

# **THE NEW TESTAMENT VALIDATES TORAH**

**Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?**



# **THE NEW TESTAMENT VALIDATES TORAH**

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**REFERENCE EDITION**

**J.K. McKee**



# **The New Testament Validates Torah**

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# Dedication

*The New Testament Validates Torah* is dedicated to my spiritual and ancestral forbearers in both the Reformed and Wesleyan theological traditions. These were men and women who have always valued the moral instructions of God from the Old Testament as a standard of Christian holiness and piety, emulating the life and faithfulness of our Lord and Messiah.

The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God, the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

## **Westminster Standards 19.1-5**

I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ: seeing I now want it as much, to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him...Indeed each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me 'above gold or precious stones;' seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfill in its season.

**John Wesley, "Properties of the Law"**

*Today's Messianics have the responsibility  
to build upon the positive work  
of the generations of those faithful Christians  
who have preceded us in faith*



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# Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by TNN Press. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*  
 AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*  
 ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)  
 Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament  
 Ara: Aramaic  
 ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)  
 b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)  
 B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.  
 BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)  
 BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*  
 BECNT: *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*  
 BKCNT: *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*  
 C.E.: Common Era or A.D.  
 CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)  
 CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)  
 CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*  
 CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)  
 DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition  
 DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls  
 ECB: *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*  
 EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*  
 eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text  
 EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*  
 ESV: English Standard Version (2001)  
 exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own  
 EXP: *Expositor's Bible Commentary*  
 Ger: German  
 GNT: Greek New Testament  
 Grk: Greek  
*halachah*: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community  
 HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)  
 HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)  
 Heb: Hebrew  
 HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible  
 ICC: *International Critical Commentary*  
 IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*  
 IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*  
 ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*  
 IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*  
 Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)  
 JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)  
 JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*  
 KJV: King James Version  
 Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)  
 LITV: Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green (1986)  
 LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell & Scott)  
 LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)  
 LXX: Septuagint  
 m. Mishnah  
 MT: Masoretic Text  
 NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)  
 NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)  
 NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*  
 NEB: New English Bible (1970)  
 Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*  
 NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)  
 NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*  
 NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*  
 NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*  
 NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*  
 NIV: New International Version (1984)  
 NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)  
 NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)  
 NKJV: New King James Version (1982)  
 NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)  
 NLT: New Living Translation (1996)  
 NT: New Testament  
 orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world  
 OT: Old Testament  
 PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*  
 REB: Revised English Bible (1989)  
 RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)  
 t. Tosefta  
 Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament  
 Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*  
 TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*  
 TEV: Today's English Version (1976)

TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New  
Covenant (2011)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New  
Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and  
New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

Yid: Yiddish

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

# Preface to the Reference Edition

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

One of the most useful and important exercises that I conducted during the completion of my M.A. in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2008) was to read the analysis contained in Stephen Westerholm's book *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*. While his purpose was to address a contemporary debate in terms of the Jewish background of the Apostle's letters, several of the opening chapters were most useful, as they summarized the approach that three significant figures of Protestant Christianity had in terms of the relevancy of the Mosaic Torah for Christians: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley.<sup>i</sup> What was basically presented is that two of the three main Reformation traditions had a largely positive view of the Torah (Calvinism, Wesleyanism), as including foundational instruction and commandments that all of God's people were to follow—what is often termed to be the “moral law”—with the other tradition tending to pit God's Law and God's grace against themselves as polar opposites (Lutheranism).

It is very true that a distinction within the Torah between commandments that are classified as being moral, civil, or ceremonial is a bit artificial.<sup>ii</sup> It cannot be denied, though, that throughout much of post-Reformation history the two great theological traditions of both Calvinism and Wesleyanism have largely looked to the Mosaic Law and the Ten Commandments to include ethical principles that all followers of Jesus Christ are to obey and not disregard. These are arguably the two main Protestant strands that have made the most amount of positive difference in Western society, either through the promotion of what is called the “Protestant work ethic” (Calvinism), or simply encouraging faithful Christians to be active in their communities and in accomplishing significant humanitarian works (Wesleyanism). This is important to someone such as myself, whose religious background from both sides of my family is principally Methodist and Presbyterian. *At no time* in evangelical Christianity was I *ever* raised or taught to believe that the Law of Moses as a whole was abolished by Jesus. While I may have thought that some of its aspects were exclusively for Ancient Israel or the Jews for a time long before me, *never* would it have been tolerated for me to think that the Ten Commandments were smashed into pieces at the foot of the cross of Christ.

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<sup>i</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp, 22-87.

<sup>ii</sup> The division of the Torah's commandments as witnessed in the six divisions of the Mishnah (Agriculture, Appointed times, Women, Order of Damages, Holy things, Purities) seems to be more accurate. Consult the FAQ on the TNN website “Torah, division of commandments.”

## The New Testament Validates Torah

It can definitely come as a shock to many of today's Messianic Believers, when they realize that well known figures throughout Christian history have recognized—at least in a broad sense—that the Torah serves as valid instruction for Believers in Yeshua. Notwithstanding some of the finer points of the Law, one can survey some rather significant works that have molded the Christian psyche since the Reformation, and see how various instructions within Moses' Teaching, albeit largely moral, are lauded as being relevant for those who wish to emulate the Lord Jesus. The following are a small snapshot:

**John Calvin:** "The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law..."

"Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it. It is as if some servant, already prepared with all earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and observe his master's ways more carefully in order to conform and accommodate himself to them. And not one of us may escape from this necessity. For no man has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.

"Again, because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened by it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression..." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.7.12).<sup>iii</sup>

**John Wesley:** "I am afraid this great and important truth is little understood, not only by the world, but even by many whom God hath taken out of the world, who are real children of God by faith. Many of these lay it down as an unquestioned truth, that when we come to Christ, we have done with the law; and that, in this sense, 'Christ is the end of the law to every one that believeth.' 'the end of the law:'—so he is, 'for the righteousness,' for justification, 'to every one that believeth.' Herein the law is at an end. It justifies none, but only brings them to Christ; who is also, in another respect, the end, or scope of the law,—the point at which it continually aims. But when it has brought us to him, it has yet a farther office, namely, to keep us with him. For it is continually exciting all believers, the more they see of its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, to exhort one another so much the more....

"Therefore, I cannot spare the law one moment, nor more than I can spare Christ: seeing I now want it as much, to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him. Otherwise, this 'evil heart of unbelief' would immediately 'depart from the living God.' Indeed each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me 'above gold or precious stones;' seeing I know every part of it as a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfill in its season" (Sermon #34, "Properties of the Law").<sup>iv</sup>

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** "This is the fundamental presupposition of the whole Sermon on the Mount. Jesus manifests his perfect union with the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament law and prophets. He has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them. He fulfills the law, and he tells us so himself, therefore it must be true. He

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<sup>iii</sup> John T. McNeill, ed., and Ford Lewis Battles, trans., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp 360-361.

<sup>iv</sup> N. Burwash, ed., *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing, 1988), pp 349, 350.

fulfills the law down to the last iota...Jesus vindicates the divine authority of the law. God is its giver and its Lord, and only in personal communion with God is the law fulfilled. There is no fulfillment of the law apart from communion with God, and no communion with God apart from fulfillment of the law" (*The Cost of Discipleship*).<sup>v</sup>

Generally speaking, those Christians who have preceded today's generation of Messianic Believers in faith, who have had a positive view of the Law of Moses, have sub-divided it into the moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law. The ceremonial law and civil law are thought to have only been given to Ancient Israel until the destruction of the Second Temple, whereas the moral law was given to all of humanity to be followed by all people for all time. Theologians, who have approached the Torah this way, have undoubtedly had an incomplete picture of its intention—*but to their credit* they have certainly advocated that Yeshua the Messiah did not come to completely abolish the Torah, and perhaps replace it with an under-disciplined way of living by the Spirit. What is often classified as composing the "moral law" makes up a considerable majority of commandments in the Torah.

It can be rather easy for us to criticize the approach of dividing the Torah into divisions like the so-called "moral law" and "ceremonial law." Rather than be negative toward it, though, we need to instead recognize that figures like Calvin or Wesley, from the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries respectively, were products of their time. They lacked many of the Jewish sources and academic dialogue with the Synagogue from which Twentieth and Twenty-First Century scholars benefit. They did the absolute best that they could, by utilizing little more than the Biblical text by itself in Hebrew and Greek, various extant historical works like Josephus and Philo, the writings of the Church Fathers, and different figures from classical history. Even though Protestant countries in Europe were a bit more liberal and understanding toward the Jews than their Roman Catholic counterparts, it was not until the Nineteenth Century that Christian scholars began to really have access to ancient Jewish literature like the Mishnah, Talmud, or Midrashim. Only in the more modern era has direct access to the lands of the Bible become commonplace—not to mention the discovery of texts like the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947! *And, how long has it taken such information to finally filter down to the average layperson?*

Today's Messianic Believers need to appropriately recognize and highly laud the positive benefits that many of our Protestant Christian forbearers have left us. We should be able to emphasize the areas of strong theological agreement and ideological commonality, in our quest to have *an even healthier* appreciation of the Torah in our faith practice and integration of our Hebraic and Jewish Roots. None of us should ever be caught making unfounded claims about *all* of the past generations of Christians somehow being "lawless," perhaps in violation of the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16),<sup>vi</sup> when many of them clearly did not benefit from the information and resources in Biblical Studies that we possess today. On the contrary, all of us know of Christians in our past history—or even immediate history, or personal discipleship—who made significant contributions to society and were greatly instrumental in the spread of the gospel and the transformative love of Christ to the unsaved of Planet Earth! Many of them had a very high regard for the Law of Moses and the Old Testament for guiding their faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

In many cases, such previous generations may specifically include various godly and saved persons *from our own families*, who may very well have followed the Mosaic Law and Ten

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<sup>v</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised edition, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp 137, 138.

<sup>vi</sup> Consult the author's article on the Fifth Commandment, "Honoring our Predecessors in a Complicated Messianic Movement," appearing in his book *Confronting Critical Issues*.

## The New Testament Validates Torah

Commandments to the best of their understanding. **We have the definite responsibility to honor and respect their legacies to us**, and to recognize the awesome task we have at letting the heritage they have given us, encourage us to continue forward in our faith's reformation (cf. Hebrews 12:1). I ask you to ponder the thoughts of my late third cousin, Dr. Charles L. Allen (1913-2005),<sup>vii</sup> formerly the pastor of Grace Methodist Church in Atlanta, GA and First Methodist Church in Houston, TX (and who interestingly enough led many Christians on guided tours to Israel). In his best-selling book *God's Psychiatry*, he wrote the following on the importance of the Ten Commandments:

"We have these rules, known as The Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20. They are not only the basis of conduct, both moral and spiritual, but also the basis of peace and prosperity for the individual and for the world. The Bible says, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God' (Psalm 14:1), and it is only a fool who thinks he is big enough or smart enough to violate the unchangeable laws of the eternal God and get by with it. No man can break God's law, he breaks only himself."<sup>viii</sup>

What does any of this have to do with the book that you are about to read: *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?* It has much to do with the fact that since this publication was originally released in 2004, the Messianic conviction that the Torah of Moses remains relevant instruction for born again Believers is something that has had to be further researched, detailed, and fine-tuned. My own belief that the Law remains valid is something unchanged, but my ability to defend this position with greater skill, precision, strength, engagement with contemporary Biblical scholarship and relevant ancient literature—but most importantly **in agreement** with many Christian interpreters on the New Testament—has certainly improved, if not mushroomed. Being able to demonstrate a thorough approach to what is a controversial subject matter is imperative, as the definite tendency in much of Messianic Bible teaching is to do the exact opposite: make things *more simplistic and disengaged* from current Biblical Studies. This consequently helps to foment unfair conclusions and grossly negative attitudes that castigate a huge majority of Christians throughout history as being anti-Law, when this is not at all the case.

Quite contrary to this, the 2010s must be a decade when our still developing and very much emerging Messianic faith community has to become more complex and engaged in its Biblical Studies. Some of our current, negative attitudes demonstrated toward the Christian Church need to seriously change—as we learn to focus on how there are many more things we agree, than disagree, on (cf. Ephesians 4:2-6). I have taken considerable strides in our discussion of the Torah's continuance to reference various Christian scholars and theologians who recognize that the Law as a whole has not been abolished by the sacrificial work of the Messiah, and that it is at least to guide Believers' ethics and morality. But with this does come our need to fairly dialogue with those Christian scholars and theologians who do believe that the Law of Moses was abolished, and was intended exclusively for the pre-resurrection period.

This new paperback edition of *The New Testament Validates Torah* may be considered a **Reference Edition** because of the information expansions, its conversation with relevant scholars and commentaries, and with more attention given to different Hebrew and Greek

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<sup>vii</sup> Charles Allen was the first cousin of my maternal grandmother, Mary Ruth Franklin Jeffries (1919-), who herself is the daughter of the late Bishop Marvin A. Franklin (1894-1972), who served as President of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church from 1959-1960.

The information on the Bishop Marvin A. Franklin Historical Marker can be accessed online at <[georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm)>.

<sup>viii</sup> Charles L. Allen, *God's Psychiatry* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), pp 45-46.