

## One Law Movements

A Response to Russ Resnik & Daniel Juster<sup>1</sup>

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by Tim Hegg • TorahResource • May, 2005

A recent article was written by Russ Resnik and Daniel Juster entitled “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community.” In this eight page article, the authors take to task those of us who teach that God’s Torah is the privilege and obligation of all His people, Jew and non-Jew alike. They do so by suggesting how our teaching is flawed both historically and exegetically. In the end, they conclude that our position is actually a repackaged form of “Replacement Theology.” My purpose in this response is to defend what I understand to be the biblical teaching on this subject, and to encourage believers in Yeshua to the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5).

### *What’s All the Hype About the Torah?*

My first question as I read this short paper was simply this: “why are these authors so worked up about Gentile believers pursuing a life of obedience to the Torah?” The reason I ask this question is because it is widely known that many leaders, rabbis, and teachers of the denominations or fellowship of congregations they represent have openly expressed their view that the Torah, or Law, is no longer an obligation for those who have come to faith in Yeshua. And they live out what they believe. I have attended UMJC and MJAA congregations where the Judaica Shop is open on Shabbat, where visiting Messianic musicians sell their recordings after the Torah service, and congregates retreat to their favorite restaurant following the Shabbat morning service. Some don’t seem to have any qualms about shrimp on ice at their wedding receptions, and it’s not uncommon to hear bold statements that “since we are members of the New Covenant, we are free from the Law.” In fact, I wonder if it might not be appropriate to label some groups within “Messianic Judaism” as “Reform Messianic Judaism?” The reason I suggest this is that some time ago my wife and I attended the local Reform Synagogue for nearly a year. It didn’t take long to realize that the *mitzvot* were considered a matter of individual preference. In fact, in reality the Torah as a whole was little more than a Jewish cultural icon. So perhaps “Reform Messianic Judaism” fits, especially since Messianic Judaism appears to be in the mode of reforming. Additionally, in the official statement called “Defining Messianic Judaism” of the UMJC,<sup>2</sup> the conversion standards of Reform Judaism are the accepted norm for proselytes within the UMJC. In some ways, then, the current drive to redefine Messianic Judaism appears to have some close affinities with the Reform movement.

As I contemplated this, I remembered a conversation I had with a gentlemen who attends one of the UMJC congregations. He was concerned about a paper I had written entitled “Is the Torah Only for Jews?” From his perspective, I had misunderstood a fundamental issue, namely, that his rabbi didn’t think the Torah was “for” anyone, Jew or Gentile, at least not as something that *needed* to be obeyed. He explained the common teaching from his rabbi: the New Covenant had forever changed the function of the Torah—it no longer marked what was right and what was wrong. Rather, he went on to explain, the Torah had become a cultural marker of Jewish identity. His rabbi would keep Torah when doing so gave

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1. I ask the indulgence of the reader for the length of this response. Some might think that such a lengthy response to a paper no longer than nine pages is excessive. My hope is that a more thorough response will help give answers to those who are honestly seeking the truth, and that they will find in these pages a sign-post to the eternal and unchanging word of God upon which they may firmly stand.
  2. Available at [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org), and explained and expanded in issues of *Kesher* (cf. Resnick, “Defining Messianic Judaism,” *Kesher* (Vol. 16, Fall 2003), 63-70; Resnick, “Defining Messianic Judaism Commentary,” *Kesher* (Vol 17, Spring, 2004), 82-88).

him acceptance within the larger Jewish community, but he did so only to identify himself as Jewish, not as an act of obedience to God. According to this man, the rabbi apparently had no problem going to the shopping mall on Shabbat, or eating a ham sandwich. All of those “restrictions” had been wiped away in Yeshua.

So I think I finally get it! The Messianic Jews who have a problem with Gentiles keeping Torah are just trying to retain the Torah as a symbol of their Jewish culture. While some may affirm the eternal and therefore universal value of the *moral* aspects of the Torah, the remainder of the Torah, having been one-upped by the New Covenant, functions only to provide cultural identification for the Jewish people, and, in this case, for Messianic Jews in particular.

The angst that has been demonstrated toward Gentiles who engage in the “ceremonial” aspects of the Torah is therefore understandable. When Gentile believers keep Shabbat, celebrate the Festivals, wear tzitzit, and so forth, they are taking for themselves those parts of the Torah that remain only as Jewish identity markers. For instance, men and women should obey the laws given to each respectively. In doing so, they affirm their proper identity as male and female. We could apply this, by way of analogy, to the current debate: when Juster and Resnik see a Gentile believer dressing in Jewish garb, doing Jewish things, and participating in “Jewish cultural” events (such as Sabbath and the Festivals), it is analogous to meeting a woman in the men’s restroom. She’s clearly in the wrong place!

This is precisely the rub for Juster and Resnik. They seem to appreciate the fact that the “One Law Movement” (as they refer to us) has helped moderate the extreme views of Dispensationalism regarding the Torah, while also emphasizing the value of the moral aspects of Torah well-known in classical Reformed Theology. Yet they claim we have taken one step too far when we have taught that the Torah is the privilege and responsibility of Jew and Gentile alike. In doing so, we “misinterpret a great body of Scripture” and also “miss the unique calling of Jews and Gentiles within the Body of Messiah.” In other words, with this last “crucial step,” we’ve simply gone too far. We’ve erred in accepting the Torah as the unchanging, eternal word of God to His people.

### *The Core Issue: Unique Callings*

The foundational issue upon which Juster and Resnik formulate their “Two Law” theology is that there exists a unique calling for Jews and Gentiles within the body of Messiah. By definition of words, what is unique cannot be shared. Thus, the unique calling of Jews is undermined if Gentiles attempt to participate in this calling. In short, this unique Jewish calling is for Jews to remain distinctively Jewish as a witness of God’s faithfulness to maintain His chosen people and as the means by which Israel’s national calling to be a light to the nations will be fulfilled. Likewise, the unique calling of Gentiles within the body of Messiah is to remain as Gentiles, showing the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promise to bless all the nations in Abraham. How do Jewish believers in Yeshua remain distinctively Jewish? They live out certain aspects of the Torah that mark their Jewish identity. These would be such things as observing the Sabbath, celebrating the Festivals, keeping kosher, wearing tzitzit, and retaining certain other distinctions that have become recognized elements of Jewish culture throughout the centuries. How do Gentile believers remain distinctively Gentile? By maintaining their membership in the Christian Church, supporting Israel and Jewish causes in general, and maintaining their distinctive religious practices as Christians.

Juster and Resnik seek to strengthen their position by showing that the Torah itself differentiates laws for distinct groupings of people, such as “men, women, widows, children, and so on” (p. 4). Since the Torah itself makes a distinction in terms of laws that apply to various groupings, it is reasoned that there could be distinct laws for Jews and Gentiles as well. (The process of determining which laws apply to whom and why is never delineated.)

But do the Scriptures teach a unique calling for Jews within the body of Messiah in contrast to Gentiles? The answer is a clear “No,” at least if one is willing to allow the word “calling” to have its

biblical meaning. In the Apostolic Scriptures, with the exception of Paul's personal calling as an Apostle (Acts 13:2 [which includes Barnabas as well]; Romans 1:1; 1Corinthians 1:1),<sup>3</sup> God's "calling" is always a call to salvation, not something that determines unique functions for various groups within the body of Messiah. The idea of a divine call to salvation in the Apostolic Scriptures begins with the words of Yeshua: Luke 5:32 "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (cf. Mark 2:19) and the Apostles continue to use this same "calling" theme. Thus, "those who are called" is another way of describing all believers in Yeshua (Romans 1:6; 8:28; 1Corinthians 1:24; Jude 1:1; Revelation 17:14). God has called believers into fellowship with His Son (1Corinthians 1:9) and Paul exhorts the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (Ephesians 1:4). In his emphasis upon the unity of Jew and Gentile within the body of Messiah, Paul teaches that there is one calling for all, with a singular hope of that calling (Ephesians 4:4). Peter exhorts his readers to make their "calling and election" sure (2Peter 1:10-11). So there is not one instance in the Apostolic Scriptures where God prescribes a "unique calling" for Jews and Gentiles within the body of Messiah. In the reality of the New Covenant in which the body of Messiah exists, Jews and Gentiles participate in precisely the same calling, which is a call to faith in Yeshua as God's way of salvation, and the life of holiness that such faith produces.

This is not to deny that God remains faithful to the physical descendants of Jacob, nor that He will regather the dispersed of Israel to the Land in the last days and bless her in accordance with the words of the prophets. Nor does it imply that Jewish and Gentile identities are lost within the body of Messiah. My point is simply that not one scrap of evidence can be produced from the Apostolic Scriptures to support the idea that there exists a "unique calling" for Jews as over against Gentiles within the body of Messiah.

Some might want to point to 1Corinthians 7:18-20 as teaching that each group is to fulfill "its own identity and destiny:"

18 Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

It is obvious, however, that "called" in this passage means "called to salvation." Paul's point is that a Jewish person who comes to faith in Yeshua should remain Jewish and not seek to hide or overturn his Jewishness. Likewise, a Gentile should remain content as one called to salvation from the nations, and not become a proselyte in order to be given the status of "Jewish" (as though having a Jewish status offers greater favor within God's family). In this context of salvation and participation within the body of Messiah, Paul is emphatic in stating that neither Jewish status (circumcision) nor Gentile status (uncircumcision) has any importance. What is of importance, however, is that both Jew and Gentile within God's family pursue a life of obedience: "what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Moreover, there is no indication in this context that Paul envisions two separate lists of commandments, one for Jews and another for Gentiles. Rather, the plain sense of the passage is that being reckoned as Jewish or non-Jewish has no bearing on keeping the commandments. All who are "called" to salvation are to keep them.

The text most often used by those who teach a "unique calling" for Jews as over against Gentiles is Romans 11:28-29:

28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice

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3. But it seems also quite probable that Paul equated his "call" as an Apostle as one and the same with his "call" to salvation. See Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols., Carson, O'Brien, and Seifrid, eds. (Siebeck/Baker, 2004), 2.361-91.

they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Paul's point is clear: the election of the physical offspring of Jacob is secure, because it is God's work, and He is faithful. Israel is the only nation chosen by God as a covenant partner, and in this, she is unique. Because God chose the nation of Israel as His covenant partner and committed Himself to her ultimate blessing, even her disobedience cannot overturn God's purposes. Thus, the Jewish community who had rejected Yeshua in Paul's day is described as "enemies of the Gospel" while at the same time "beloved for the sake of the fathers." The reason that Israel's ultimate salvation is secure is plainly stated by the Apostle: "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Paul's point in his use of the terms "gifts" and "calling" is to emphasize the divine, monergistic aspects of Israel's covenant by which she received her special status among the nations. God's faithfulness to Israel, in spite of her disobedience, is "for the sake of the fathers," meaning that Israel's gifts and calling are irrevocable because God's love, which he bestowed upon the fathers in enacting His covenant with them, never fails. In other words, Paul's emphasis here is that Israel's salvation is secure because God is faithful to His promises.

This is an important point for the Apostle. For God's covenant blessing upon individuals within Israel is not based upon their lineage, but upon His choosing. Paul's argument in chapter nine of Romans is that physical lineage alone is not enough to secure the covenant blessings. His example of Jacob and Esau makes this clear: Jacob receives the blessing because of God's sovereign choice. Likewise, in each generation, a remnant of Israel receives the full covenant blessings because they believe. Those who reject God's offer of salvation are ultimately cut off. Yet His choosing of individuals for salvation is not limited to the physical offspring of Jacob. God also chooses some from the nations:

And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles (Romans 9:23–24).

So Gentiles are also saved through God's sovereign "call."

When we consider the irrevocable "gifts and calling" of God in 11:29, we must likewise reckon with the grafting metaphor that Paul uses in the previous context. His point is that the wild branches are nourished by the same root as the natural branches. That is to say, the blessings of the covenant flow equally to both. And this is the only way it could be, since Israel is the only nation with whom God has entered into covenant. If the Gentiles are to receive God's blessings, they must be brought into Israel, for this alone is the locus of God's saving work. To put it simply, the salvation of the elect from the nations is never envisioned apart from Israel's salvation.

This highlights Israel's unique status: she alone is the nation God has chosen to redeem. This is emphasized by Paul (following the example of his Master) in that the gospel should go to "the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16, cp. 2:9–10). On the other hand, Gentiles are chosen as *individuals* and added to Israel. In the end, both are nourished by the same covenant faithfulness of God, that is, the root that supports the branches. Further, since Paul has specifically taught that Gentile believers may rightly call Abraham their father (Romans 4:16–17), it follows that the salvation of God's elect among the nations is equally irrevocable, since they have become partakers of God's grace promised to Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The inclusion of the Gentiles, however, does not negate the fact that in God's providence He determined that Israel should be blessed on a national scale. Romans 9:4–5 speaks directly to that reality, and one should note the present tense Paul uses: "who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over

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4. "...the continuity of election always includes but is not limited to Israel, since it is a continuity of grace." James G. D. Dunn, *Romans*, 2.686.

all, God blessed forever. Amen.” Yet this unique status of Israel as a chosen nation does not negate the fact that those who join her also share in this blessing. Even Juster and Resnik would seem to agree with this, judging from their perspective on how proselytes should be received. For them, a Gentile who undergoes a prescribed conversion ritual is not viewed as diminishing the “unique calling” of Israel when he or she fully participates in all matters of Torah. On the other hand, a Gentile who has not gone through such a ritual is charged with usurping the distinctive way of life unique to Israel if he or she lives a Torah pursuant life. From their viewpoint, the ritual of conversion makes all the difference. But where do we find anything in the Scriptures that teach this? It is not from the Scriptures but from rabbinic Judaism that the conversion ritual is what makes the difference for Gentiles.

For Paul, however, the decisive factor is God’s election that produces faith in Yeshua, a faith that is proven to be genuine through a life of faithfulness. The elect Gentile is grafted in by faith, not by a man-made ritual, and the Jewish person remains in by that same faith. In either case, unbelief results in being broken off, or (in the case of some Gentiles) never being grafted in at all.

Therefore, if we give the olive tree metaphor its obvious sense, we must conclude that as far as Paul is concerned, believing Jews and Gentiles participate in the same covenant blessings because they are equally nourished by the root of God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel. We may also conclude that both bear the same fruit, since each is grafted into the same tree, and each are nourished by the root. As far as unbelieving Israel is concerned, she has a unique national status, for in spite of her unbelief, she remains precious to God, something that is true of no other nation. Israel, as a nation, is the only people group promised salvation on a national scale.

We should also note that the phrase “for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” is a statement proclaiming the faithfulness of God in all of His dealings, which includes His divine call upon elect Gentiles who therefore come to faith. The fact that unbelieving Israel is precious to God has nothing to do with Israel herself but everything to do with God’s faithfulness to the covenant made with the fathers. Here, once again, Paul uses the term “calling” primarily to speak of God’s sovereign work of salvation. Unbelieving Israel is secure in her final deliverance because God is faithful to His promise to save her.

In the final analysis, the irrevocable calling of Israel, in the context of Romans 11, has to do with her ultimate salvation as God’s chosen people more than her role among the nations. Once again, Paul’s use of the concept of “calling” is primarily a divine initiative that results in eternal salvation. When Gentiles, who are “called,” are grafted into the remnant of Israel, they also participate in God’s sovereign calling that results in salvation.

We conclude, then, that in terms of the Apostolic *halalchah* for the body of Messiah, there is no unique calling for Jews and Gentiles within the body of Messiah, in which Jews are called to do specific things that Gentiles are not called to do. Rather, there is a singular calling for Jew and Gentile, which is a call to salvation in Yeshua and the life of holiness that God’s redemption inevitably produces.

## ***Response to Specific Points in the Paper***

### *Circumcision as a Boundary Marker*

The first point made by Juster and Resnik relates to the matter of circumcision and specifically the Torah prohibition against any uncircumcised male eating the Pesach sacrifice (Exodus 12:38, 43-48). In their view, a person can only be incorporated into the people of Israel and their Torah through circumcision. “Without it, he remains an outsider and is banned from the Passover” (p. 3). The same is applied to the “mixed multitude” that came up from Egypt in the exodus. All were circumcised before entering the Land (Joshua 5) and thus were allowed to participate in the Pesach sacrifice. The authors conclude: “Circumcision marks the boundary between those who have the fullness of Torah given to Israel and those who have the more general connection to Torah common to all nations” (p. 3).

There is, however, a great deal of ambiguity in these statements. What do the authors mean by

“circumcision?” Surely they do not mean that any male who is physically circumcised has become part of Israel, else literally hundreds of thousands of men born in the modern era, along with countless muslims, have unwittingly become members of Israel. So they must be referring to circumcision as part of a “conversion ceremony.” However, to view circumcision *as a ritual* marking the boundary between Israel and the nations is anachronistic when read back into the Torah narratives, especially when circumcision is considered the significant element in a ritual of conversion for Gentiles, for such a conversion ritual is unknown until the time of the Maccabees.<sup>5</sup>

Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and it was specifically required of all who were part of Abraham’s household, regardless of whether they were his physical descendants or not (Genesis 17:12). That is, community membership (being in Abraham’s household) presupposed covenant membership. The community of Abraham, and eventually Israel, was to be a people separate from the pagan nations. But this sanctification was marked by obedience to God, not merely by physical lineage. Thus, it was expected that males who were part of the community of Israel would be circumcised as part of their obedience to the covenant stipulations. The crucial point is that covenant membership was not gained through the act of circumcision. Or to put it another way: they were circumcised because they were part of the covenant, not in order to become part of the covenant. This is Paul’s primary point in Romans 4, where he notes that Abraham came into covenant relationship with God *before* he was circumcised.

Unlike in later eras when, from the viewpoint of the rabbis, circumcision became the means by which covenant membership was granted, in the time of ancient Israel, circumcision was a sign of those who were already part of the community of Israel. This is true for Abraham’s family as well as for the mixed multitude who were circumcised before entering the Land (Joshua 5). The circumcision at Gilgal is not presented as a way to become part of Israel. Rather, those who were already part of Israel were called to obey the Lord in receiving the sign of the covenant of which they were already a part. Granted, Genesis 17:14 states that those who refused circumcision were to be cut off from their people. But the fact that the text clearly notes that an uncircumcised male would be cut off *from his people* because he had *broken the covenant*, would strongly indicate that he was a covenant member in spite of not being circumcised. The point is this: circumcision was an act of obedience for those within the covenant, it was not a means of entering the covenant. But it was not only neglecting circumcision that could cause a man to be cut off from his people. There were other outward signs of covenant obedience as well, such as abstaining from blood (Leviticus 17:13) or afflicting one’s soul on Yom Kippur (Lev 16:29f) or honoring the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9–10). In these examples, failure to obey God’s instructions would also result in being cut off from one’s people. And, like circumcision, the native born and the *ger* were expected to live in obedience to these commandments as well.

The structure of the Exodus narrative makes it clear why circumcision as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant was stressed in relationship to eating the Pesach sacrifice. Throughout the story of the exodus, the repeated emphasis is that God acted on behalf of Israel because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Indeed, the actions of God toward Israel in bringing her out from Egypt begin with the notice of the Abrahamic covenant, and this same emphasis is found throughout the exodus story:

Exodus 2:24 So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Note also 3:6,13,15-16; 4:5; 6:8; 13:11; 15:2; 32:13; 33:1.)

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5. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* (KTAV, 1985), p. 25, thinks that it is possible that the conversion ritual represented in the later rabbinic materials may have existed earlier in the Second Temple period, but notes that its clear documentation cannot be found earlier than the Maccabean Revolt. Earlier in this same work (p. 15), he notes that Y. Kaufmann is probably right in asserting that an institution of religious conversion was not extant in the time of Ezra.

In subsequent generations as Israel came to celebrate the Passover, she was to be reminded that her freedom from slavery was in direct fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, of which circumcision was the sign. Thus, redemption from Egypt is tied directly to Abraham's covenant, not to the Sinai covenant which came later. The whole picture of redemption is marred if it is not tied to the promise God made to Abraham. Or to put it another way, the fact that the exodus is based upon the Abrahamic covenant emphasizes that Israel's redemption from Egypt was a matter of God's pure grace, not something Israel deserved or earned, for the Abrahamic covenant is markedly one-sided, depending entirely upon God for its fulfillment. Thus, circumcision, as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, stood as a reminder that one could not rely upon the flesh—that redemption was entirely the work of God. It is for this reason that circumcision was a basic requirement for participation in the fellowship offering of the Pesach lamb, itself a remembrance of redemption from Egypt.

This, however, is a far cry from the manner in which circumcision evolved into the means of covenant membership itself within rabbinic teaching. By the time of Yeshua and His Apostles, circumcision had become the primary mark of Jewish identity from the perspective of the Jewish community itself, which in turn had become the basis for covenant membership as far as the majority of rabbis were concerned. Rather than obedience to God being the defining characteristic of covenant members, Jewish status had become the sole criteria. Entrance into the covenant was therefore either by birth or by the process of becoming a proselyte. Thus, when Paul prohibits circumcision to the Gentiles (Galatians 5), it is not the mere physical cutting of the flesh that he prohibits. As already noted, if this were the case, hundreds of thousands of Gentile boys born in Europe and America have become estranged from Messiah (cf. Gal 5:2f). But actually Paul is prohibiting Gentiles from becoming proselytes under the pressure of some who were influencing them against his gospel. In an era when the prevailing theology taught proselytism as the sole method for Gentile inclusion into the covenant, it is understandable why Paul prohibited it, for it was in fact “another gospel.”

Moreover, it seems very probable that in the strong and direct language of Colossians 2:11, Paul is instructing the communities of The Way that believing Gentiles, though uncircumcised in the flesh, were to be received as though they were circumcised:

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Messiah...

For what other reason would Paul be so concerned about Gentiles and circumcision? The language is stark and straightforward: “you were also circumcised.” The Gentile believers were to be considered and received as circumcised—as *bona fide* covenant members in every way. If, like Timothy (Acts 16), they later received physical circumcision, not in order to give them covenant status based upon a declared Jewishness, but as a simple act of obedience to the Lord, as a “seal of the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:11) which they already had, that would be an entirely different matter.

### *A Change of Relationship in the New Covenant*

Another foundational element in the “One Law” paper produced by Juster and Resnik is their dispensational hermeneutic. They write: “With the coming of the New Covenant, there is a change of relationship between the circumcised and the uncircumcised” (p. 3). What exactly do they mean by “the coming of the New Covenant?” According to Jeremiah who first prophesied the establishment of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), it is specifically “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (v. 31), defined more precisely in the subsequent context as “the house of Israel” (v. 33). From the prophet's perspective, the New Covenant is established at a time when the divided kingdom is once again restored as the united nation of Israel (cp. Jeremiah 3:15–18; 33:17). Moreover, in Jeremiah's vision, the establishment of the New Covenant brings a return of Israel to her God on a national scale

(“from the least to the greatest”) so that all will acknowledge God in truth. This national revival is based upon God forgiving Israel of her sin: “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (v. 34), something that could only occur when the nation of Israel confesses Yeshua as her Messiah. Furthermore, a primary characteristic of Jeremiah’s New Covenant is that the Torah is written upon the heart of all those who are part of it. This means that the Torah functions as a governing factor in the lives of all who are part of the New Covenant. Ezekiel foresees a similar reality when he prophesies the God will sprinkle Israel with clean water, remove the heart of stone and give her a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26ff). Moreover, He will put His Spirit within her, and the result will be that He will cause her to “walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” The reality of the Torah written on the heart is that it produces obedience to the Torah—all of it.

The fact that those things prophesied by Jeremiah in connection with the establishment of the New Covenant have not yet occurred presented a real dilemma for the emerging Christian Church. How could she appropriate the New Covenant for herself when, in its original giving by Jeremiah, it pertained clearly to the nation of Israel—the same nation that God had punished through exile (cf. Jeremiah 31:28)? The emerging Christian Church “solved” this theological conundrum by formulating her doctrine of Replacement Theology: the newly formed Church was the New Israel that had replaced the unbelieving offspring of Jacob. Thus, through Supersessionism, the Church was able to take the Scriptures of Israel and appropriate them to herself. The promise of the New Covenant had been fulfilled in the New Israel.

But the doctrines of Supersessionism could not be sustained by a grammatical, historical interpretation of the Scriptures. Even Paul was clear that there remained a future salvation for Israel, the very nation that had rejected Yeshua as the Messiah (Romans 9–11). It was necessary, then, for the allegorical hermeneutic to become the warp and woof of the Christian tapestry. Where the Bible spoke of physical Israel, it was interpreted through *sensus plenior* (a “fuller sense”) as pertaining to “spiritual Israel,” meaning the Church. Through an allegorical approach to Scripture in order to find the “deeper sense,” the physical descendants of Jacob were expunged from Christian theology, and replaced by the Church itself. God had abandoned physical Israel because she had rejected Yeshua, and had fulfilled His covenant promises to the Church. The “younger brother” had been chosen over the “older brother” (a familiar motif in the early Church Fathers).

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, however, there have always been those who were not comfortable with this approach to Scripture. It simply did not fit the way the prophets themselves interpreted the former prophets. For instance, Daniel understood Jeremiah’s prophecy of a 70 year exile as a literal period of 70 years (Daniel 2:9). Moreover, Yeshua interpreted the messianic prophecies to be speaking of His own literal death and resurrection. Paul likewise interpreted the Tanach in a very literal fashion, even down to individual words (Galatians 3:11). Those who simply could not accept the allegorical interpretation of the Bible were therefore left with the nagging question of the relationship of Israel and the Church. How was the Church appropriately to apply the Scriptures of the Tanach to herself if, in their historical context, they were given to Israel?

Dispensationalism became one answer to this dilemma. In short, this hermeneutic understood the Scriptures as developed along discreet lines of demarcation. Within God’s plan for the ages, He determined to work with different groups in different ways, requiring different things of each. Moreover, He was able to “suspend” His work with one group, move on to another group, and then in time return to the previous group. This solved the problem of the relationship between Israel and the Church. God had worked with Israel during the “Old Covenant” era, but it was His plan to “stop the prophetic clock” for Israel, and start up with the Gentiles in the “Church age.” Once the Church age was finished, marked by the removal of the Church from the world in the “rapture,” God would once again start Israel’s clock ticking, meaning that the prophetic promises to her would begin to be fulfilled. This also helped delineate the relationship of the Torah to the Church. Since the Torah was given to Israel, when God’s work with her was suspended, so was the Torah. But when God, in the future, would again take up with Israel, the Torah would also become active as the pattern for righteous living for His chosen people.

Juster and Resnik clearly adopt a dispensational hermeneutic, even if somewhat modified from its more classical expressions. Interestingly, they write that “we cannot simply transfer the practices of pre-Yeshua times into the New Covenant period” (p. 3). Why then have they based the first part of their argument on the Torah instructions regarding circumcision as a requirement for eating the Pesach sacrifice? Have they not taken something of “pre-Yeshua times” and applied it to our era? If the practices in “pre-Yeshua times” are not applicable for us, why did they spend time writing about the place of the foreigner in Ancient Israel? In fact, they find it a very difficult task to remain consistent in their dispensationalism, for the very heart of dispensationalism is the utter distinction of Israel and Church, yet they want to maintain Messianic Judaism as part of the distinct people group of Israel while at the same time have Messianic Judaism an integral part of the “body of believers” (i.e., the Church). Hermeneutically, they want to have their cake and eat it too.

It was, in fact, the rise of Dispensationalism that took Replacement Theology in the opposite direction. Whereas the Christian Church had adopted the view that she had replaced Israel, Dispensationalism taught that God’s work with Israel had been suspended, awaiting the completion of the Church Age. As such, Jewish people who come to faith during the Church Age become part of the Church, and are therefore no longer part of Israel. Instead of replacing Israel, Dispensational Jewish evangelism made Jews into Christians, since all believers in the Church Age were part of the Church, which dispensationalism defined as absolutely distinct from Israel.

Juster and Resnik also reveal their basic dispensational hermeneutic when they write: “The essential and unique addition of New Covenant ethics is the sacrificial example of Yeshua” (p. 4). If the sacrificial example of Yeshua adds an “essential and unique” aspect to biblical ethics, then clearly those who lived before the coming of Yeshua lacked this essential ethical standard, and were, in this measure, deficient. Put simply, they lacked something essential. This also means that the bar of ethical standards for what God considers righteous has been raised to a higher level by the coming of Yeshua. Furthermore, since this new ethic is also “unique,” it is something new and distinct from the body of ethics previously revealed. If such a theology is allowed to stand, we must conclude that what God requires in terms of righteous living has also changed, and this too is a hallmark of Dispensational Theology. But one is hard pressed to support such a theology from Scripture. Yeshua and His Apostles emphasized the need to obey the commandments (Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 2:13; 3:31; 7:12, 22; 8:4, 7; 1Corinthians 7:19; 14:34; Hebrews 10:28; James 1:25; 2:8; 4:11; 2Peter 2:21; 1John 5:2; 2John 4-6; Revelation 12:17; 14:12). Moreover, if a new ethic has come, why do the Apostles continue to appeal to pious men and women of ancient Israel as ethical role models for the followers of Yeshua? Paul speaks of the Gentiles believers as those who “follow in the steps of the faith of Abraham our father” (Romans 4:12). The author to the Hebrews lists the faithful among the ancients as models for his readers to follow (Hebrews 11), and Peter considers Sarah to be the example for women in submitting to their husbands (1Peter 3:6). If a unique and essential ethic has arisen following the first advent of Yeshua, why would the Apostles continue to appeal to the people who lacked this “essential” ethic as role models to be followed?

But what does this honestly mean in terms of the message and life of Yeshua? Did He really bring a new ethic, one that trumped the older ethic of the Torah? His words do not seem to convey such a thing. When He stated that not the smallest stroke of the Torah would fail as long as heaven and earth remained (Matthew 5:18), it does not sound like He intended to replace it or even add to it with a new ethic. And when He gives His prophetic description of the day of judgment (Matthew 7:22-23), He speaks the condemning words “depart from Me, I never knew you” to those who are described as “lawless” (quoting Psalm 6:8[9]). Even the “new commandment” of John 13:34 (cf. 1John 2:7-8; 2John 5) has been understood by many scholars not to be new in kind, but new in the sense of “re-established” (Calvin), “renewing” (Augustine), or even “ever new” (Olshausen). It is even possible that the phrase

should be understood as “I give you it [the commandment to love each other] anew.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the Torah taught love for God as well as for one’s neighbor, as Yeshua Himself emphasized (Matthew 26:36–40). So the command to love one another is not something new. Nor was it something new for Yeshua to command His disciples to love one another, even when such love would go beyond the circle of the Jewish nation to Gentile believers. Leviticus 19:34 specifically commands the native born Israelites to love the foreigner who dwelt with them. Rather, in giving the command to love one another, Yeshua is once again bringing His disciples back to the heart of the Torah itself, unburdening it from layers of tradition and religious practice accumulated over centuries of rabbinic theology. Yet Yeshua’s commandment to love is not unique among the rabbinic sages. Some taught a similar message:

R. Eleazar on concluding his prayer used to say the following: May it be Your will, O Lord our God, to cause to dwell in our lot, love and brotherhood and peace and friendship ... (b.*Berchot* 16b; cf. y.*Berchot* 33a where the saying is attributed to R. Yochanan)

Some suggest that what is new about the commandment to love each other is that it is a love modeled after Yeshua’s sacrificial death. Surely there is no doubt that the death of Yeshua for sinners is the highest model of such love. Yet the believers of old were aware that the Messiah would come and die for His people. David knew of the resurrection of Messiah (Acts 2:29–31), so he also knew of His death. And it seems quite obvious that David wrote of this in his Psalms. Moreover, the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the pierced One of Zechariah 12, as well as the sacrificial system itself surely gave the ancient Israelite a prophetic and dramatic picture of the Messiah’s sacrificial love. The prophetic Scriptures of the Tanach, then, presented the sacrificial example of Messiah to all whose eyes were opened to see it, even as the completed canon of Scripture does for us who live after the event.

The idea, therefore, that the New Covenant has brought a new ethic which in turn has created separate laws for Jews and Gentiles within the body of Messiah is simply not sustained by the Scriptures themselves. While the Dispensational hermeneutic upon which such a notion is based may appear to offer a tidy systematic theology, segmenting God’s work into neatly demarcated frames, in reality it dissects the Scriptures arbitrarily and fails to reckon with the continuity of God’s salvific plan. For Yeshua and His Apostles, the salvation of Israel is not a separate dispensational reality from the salvation of the nations. The ingathering of the nations to faith in the God of Israel was viewed as the culminating act of God in and through Israel, a work that brought the believing Gentiles into the same body (1 Corinthians 12:13), the same family (Eph 2:19), the same people (Acts 15:14–18), and the same citizenship (Eph 2:12, 19) together with believing Jews, the reality of which would be used of God to bring about the final and complete salvation of Israel on a national scale (Romans 11:25-26).

### *The Noahide Laws*

Juster and Resnik claim that “by the time of Yeshua, an interpretive tradition was developing concerning the requirements for Gentiles” (p. 4). They explain that this tradition became known as the Noahide laws which were universally applied to all mankind. They claim that “already in the first century, Judaism made a distinction between universal requirements and requirements that were the particular responsibility of Jews.” But they give no data for this assertion because there are none. The first mention of the Noahide laws as a grouping of laws applicable to non-Jews is in the Tosefta (t.*Avodah Zerah* 8.4), which was compiled around 300 CE. They also are mentioned in the subsequent Babylonian Talmud, compiled between 300 and 600 CE (b.*Sanhedrin* 56a–60a; b.*Avodah Zerah* 64b). In t.*Avodah Zerah* 8.4, it is true that R. Meir (130–160 CE) is cited, but his words apply only to the

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6. Moulton-Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols (T&T Clark, 1963), 3.225.

prohibition of idolatry. Moreover, even throughout the Talmudic era, the Noahide doctrine “never seems to assume a fixed and final definition.”<sup>7</sup> To assert that what began to be formulated in 4th Century rabbinic Judaism in regard to the Noahide laws, was established and practiced in the 1st Century, is simply not defensible. As Witherington concludes regarding Acts 15:

It would be anachronistic to bring the latter rabbinic concept of *seven* Noahic commandments, binding on all descendants of Noah, into our discussion.<sup>8</sup>

Schnabel writes that there is evidence that so-called “God-fearers” of the 1st Century “kept the Sabbath, the food laws, and, depending upon personal choice, further stipulations of Torah.”<sup>9</sup>

Particularly germane in this regard are the words of Paul in Ephesians 2:19, in which he describes the Gentile believers as “fellow citizens” with the “holy ones” (saints, ἀγίωσι/ἁγίοις) in the “household of God.” The term “fellow citizens” (συμπολίται, *sumpolitai*) casts Paul’s words into the realm of group identity. A citizen was one who was joined to others via a common body of laws and privileges by which the group was governed. That Paul would use this term to describe the Gentile believers within the sect of The Way strongly suggests that he did not envision two separate governing principles within the body of Messiah, one for Jews and another for Gentiles. Historically, we know that Rome taxed Jews and Gentiles with the Jewish Tax (*fiscus judaicus*),<sup>10</sup> meaning that the Gentiles who met in the Synagogue (whether proselytes or God-fearers) were also identified as part of the Jewish community. The minimum boundary markers that identified members of the Jewish community in the 1st Century would have included the Sabbath, Festivals, and kosher food, along with some connection to the Jerusalem Temple as well as monotheism. Obviously, circumcision was a more private matter, so from Rome’s perspective, proselytes and God-fearers may have not always been differentiated.<sup>11</sup> These social and political aspects which formed the social milieu within which the early followers of Yeshua emerged as an identifiable group should not be overlooked in understanding Paul’s use of “fellow citizens” to describe the Gentile believers. While the ultimate sense was no doubt a heavenly citizenship (cf. Philippians 3:20), the realities of the social and political pressures under which the people of The Way were formed surely influenced the Apostle’s choice of words.

### *Matthew 5:17–18*

When commenting upon this text, Juster and Resnik suggest that Yeshua’s words could only be applicable “in [a] period when the Temple was still standing and it was possible to keep the Torah to a much greater degree than now. To teach people to obey the least of the commandments, however, assumes that they keep them according to the intent of the commandment.” This was certainly not the perspective of Moses, however. In Deuteronomy 30:1–3 Moses writes:

1 “So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, 2 and you

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7. Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches* (Baker, 2000), p. 160.

8. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 464.

9. Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols (IVP, 2004), 1.133. The idea that other matters of Torah observance were based upon “personal choice” is Schnabel’s interpretation, but he gives no primary source data to substantiate his opinion. Regarding “God-fearers,” also cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols (T&T Clark, 1973-1987), 3.169.

10. According to Suetonius. See Robert Graves, *Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars* (Penguin Books, 1979), p. 308.

11. See the study of Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness* (Univ. of California Press, 1999), pp. 39–49.

return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 3 then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

What is striking here is that even when Israel has been exiled to the lands of her enemies, she is still able to obey God sincerely (“all your heart and soul”) by doing all that He had commanded “today,” which means the whole Torah. Yet in exile there would be no Temple, no functioning priesthood, and laws related to the Land would not be applicable. How then could Israel be seen as obeying the Torah as given to her at Sinai, and as a result, be restored from her captivity? Is Moses suggesting a “no-win scenario?” If the way of restoration is repentance as evidenced by obedience to the commandments, and if such obedience is actually impossible because many of the commandments require the Temple, priesthood, and dwelling in the Land, then these words are without meaning. Rather, the apparent sense of Moses’ words is that God considers obedience to those commands that are possible to keep as evidencing a genuine heart of repentance and love for Him, and He accepts this as obedience of the whole.

The same would then apply to the words of Yeshua in Matthew 5:17–18. When He admonishes us to keep even the least of the commandments, He is asking for a heart that desires to do all that God commanded, a heart that is seen by a willingness to actually live out those commandments that are possible to obey in our times and situations, and a willingness to seek repentance and forgiveness when we disobey. Juster and Resnik, however, presume that these words of our Master do “not mean that Gentiles should be taught to keep all the details of law given to Israelites” (p. 4). Where, in this context, is Yeshua restricting His comments to the physical descendants of Jacob? He rather is speaking of His kingdom which is much broader (cf. John 10:16), for those who fail to do the commandments, and teach others to disregard them would be considered “least in the kingdom.” Even more, however, unless one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will not even enter the kingdom of Heaven (v. 20). Furthermore, Matthew ends his gospel with Yeshua commissioning His disciples to make disciples of the nations (Gentiles) by “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (28:20). This would surely include His teaching in 5:17–20.

### *Universal vs. Specific*

One of the arguments Juster and Resnik repeatedly make is that the Torah contains some laws that are “universal” while others are restricted or specifically detailed to one sub-group or another. No one is denying that there are specific laws within the Torah for specific groups. There are laws specific to kings, priests, men, women, widows, children, and so on. And no one is suggesting that men need to keep the laws specifically detailed for women, or *visa versa*! But Juster and Resnik bring up this point in order to demonstrate logically that if some laws of Torah are given to specific groups, and therefore not to the whole, then the possibility exists that some laws could be given to Jews and not to Gentiles. The obvious problem with this line of reasoning is that when the Torah has laws delineated for specific groups, *it says so*. Yet when it comes to such things as the Sabbath, the Festivals, kosher food laws, purity laws, and so on, there is no indication whatsoever that these are restricted to a specific sub-group. Moreover, when these laws are given, it is clear that they envision the widest possible grouping, including both the native born and the foreigner (Sabbath: Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14; Pesach: Exodus 12:48; Numbers 9:11; Unleavened Bread: Exodus 12:19; Shavuot: Deuteronomy 16:10–11; Yom Kippur: Leviticus 16:29; Sukkot: Deuteronomy 16:13–14; Sacrifices (which includes purity laws): Leviticus 17:8–9; 22:17–18, 31; Numbers 15:14–16; kosher laws (includes prohibition of ingesting blood): Leviticus 17:12–13, 15; Numbers 19:10). Furthermore, at the renewal of the Sinai covenant before Israel entered the Land, all were included in the ceremony, including the foreigners (Joshua 8:33–35), and this ceremony of accepting the Covenant included the entire Mosaic Torah: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with

the women, and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.”

Juster and Resnik seem to agree that the Torah cannot be divided into the categories of Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil (p. 2). Yet they persist in dividing the Torah into “universal” and “specific.” The labels may have changed, but the meaning remains the same: “universal” means the moral aspects of the Torah, while “specific” are those ceremonial and civil laws that are viewed as cultural markers for the Jewish people. But how does one decide what is moral as over against what is merely ceremonial or civil? Is the Sabbath a moral commandment? What about leaving the corners of the field? Unclean foods are labeled “abhorrent” (Leviticus 11) and one who eats them is considered “abhorrent” (Leviticus 20:25). Is this a moral issue? Bockmuehl gives a fitting summary to this question:

The classic answer, disqualifying “civil” and “ceremonial” laws based on a kind of systematization ..., is hardly satisfactory. Indeed the very distinction between moral, civil and ceremonial laws, aside from being unknown to the Old and New Testaments and to Judaism, is legally unworkable and practically awkward. Who would confidently classify the laws about gleaning or the taking of a bird’s nest, not to mention the Sabbath and the command about images?<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the attempt to make the moral aspects of the Torah eternal, but limit the civil or ceremonial laws as cultural markers simply cannot be sustained from a study of the Torah itself, nor from the remainder of Scripture.

### *Acts 15 & the Jerusalem Council*

The authors of the “One Law Movement” paper also focus attention upon the Jerusalem Council as recorded in Acts 15. They recognize that the four requirements drawn up by the Council were not an exhaustive list. “The passage assumes a universal morality, as do Paul, Peter, and James (who were present that day), and John in their writings” (p. 4). Thus, the Gentiles were not free “to murder, steal, and dishonor parents.” Juster and Resnik suggest that natural law, extant within the created universe, would have made such basic morality a given. They note that “classic Roman moral law taught the ideals of monogamous marriage, honoring parents, honesty and much more” (p. 4), and they appeal to Romans 2:14–15, which they apparently interpret to mean that even unbelieving Gentiles are endowed with natural law in their conscience which would have directed them to a basic morality. Following the logic of the authors, they seem to suggest that the Jerusalem Council had no need to include moral aspects of the Torah as incumbent upon Gentiles, since this would be presumed on the basis of natural law. But such an appeal to “classic Roman moral law” is overrated. The Roman definition of “monogamous marriage” seems extremely deficient in light of the fact that participation with temple prostitutes was viewed as normative for Roman men, not to mention that giving one’s daughter for a year’s service in a pagan temple was applauded as what good citizens do. What is more, by all accounts, adultery was prevalent in 1st Century Roman culture despite what ethicists may have taught.<sup>13</sup> Non-cultic prostitution, male and female homosexuality, and pedophilia were also common and on the rise in the Roman Empire of Paul’s day. Need we speak of idolatry and all of its debauchery, along with the blood sports that characterized 1st Century culture under Roman rule?

So is Paul applauding a “universal morality” well recognized among the unbelieving Gentiles in Romans 2:14? I hardly think so. Such an interpretation neither fits Paul’s overall message nor the social background from which he wrote. In the context, Paul is not speaking of unbelieving Gentiles, but of those who have come to faith in Messiah, for in v. 13, he speaks of those who not only hear the Torah,

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12. Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, p. 149, n. 14.

13. C. S. Keener, “Adultery” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (IVP, 2000).

but actually do it, and v. 14 is connected to v. 13 by its opening conjunction “for.” Moreover, in Paul’s theology, those who are “in the flesh” cannot please God (Romans 8:8), and his description of the unbeliever in Romans 3 makes it clear that apart from the genuine work of regeneration, no one does good, not even one. Indeed, all are corrupt. One need only remember his description of the pagan mind in chapter one to realize that he did not consider the unregenerate Roman to possess morality, at least from God’s perspective. Moreover, the phrase “the Torah written in/on their hearts” (2:14) would have surely evoked a parallel to Jeremiah 31:33 in the minds of his Jewish readers (to whom he addresses himself in this section), and marked these Gentiles as first fruits of the New Covenant. Thus, the Gentiles to whom Paul refers in Romans 2:14–16 are those believers who, though not having the Torah as a matter of their upbringing<sup>14</sup> nonetheless live in obedience to the Torah because it has been written on their hearts. As such, their lives of obedience stand as a judgment against the Jewish person, who, though having the Torah from birth, fails to obey it.

Juster and Resnik admit that the four stipulations given to the Gentile believers by the Jerusalem Council essentially required that they “make a radical break with Roman culture” (p. 5), but they give no hint of what culture was to replace the pagan one they had forsaken. They go on to label the statement of Acts 15:21, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,” as ambiguous, and apparently insignificant in the overall message of the Council. They substantiate this by noting that no mention of these words is “included in the apostolic letter that was circulated among the congregations” (p. 5). But the statement of v. 21 is part of Luke’s narrative presentation of the event itself, and the circulated edict of the Council did not contain a description of the general state of things, but only of those four stipulations that the Council had determined were necessary for the Gentiles to follow. They did not need to instruct the Gentiles to attend the Sabbath meetings in the synagogue—*they already were!* In fact, this was what created the “problem” for which the Council convened in the first place. What is more, if Juster and Resnik think that whatever was left out of the apostolic letter was insignificant, what are we to conclude about the statement “but we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they also are” (v. 11) that likewise was “excluded” from the letter?

So how does Acts 15:21 function in Luke’s retelling of the Jerusalem Council event? Connected as it is by the word “for,” it gives a substantial reason why the Gentiles should make their definitive break from the idolatrous culture of their past by abstaining from those things that characterized the pagan temples. The reason is that every Shabbat, as the Torah is read, it constantly calls all who hear it to a single-hearted love for God and neighbor, a love defined and redefined in the commandments, statutes, and ordinances given to Israel. James goes on to show how the ingathering of the Gentiles was fulfilling the prophecy of Amos (9:11–12), for the Davidic dynasty had been renewed in the reign of Yeshua, and

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14. It seems more probable that φύσις, *phusis* (“naturally”) modifies ἔχοντα, *exonta*, “having” rather than ποιῶσιν, *poiosin*, “doing” as most English translations have it. See C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2 vols. (T&T Clark, 1975), 2.157. Dunn’s arguments to the contrary (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* 2 vols. in *The Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1988), 1.98 are not convincing. He dismisses Cranfield’s exegesis on the basis that “Syntax and balance of the sentence require that φύσει be taken with what follows...; had Paul wanted to speak of “those who do not have the law by nature,” he would have put the φύσει *within* the phrase (that is, preceding ἔχοντα...).” But this argument is self-defeating, because φύσει is not contained within the following clause either: it is sandwiched between the two clauses. As Cranfield notes, the syntax and sentence structure cannot determine with which clause φύσει should be attached. The decisions must rest upon the immediate as well as the larger contexts, including Paul’s overall message in Romans. The next phrase of 2:14, “not having the law,” seems better understood as a reiteration of the previous phrases, and thus strengthens the interpretation that φύσει describes ἔχοντα rather than ποιῶσιν. Moreover, Paul’s consistent emphasis throughout the epistle is that righteousness comes only through being justified, and that apart from the Spirit, one is unable to live righteously. Given the immediate and wider contexts, Cranfield’s interpretation seems most warranted. Thus, in 2:14, the Gentiles are characterized as not having the Torah naturally, that is, as a matter of birth, and thus not in their upbringing and culture. See also S. J. Gathercole, “A Law Unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2:14–15 Revisited,” *JSNT* 23.3 (2002), 27–49.

therefore the worldwide harvest of the nations foreseen by the prophets was dawning. When James sums up Peter's speech (v. 14) by saying that "God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people (λαός, *laos* rather than ἔθνος, *ethnos*)<sup>15</sup> for His name," he is paralleling the words of Zechariah 2:11, "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people." The promise of the Davidic covenant, that the Torah would be for all mankind (2Samuel 7:19), was becoming a reality. The coastlands that had waited expectantly for God's Torah (Isaiah 42:4) were now to be satisfied. From the perspective of the Council, the four stipulations were not simply what was necessary in order to make the Gentiles "acceptable" to the Jewish community. They were the important, practical first steps for the Gentile believers to bring about their full welcome and inclusion into the people of God. The words of Moses had become the longing of their hearts, and the synagogue was the place where that longing could be satisfied.

### *No Explicit Command for Gentiles to Keep the Whole Torah*

The authors of the "One Law" paper make a bold statement: "It is most telling that in all the epistles to congregations there is not a single word commanding Gentiles to adopt the whole Torah, and no direct statement of hope that they will eventually adopt a fully Torah-keeping life in the same way as the Jews" (p. 5). They reinforce this position by appealing to Acts 21, where Paul is informed of the false rumor that he is teaching Jews to forsake the Torah. While Paul engages in Temple activities to prove this rumor false, Juster and Resnik emphasize that neither he nor James suggest that the Gentiles should also obey Torah: "Neither Paul nor James gives the slightest hint that they were encouraging full Torah observance among Gentiles," and they conclude the paragraph by saying, "there is not one word in the New Testament that explicitly encourages Gentiles to grow in keeping the whole Torah."

Once again, the dispensational perspective of the authors is evident. The Bible which the believing community had at this time was the Tanach. Why then do Juster and Resnik limit their perspective to the "New Testament," the canon of which was not solidified until the 2nd Century at the earliest? Are they really suggesting that the "New Testament" had replaced the Tanach as the authoritative word of God for the Gentile believers in Paul's day? The Bible of the 1st Century was the Tanach, and it contained verses like Psalm 19:7–11. How, then, could anyone have thought that the Torah had been suspended for anyone who loved God, or that the commandments of the Lord had been dissected into what was relevant and what was not? "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul... The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether (יְקָרִי),"<sup>15</sup> meaning that the commandments stand together as a single whole (Psalm 19:7, 9 [8, 10]). Had not Isaiah prophesied of the time when even the foreigners would prove their covenant faithfulness by keeping the Sabbath, receiving God's blessing (Isaiah 56:6-7)? And did not Yeshua Himself quote these very words of Isaiah as He anticipated the Temple becoming the House of prayer for all peoples (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46)? What Gentile believer, having learned of Yeshua's teachings, would have considered the Temple service unimportant, or thought that participating in the daily prayers was something left only for the Jewish people? Any disciple of Yeshua who was familiar with the words of Moses and the Prophets, and the manner in which the Master's teaching had reinforced these sacred themes, would have received the Torah of Moses as a boundless treasure. It is preposterous to suggest that the Apostles could have suddenly taught the Gentile believers that significant parts of their Bible really did not apply to them or were irrelevant in terms of their being "fellow citizens with the saints" and members of "God's household" (Ephesians 2:19).

What is more, the words of James in Acts 21 envision more than the Written Torah—they also

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15. Most often in the Apostolic Scriptures, *ethnos* is used of unbelievers, especially Gentiles in contrast to Israelites, but when referring to the "people of Israel," *laos* is normally used. It is therefore significant that Peter uses *laos* here when referring to the Gentile believers, and this is the link to Zechariah 2:11, where *laos* is also used in the Lxx.

encompass the traditions of the elders which, in many ways, had taken on a *de facto* equality with the words of Moses:

... they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. (Acts 21:21)

“Forsaking Moses” and “walking according to the customs” includes both the Written and the Oral Torah. Yet Yeshua Himself had rebuked the Jewish leaders in regard to some of their traditions because rather than drawing the people to a genuine love for God and their neighbor, they had become objects of pride and hypocrisy (Matthew 23:4ff; Mark 7:6–9). It is not surprising, then, that His Apostles would also discard those traditions that either set aside the commands of God, or where roadblocks in the path of obedience.

We may rightly ask on what basis the rumor about Paul could have been circulated in the first place? By his own confession, he had not done anything against his people or the “customs of our fathers” (Acts 28:17), and this was apparent to James and the rest (21:24). If we take the word of James as well as Paul himself at face value, then his Torah observant life should have squelched any such rumor that he was teaching against Moses. It would seem, however, that the rumor had begun because Paul, following the example of Yeshua Himself, had openly disregarded some of the traditions of elders. In Paul’s case, these may have been particularly those rabbinic rulings that kept Jews and Gentiles separated. But in an era when the Oral and Written Torahs had become so entwined as to be in many ways inseparable, to negate aspects of the one was viewed as forsaking the other as well. So when zealous Jews saw Paul and other Jews freely communing and eating with Gentiles, the accusation was that Paul had abandoned Moses, and that he was teaching other Jews to do the same. Further, his insistence that Gentiles not become proselytes became the grounds for the accusation that he was disregarding the commandment of circumcision.

But how *were* the Jewish believers to respond to the influx of Gentiles? Were they to abandon the teachings of their respected Sages who had erected a wall between Jew and Gentile? And if they were to disregard some of the elders’ traditions, where would such an enterprise stop? The Apostles apparently recognized the fact that necessary changes to the traditional *halachah* would have to happen gradually, even if certain aspects (like a strict separation from Gentiles) would need to be forsaken immediately. The ability to welcome the many Gentile believers as members of The Way required at least that much. But it also seems apparent that as the Gentiles would prove themselves to be genuine in faith, and therefore zealous to live righteously, there would be a growing acceptance of them within the larger community of Jewish believers. The Apostles expected that in time, the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of all believers would resolve the Jewish/Gentile tensions.

Yet the Apostles had likewise determined that to expect the Gentiles to conform to the extensive *halachot* of the Sages *before* they would be received was also impossible, and even more, would send a dangerous message. Inclusion into the people of God was not through performance of accepted cultural norms, but through faith that transforms one’s life. Thus, the edict of the Jerusalem Council is reiterated by James (Acts 21:25) to reinforce this fundamental truth: Gentiles were to be received because of their confession of Yeshua as their Master. But the first and perhaps most important evidence of their genuine faith was for them to abandon all connections to their idolatrous past. Adherence to the four stipulations would guarantee that.

The argument from silence, that neither in Acts 21, nor elsewhere do the Apostles specifically state that the Gentiles should be encouraged to “full Torah observance” is a *non sequitur*. If this argument were valid, we should find explicit teaching by the Apostles, directed specifically to Jews, requiring them to pursue full Torah obedience. The lack of such a specific commandment renders the argument fallacious, unless one were to take the position that no one, Jew or Gentile, is to pursue full Torah obedience, and even then, it would be an argument from silence. To put it simply: since the Apostles do not give explicit commandment to either Jew or Gentile to pursue full Torah obedience, such an

argument from silence cannot be applied only to one and not to the other.

But there is a bigger factor at work in the way this question is formulated in the first place. If one argues that, because the Apostolic Scriptures contain no explicit commandment to pursue full Torah obedience, God no longer requires obedience to the Torah, they can do so only if they have already determined that the Apostolic Scriptures have replaced the Tanach as the authoritative rule of life for Yeshua's disciples. The same may be said for those who suggest that only those aspects of the Tanach that are repeated in the Apostolic Scriptures are incumbent upon the faithful. Either way, what these positions presuppose is that the Apostolic Scriptures have trumped the Tanach in terms of what God requires of His children. Once again, such a perspective is based upon a dispensational hermeneutic that dissects the Scriptures according to a pre-determined theology.

But even in spite of this, there *are* plenty of times in the Apostolic Scriptures where obedience to the Torah is enjoined upon all who are born from above. Paul teaches that those who do the Torah, not simply hear it, are the justified ones (Romans 2:13). This is because faith, rather than nullifying the Torah, actually establishes it (Romans 3:31). Paul characterizes the unbeliever as one who is not able to submit to the Torah of God (Romans 8:6-7), which is just the opposite of believers in whom the requirement of the Torah is lived out because they walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Romans 8:4). Indeed, Paul confesses that he joyfully “concur[s] with the Torah of God in the inner man” (Romans 7:22), because he recognizes that it is holy, righteous, and good, as well as spiritual (Romans 7:12, 14). He specifically teaches that the primary issue is not whether one is Jewish or Gentile (circumcised or uncircumcised), but what matters is “the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Corinthians 7:19). John has much to say about keeping the commandments (1 John 2:3-4, 7-8; 3:22-24; 4:21), and his conclusion is: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2-3). Likewise, in the Apocalypse, John defines those who are saved: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Yeshua” (Revelation 14:12). In affirming God's Torah as the eternal, living word of God, applicable to all who are granted eternal life in the Son, the Apostles are simply following the directive of their Master, Who told His Apostles to make disciples of the Gentiles, and to teach them to observe (“keep”) everything that He had commanded them (Matthew 18:19-20). His strong emphasis upon even the least commandment (Matthew 5:17-20) must therefore be included in their work of making disciples.

### *Galatians 5*

Juster and Resnik label Galatians 5 as a “watershed passage” (p. 5). The argument is that Paul, in strongest terms, exhorts Gentiles not to receive circumcision, because “the New Covenant offers the fullness of God's blessing upon Gentiles without the necessity of circumcision.” One immediately wonders what Juster and Resnik mean by “the fullness of God's blessing?” Does this include the blessings of Sabbath, Festivals, and other “statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole Torah” (Deuteronomy 4:8)? I strongly agree that the “fullness of God's blessings” has come upon Gentiles who have come to faith in Yeshua, which is why I believe the blessings of the Torah ought to be the privilege of all of God's children.

But like any biblical text, the question that confronts the interpreter when approaching Galatians 5 is what the writer *meant* by the words he uses. We are required to find, as much as possible, the historical as well as the grammatical background of the author's words before we can understand his meaning. Paul uses the term “circumcision” in Galatians as a shorthand term for “Jewish status,” (2:7-9, 12). When circumcision is spoken of in relationship to Gentiles, it references the prevailing rabbinic theology of how they could obtain “Jewish status,” that is, through becoming a proselyte.

The language of Galatians 5:2-3 fits this interpretation. Paul speaks of Gentiles “receiving

circumcision,”<sup>16</sup> which envisions a ritual of circumcision. Moreover, the language of v. 3 is curious, for Paul speaks of “every *person* who receives circumcision,” using *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthropos*, “person,” “man”) where we might expect *ἀνὴρ* (*aner*, “male,” “man”). Every other time that Paul uses *anthropos* in Galatians (1:1, 10–12; 2:6, 16; 3:15; 6:1, 7) he is clearly speaking of “mankind,” or “persons,” meaning men and women, and not of males only. So in 5:3 when he writes “And I testify again to every person<sup>17</sup> who receives circumcision...,” it seems highly probable that he is using the word “circumcision” as a technical term to mean “become a proselyte.” If he were talking only to males, then what about the women? Would it have been permissible for women to become proselytes since it would not require the physical act of circumcision? In fact, history records that there were more women proselytes than men. But Paul’s message in Galatians centers on the Gospel of Yeshua which is applicable both to men and women, and thus his admonition given here to strengthen his message of the Gospel ought likewise to be applicable to both. This would explain his use of the word *anthropos* (“person”) where we would expect *aner* if his words were directed only to males. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that Paul’s concern in this text is over the matter of Gentiles becoming proselytes in order to gain some greater level of acceptance within God’s family. The teaching that such was necessary or even possible was what Paul calls “another Gospel,” and what formed the impetus for the epistle in the first place.

What does Paul mean when he writes in 5:3 that “every person who receives circumcision...is under obligation to keep the whole Torah?” Juster and Resnik emphasize what they consider the inescapable “implications of this verse. *If one is circumcised, he is obligated to keep the whole law; if one is not circumcised, he is not obligated to obey the whole law*” (emphasis theirs, p. 5). Once again, however, we must ask what Paul means by “keep the whole law or Torah.” Throughout the history of Judaism, including the Judaisms of Paul’s day, while there was surely a distinction between the Written and Oral Torahs by their very nature, they nonetheless were inseparably bound together. The rabbinic perspective was that the Oral as well as the Written Torah was given to Moses on Sinai (m.*Avot* 1:1), meaning that the Oral Torah, or the additional interpretive laws of the Sages, had divine authority as did the Written Torah. In the rabbinic way of thinking, to separate the Oral from the Written was impossible, since the Written Torah could not be understood nor properly applied without the Oral Torah. It is not surprising, then, that the rabbis expected the proselyte to submit to both:

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: ‘What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions’? If he replies, ‘I know and yet am unworthy’, he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments ... If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects (b.*Yevamot* 47a).

What is meant by “minor” and “major” commandments? The following talmudic discussion shows that these terms refer to the Oral and Written Torahs:

R. Hisda asked one of the young Rabbis who was reciting aggadot in his presence in a certain order: ‘Did you hear what [was the purport of the expression,] ‘New and old’? — ‘The former’ [new] the other replied: ‘are the minor, and the latter [old] are the major commandments’. ‘Was then the Torah,’ the former asked: ‘given

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16. taking *περιτένησθε* *peritenesthe* as a middle rather than active, thus “get yourself circumcised”

17. All the English translations use “man” here.

on two different occasions? But the latter [old] are those derived from the words of the Torah while the former [new] are those derived from the words of the Scribes' (b.*Eruvin* 21b).

Thus, a proselyte was required to submit to the “whole Torah,” meaning both the Written and Oral as divinely given *halachah* (at least from the standpoint of the Sages). Consider the following rabbinic story:

Our Rabbis taught: A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, ‘How many Torot have you?’ ‘Two,’ he replied: ‘the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.’ ‘I believe you with respect to the Written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only]. [But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day, he taught him, Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet; the following day he reversed [them ] to him. ‘But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,’ he protested. ‘Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral [Torah] too.’ (b.*Shabbat* 31a)

Indeed, according to some of the Sages, one who dismissed the rulings of Sages as irrelevant or taught contrary to them was unworthy of a place in the world to come. Rabbi Eleazar of Modiim died in 135 CE, and was a prominent Sage at Yavneh. In *Avot* he is remembered as teaching:

R. Eleazar the Modiite said: He who profanes holy things and despises the festivals, and shames his associate in public, and makes void the covenant of Abraham our father, and gives interpretations of the Torah which are not according to *Halachah*, even though he possess Torah and good deeds has no portion in the world to come. (m.*Avot* 3:11 [numbered as 3:15 in some editions])

Thus, when a Gentile became a proselyte, he or she was required to submit to the full “yoke of the commandments,” which meant both the Written as well as the Oral Torah, or in Paul’s words, “the whole Torah.”

Now this situation would have caused a true dilemma for the Gentile believer in Galatia and elsewhere. Since the Oral Torah in Paul’s day required certain levels of separation between Jew and Gentile, even in some cases marking the Gentile and his house as unclean, how would the proselyte function within the body of Messiah if he had obligated himself under oath to observe the entire Oral Torah? He might very well be severed in great measure from his own family and friends who, though believers in Yeshua, were not proselytes. The Sages’ rulings regarding table fellowship alone would cause inescapable rifts! Such a separation in the body of Messiah was unthinkable from Paul’s perspective.

Indeed, the act of eating together was a confession of being members of the same covenant. Paul’s rebuke of Peter had come about over this very issue. To tell a Gentile that he was not welcomed at your table (as the Oral Torah might require in some cases), or to decline the invitation of a Gentile believer to eat in his home (note Peter’s initial reluctance to the idea that he should go to the home of Cornelius), was equally to deny that the Gentile was a member of God’s family—a fellow covenant member. Becoming a proselyte would require a separation based upon the traditions of men, and as far as Paul was concerned, that was “another Gospel” altogether. Surely if God had received the Gentile believers, evidenced by giving them His Spirit, then who was any man to reject them? Doing so would not only undermine the Gospel, but would also fly in the face of the Almighty.

We conclude, then, that when Paul prohibited the Gentile believers from receiving circumcision, he was warning them not to become proselytes, because to do so would require that they “keep the whole Torah,” which included the traditions of the elders, some of which were contrary to the Gospel of Yeshua. But prohibiting the Gentiles from becoming proselytes in no way limited their obedience to the eternal word of God as found in the Written Torah of Moses. It rather affirmed the truth that obedience to God was not a badge of Jewish status, but the inevitable fruit of saving faith. “What matters is

keeping the commandments.”

## *Colossians 2*

Juster and Resnik turn next to Colossians 2, and Paul’s exhortation to the community of believers in Colossae. Paul had a great struggle for the believers there, for he fears that they might be led astray “through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world” (v. 8). Apparently, there were those who were teaching the people contrary to Paul’s own message of the Gospel, a false teaching that including “self-abasement and the worship of angels,” doctrines based upon supposed mystical experiences such as visions (v. 18).<sup>18</sup> Paul traced these false doctrines to “the elementary principles of the world” (v. 20), to which the Colossians had “died with Messiah.” The false teachers were giving the Colossians their own list of commandments: “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (v. 21) which Paul specifically identifies as “the commandments and teachings of men” (v. 22). He reminds his readers that while such esoteric philosophies may appeal to the prideful wisdom of “self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body” (v. 23), they actually are of no value when it comes to living a sanctified life.

Juster and Resnik pick vv. 16–17 out of this larger context as their proof text:

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah.

They appeal to these verses as teaching that “the clear and main meaning of the text is that no one is to judge them as to whether or not they observe these days” (p. 5). Here is a classic example of eisegesis, importing meaning into an isolated text without concern for the context in which it is found. Clearly Paul is combating errant teachings of mystical philosophers in this passage, not giving an exposition on the relevance of the Mosaic Torah! This seems clear from the reference to “the elementary principles of the world,” described as “weak and worthless,” and which may parallel Paul’s use of the same phrase in Galatians 4:3, 9. There he connects the “elementary principles of the world” with the bondage and slavery characteristic of unbelievers:

4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.  
4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

He likewise connects calendrical observance to the “elemental things of the world” in this text: “You observe days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:10). Granted, in Colossians Paul does not include “years” as he does in the list in Galatians, but the similarities of the two passages are striking. Even if there are specific differences between Paul’s use of “elementary principles” in the two passages, what is common to both is that these principles are not the foundation for truth and righteousness but are part of a pagan philosophy that believers should shun. The “elemental principles” are part and parcel of the pagan belief that air, earth, wind, and fire (along with the planetary bodies and stars) were the governing factors in the universe, a belief that also found its way into Jewish philosophy, as evidenced in the writings of Philo.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Nanos and others have shown that in Galatians, the “days and

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18. ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύω is generally understood as referring to visions, see C. F. D. Moule, *Colossians in The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 105–6.

19. See *Vit. Mos.* 2.121, 125, where Philo parallels the garments of the High Priest to the universe, governed by the four στοιχεῖα “which hold together (συνίστημι) and administer all things.” In contrast, Paul affirms that Yeshua is the sovereign Creator of the universe, and that “in Him all things hold together (συνίστημι)” (Colossians 1:17).

months and seasons and years” may well refer, not to the Appointed Times of the Hebrew calendar, but to the festivals of the Imperial Cult.<sup>20</sup> What is conspicuously missing, if these the list in Galatians were to denote the Hebrew calendar, is the entry “weeks,” the very thing that set apart the Hebrew calendar from the pagan ones.

In Colossians 2, it seems very possible that Paul is combating a latent Gnosticism which, as history has shown, became a formidable foe to the Apostolic message by the end of the 1st Century CE. The warnings about the worship of angels as well as to self-abasement and severe treatment of the body point in that direction. Thus, it was in the midst of this errant teaching that the Colossians were being judged in respect to their observance of the kosher food laws, as well as their keeping of the Appointed Times. How were they being judged? Paul specifically indicates that the criteria for such judging was that of errant teachers, who followed the “tradition of men” rather than the word of God as taught and demonstrated by Messiah (v. 8). It is clear that Paul does not side with the false teachers who were doing the judging. On the contrary, his point is that the *mitzvot* of the Torah are shadows of Messiah,<sup>21</sup> and that therefore correctly observing them should lead to a greater appreciation of Him, not to puffed up arrogance over hidden, esoteric wisdom. Apparently these false teachers were judging the *halalchah* of the Colossians because it did not conform to their mystical understandings. In short, they were trying to persuade the believers in Colossae to follow them against what they had been taught by Paul. He thus strengthens the Colossian congregation by affirming that they need not give way to false teachers who were telling them to conform to their man-made traditions. Rather than feel compelled to follow teachers who based their instructions on visions and mystical philosophies, Paul urges the Colossians to remain firm in their faith in Messiah upon whom they had believed through the Gospel.

### *The Presence of the Future*

Juster and Resnik go on to write: “One of the serious problems with One Law interpretation is that it seems to ignore the awesome change that has come through the death and resurrection of Yeshua. The eschatological Kingdom has come and Gentiles are invited into full participation without the pre-Yeshua requirements” (p. 6). They continue by noting that “the spiritual equality of Jew and Gentile in the Messiah is a monumental change.” There’s a bit of double-speak here: they affirm the present reality of the eschatological Kingdom, but do so only in the realm of “spiritual equality,” by which they presumably mean “non-physical.” However, the eschatological Kingdom knows no platonic bifurcation of the physical and non-physical. The Gentiles celebrate the feasts with Israel (Zechariah 14) and honor the Sabbath (Isaiah 56), participating in the prayers and sacrifices of Israel in the Temple. If the eschatological Kingdom has come, then why would anyone want to restrict the Gentiles? The message of the prophets is replete with the picture of all the nations worshipping God *with* Israel, as Paul points out in the conclusion of Romans (15:7ff).

I fully agree that there is “no higher status” than to be in Messiah (p. 6), and that Jew and Gentile alike are seated together with Him in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6). This, in fact, is the very heart of the matter, and why I teach that there is one law for the native born and the foreigner, for our task is to make true on earth what is true in heaven: “May Your name be sanctified on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>22</sup> If Jew

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20. See Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Fortress, 2002), p. 267, and the other references he includes there; see also Mark Nanos, “A Torah-Observant Paul?: What Difference Could it Make for Christian/Jewish Relations Today?”, to be delivered at Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations (June 4–6, 2005), available for download at: <http://home.comcast.net/~nanosmd/Boston-Torah-Obs-5-9-05.pdf> (as of 5/22/05).

21. The inclusion of the word “mere” in the NASB or “only” in the NRSV of Colossians 2:17 is unfortunate: “things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah.” It is not represented in the Greek, but betrays the translators’ bias against the eternal viability of God’s Torah.

22. Throughout the latter prophets, God’s Name is presented as defamed by Israel’s disobedience, e.g., Ezekiel 36:22f. In

and Gentile in Messiah have equal privilege at the throne of the Almighty, shouldn't they have equal privilege at the synagogue Bimah? If both are equally blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:3), shouldn't both be privileged to participate in the Torah commandments here on earth, commandments which God promises will be attended with His blessing (Psalm 19:11[12])? If a *mezuzah* on the doorpost, or *tzitzit* worn on a four-cornered garment help us remember that our lives are hidden with God in Messiah and that therefore our actions should conform to His will, why would anyone want to keep these from anyone in God's family? When Juster and Resnik conclude that "the distinctive way of life mandated in the Torah for Israel is not presented as the ideal for all people" (p. 6), they are ignoring the eschatological perspective of Israel's prophets who foresee the goal of God's redemptive work in blessing all the nations:

Isaiah 2:3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the Torah will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 3:17 "At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

Zechariah 8:22 'So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.'

If, indeed, the eschatological Kingdom has dawned in the present age because of the risen and reigning Messiah, then the beginning of the future should be evident in our communities, a future that envisions the nations coming to Israel's God, seeking to walk in His ways.

### *Replacement Theology with a New Twist*

Juster and Resnik charge that we "have nothing to say concerning the unique calling and destiny of the Jewish people" (p. 6). To prove this, they quote a paragraph of the response to Resnik's article, "Torah & Israel: A Unique Relationship,"<sup>23</sup> but they misinterpret what is written. In summing up how they interpret the words of the response, they write: "The new and true Israel is said to replace the old Israel of flesh..." Nowhere in the response, or in any of the publications of FFOZ, is there any suggestion that a "new Israel" replaces the "old Israel of flesh!" A fair reading of our position, contained in many articles and books, would have never come to such a conclusion. Rather, our consistent teaching is that nothing replaces Israel but that Israel is enlarged by the believing Gentiles who are brought into her.

We believe that identity within Messiah is adequate for Jew and non-Jew alike. Becoming a believer does not make a Gentile Jewish, but it does guarantee him a heritage and inheritance within the people of God (Romans 4 and 11).<sup>24</sup>

So the use of the "new" vs. "old Israel" language is entirely imported by Juster and Resnik—it is nothing we have ever written or taught. No one who had honestly read and assessed the articles and

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contrast, His Name is sanctified when Israel returns to Him in obedience, the result of God's divine work within her, e.g., Ezekiel 36:36. Moreover, God is seen to be great when He enlarges Israel, Ezekiel 36:37–38. If anyone says that he or she loves God, this is shown by keeping His commandments: Deuteronomy 6:4f; Qohelet 12:13; John 14:15. God is sanctified upon the earth when we listen to His instructions and obey them, cf. Isaiah 29:23–24.

23. Russell Resnik, "Torah & Israel: A Unique Relationship," *messiah magazine*, 79 (2004), 28-9.

24. *Ibid.*, (response by FFOZ staff)

books we have written could level the charge that we teach “the old replacement theology with a new twist.” To suggest that we do is nothing but a straw-man argument.

But since this irresponsible accusation has been made, it is important for us to counter it by affirming once again: We do not believe there is a “new Israel” that replaces the “old Israel.” Rather, we fully affirm the continuity of the Jewish people as God’s chosen nation throughout the ages, uniquely maintained by God’s covenant faithfulness. What we also affirm is that God’s blessing of the nations does not occur apart from Israel, but within her, as God grafts the wild branches into the covenant Olive Tree. We have also taught that even those descendants of Jacob who have rejected Yeshua as the Messiah still retain the temporal blessings of the covenant God has promised. In doing so, we have also stressed the biblical teaching that a place in the world to come is predicated upon faith in Yeshua, and that apart from such faith, no one, Jew or Gentile, can stand before the judgment of the Almighty. Furthermore, God has set Himself to bring about the eternal salvation of the physical offspring of Jacob on a national scale in the end of days.

### *Features of the “Unique Calling of Messianic Jews”*

Juster and Resnik list eight areas that define their understanding of the “unique calling for Messianic Jews” within the body of Messiah. In large measure, all of these things listed are commendable, but it is questionable whether they comprise unique aspects of life relevant only for Jewish people. Moreover, to affirm that they are the unique responsibility of Jewish people including Jewish believers in Yeshua raises many other unanswered questions.

*First* is the “covenant responsibility for the whole Torah,” but only as it is “fitting to the New Covenant and an age without Temple and sacrifice.” They affirm that “circumcision is a unique marker of this call.” This raises the following questions which are not addressed:

1. Does this mean that Jewish people who fail to honor the Sabbath are sinning? If so, is the UMJC willing to make a strong effort to encourage Jewish people within the Christian Church to reverse their assimilation and obey those parts of the Torah that are not connected to the Temple and sacrifices? Or do they believe that the application of the Torah within the body of Messiah is only relevant to Messianic Jews? In other words, is the Torah still a covenant obligation for all Jews who have placed their faith in Yeshua, or only for those who decide it is for them?
2. If circumcision is a unique marker of this call, then is the UMJC ready to adopt Nichol’s proposal for Gentile conversion?<sup>25</sup> If so, how does this support the unique calling of Gentiles within the body of Messiah? Moreover, if a conversion ritual for believing Gentiles is adopted, will this be affirmed openly or kept hidden so as not to offend the Christian Church?
3. What exactly is meant by “fitting to the New Covenant?” When they write that Jewish people have a “covenant responsibility for the whole Torah,” are they willing to give concrete examples of what this looks like in terms of Torah observance? Are they affirming that Jews who disregard the dietary laws, for instance, are sinning?

*Second* is the connection to “Jewish life connected to the Jewish community” and the reality that Messianic Jews remain part of Jewish people.

1. If “push comes to shove,” will they affirm the mystery of Yeshua’s divinity in spite of the fact that this will mean their rejection by the larger Jewish community?

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25. Richard C. Nichol, “The Case for Conversion: Welcoming non-Jews into Messianic Jewish Space.”

2. In their desire to be received within the larger Jewish community, will they still maintain that a Jewish person who rejects Yeshua as the Messiah has no place in the world to come?<sup>26</sup>
3. Is this aspect of the “unique call” actually the most vital of issues in their thinking? Is the desire to maintain a vital participation in Jewish life connected with Jewish community the reason why Gentile participation needs to be limited? Or to ask the question differently: Is it necessary in your mind to limit Gentile participation in Messianic congregations in order to maintain this living connection with the wider Jewish community? If so, how does limiting Gentile participation in Messianic Judaism show the reality that eschaton has invaded the present age? Is there Scriptural evidence to support the idea that one’s people-group connection is a priority over ones’ life-to-life community with a fellow believer in Yeshua who is a non-Jew?

*Third* is the connection to Hebrew and the Land of Israel, along with the “good aspects of the culture of Israel today.”

1. How does this work out practically for Messianic Jews living in the Diaspora, and how does this appear any differently for Gentile believers who love and support the Land of Israel, and desire to know the language of the Tanach (Hebrew/Aramaic)?
2. Are non-Jewish believers living in the Land suppose to keep themselves from Hebrew and the culture of the Land of Israel?

*Fourth* is the “implied command in the Bible that we are not to undercut the survival of our people. We are not to assimilate.”

1. Are not all who love God to strengthen the survival of God’s nation of Israel, and to support the Jewish people? How is such a perspective unique to Jewish people?
2. If Jewish believers are not to assimilate, what is the UMJC and other represented groups doing to call Jewish believers in Yeshua, who have clearly assimilated to a non-Jewish way of life within the many Christian Churches, to this unique duty? Or do you hold that this “calling” is unique only to some Jewish believers? If so, how does this work in terms of *covenant* responsibilities?

*Fifth* is the unique calling to a “prophetic role in the last days by that Jewish contingent that witnesses to Yeshua before our people and before the nations.”

1. How does this square with the vision of the prophets that unbelieving Israel is brought to faith when they look upon the One who is pierced (Zechariah 12:10ff), or Paul’s understanding that the hardening upon Israel remains in place “until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25)?
2. From the standpoint of the prophets, the success of Israel’s mission as a light to the nations is

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26. The many statements being quoted over the controversial Jerusalem Post article, “Zaka Gets Donations from Messianic Jews” (July 3, 2003) and the senior thesis by Gabriela Karabelnik, “Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism” (Unpublished senior thesis, Department of Religious Studies, Yale University, 2002), along with the retraction of Loren Jacob’s ordination by the UMJC, are troubling at best, though one is always leery that people have been misquoted or misrepresented. Yet written statements, such as those found in Mark Kinzer, “The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species” (*Hashivenu Archives*, 2000) appear to be very close to a “two-covenant” theology, which is also troubling. See also Mark Kinzer, “Toward a Theology of Messianic Judaism,” *Kesher* 10 (2000) and further discussions on Kinzer’s articles in *Kesher* 12 (Winter, 2001) and 13 (Summer, 2001).

that the nations come to her light, and worship her God with her (e.g., Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Zechariah 2:11). How does your desire to limit Gentile participation within Messianic Judaism square with this perspective, and the fact that the eschatological Kingdom has invaded the present?

*Sixth* is the welcoming of Yeshua with the words “*Baruch haba b’shem Adonai.*”

1. This phrase is quoted from Psalm 118:26, and is in the context of worship within the Temple: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.” Does this mean that the Temple is re-established when the prophetic words of Yeshua (Matthew 23:39; Luke 13:35) are fulfilled? Yeshua’s words in this context refer to the “house left desolate” (Matthew 23:38), which most take as a reference to the coming destruction of the Temple.
2. Why is the pronouncement of this blessing limited to the physical descendants of Jacob? In the message of the Gospel writers, would this not also include the Gentiles who have joined themselves to the Lord? If the restored Temple is to be the “house of prayer for all peoples,” why would not all participate in welcoming the Messiah with this blessing?

*Seven* is involvement in the “heritage of our people where it is good and beautiful as a part of our unique peoplehood...we cannot adequately express Jewish life if we ignore 2000 years of cultural development.”

1. Once again, why is the rich heritage of Israel limited to those with Jewish lineage? If God’s people are one, then the pagan culture that Gentiles leave when they confess the God of Israel is replaced by the culture defined by God’s people.
2. Why would that which is “good and beautiful” not be the privilege of all of God’s children who have been adopted into His family? If this is the culture of the Messiah Himself, would not all who claim Him as their Master long to participate in His way of life?

*Eight* is the “prophetic priestly role” which is the privilege of the Jewish people as they “engage in Biblical celebrations.” Juster and Resnik suggest that these celebrations “call into being the events of the last days and the redemption of the World.”<sup>27</sup> There is no doubt that the celebration of God’s Appointed Times have both an historical as well as eschatological reality. But they do so in that they are divine revelations of what God has done and what He will do. Moreover, as modes of divine revelation, they witness to the plan of God, both past, present, and future. The celebration of the Festivals do not “call into being” the events of the last days, but commemorate and anticipate what God has already proclaimed He would do.

1. Why is it presumed that the Gentile believers are prohibited from celebrating these Appointed Times? Once again, the prophets envision the nations joining Israel in her celebrations. Is there any place in Scripture that call the Festivals the exclusive possession of the Jewish people?
2. The presentation of Israel as fulfilling a priestly role among the nations seems contrary to the thesis of the “One Law” paper. For is it not the role of a priest to bring the one he represents close to God? The function of the priesthood was to teach and draw the people near, not to exclude those for whom they intercede.

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27. This language is reminiscent of R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress, 1996).

3. Peter's description of the believing community as a "royal priesthood" (1Peter 2:4ff, quoting Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6) must extend to the believing Gentiles as well (cf. 1Peter 4:1–6). Why, then, is the priestly function as proclaiming the God of Israel and His work in the last days relegated only to Jewish people?

### *Post-biblical Jewish Practices*

Juster and Resnik confess that they are puzzled over the use of rabbinic traditions by Torah communities who teach that there is one Torah for Jew and Gentile alike (p. 7). They charge that Gentiles who celebrate the festivals do so, not strictly from a biblical basis, but after the tradition of post-biblical Judaism, and they use the Pesach Seder as an example. They suggest that by incorporating post-biblical traditions, there is a blurring of what is from the Scriptures and what is not. This is a valid concern, but it is just as much a concern in Messianic congregations everywhere, not just those who advocate equal privilege and responsibility for Jew and Gentile. And in fact, various communities have approached this question in different ways. Some use a greater amount of rabbinic or Jewish traditions than others. Recently, FFOZ published a Pesach Hagaddah that would be considered by most as dismissing a good amount of "post-biblical" traditions.<sup>28</sup>

But how does one access what is "post-biblical" and what is not? The Mishnah seems to suggest that a great deal of the traditional Pesach Seder is very early, including the four cups, the breaking of the matzah, the telling of the story, the "Hillel sandwich," dipping the bitter herbs, reclining while eating, reciting the ten plagues, and so forth. For those who wish to celebrate the Pesach in a similar manner as Yeshua did (yet without Temple and sacrifice), why would these things be considered "post-biblical" when there is some good evidence that His Seder would have included them? Moreover, other symbols such as the *mezzuzah* or *tzitzit* have clear continuity back to the time of Yeshua as well, and the use of the Menorah as reminiscent of the Temple seems appropriate for anyone who anticipates and prays for its rebuilding. Granted, the wearing of *kippot* is clearly a later rabbinic invention, but many Gentiles with whom I've spoken say that they wear a *kippah* during the Shabbat service as a way of honoring the Jewish members of the congregation. When a man goes to the Kotel, for instance, or to any Orthodox place of prayer, he is required to wear a *kippah* or something on his head, regardless of whether he is Jewish or not, yet no one presumes that this diminishes Jewish identity.

We have always affirmed that Gentiles who come to faith in Yeshua do not thereby become Jews but remain as those grafted into God's covenant family from the nations. Only when both Jews and Gentiles are seen as recipients of God's grace in Yeshua is He likewise seen as faithful to His covenant promises. But when I talk about "seen as recipients of God's grace," I'm not using theological jargon or gnostic idealism. I'm talking about Jews and Gentiles worshipping together and engaging in community life together. It is when Jew and Gentile actually struggle to be one in the service of the King that the theological constructs of the Apostolic Scriptures are actually lived out. Jamie Cowen has said it well:

It is one thing to mutually respect one another's community and even invite the other into the community as a guest; it is another to be an active participant in the community. In one you are a guest, in the other a member. A corporate unity with separate organizations or congregations is a myth. Real unity is expressed in intimate relationships, which can only occur within one community. Paul's admonitions in both Romans and Galatians reflects this fact.<sup>29</sup>

Juster and Resnik are afraid that such a scenario will compromise the identity of both Jew and Gentile.

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28. Boaz Michael, *Passover Encounter* (FFOZ, 2005).

29. Jamie Cowen, "A Response to Dr. Mark Kinzer," *Keshet* 12 (Winter, 2001), 116.

But there are two sides to identity.

Like all group identity issues, there is the view from within the defined group, and the view of those outside of it. From within the group, it is recognized that there are those who are Jews and those who are not, and both are affirmed as equal members of God's family. Speaking from my own experience within a Torah community that is now nearly 17 years old, it is not uncommon to hear visitors ask an individual, "Are you Jewish?" And to hear the response, "No, but My Messiah is," or "yes, I grew up in the Reform synagogue here in town," or "I have Jewish ancestry, but I grew up in a non-religious home," or similar responses. Those viewing us from outside our community, however, may not see these distinctions as clearly. Still, it is not uncommon to hear Gentile believers relate stories from their work place of how they are asked if they have converted to Judaism, and the opportunities these questions afford to express their faith as a non-Jew in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in His Messiah, Yeshua. If a non-Jewish member of our community orders kosher meals on his airplane flight, it's understandable why people will presume he or she is Jewish. But if they ask, they will get a clear answer that they are not Jewish, but that they honor the laws of God because He is not only the God of the Jews, but also of all who believe in His Son, Yeshua.

We oppose the errant theology of some groups who have tried to find imaginary ancestry through linkage to the so-called "Lost Tribes," or who teach that believers in Yeshua are "spiritual Jews." We rather affirm that God has chosen both Jews and Gentiles to become part of His people, and that together we display the utter faithfulness of God to bless both the seed of Jacob as well as "all the families of the earth" by His grace in Yeshua. But we also affirm that God has always intended to display His blessings upon one family, not two.<sup>30</sup>

The statement of Juster and Resnik at the conclusion of the paper is worthy of our attention:

The refrain "One people, One Messiah, One Torah" must be balanced with the affirmation of God's continuing election of the Jewish people alongside His election of the Messiah-believing community. Without this balance, such a refrain resembles the language of Christian theology used for centuries to argue for the replacement of Israel by the Church.

The need to affirm the biblical truth of God's continuing election of the Jewish people is an important truth and therefore something we must never fail to emphasize, and something I have often stressed when I teach or write. But here, again, Juster and Resnik have failed to reckon with the fact that God's election is both corporate (i.e., the Jewish people as the nation descended from Jacob) as well as individual (those who comprise the elect in Yeshua, both Jew and Gentile). Both must be affirmed as the revealed work of God. Yet we must also realize that God's intention to save individuals eternally is not something separate from His purposes for Israel, as though God has two distinct peoples. Paul constantly views the salvation of individuals chosen from the nations as in concert with (and not separate from) God's covenant faithfulness to Israel. In the final analysis, God's eternal purposes, centered as they are upon Yeshua (2Cor 1:20), find their locus of fulfillment in one nation, and one nation alone—and that is the nation of Israel.

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30. The issue of whether the body of Messiah is one community or two is, in fact, at the heart of the on-going debate within the UMJC and other Messianic Jewish groups (e.g., Tikkun and Hashivenu). One need only read Kinzer's works (see footnote 24 above) and the responses to them to realize that there is no clear unity within these various denominations/fellowships/unions of Messianic Congregations. Yet the fact that Juster and Resnik both are top leaders of their various groups indicates that their co-authored "One Law Movements" paper defines the direction they intend their organizations to go. And it seems clear, when comparing articles written in *Kesher* since 2000, that there is a steady trend in these groups toward the theological constructs proposed by Kinzer in his "Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species" article.

### *Some Gentiles Worthy of Particular Honor*

The final paragraphs of the paper by Juster and Resnik resonates with the extra-biblical theology upon which their premise is based:

Gentiles who are called to be part of the Messianic Jewish community are worthy of particular honor, not because they have finally realized that they are responsible for Torah in the same way as their Jewish brothers, but because they have voluntarily taken on a relationship to Torah out of a love for the God and people of Israel.

Where in any part of the inspired Scriptures does one find that some Gentiles are particularly “called” by God to join the Jewish remnant of believers, while the majority of the elect from the nations form a different entity all together? Or that the few Gentiles who have “voluntarily taken on a relationship to Torah out of a love for the God and people of Israel” are worthy of special honor? In fact, such an idea is altogether foreign to the Bible! Clearly such a premise is based upon a theology constructed to support their desired conclusions, a theology that presupposes the body of Messiah to be composed of two distinct entities: the Gentile Church and Messianic Judaism.

The major problem for Juster and Resnik, then, results from those who want to cross the boundary lines. Jews who assimilate into Christianity have neglected their unique calling. Gentiles who want to be part of Messianic Judaism blur Jewish self-identity. So it becomes clear that the root of this whole controversy, as well as the impetus for the One Law paper itself, is the “Gentile problem,” something the UMJC and other groups apparently hope to solve.<sup>31</sup>

Except for Gentiles who are trying to cross the fence, there could be the Gentile Church and Messianic Judaism, all bounded by neat lines of demarcation that keeps everyone clearly defined and separate. Yet from a practical standpoint, excluding Gentiles from Messianic Judaism is hardly possible, since they currently comprise the majority in most Messianic Congregations. I suppose one also ought to mention the fact that no such scenario is even remotely envisioned in the Scriptures, which might also be considered a problem, at least by some.

The only solution offered by Juster and Resnik to this dilemma created by the “Gentile problem” is to postulate a special, divine call upon a few Gentiles to join Messianic Judaism, with the possibility of a conversion ceremony by which they could be reckoned as Jews, thus maintaining the identity boundaries of Messianic Judaism as distinct from the Gentile Church while “theologically” still part of it. Such a scenario might allow Messianic Jews to be accepted within the wider Jewish community, something that is considered impossible as long as Gentiles comprise a significant percentage of Messianic Jewish synagogues. It is hard to escape the perception that what actually drives the current “Two Law” position of Juster and Resnik is this goal to win acceptance within the larger, traditional Jewish community at the expense of their Gentile brothers and sisters.

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31. While attending the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2000 (Nashville, TN), I had a conversation with Rabbi Jerry Feldman, leader of UMJC congregation Adat Yeshua in Overland Park, Kansas. We were discussing a paper presented by Kanan Rosenstein, in which he had claimed Messianic Judaism was for Jews, not Gentiles. In the course of our conversation, Feldman made a startling statement: “I do everything possible to discourage Gentiles from joining our congregation.” One could only surmise from such statements that for Rabbi Feldman, Gentile believers in Yeshua are a problem for Messianic Judaism. I would suggest that the Influencers (to use the language of Mark Nanos) in Galatia felt the same way.

## Conclusion

The current struggle within Messianic Judaism is one that existed from its earliest days, namely, the issue of self-definition. In the earlier stages of modern Messianic Judaism, self-definition revolved around mission, that is, the evangelical desire to draw Jewish people to faith in Yeshua as well as to persuade the Church to reconnect with her Hebrew roots. The first part of this mission has been only marginally successful. Once Jewish people realized that Messianic Judaism was the bait on an otherwise Christian hook, most of them wanted nothing to do with it. The second part, teaching the Church about her Jewish Roots, was far more successful, and thus became the primary defining factor. The “Hebrew Roots Movement” became the primary result of early Messianic endeavors. This success, however, produced an unforeseen consequence: Christian Gentiles who connected with the “Jewish Roots of the Christian faith” often were more zealous for joining Messianic Judaism than were the Jewish people. And this in turn created an even greater identity crisis for the Messianic Jews, because the influx of Gentiles continued to dilute a distinctive Jewish identity, and even more, gave the strong impression that Messianic Judaism was actually a sub-group of Christianity rather than one connected to the historic Jewish people. Since the ‘90’s, some leaders and teachers within Messianic Judaism, such as Stuart Dauermann, Tony Eaton, Mark Kinzer, Rich Nichol, Daniel Juster, Russ Resnik, and Andrew Sparks (to name just a few) have therefore sought to find how they could overcome this problem, and position Messianic Judaism as a *bona fide* sub-group of historic Judaism. In order to accomplish this, two significant stumbling blocks that impeded connection to the traditional Jewish communities needed to be reassessed. These were 1) the need to call Jewish people to repentance and faith in Yeshua as the only way for their eternal salvation, and 2) acceptance of Gentile believers as equal members within the Messianic community. An example of the shift in defining an evangelical mission to the Jewish people may be seen in Tony Eaton’s statement that “If Abraham Heschel is not in heaven, I don’t belong there either, regardless of what I think about Jesus.”<sup>32</sup> It is hard to imagine Paul sharing similar sentiments! Regarding Gentiles as equal members within Messianic Judaism, Kinzer notes:

More leaders are concluding that Messianic Jewish congregations should be primarily Jewish. In the past, Messianic congregations have generally defined themselves as a place where Jews and Gentiles worship together, witnessing to the unity of Jews and Gentile. Many in the UMJC are seeing this as a defective definition.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, as the leaders of various Messianic Jewish groups move toward the goal of this newly evolved self-definition, we see attempts to de-emphasize the earlier evangelical mission of Messianic Judaism toward the Jewish people at large, as well as to de-Gentilize Messianic Judaism.

Modern approaches to the Scriptures have been necessary to move in this direction. It is clear that Mark Kinzer, for example, has accepted a hermeneutic of pragmatic contextualization in which certain texts are given privilege over others, depending upon what suits the current need.<sup>34</sup> In short, when Paul’s “pastoral strategy” (of a multi-national *ekklesia*) seems out of step with the current desire to be accepted within the traditional Jewish community, it may be disregarded in favor of a more propitious alternative. It seems a very slippery slope indeed when, for the sake of a desired outcome, one engages in selective approbation of the Scriptures. I recognize that such a viewpoint may not be espoused by all who are

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32. Quote from Gabriela Karabelnik, “Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism” (Unpublished senior thesis, Department of Religious Studies, Yale University, 2002). See also Gabriela M. Reason, “Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism,” *Kesher* 17 (Spring, 2004).

33. Gabriela M. Reason, “Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism,” *Kesher* 17 (Spring, 2004), 62.

34. See Derek Leman, “A Response to Dr. Mark Kinzer,” *Kesher* 12 (Winter, 2001), 101.

opting for the new definition of Messianic Judaism. But it is at least honest of Kinzer to admit that the path forward for Messianic Judaism, at least as he sees it, cannot be reconciled with some of Paul's teachings. It remains to be seen, therefore, how others will approach the Scriptures as they seek to achieve the same goal.

This brief overview of the struggle for self-definition within Messianic Judaism helps us understand why the One Law paper was written in the first place. As the UMJC and associated groups move toward their new definition of Messianic Judaism, our Torah message is clearly a dissonant voice, not only because we believe the Torah is God's gift to all of His children, but because we stress what Paul stresses, a single family of God where Jew and non-Jew fellowship in the shalom won by the Messiah's salvific work. As long as our message continues to be espoused by more and more of the Messianic community, it stands as a growing challenge to the UMJC message of duality.

We all agree to the need for self-identity as Jew and Gentile in Messiah, but we are not agreed as to what price we are willing to pay for such identity. None could produce such an impeccable Jewish pedigree as Paul, who from his birth was immersed in Jewish culture, language, heritage, *mitzvot* and social grouping (Philippians 3:5–6). Moreover, Paul never despised his heritage nor his Jewishness. He openly affirmed who he was as a Jew. Yet in terms of his association with Gentile believers, he recognized the price that had been paid to achieve it, and he therefore considered it of extreme value. He never thought he would have to decide between the two, but he had already made up his mind that if such were the case, he would willingly maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of shalom, because that is what his Messiah had died for. He could thus write (Philippians 3:7–11):

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Master, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Torah, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The challenge that is before us is one of maintaining the basics. Will we continue to hold the Scriptures up, not merely as a witness to what was, but as the divine directive to what must be? Are we willing to submit to the inspired text despite the fact that doing so will continue to put us in "no man's land," between the traditional Christian Church on the one hand, and the traditional Jewish community (along with those Messianic Jewish groups who desperately wish to be recognized as partners with them) on the other? And while in this marginalized zone, will we still affirm groups on both sides of us as our brothers and sisters, even if they are not willing so to affirm us? And will we maintain the priority of Yeshua, Who is our Master and Savior, confessing the wonder of His divine humanity, walking in His footsteps, and reveling in the mystery of His unending grace and love?

If anyone of us is honest, we will admit that we enjoy the affirmation of others. No one likes being rejected. But our desire to be affirmed by others cannot take a priority over the fundamental truths that define who we are in Yeshua. When Paul confessed that he was not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16), he teaches us that it *is possible* to be ashamed of that Gospel. This is because the Gospel proclaims the suffering Messiah, Who was impoverished so that we might become rich. In doing so, the Gospel appears foolish to the unregenerate mind. But Paul had learned that though to the natural mind the Gospel of Yeshua aroused no great prestige, yet in the hands of the Spirit, it was the power of God that results in salvation, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The challenge that faces us, then, is whether we will live out the message of that Gospel.

If we are to meet this challenge, we must never weary in the study, learning, and application of God's eternal word. Moreover, by God's strength, through His Ruach, we must continue to carefully, humbly, but boldly, proclaim the message of the Scriptures in word and deed, anticipating the return of

our Messiah to reign in Jerusalem.

*Postscript*

I hold no illusions of grandeur that this response will convince my detractors to agree with me. Nor have I been convinced by their arguments. I did not write this response to win the approval of Juster and Resnik, and those they represent or who applaud their position. I wrote it for those of you who, simply because you desire to obey God's Torah, and to fellowship in the life of faith that it nourishes, are accused of doing something wrong, marginalizing the Jewish people, and even accepting a form of Replacement theology. My hope is that what I have written will encourage those who are committed to a Torah way of life to continue growing in their appreciation for the beauty of God's ways.

Enough words have been exchanged. We have each sufficiently stated and defined our positions, made clear how we differ on the issue of the Torah in the life of believers in Yeshua (both Jewish and non-Jewish), and how we interpret the relevant biblical texts. Hopefully those who read our respective works will be encouraged to search the Scriptures themselves, to test our words against those of the inspired text, and stand firm in "the faith which was once and for all passed on to God's people" (Jude 1:4, CJB).