

Is Messiah the Termination of the Torah?

or: Is Christ the End of the Law?

by J.K. McKee

A foundational principle of Christianity is supposed to be “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In theory, most evangelical conservative Christians claim to honor the Bible as if all of it is the inspired, inerrant word of the Lord. However, in practice, the same cannot often be said, especially when it comes to most Christians’ attitude concerning the Law of Moses or the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy).

The Psalmist declares, “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8), and “If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction” (Psalm 119:92). Yeshua tells us in Matthew 19:17, “if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” These concepts are admittedly hard to understand for today’s Christian. Have we not also been taught, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8) and “if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Messiah died needlessly” (Galatians 2:21)? These too are important concepts of our faith.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). We are to be very careful when handling Holy Scripture, especially if one claims that certain parts of it, such as the Law of Moses, are no longer relevant for today’s Believer. As Yeshua warns, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

What is the average Christian to do about these “contradictions” in the pages of the Bible? From one perspective, we could argue that the Torah is not for the Believer, whereas from another, we could come to the conclusion that a Believer must and should be observing God’s commands. Rather than be dogmatic about a particular persuasion, let truth be our ultimate quest. Let us understand that the Bible has no contradictions regarding God’s purpose and plan for His people—and that it is our job to seek what is true above all else—even our own opinions. We must synthesize what appear to be opposing viewpoints among Scripture passages.

Through the advent of the Messianic movement and Believers embracing the Hebraic heritage of our faith, many have been led to study and keep the Torah. But at the same time, there are concerns that exist, the first one being “you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Letting *the whole of Scripture* be our guide, we will attempt to set straight many of Christianity’s misconceptions of the Law in this article, as “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). As Yeshua told a group of Pharisees, “if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46). Have we made the same mistake and have failed to see Yeshua for who He is in the writings of Moses?

We must seek Scriptural continuity and seek to truly follow the entire Word of God—including the Torah—letting Yeshua be our Interpreter and example for living.

Initial Misgivings About “the Law”

When many Christians think about the Law of Moses or the Torah, often they conjure up a listing of rules and regulations given by a God who will “strike them down” if they disobey or do not obey them “perfectly.” They fail to observe that much of modern Western government is in fact based on

the writings of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Even more so, the United States of America has more laws than any other country on the face of this planet, and it is considered by many to be an example of “true freedom.”

As far as personal understanding or application is concerned, the Torah is not just “the Law.” The Hebrew *torah* is often defined as “direction, instruction, law,” and could also be called “teaching” (*BDB*).¹ Depending on your perspective, you can treat God’s commandments as “orders” or as the loving Instructions of a Heavenly Father. The Apostle John writes, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

Most of our controversy concerning the validity of the Torah is not going to come from the Tanach or Old Testament. It will rather come from the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament and Christian misunderstandings—or sometimes biased translations—of certain Greek words. One such example exists with the Greek word *nomos* commonly translated as “law.” Imperative to a proper understanding of *nomos* is that this word is an *all-inclusive* Greek term entailing: law, teaching, instruction, rules, and natural laws of the universe. When the Apostolic Scriptures speak of “the law,” it is important to determine *what law* it is speaking of. Is the *nomos* mentioned the Torah or the Law of Moses, or is it a spiritual law/constant such as the law of sin and death?

Some Christians would agree with what has thus far been mentioned. Very few Christians will say that the Law of Moses “did not serve a purpose,” but Jesus did say, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). They will agree that Yeshua did not come to “destroy” (KJV) the Law, but certainly He has already fulfilled it? To this we answer **yes and no**. The Greek verb translated “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17, *pleiroo*, notably means “to make full, to fill, to fill up,” or more importantly, “to make complete in every particular, to render perfect” (*Thayer*).² In order to be the promised Messiah of Israel, Yeshua must have observed the Torah of Moses perfectly as He is our Passover Lamb and blameless sacrifice. Yeshua had to fulfill the Torah by living it without any error. Nowhere in His sayings or actions did He ever contradict the Torah or teach others to disobey it.

If we continue reading Yeshua’s critical admonition in Matthew 5:18-19, we discover some extremely important statements:

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

In these verses, the Messiah very clearly tells us “till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (RSV). Now we would have ask to ask ourselves, has all been accomplished? Have the prophecies within the Tanach or Old Testament all been fulfilled? Are we presently in the renewed Kingdom of God on Planet Earth? Is Yeshua ruling and reigning from Jerusalem?

We are forced to answer a resounding “no” to these questions. Furthermore, what did Yeshua mean by stating, “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20, NIV)? This is important to comprehend because there are some who believe and teach that the Messiah came to do exactly this—*annul or abolish the commandments of the Torah*. But this is obviously not proper, unless such people want to be considered “least” in God’s Kingdom.

From Yeshua’s own words, is He telling us that we need to keep the commandments of the Law of Moses? **Yes!** Because Yeshua also said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and

in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’” (Matthew 7:21-23)?

This, of course, opens up an entirely new range of theological questions. Your average Christian’s understanding of Holy Scripture often comes from the epistles of Paul, which were letters written to various communities of Believers in the First Century to address problems that each of the congregations had. In fact, some have gone as far as to say that Christians need not concern themselves with Yeshua’s words, because He “was speaking to the Jews” and that Paul was the “apostle to the Gentiles.” But as you will find as you examine them closely, most of Paul’s writing is actually commentary on the Torah, or Torah-related issues as applied in a community!

This perspective of Scripture, and most importantly the Torah of Moses, is unwarranted. In fact, throughout his writings the Apostle Paul upholds the validity of the Torah, telling us, “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Romans 7:12). In Romans 3:31, he writes, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” The Greek verb *histeimi* is translated “established” in the NASU, but it actually means “to uphold or sustain the authority or force of any thing” (Thayer).³ The RSV and NIV actually render it as “uphold.”

Some Christians might argue at this point that they are “under the law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2), which would be correct. But who is the Messiah? Is not Yeshua the LORD God made manifest in the flesh? As God, was not the Messiah at Mount Sinai giving the commandments to Moses? 1 Corinthians 10:4 tells us that Ancient Israel “drank from a Spirit-sent Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Messiah” (CJB).

To deny that the Torah composes Yeshua’s commandments says that He is not the LORD God and is tantamount to denying His Divinity and oneness with the Father.

Others would argue that the Law of Moses was “for Israel.” 2 Kings 17:37 states, “The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forever.” But such people misunderstand the fact that Yeshua came as the Messiah of Israel to restore Israel (Jeremiah 33:7; cf. Matthew 16:18), and that at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, Peter declared “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Most importantly, the Apostle Paul wrote the non-Jewish Believers in Ephesus that because of their conversion of faith they had become part of the “commonwealth of Israel,” previously having been without “hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Born again Believers are not part of a separate group of elect known as “the Church.” On the contrary, in the Last Days the Lord’s major purpose is to restore Israel, and this includes both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in His Son, Yeshua. This is the people that the Messiah is returning to rule and reign over, and this people is certainly called to obey His eternal instruction.

There is a plethora of references throughout the pages of the Bible telling us that the Torah and its commandments are “everlasting” or “for all generations.”⁴ But why do we have those trying to tell us otherwise? Are there those within Christianity whose traditions are more important to them than Scriptural truth and continuity? Are some trying to maintain the “status quo,” so they do not have to admit they are possibly wrong and might have to change?

What Does Romans 10:4 Actually Mean?

We now arrive at the heart of the matter. In most Bibles, Romans 10:4 is translated “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (NASU). The first part of the verse, “Christ is the end of the law,” is a cause of much confusion among Believers today. First, it would seem to contradict Yeshua’s admonition to us in Matthew 5:17-19. Second, it would also contradict Paul’s previous writing in Romans 7:12.

The Messiah is *not* the “end” or “termination” of the Law of Moses. The Greek word translated as “end” in Romans 10:4 is *telos* (te,loj), meaning “*the end to which all things relate, the aim, purpose*” (Thayer).⁵ AMG offers us some valuable commentary, by stating that *telos* “does not, as is commonly supposed, mean the extinction, end, termination with reference to time, but the goal reached, the completion or conclusion at which something arrives...or as a result, acme, consummation.”⁶ The Complete Jewish Bible also offers a good translation of Romans 10:4: “For the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts.”

More generic English Bible translations such as the Contemporary English Version translate Romans 10:4 as “But Christ makes the Law no longer necessary for those who become acceptable by God through faith.” Interestingly enough, a footnote exists in the CEV stating, “or ‘But Christ gives full meaning to the Law.’”⁷

Romans 10:4 also brings us to a more perplexing paradigm, what does it mean when Christians say “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”? This passage of Scripture continues, explaining,

“For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: ‘DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, “WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?” (that is, to bring Messiah down), or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Messiah up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART’—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED’” (Romans 10:5-13).

Some might say that the Messiah is a termination of the Torah as far as righteousness is concerned. But a critical question we must ask ourselves is: Did righteousness ever come through the Torah? Paul comments in Galatians 2:21, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Messiah died needlessly.” But Paul also tells us, “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (Galatians 3:21).

If we consider a more correct understanding of Romans 10:4, we see that the Messiah is the aim or purpose of the Torah, and faith in Him provides us the righteousness that we should all desire. Perhaps a better way to phrase this is that “the Torah is to point to the Messiah.” With this in mind, what is the Torah to do? To this Paul answers, “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COVET’” (Romans 7:7).

We see here that the commandments of the Torah *are to convict a person of his or her sin*. As he also tells us, “For what *the Torah* could not do by itself, because it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate, God did by sending his own Son as a human being with a nature like our own sinful one. God did this in order to deal with sin, and in so doing he executed the punishment against sin in human nature” (Romans 8:3, CJB).

The purpose or *telos* of the Torah is to convict a person of his or her sin, reveal the individual’s violation of God’s commandments, and thus reveal a person’s sin nature and need for a Divine Savior.

For the born again Believer, the Torah is to continue to convict, so you can “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), knowing what to confess daily before the Father when we fall short of His high standard.

Yeshua the Messiah summed up the Torah of Moses for us in the following verses:
“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

What may be surprising to some of your averages Christian is that Yeshua’s admonition is quoted directly from the Torah. These commandments were not “made up” as some may unconsciously believe:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

Summarized, both Yeshua the Messiah and the Apostle Paul uphold the validity of the Torah for the Believer. This is not to say that the position of the Torah has not changed since Yeshua’s sacrifice and that some modifications have been made, but it is to say Christians today must reevaluate the Torah’s position and application for their lives. Let us truly make the Messiah “the *goal* at which the Torah aims” (Romans 10:4, CJB) as opposed to the “end of the law.” Otherwise, Paul has contradicted himself (cf. Romans 7:12) and we should consider Yeshua’s admonition of the Law not passing away (Matthew 5:17-19) null and void. In other words, Yeshua has misled us. *This cannot be*, and we have a job to do in reconciling what appear to be contradictions in the Biblical text.

If we assert the position that the Torah is no longer valid, then do we join liberal theologians and their assault on the Holy Scriptures that they are not the inspired Word of God and are full of contradictions? The true Believer in Yeshua must accept His teaching: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:15, 21).

What are those commandments? They are found in the Torah!

Your Response

Your response to the message of Torah validity is totally up to you. As it is written in Psalm 119:142, 152, “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth...Of old I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever.” The Psalmist also writes, “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165). An unfortunate admonition to us comes from Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law.”

Is this the state of Christianity today? What is the long-term purpose of the modern Christian’s walk with the Messiah? Are we truly praying “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven” and doing all we can to see Yeshua return in power and great glory to establish His Kingdom? Let us not be as “one [who] turns aside his ear from hearing the law, his prayer, too, will be [considered] an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

There are no easy answers to these questions. There is no easy answer that I can give to the person whose beliefs have just been challenged. I can tell you, however, what Yeshua told us: “He who

has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21). If we truly believe that Yeshua is God, then we will do what He said and will believe that the commandments of the Torah are *His commandments*. We should all want the best possible relationship with God as possible and obey Him because we love Him.

Yeshua says in Matthew 24:12 that in the Last Days “because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of many will grow cold” (LITV). He may put it best in Matthew 13:41: “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness [CJB: ‘people who are far from *Torah*].”

Will you be one of those lawless people? Will your messiah be the man of lawlessness, the antimessiah/antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3)? I sincerely hope not. Or will your Messiah be the One who said, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19)? Will you seek not to be one of the least and seek to obey God?

We leave you to answer these questions. Will you see the Torah as pointing to the Messiah, by revealing the sin you need repent of in your life? Or will you see Yeshua as lawless, annulling the commandments of His Father? As it has been validly observed, if God had a problem with His Torah, then He must have found a problem with Himself. **To say that the God of the Universe has a problem with Himself is to say that He has made a mistake.**

But the Lord has not made the mistake. We in our fallen human nature have made the mistake in discounting His eternal statutes and considering them to be archaic and unimportant. If the Torah is for you and its validity is upheld by our Lord Yeshua and the First Century Believers, what Christian traditions or practices will you need to reevaluate because they may violate our Heavenly Father’s holy commands? If Scriptural continuity is what you seek, then truly aim to see the Messiah in the Torah! If you are a Christian who truly desires to live a life like Jesus, then you will want to follow the Father’s commandments as He did.

The Torah is what has defined sin for mankind, and as all have sinned—we are all guilty of transgressing God’s commandments. We have a responsibility to repent of our previous lawless nature and pursue obedience to our Heavenly Father’s Instructions. We know that even as regenerate Believers, we will still stumble, but we have the understanding that the Messiah has taken away the curse of the Law—eternal punishment (Galatians 3:13). Out of gratitude for what He has done for us through His shed blood atonement, we should naturally want to follow His example and seek to follow the Torah. This obedience comes as an outworking of the Holy Spirit, and is something that is to bring us great blessings.

¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 435.

² Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), pp 517-518.

³ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴ Exodus 27:21; 28:43; 29:28; 30:21; 31:17; Leviticus 6:18, 22; 7:34, 36; 10:9, 15; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 41; 24:3; Numbers 10:8; 15:15; 18:8, 11, 19, 23; 19:10; Deuteronomy 5:19; Psalm 119:160.

⁵ *Thayer*, 620.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 1881.

⁷ *Holy Bible, Contemporary English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995), 971.

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