
FAQ

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Christians who do not keep Torah

J.K. McKee revised 12 August, 2019

Are Christian people who do not keep Torah hopelessly lost? I notice that your ministry freely, and sometimes liberally, quotes Christian Bible scholars. There are a great number of people in the Hebrew Roots movement who think that they have a corner on the “truth,” and that everyone else is in error.

The issue of the wider, evangelical Christian world, and what to do about its activity or non-activity regarding the Torah of Moses, will certainly provoke a wide number of thoughts and opinions in the broad Messianic movement—ranging from a diversity of views present within Messianic Judaism to the One Law/One Torah sub-movement to the widely independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement. The opinion and vantage point of a ministry like Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics, for certain, does represent us and not everyone you will encounter.

As far as quoting from Christian Bible scholars, there are many learned men and women, and brilliant persons conservative and liberal alike, who have been active or who are active, in interpreting the Holy Scriptures. Even if we do not agree with all interpretations or conclusions of Christian scholars, or even Jewish scholars, as an educational ministry we do need to be engaged with a fair modicum of academic religious resources. As our wide array of ministry materials and publications should reveal, we certainly find it important to document our conclusions, and demonstrate how we have reasoned through the issues of the day, weighing opinions and points of view, and frequently quoting and cross-examining (cf. Proverbs 18:17) positions that we may not totally agree with.

In terms of the issue of those in the Hebrew Roots movement who think that they have an apparent corner on “truth”—especially in light of an evangelical Protestantism which they tend to frequently paint with a broad brush as being “antinomian” or “lawless”—we have made it clear in many of our writings that this is not a constructive or edifying way to encourage a Torah-positive ethos to emerge. There can be many people who are “lawless” by virtue of the fact that they fail to observe the steadfast requirement of God’s people to love others (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)—which can certainly include people who self-identify as “Torah observant.” Our broad approach toward Christian handling of God’s Torah is stated in the “Preface to the Reference Edition” of the editor’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah*,

“How do many of today’s Messianic Believers approach the issue of the validity of the Torah? Many feel that throughout history, the Jewish people have followed the Law, and that Christians have believed that the Law was abolished after the time of Christ. For many cases this is an accurate assessment, yet for many other cases this is not only too simplistic an approach, but it can also cause us as Messianics to foment some negative and inappropriate attitudes toward faithful Christian men and women who have preceded us in the faith. It is not difficult for us to see how not every Jewish person since the time of Yeshua has been obedient to the Torah, and so it should similarly not be too much of a stretch for us to

acknowledge that there have been many Christians who have looked to follow Moses' Teaching, at least as a guide for ethics and morality."¹

The assertion of 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who keeps sinning is violating *Torah*—indeed, sin is violation of *Torah*" (CJB), can be used to claim that the significant majority of Bible-believing Christians are in lawlessness, and conversely that a significant majority of Jewish people are not in lawlessness. It might indeed be true that there are evangelical Christian people who believe that the Torah or Moses' Teaching has absolutely nothing to teach or communicate to them, and that the New Testament is the only real Holy Scripture they need. They have no problem in claiming that they believe that God's Torah is abolished in the post-resurrection era, even though this would be contrary to the Messiah's words (Matthew 5:17-19, et. al.).²

At the same time, there are many evangelical Christian Believers who come from a tradition, like Calvinism or Wesleyanism, who think that the perceived moral or ethical instructions of the Torah are valid in the post-resurrection era, but the ceremonial ones are not. Ceremonial instructions would namely include things like the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*,³ the appointed times or *moedim*,⁴ the kosher dietary laws,⁵ and circumcision.⁶ Are these people "lawless," or are these people just misinformed and under-developed, as dividing up God's instructions among moral, civil, and ceremonial is a bit artificial?⁷

Consider this from another angle, regarding who is more "lawless," as it were. Let us say a Reform Jewish person believes that the Sabbath or *Shabbat* is to be honored by the descendants of Israel (cf. Exodus 31:13-17) more-or-less perpetually as a cultural feature of the Jewish people, even though he or she fully believes in homosexual marriage, and that many of the Torah's instructions kept by fellow Conservative or Orthodox Jews are definitely outdated for what should be a modern and progressive era. Violation of the Sabbath is, at least in the Pentateuch, punishable by death (Exodus 35:2-3), yet this Reform Jewish individual has honored the Fourth Commandment as being relatively permanent. The following day, a conservative evangelical Christian person goes to worship at a church, but not to really observe a "Sunday Sabbath," as much as to just fellowship with other Believers. This person does believe that what he or she has (artificially) classified as the ethical and moral commandments of the Law, are to be observed, and this person certainly does not believe in homosexual marriage. *Which of the two is the real sinner?* Although God is the only One who can ultimately judge the heart of any human being, the evangelical Christian who has made a profession of faith for salvation in Israel's Messiah, Yeshua or Jesus, is on much firmer ground before God than the Reform Jew who actually has an ancestral connection with Israel's progenitors.

An important cue needs to be taken from Paul's word in Romans 2:12, "For as many as have sinned without the Torah will also perish without the Torah, and as many as have sinned in the Torah will be judged by the Torah" (PME). There are going to be people, who have specific knowledge of God's Torah and know its instructions, and who consciously disregard it, who will be judged much more severely than those who commit sins of ignorance or omission. There are many principles of right and wrong imbued upon the human conscience (Romans 2:15) via God's Divine image (Genesis 1:26)—which born again Christians filled with the Holy Spirit, even though they may not study the specifics of His Torah as much as they should, are certainly fulfilling. These are people who have been remitted from the curse of the Torah (Galatians 3:13; cf. Isaiah 24:5)⁸ and the Torah's high capital penalties, which Yeshua has taken away by His sacrifice (Colossians 2:14). **It is only the Lord Yeshua Himself who can make the determination, "Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!" (Matthew 7:23, HCSB), for any human being.**

In our estimation, there are many Christian people who are genuinely born again, but who do need to reevaluate their position and views on the post-resurrection era relevancy of God's Torah. They may not keep the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times, or eat kosher—but they do obey God to the best of their understanding, in loving Him and serving the world around them through acts of kindness and mercy (James 1:27). Yeshua's sacrifice for them is big enough to cover their omissions, which are often not purposeful as much as they are the result of an under-developed understanding of God's Torah and its place for the redeemed. While we would state that many Christians are not

¹ J.K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2012), xi.

² Consult the editor's exegesis paper on Matthew 5:17-19, "Has the Law Been Fulfilled?", appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

³ Consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* and *Shabbat: Sabbath for Messianic Believers* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁴ Consult the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*, *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*, and *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁵ Consult the *Messianic Kosher Helper* and *Kashrut: Kosher for Messianic Believers* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶ Consult the editor's article "Is Circumcision for Everyone?", appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

⁷ Consult the FAQ, "Torah, division of commandments."

⁸ Consult the FAQ, "Isaiah 24:5."

experiencing many of the blessings of resting on *Shabbat* or remembering the appointed times—as today’s Messianic people are—they are still our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and it is our job to love them, to lead by a positive example, establish common ground with them, and do our best to have answers to their questions when they are posed.

The promise of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; cf. Hebrews 8:8-12) is indeed that God’s Instruction is to be supernaturally transcribed by His Spirit on redeemed hearts and minds. A challenge for many of us is recognizing that the pace of the Holy Spirit, might not be our pace. So, today’s Messianic congregations and assemblies should be places where we allow for an environment of love and mutual respect, and where God’s people are encouraged to grow in their faith for certain—but where we let the Spirit do the Spirit’s work.