

# Chapter One

## *Introduction*

A growing movement is afoot among the followers of Yeshua (Jesus). Some refer to this movement as the “Messianic Movement” while others use the label “Torah Movement.” Regardless, what characterizes this movement is a renewed interest in the first five books of the Bible, often referred to as “the Law” or “the Books of Moses,” or (in Hebrew) “Torah.” The primary question that many people are asking these days is quite simple: “what place does the Law of God have in the lives of those who confess Yeshua to be their Savior and Messiah?” The current teaching of much of the Christian Church, that the Torah or Law of God has been abolished, set aside, or replaced by the “New Testament,” has been less than satisfying for many people who have returned to studying the Scriptures on their own and as a result have wondered why so many of the commandments of God enumerated in the “Old Testament” find no place in the life of the Church and in modern Christianity. When they ask the leaders of their own Church about such questions, they are often met with smug replies or even disgust. Of even greater concern is the response when they begin to keep some of the commandments, such as observing the Sabbath as a day of rest set apart from the six days of work, or eating foods in accordance with the Torah guidelines. They are accused of giving up the essentials of their faith, as though they believe that salvation is gained by works rather than by faith in Yeshua! Or they are marginalized as those who desire to “go back under the Law,” diminishing the completed work of Yeshua.

Many of us have experienced this to one extent or another. What often ensues are the discussions, often infused with a great deal of emotion, about how we are overlooking the clear and straightforward teaching of Jesus and His Apostles, to the effect that the Torah (or Law) has been done away with and that true believers in Jesus have entered into a “new way,” that is, the “New Covenant” in which these old things have passed away. Usually the arguments that are presented to prove that the Torah no longer has any binding authority upon believers in Yeshua are built upon a single premise: “If I can prove to you that even one Law has been abolished, then it follows that all of the Law has been replaced by the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles.” Those who oppose the Torah as a standard of righteous living for followers of Yeshua are quick to point out that they do not oppose the Torah outright, for they affirm that the Books of Moses are the word of God. But they simply argue that the laws contained in the Torah have lost current relevancy and that the followers of Yeshua now are required to obey only those Laws that are given to us in the “New Testament.” So they seek to show that commandments related to the Sabbath, food laws, yearly festivals, and so forth were incumbent upon ancient

Israel, but have no relevance for modern day believers. Some would go so far as to say that the laws contained in the Torah remain relevant for Jewish people, but then this opens a whole new theological conundrum which most are unwilling to pursue, namely, how such a theological position should be properly applied to Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Inevitably, when such discussions, debates, or arguments are presented, the same questions and biblical texts are brought forward. I have termed these as “Persistent Questions” because time and time again they are brought forward by those who oppose the application of Torah to the lives of believers in Yeshua. Now, there are far more than 10 such questions! But I have chosen those that, in my own experience, most often surface in these discussions. Generally, they revolve around the Sabbath, food laws, and circumcision, and (as I have said), are argued from the standpoint that if Yeshua or His Apostles dismissed these as no longer applicable to “New Covenant believers,” then it follows that the whole Torah has been replaced with new laws or commandments. So I have chosen these “10 Persistent Questions” as generally those with which we who desire to incorporate Torah commandments into our life of faith in Yeshua are confronted.

Here is a list of the “10 Persistent Questions” I have chosen to discuss in this study, and some of the sub-questions or topics that they contain:

### **1. Didn't Yeshua declare all foods clean (Mark 7:19)?**

- In this story, Jesus dismisses the Old Testament food laws, and thus the distinction between “clean” and “unclean.”
- He also sets aside all of the traditions of the Jewish elders as irrelevant of His followers
- He makes it clear in this text that if your heart is right, it really doesn't matter what you eat. From this we learn that in the New Covenant the outward things give way to the inward, spiritual realities.

### **2. If we're to keep Torah, what about animal sacrifices?**

- In ancient Israel, a person's sins were forgiven when they brought the proper animal sacrifice. But now that Jesus has come, sins are forgiven by accepting His once-for-all-time sacrifice.
- The fact that the sacrifices have been done away with proves that the Torah has also been done away with.
- Ezekiel's description of a future Temple must therefore be describing “spiritual,” not physical, sacrifices.

- 3. If Yeshua and His Apostles Changed the Sabbath to Sunday, Doesn't that Prove that the Torah has been Abolished?**
  - The observance of the Sabbath was given by God to Israel to teach them a spiritual lesson, namely, that our rest would be won by Christ.
  - We therefore rest, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual one. The outward observance of the Sabbath has given way to the inward, spiritual rest that we have in Jesus.
  
- 4. Doesn't Paul Dismiss the Torah's Laws about Food, Festivals, New Moons, and Sabbath in Colossians 2?**
  - The things of the Law were all shadows pointing forward to Christ. Now that Christ has come, the shadows are no longer of any value. Who wants shadows when one can have the substance?
  - When the New Testament believer focuses on the shadows, the centrality of Jesus is displaced.
  - These words of Paul make it clear that many of the commandments of the Torah became obsolete when Jesus came.
  
- 5. In Peter's Vision (Acts 10), Didn't God Make it Clear that there was No Longer any Need to Keep the Food Laws of the Torah?**
  - Peter was stuck in the mode of thinking that to live righteously, one had to follow the laws given to Israel. God's command that he should eat something unclean was given so that Peter would realize those laws had been done away with.
  - If the food laws have been abolished, doesn't this prove that the Law itself has been set aside?
  
- 6. Paul makes it clear that we are "not under the Law." Doesn't that mean that we no longer are required to obey the Torah?**
  - what Paul means by "under Law" is "required to obey the Law." Since we are not "under Law" but "under grace," we are no longer required to obey the Law.
  - Those who are teaching that the Torah (Law) is still to be obeyed have missed the glory of God's grace! Now that Jesus has come, the inferior Law has been replaced with God's grace.
  - Now, since God has given us His grace in Jesus, we have only one law—the Law of love. If we love God and love our neighbor, then we have fulfilled the whole Law (Lk 10:25–28; Rom 13:8, 10; Gal 5:14; James 2:8)

**7. If Paul abolished the commandment of circumcision, doesn't that prove that the Torah has been abolished?**

- Since Paul clearly teaches that circumcision has been done away with, he must likewise be teaching that the requirements of the Law have been set aside, for surely the Law required that all males be circumcised.
- Further, since circumcision has been abolished, and since circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Israel, it is clear that this covenant has also been dismissed.
- God is only concerned with the circumcision of the heart now. The physical sign has given way to its spiritual reality.

**8. Didn't the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) Make it Clear that the Torah was Only for Jewish People?**

- The Apostles dealt with the issue of the Law at the Jerusalem Council. They concluded that the Gentiles did not need to live in accordance with the Law, but gave them only four requirements.
- If there is any current use of the Law, it is only to give identity to the Jewish people. It is no longer a moral or ethical code, much less a standard of righteousness for Christians.

**9. Wasn't the Torah Given to Condemn Sinners and Not as a Guide for Living Righteously? (1Tim 1:8; Gal 3:19)**

- The Law was never given to make people righteous, nor was it given as a standard for how people should live. God gave Israel the Law in order to prove to them that they need God's grace.
- In fact, the Law was given to show Israel their sin and to cause them to look to Christ as the only way to be saved. Once a person comes to Christ, they no longer need the Law.

**10. Didn't God Abolish the Ceremonial and Civil Parts of the Torah, Requiring of Us only the Moral Laws?**

- When Jesus came, His words and teachings became the new Law for all who received Him. The old Law was therefore replaced by the new Law that Jesus brought.
- The ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament were given to Israel only until Jesus came. When Jesus did come, these externals were done away with. Now that we have the Spirit to guide us, we are called to obey the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses. It is in the teachings of Christ and His Apostles that the moral aspects of the Law are more perfectly understood.

As noted above, these questions will be the focus of our study in this course, but they by no means exhaust the questions that have arisen regarding the place of the Torah in the life of the believer in Yeshua. I hope, however, that as we seek biblical answers to these questions, a good deal of light will be shed upon the primary question, namely, “Why we keep Torah.”

When asked to give a short, direct answer to this question, I usually respond “because God told us to keep the Torah” or “because I want to follow in the footsteps of Messiah, and He kept the Torah.” While such an answer may seem flippant or even naive, it brings forward a most important issue, that of hermeneutics, or the method by which one interprets the Bible. Everyone who affirms the authority of the Bible would agree that the Bible is clear about God wanting His people to keep His commandments:

Deut. 5:29 Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!

Deut. 11:1 You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.

Deut. 13:4 You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

Josh. 22:5 Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

1Kings 8:61 Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.

Psa. 119:1 How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the Torah of the LORD.

Ecl. 12:13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

1John 2:3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and

the truth is not in him;

1John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Rev. 14:12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Yeshua.

“But,” some will hasten to argue, “it all depends upon how you interpret these verses!” Some will argue that those texts in the “Old Testament” are specifically written to Israel, not to the Gentiles. Others will interpret “commandments” in various ways, determining that some commandments endure while others do not. Still others will interpret passages from the Tanach (Old Testament) as having less authority than those of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). Some will find a deeper, “spiritual” interpretation of the commandments, interpreting them allegorically. So, given all of the various interpretations by so many different scholars and groups, how are we to be sure about what the Bible actually says? In short, is there a “proper” method of interpretation?

This is not a course on hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> But it is important to state from the beginning that I accept the grammatical, historical hermeneutic. In short, I may sum up my understanding of this hermeneutic in three basic axioms: 1) that the word of God is incarnational, 2) that words do not have meaning apart from their grammatical and historical (cultural) background, and 3) that words do not have meaning apart from the context in which they are found.

*The word of God is incarnational* — What I mean by this is that the Bible is the inspired word of God given in common human languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) just as the Word of God (Yeshua) is God in common, human flesh. This means that in the same way that Yeshua was fully man yet fully divine, so the Scriptures are divinely inspired yet given to us in common, human languages. This means that we should employ common, human methods of interpretation to understand the meaning of the words. In short, there is no *sensus plenior*, or “deeper sense” to be found in the Scriptures. As in all human communication, the words themselves, cast in phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc., carry the meaning of the author. The languages of the Scripture are not themselves sacred. It is the inspired message that these common languages convey that is sacred.

*Words do not have meaning apart from their grammatical and historical (cultural) background* — Words develop and evolve over time. One need only consider the way that the word “bad” is used in modern day slang to get a sense

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Interpreting the Bible: An Introduction to Hermeneutics* (<https://www.torahresource.com/shop/books/interpreting-bible-intro-hermeneutics>)

of this. It is foolhardy to think that when a modern American teenager describes an automobile as “really bad” he means that the car has many flaws! In all cultures, in all eras of earth’s history, words take on special or even technical meanings that can only be known when one understands the social context in which they are uttered or written. It is blatantly neglectful to think that one can understand the words of Yeshua and His Apostles without taking into due consideration the Jewish culture in which they were spoken and written.

In a similar way, grammatical and syntactical issues evolve as a language evolves. What might be correct grammar in one era is incorrect in another. One example from English will suffice to demonstrate this. Until recently, subjunctive clauses in the singular demanded a verb in the plural: “If I were a rich man” is correct grammar, not “If I was a rich man.” However, in modern times, scholars in English grammar are suggesting that this grammatical rule is antiquated and needs to be dropped. Such grammatical and syntactical changes are evident in the Scriptures, for they span millennia of time in their writing. To presume that the grammar of the Torah is equivalent with the grammar of the post-exilic books is, once again, to neglect the obvious evolution of the Hebrew language.

*Words do not have meaning apart from the context in which they are found*— Quite often in theological debates, those on opposite sides resort to “proof texting.” This is when a verse or two is taken entirely out of the context in which they are found, and thus given a meaning that the wider context could never support. For instance, one could claim that Peter believed in salvation by baptism. After all, 1Peter 3:21 states quite plainly, “baptism now saves you.” If one looks at the fuller context, however, it is clear that Peter is making an illustrative parallel between Noah and his family in the ark (who were saved from the flood) and the common practice of the *mikvah* in 1st Century Judaism. Even as the ark was the means by which God physically saved Noah and his family, so the *mikvah* dramatizes the reality of resurrection, and particularly the resurrection of Yeshua. Here’s the whole verse:

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah...

“Proof texting” is often dangerous work. It takes snatches of texts out of their contexts and imports meaning into them which the author himself never intended.

It will be our duty, then, in this course, to interpret the various biblical texts we will encounter, within their historical and cultural background, in accordance with good grammar and syntax, and within their larger contexts.

