings**” (*CHALOT*).⁵²
2. *chuqim* (חוקים): “divine statute[s]” (*CHALOT*).⁵³
3. *mishpatim* (משפטים): “**decision by arbitration, legal decision**” (*CHALOT*).⁵⁴

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

While these are three broad categories of commandments, seen within the Torah itself, the Oral Torah as evidenced by the Mishnah and Talmud demonstrates that the Jewish Rabbis have spent considerable time classifying the commandments (and their application/non-application) even further.⁵⁵ The six significant divisions in the Mishnah, from the Second Century C.E., include:

1. Agriculture
2. Appointed times
3. Women
4. Order of Damages
5. Holy things
6. Purities⁵⁶

From those broad headings the Torah’s commandments are often further divided into various sub-categories as titled by the Mishnah tractates, and the Talmud which is essentially commentary on the Mishnah. The six divisions of commandments seen in the Mishnah do appear to be much more natural from a reading of the Torah than the traditional Reformed Christian division of moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law.

“Those who say we must keep the Law tell us that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial and civil laws, but not the moral law.”

⁵⁰ This could specifically concern the various instructions given in regard to the appointed times or *moedim*, which do include animal sacrifices to be presented at the Tabernacle or Temple. Since it is impossible to perform these, do we then completely disregard the Biblical holidays, or honor and memorialize them to the best of our ability?

Consult the author’s observations in the author’s article “What Are the Lord’s Appointed Times?”, appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*.

⁵¹ Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

⁵² William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 266.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁵ For a useful review, regarding how many of the Torah’s commandments are, or have been, followed in a modern Jewish context, consult Abraham Chill, *The Mitzvot: The Commandments and Their Rationale* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1974); Ronald H. Isaacs, *Mitzvot: A Sourcebook for the 613 Commandments* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996).

⁵⁶ English titles are taken from the Table of Contents in Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

While we have just described how dividing the Torah into the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws is a bit artificial—the main argument we will be addressing throughout *The New Testament Validates Torah* is whether or not the Apostolic Scriptures uphold and validate the Torah’s continued authority for Believers in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), because many of today’s Christians do not believe it does. The idea that Yeshua has “fulfilled” the Law comes directly from Matthew 5:17-18, although the implication from many is that when the Messiah “fulfilled” the Torah it is now no longer applicable to God’s people. It is often said that Yeshua the Messiah “fulfilled and thus abolished” the Law. The KJV translation of these verses reads as follows:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

As far as mainline Protestant translations are concerned, the NASU rendering of Matthew 5:17-18 is far more accurate:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

The reason the NASU offers a better rendering is because there are two different Greek verbs translated as “fulfil” and then as “fulfilled” in the KJV of Matthew 5:18, perhaps misleading the reader.

Matthew 5:17b first says, **“I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”** (KJV). The first verb translated as “fulfil” is *plēroō* (πληρόω), the first definition provided by *BDAG* being **“to make full, fill (full).”**⁵⁷ The intention of Yeshua to fulfill the Torah can regard the completion of various Messianic prophecies, but notably also His demonstrating the Torah’s proper interpretation and application by His own teachings and ministry. *Thayer* includes the definition **“to make complete in every particular, to render perfect.”**⁵⁸ *TDNT*, commenting on Yeshua’s work in relation to the Torah, summarizes how **“the idea is not simply that of validating the law as distinct from abolishing it. The goal of Jesus’ mission is fulfillment. He does not simply affirm the law and the prophets but actualizes the will of God that is declared in them from the standpoint of both promise and demand.”**⁵⁹

The KJV rendering continues, **“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled”** (Matthew 5:18, KJV). The Greek verb translated here as “fulfilled” is *ginomai* (γίνομαι), which is one of several “to be” verbs in Ancient Greek. *CGEDNT* gives a wide array of meanings for *ginomai*, including: **“become, be; happen, take place, arise...come into being, be born or created; be done (of things), become something (of persons); come, go.”**⁶⁰

These two different verbs are obviously better translated in the NASU as “fulfil” (*plēroō*) and then as “accomplished” (*ginomai*). The RSV and NIV also render *ginomai* as “accomplished,” with YLT and LITV having *ginomai* as “come to pass.” Either way it is translated, *ginomai* has a much different meaning than does *plēroō*. The KJV’s “...till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18b) is just not that accurate.

Yeshua, being our blameless sacrifice, provided fulfillment of the Torah and Prophets for us not only by being the anticipated Redeemer—but also by living forth the Law’s righteous imperatives and properly interpreting it for us in His words, teachings, and deeds. Only by obeying Moses’ Teaching perfectly, could He be our blameless sacrifice and atonement for our sin. Yeshua could not be our blameless, sinless Redeemer if He broke or annulled the Torah. Much of the conflict that one encounters in the Gospels between Yeshua and various Jewish religious leaders is often over the *application* of the Torah, and **not** over its validity and relevance as the Instruction that God’s holy people are to follow. Among the many examples to be considered,

⁵⁷ *BDAG*, 828.

⁵⁸ *Thayer*, 518.

⁵⁹ G. Delling, “*plēroō*,” in *TDNT*, 869.

⁶⁰ *CGEDNT*, 37

a relatively conservative theologian like Douglas J. Moo, who does not have a particularly high view of the Mosaic Law for Believers today, does admit how Yeshua did not break the Sabbath:

“Certainly Jesus and his disciples violated the scribal Sabbath regulations...these activities [were not] a clear violation of the Mosaic Sabbath rules...The most that can be said is that his initiative in healing on the Sabbath, rooted in theological conviction—‘it was necessary’ for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath (Lk 13:16)—stretches the Sabbath commandment. But we have no evidence that Jesus ever himself violated, or approved of his disciples violating, the written Sabbath commandment.”⁶¹

Yeshua upholding the Torah of Moses is recognized by even relatively liberal theologians who have to admit, albeit reluctantly, that Jesus was a First Century Jewish Rabbi who taught the Law to His followers. Howard Clark Kee notes, concerning Matthew 5:17,

“[T]he declaration that both the purpose of God disclosed through the prophets and the demands of God that his people obey him have found their fulfillment in Jesus. There is to be no relaxation of the strictness of the commandments.”⁶²

Yeshua says that “until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18, NIV). Not all has been accomplished, as there are still expectations in the Torah and the Prophets, which have yet to occur. We are still awaiting the return of the Lord, the defeat of His enemies, and the complete establishment of the Messiah’s Kingdom on Earth. *Heaven and Earth are surely still with us, meaning that any outright dismissal of the Law of Moses on the part of Believers is **most unacceptable**.*⁶³ In the Last Days, a major expectation is that “the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3; cf. Micah 4:2).⁶⁴ Does this sound like some kind of “abolishment of the Law”? Not at all. **On the contrary, when Yeshua returns the Torah will be enforced as the Law of Planet Earth.**

So is the Torah for Believers today? *I can only answer for myself.* I choose the safe course of action, which is that the Torah is still relevant instruction for Messiah followers. I choose to be in alignment with the words of Yeshua (Jesus), who is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1), embodying it in His teachings, actions, and deeds. He does, after all, issue the warning, “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19, NIV). I choose to follow the totality of Scripture, rather than a selective reading of it.

I think we should all choose to be a part of the holy and set-apart people that our Heavenly Father desires in Deuteronomy 28:9: “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.” The Apostle Peter concurs, instructing how important it is that God’s people obey Him and demonstrate proper conduct: “[B]ut like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’ [Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7]” (1 Peter 1:15-16). As always, our impetus for obeying God’s Law should be to demonstrate His character and goodness to all we encounter:

“So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?” (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

⁶¹ D.J. Moo, “Law,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), pp 454-455.

For a further review, consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶² Howard Clark Kee, “Matthew,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 615.

⁶³ A more detailed analysis of Matthew 5:17-19 is provided in Chapter 9, “Has the Law Been Fulfilled?”

⁶⁴ For a further review of Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4, consult the author’s exegesis paper “The Torah Will Go Forth From Zion,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.