

What is the New Covenant?

by J.K. McKee posted 26 November, 2009 www.tnnonline.net

Everyone who expresses trust in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) believes that we are a part of what is commonly called “New Covenant faith.” But what is New Covenant faith? We all recognize that at the Last Supper, our Lord said, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). The sacrificial work of Yeshua has surely inaugurated the reality of the New Covenant, which includes complete forgiveness and redemption from the power of sin, as well as people being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Yet, not enough evangelical Christians today are familiar with the fact that the expectation of the New Covenant, as it is commonly called, is something rooted within some distinct prophecies of the Hebrew Bible or Tanach.

Messianic Believers, who are of the conviction that God’s Torah remains relevant instruction for all of His people today, are often refuted with the concept that since we are living in the age of the New Covenant—the Old Covenant or the Old Testament is not something that is to really govern or control our lives, or even inform us that much about proper spirituality. The problem with this commonly held opinion is that even though a transition has surely taken place for those of us in this post-resurrection era, it is not a transition that completely divorces us from the Law of Moses, and certainly not from the Tanach. Yeshua explicitly said that He did not come to abolish the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19), immediately after saying for His followers to demonstrate good works to the world at large (Matthew 5:14-16). The witness of the Tanach is to point us to Him (Luke 24:44).

It is important that we take a look at some of the main Scripture passages, which specifically deal with what the “New Covenant” is, in both the Tanach and Apostolic Writings. What have some of us perhaps missed or overlooked in our reading of the Bible? Is the New Covenant something completely separate from the Torah? How much continuity is there throughout the Scriptures, and what new things has this post-resurrection period specifically brought to God’s people? What are some of the similarities and differences between the Sinai Covenant and this New Covenant?

We will be examining five specific areas of Scripture (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Romans 11:26-27; Hebrews 8:7-13; Hebrews 10:14-18), a selection of the main passages that articulate the concept of the “New Covenant.” We will discuss the previous ministry of death or condemnation, which composed the “Old Covenant.” We will also consider the dynamics of the New Covenant, how we might properly consider them in relation to the current development of today’s Messianic community, and how we should approach the subject of “Torah” for the future.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”

Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the only place in the Tanach or Hebrew Bible where you will find the explicit term “new covenant” or *b’rit chadashah* (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה) used. Christian commentators are often very interested in this prophecy, and how it is applied by the Apostles. Somewhat contrary to this, many lay people seem to just throw the term “New Covenant” around, without any

¹ More passages that could be examined for complimentary study, include: Isaiah 55:3; 59:21; Jeremiah 32:37-41; Ezekiel 16:60; Hosea 2:18.

framework or basis for where this term actually originates in Israel's Scriptures.² Given how important the concept of the "New Covenant" is to those of us who believe in Israel's Messiah, what was originally prophesied by Jeremiah?

The overall context of Jeremiah 31 squarely places its enactment with the promise that Israel's Kingdom will be restored in the Last Days. This includes the word that "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:1). They will be permanently restored from their captivity and scattering, with song and jubilation (Jeremiah 31:2-14, 21-26, 38-40). This will include not only the exiles of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but also those of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim (Jeremiah 31:15-20). There is, however, the problem of Israel's sin that will need to be punished (Jeremiah 31:27-30). The answer to rectifying the punishment that has had to be meted upon Israel is the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), whereby sins can be forgiven and the people of Israel can enter into the right relationship that God desires with them.

While the concept of the New Covenant is featured throughout the Apostolic Scriptures, it is something deeply rooted in the Tanach, and does have continuity with the Sinai Covenant that preceded it (Exodus 19:1-24:11). The prophecy of the New Covenant is given within a series of promises about the restoration of Israel, meaning that it is not some vague, unknown idea, only revealed in the First Century C.E. by Yeshua and the Apostles. The full realization of the New Covenant is *the means* by which the schism of Judah and Israel/Ephraim will be finally fixed, and how they will be restored to the Promised Land in the eschaton.

The New Covenant was originally promised to a restored Israel, and so a big issue in theological examination is how non-Jewish Believers would actually benefit from this. Are they at all participants in Israel's restoration, or are they the recipients of the side-effects of Israel's restoration? A major issue at stake has been in trying to avoid any replacement theology, recognizing that there are some real promises concurrent with those of forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:34b), concerning a return of people to the Land of Israel. An obvious answer would be that Believers in Israel's Messiah are grafted into Israel's olive tree (Romans 11), and so just as the nations at large are affected by the arrival of Israel's Messiah, so are they too affected by the inauguration of the New Covenant. But not all see non-Jewish Believers being made a part of Israel's polity (Ephesians 2:11-12; 3:6), and this is why Charles L. Feinberg specifically argues, "The NT is careful to state in each instance what elements in the blessings promised Israel may be transferred to the common enjoyment of Israel and the church,"³ holding to a distinction between Israel and the so-called "Church." Our position on ecclesiology allows us to recognize that the restoration of Israel is bigger than just the Jewish people, also including the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim and various "companions" of the nations (Ezekiel 37:16, 19)—all of whom in the end make up the "Israel of God" (cf. Galatians 6:16). **The New Covenant similarly affects all people who call upon the Creator God.**

The original agreement that had been made with Ancient Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:3-8) had been broken by the people. This is not an observation that this agreement or covenant was bad or "evil" by any means, but rather how the people succumbed to the weaknesses of sin, and fell into rebellion—although God Himself remained faithful, like He were Israel's husband (Jeremiah 31:32). The consistent message of the Prophets seen in the Tanach is to call the rebellious people back to the Lord, and for them to repent for their breaking of the Torah (i.e., Jeremiah 11:10; 32:40; Ezekiel 37:26). The sins that were most especially grievous to the Lord were

² Do note that Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp 291-295, probably goes a bit too far in the opposite direction, in only wanting to emphasize the Tanach perspective of the New Covenant. He is a liberal Christian theologian who seems to only want to read the New Covenant promise as relevant toward Judaism, discounting some of how it is applied in the Apostolic Scriptures.

³ Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:575.

how Israelite worship had devolved into a syncretistic form of covenant obligation, with a great deal of outward doings (cf. Isaiah 1:11-18), with a mixing in of many Canaanite religious practices.⁴

The decree is issued that a time is coming when a new agreement will be made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31). These are nationalistic designations, indicating that the national sins of Israel and Judah—with the Northern Kingdom notably judged before the Southern Kingdom—have required God to take this important action.

It is promised that this New Covenant will not be “like the covenant which I made with their fathers,” when the Lord led Ancient Israel out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai (Jeremiah 31:32a). Does this denote a significant discontinuity with the Sinai Covenant? God was faithful to the agreement, and is clear to label the Sinai Covenant as “My covenant which they broke” (Jeremiah 31:32b). How are we to understand the labeling of the New Covenant as *lo k'b'rit* (לֹא כְבָרִית), or “not like/according the covenant”? Is there to be any similarity between the promised New Covenant and the Sinai Covenant that preceded it? Some say no, *but* others say yes.

One cannot expect there to be a complete one-for-one transference of what God and Ancient Israel established at Mount Sinai to be seen in the New Covenant, otherwise why would the New Covenant need to be made in the first place? Yet to argue that the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is something completely inconsistent with what was originally agreed upon by God and Ancient Israel, at Mount Sinai, runs contrary to what Jeremiah details. The New Covenant is **not entirely different or disparate** from what has preceded it in the Mosaic Covenant. The essential components of both covenants remain the same; the major difference is that the faithfulness of the people to this agreement will remain consistent, and permanent forgiveness for sins will be available (Jeremiah 31:34). Originally, the Mosaic Covenant was just written on stone tablets (Exodus 19:3-8; 24:3-8; 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13; 29:1-29; 2 Corinthians 3:3), whereas the New Covenant will be a reality written on and manifested by human hearts.

The idea that the New Covenant is something completely divorced from the Torah—and Christians today should not be following any of the Law of Moses—is entirely unsupportable when Jeremiah 31:33 is read. The Lord plainly declares, *nattati et-Torati b'qirbam v'al-l'bam aktavannah* (נָתַתִּי אֶת-תּוֹרָתִי בְקִרְבָּם וְעַל-לִבָּם אֶכְתַּבְנָה), “such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days...I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts” (NJPS). One of the essential realities of the New Covenant is God writing the Law onto the hearts of His people! Disobedience to the Torah is what brought the division of Israel and His required punishment, and so obedience to the Lord is surely to be a tangible reversal of this sorry condition. H. Freedman further observes,

“God will make a new covenant with Israel which, unlike the old, will be permanent, because it will be transcribed on their hearts. There is nothing here to suggest that the new covenant would differ in nature from the old...The prophet only makes the assertion that unlike the past, Israel will henceforth remain faithful to God, while He in turn will never reject them.”⁵

A major thrust of the New Covenant is that the Lord will Divinely write His Torah onto the hearts of His people. Anyone who says that the New Covenant is something completely disparate from either the Law of Moses or the Old Testament has claimed something that is contrary to the claim of the text. J.A. Thompson confirms, “He will set his *law (tôrâ)* within them and write it on their heart, that is, on their minds and wills.”⁶

The difference between this New Covenant and the prior Mosaic Covenant is not the relevance of God’s commandments for proper living, but the permanence of His people being His: “I will be their God and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33b). When the New Covenant is inaugurated, God is no longer going to cast off His people. There will be a definitive, internalized reality of how His people will be able to obey Him, unlike the previous Mosaic Covenant which

⁴ Cf. R.K. Harrison, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Jeremiah & Lamentations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), pp 138-139.

⁵ H. Freedman, *Soncino Books of the Bible: Jeremiah* (London: Soncino, 1968), 211.

⁶ J.A. Thompson, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 581.

was relatively external and required fierce punishments (Numbers 15:30). Such a sin problem will have been dealt with, and God's commandments will no longer just be some distant rules and regulations written on either stone or parchment.

As described elsewhere (Ezekiel 36:25-27), God's people being given a new heart is the essence of the New Covenant. Feinberg is correct when explaining, "The core of the new covenant is God's gift of a new heart (cf. Ezek 36:25-27). Herein lies the sufficient motivation for obeying God's law. Basic to obedience is inner knowledge of God's will coupled with an enablement to perform it, all founded on the assurance that sins are forgiven."⁷ Balancing Ezekiel's expectations (discussed further) with Jeremiah's, Patrick D. Miller comments, "For Ezekiel, obedience will derive from a new spirit and a new heart; for Jeremiah, it will stem from God's writing the law on the heart."⁸

The only real dissenting opinion about the positive aspects of God writing His Torah onto the hearts of His people is from R.E. Clements. He first says, rightly, "God will, by the very creative power of his love, write the law of the covenant upon the hearts of the men and women who make up Israel," but then he goes on to say, "The old covenant of the law is dead; instead there will be an inner power and motivation towards obedience on the part of Israel written on the very hearts of the People of God, not on tablets of stone."⁹ What does he mean by referring to "The old covenant of the law" being dead? Is this a reference to the Torah as a whole, or the original agreement which defined how God's commandments were to be regulated—now moving forward to the New Covenant? Clements answers this with, "A new law is not properly envisaged at all, but only a new way of knowing and keeping the existing law of the covenant made on Sinai."¹⁰ Perhaps some things have changed in the New Covenant, but paying attention to God's Torah is still undeniably required of His people. Walter Brueggemann further indicates,

"The new covenant will not be resisted, because the torah—the same commandments at Sinai—will be written on the hearts. That is, the commandments will not be an external rule which invites hostility, but now will be an embraced, internal identity-giving mark, so that obeying will be as normal and as readily accepted as breathing and eating."¹¹

It is not enough for anyone to just conclude that the New Covenant is God writing the Torah onto the hearts of His people, as important *and as overlooked* as this may be. **God's people will be His!** There will be a definite shift from how the Ancient Israelites were originally commanded to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16), to how God will circumcise their hearts and make them quite receptive to His will (Deuteronomy 30:6). Miller notes, "God will affect the human heart so that people can keep the covenant requirements."¹² The New Covenant will bring the real enactment of Deuteronomy 6:6 in the *Shema*: "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart."

Also quite important is the broad-sweeping effect that the New Covenant will have on a restored Israel. The Lord says, "No longer will they teach their neighbors, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me" (Jeremiah 31:34a, TNIV). A wide array of people will be touched by the New Covenant, so much so that it is not difficult to detect that even though it is made with Judah and Israel, there is more of a person-to-person emphasis with the New Covenant than what was seen in the prior Sinai Covenant. All of the people will "know" the Lord, with the verb *yada* (יָדָע) here concerning a great intimacy restored with Him, especially given the previous reference to the Lord as a husband (Jeremiah 31:32b). According to Thompson, "The verb *know* here probably carries its most profound connotation, the intimate person knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a

⁷ Feinberg, in *EXP*, 6:576.

⁸ Patrick D. Miller, "The Book of Jeremiah," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 6:812.

⁹ R.E. Clements, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Jeremiah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 190.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹¹ Brueggemann, 293.

¹² Miller, in *NIB*, 6:812.

relationship that touches mind, emotion, and will. In such a relationship the past is forgiven and forgotten.”¹³

Who will be affected by the New Covenant? All will know the Lord, *m’qetannam v’ad-gedolam* (מִקְטַנָּם וְעַד-גְּדוֹלָם), or “from their smallest to their greatest” (Jeremiah 31:34[33], Keter Crown Bible). Brueggemann observes how, “There will be common, shared access to this knowledge which evidences fundamental egalitarianism in the community. On the crucial matter of connection to God, the least and greatest stand on equal footing. No one has superior, elitist access, and no one lacks what is required. All share fully in the new relation. All know the story, all accept the sovereignty, and all embrace the commands.”¹⁴ A new status of equality for God’s people will arise out of the inauguration of the New Covenant, one where His power to change people—so that they might obey Him and accomplish His purposes—knows no boundaries (cf. Colossians 3:11).

The status prior to the New Covenant was, “We know our wickedness, O LORD, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You” (Jeremiah 14:20). The promised New Covenant reverses this, not only by writing God’s Torah onto the peoples’ hearts, but also in how “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34b). The Psalmist exclaims, “He will not always strive *with us*, nor will He keep *His anger* forever” (Psalm 103:9). While there is continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, the major difference is that **permanent forgiveness and restitution for sins** has been enacted. There is also an internalization of the Torah written upon the heart, as opposed to being just an external listing of rules to follow, that is also emphasized. R.K. Harrison also suggests that the New Covenant is something that is more individualistic, summarizing,

“Probably the most significant contribution which Jeremiah made to religious thought was inherent in his insistence that the new covenant involved a one-to-one relationship of the spirit. When the new covenant was inaugurated by the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, this important development of personal, as opposed to corporate, faith and spirituality was made real for the whole of mankind.”¹⁵

Appeals to the promise of the New Covenant are made in Hebrews chs. 8 and 10, as the author of Hebrews writes about how the priestly work of Yeshua the Messiah has brought the permanent atonement and forgiveness of sins that were prophesied. While there are other things that are involved with the New Covenant, including the repatriation of an exiled Israel to the Promised Land, the viewpoint of the Apostolic Scriptures is definitely that the essential reality of the New Covenant is already present in the lives of God’s people—via what is commonly called realized eschatology. In the estimation of J. Andrew Dearman, the references to the Jeremiah 31 New Covenant, seen in the Apostolic Scriptures, hold to “a belief that the future redemption promised by God through Jeremiah...has dawned in the ministry of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ He further describes how,

“[This] will be brought to an ultimate fulfillment in his second coming at the end of the age...Because of Christ’s advent and through the continuing ministry of the Spirit...[we have] tasted an ‘already’ of the future Jeremiah foresaw.”¹⁷

The essential reality of the New Covenant is realized in the lives of redeemed Believers today, as the Lord writes His commandments on our hearts via the power of the Spirit, because the work of Yeshua the Messiah at Golgotha has provided final forgiveness for our sins. This will enable us, as His people, to be loyal to Him, to obey Him, and most importantly demonstrate His love and goodness to all we encounter. Still, we cannot forget how more of the promises of the

¹³ Thompson, 581.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, 294.

¹⁵ Harrison, 140.

Do note that Rabbinic opinion in the Talmud does suggest that the Sinai Covenant was made with individuals (b.*Sotah* 37b), and not just with Israel corporately.

¹⁶ J. Andrew Dearman, *NIV Application Commentary: Jeremiah/Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 289.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

New Covenant, as they concern the restoration of Israel's Kingdom, await us in the future. We are people of that Kingdom who are waiting for the complete fulfillment of prophecies issued by Jeremiah. We can be assured of God's faithfulness toward Israel, and that *all* of what the New Covenant encompasses will come to pass:

“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the LORD of hosts is His name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.’ Thus says the LORD, ‘If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

The Lord basically says that if the universe is not as vast as it is, then Israel will cease being His chosen people. Yet the universe will never be fully measured, and a rebuilding of Israel will occur (Jeremiah 31:38-39). Those places where the Israelites had once committed their sins of idolatry and abomination against Him, will actually be considered holy (Jeremiah 31:40).

Ezekiel 36:25-27

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

While the term “new covenant” is not used in this oracle delivered by the Prophet Ezekiel, these verses are the next most associated promise of the New Covenant from the Tanach Scriptures after Jeremiah 31:31-34. Joseph Blenkinsopp indicates, “it comes to clearest expression in a passage in Jeremiah that Ezekiel almost certainly had in mind.”¹⁸ The Prophet Ezekiel's message specifically focuses on the dynamic of God washing His people clean of their sins, giving them a new heart, and transforming them by the unique power of His Spirit.

This prophecy appears within a scope of promises detailing the future restoration of Israel, as the Lord once again is depicted as having to rectify the problem of why Ancient Israel had to be judged. Ezekiel is told by God, “when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity” (Ezekiel 36:17). The sinful state of Israel is depicted like the uncleanness (Heb. *tumah*, טִמְאָה) of a woman in her menstrual cycle—but here envisioned as something that is more than just for a short period of the month—requiring God to almost separate Himself. But while the point of comparison is that of a woman in continual uncleanness, the sin that God has to judge is not specified as being sexual, but instead one of murder and idolatry committed in His Land (Ezekiel 36:18) *and* even in the areas where Israel was scattered (Ezekiel 36:19-21).

Because of His own holiness and fidelity to His people, God has a plan to act on behalf of Israel. Definite missional imperatives can be seen in the word, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went” (Ezekiel 36:22, cf. vs. 35-36), as this restoration will affect more than just Israel itself. God Himself has to sovereignly interject Himself into a situation where sinful humans have defamed Him, an intervention that will be seen in the eyes of the whole world as Israel is regathered (Ezekiel 36:23-24). The essential reality of what God will do with His people is declared in Ezekiel 36:25-27, as the state of uncleanness is radically reversed to one of purity and obedience. The oracle ends with God's people being brought back into the Promised Land, rebuilding what was torn down, and greatly prospering with His blessing (Ezekiel 36:28-38).

¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Ezekiel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 169; cf. Daniel I. Block, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp 356-357.

The New Covenant promise from the Lord, delivered by Ezekiel, is that “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you” (Ezekiel 36:25, RSV). It is not difficult to see how there is a typological connection with this spiritual cleansing by the Lord, and various purification rituals seen in the Torah, such as: those for priests (Exodus 29:4), Levites (Numbers 8:7), the cleansing of the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:4, 24, 26), or the ceremonial washing of clothes (Exodus 19:10).¹⁹ In Daniel I. Block’s estimation, “The description mixes the metaphors of priestly cleansing rituals and blood sprinkling ceremonies.”²⁰ The specific problem to be reversed is how Israel “shed blood in the land and...had defiled it with their idols” (Ezekiel 36:18, NIV). While murder and idolatry are certainly in view, offering sacrifices to idols may also be considered.

The words of the Psalmist are poignant to consider here: “Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches *and* was strong in his *evil* desire. But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever” (Psalm 52:7-8). Those of us who have placed our trust in Yeshua the Messiah, and His sacrificial work, believe that just as Ezekiel 36:25 specifies, we have been cleansed by God from any sinful activities that once separated us from His presence. According to 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The all-encompassing work of God to cleanse sinners of their defilements is further appealed to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and in the Spirit of our God.”

The gravity of Yeshua’s atoning work for us is referenced by the author of Hebrews, who encourages Believers, “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). Also not to be overlooked is how the Father showed Peter in a vision that all people are made clean by the work of His Son (Acts 10:15), provided they acknowledge Him as Savior.

The theme of Ezekiel 36:25 is something that not only affected the language or emphases of the Apostles, but also Jewish theology present in the broad First Century period. The Mishnah indicates, “Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? It is your Father in heaven [Ezekiel 36:25]...Just as the immersion pool cleans the unclean, so the Holy One, blessed be he, clean Israel” (m.*Yoma* 8:9).²¹ Similarly, the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect how “This spirit encourages...glorious purity combined with visceral hatred of impurity in its every guise” (1QS 4.5).²²

The Biblical emphasis on purification via water, seen in Ezekiel 36:25 with the reference to *mayim tehorim* (מַיִם טְהוּרִים), has led to diverse views and traditions in both Judaism and Christianity. Without going into detail about rituals ranging from proselyte immersion to Believer’s baptism to infant baptism,²³ Blenkinsopp simply summarizes, “Whatever the historical antecedents of Christian baptism, whether an initiatory cleansing of the Qumran type, or proselyte baptism, or a combination of different features, the basic pattern is already detectable in Ezekiel’s

¹⁹ Also to be considered could certainly be: Exodus 30:17-21; Leviticus 14:52; Numbers 19:17-19.

²⁰ Block, 354.

²¹ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 279.

²² Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 130.

²³ Some of this is explored by Iain M. Duguid, *NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp 422-423.

The issue of the *mikveh* (מִקְוֵה) is planned to be discussed in the editor’s forthcoming book *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

promise.”²⁴ The metaphor of water cleansing people, whose sins have caused God to separate from them, has been employed to support both Jewish and Christian practices where an immersion in water represents being restored to fellowship with Him. In the Apostolic Scriptures, in particular, water immersion is a ritual that is accessible by all, and unlike physical circumcision is not bound by a particular gender (Galatians 3:27-28).

Of course, it is not enough for God’s people to simply be cleansed by Him, as though they are only undergoing a purification ritual via water. Ezekiel’s prophecy continues, stating, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26), as those restored to Him will notably receive a *lev chadash* (לֵב הַרְשָׁ) or “new heart.” But it is not only a new heart they will receive, as they will also have a *ruach chadashah* (רוּחַ הַרְשָׁה) or “new spirit.” It has been rightly observed how the heart is the location of the human mind, and the spirit reflects the inner emotions. Christopher J.H. Wright comments, “Israel will have to *think* differently, and *feel* differently.”²⁵

With Israel promised a new heart, the Deuteronomy 30:6 decree about the Lord circumcising the heart should be considered. However, Wright thinks that from Ezekiel’s perspective, “Much more radical surgery is needed now....He will remove the *heart of stone*, which has made Israel hard, cold, unresponsive and dead to [the Lord’s] words of command or of appeal. And he will implant in its place a *heart of flesh*—flesh which is living, warm, and soft.”²⁶ By the Divine activity that will cleanse people, implanting within them a new way of relating to God, a restored, intimate relationship with the Creator will come forth. The *lev basar* (לֵב בָּשָׂר) or “heart of flesh” is not to be thought in its frequent Pauline context of “flesh” relating to base human nature, but rather represents a positive aspect of being a living and vital part of existence. Block concurs, “The only answer is the removal of the petrified organ and its replacement with a warm, sensitive, and responsible heart of flesh (*bāšār*)”²⁷ (cf. Ezekiel 11:19).

The work that takes place in changing one’s heart is something that only comes about by the work of God’s Spirit, as it is asserted “I will put My Spirit within you...” (Ezekiel 36:27a), *v’et-ruachi ettein b’qirbekhem* (וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֵּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם). This is a clearer emphasis than what is seen in the previous word from Jeremiah 31:31-34, because although the presence of God’s Spirit is certainly seen there, it is not specifically mentioned as in Ezekiel 36:25-27. Consequently, not only do we see an emphasis on water immersion in the Apostolic Scriptures representing the transformation of people, but we also definitely see an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Yet what will the Spirit cause God’s people to do? As just stated, it will change their hearts and minds to be more oriented toward Him, making the restored relationship much more intimate than it was before (Ezekiel 36:26). But once again, just as takes place with Jeremiah 31:31-34, a significantly overlooked aspect of the New Covenant by many Christians is, “I will put My Spirit within you **and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances**” (Ezekiel 36:27), *v’asiti et asher-b’chuqai teileiku u’mishpatai tishmeru v’asitem* (וְעָשִׂיתִם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר-בְּחֻקֵי הַלְכֹו וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי הַשְּׁמִרָו). The Spirit will cause God’s people to “follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments” (Leviticus 26:3, NJPS).

The Hebrew of Ezekiel 36:27 is a bit stronger than just “I will...move you to follow” (NIV) the commandments. The verb *asiti* (עָשִׂיתִי) regards how God will “make” (ATS, NRSV) such obedience possible. Kathryn Pfisterer Darr describes, “This is no turn of heart on the Israelites’ part but a heart transplant performed unilaterally by Yahweh to insure the people’s utter and unending obedience.”²⁸

The New Covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:25-27 concurs perfectly with the picture of redemption we are given in the Apostolic Scriptures. According to Ephesians 2:8-9 we are only

²⁴ Blenkinsopp, 167.

²⁵ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 296.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Block, 355.

²⁸ Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1492.

saved by God's grace, but following in Ephesians 2:10 we are told that God created us for good works. Iain M. Duguid can only confirm how "The people who are saved not *by* works are saved *through* God's work, *for* good works."²⁹ Echoes of this are seen in the work of the Holy Spirit within Believers, which according to the Apostle Paul causes people who have been redeemed from the Torah's curse, to fulfill the Torah's proper intention:

"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4).

Given the New Covenant's emphasis on being cleansed by water (Ezekiel 36:25), and the activity of the Spirit (Ezekiel 36:27), we can see a few overlooked pieces of Yeshua's teaching, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). One has to be purified of sin and filled with the Holy Spirit, guided upon a life of obedience, if he or she ever hopes to enter into God's Kingdom.

It is unfortunate that among Christian commentaries, there is not a huge amount of reflection on Ezekiel 36:27, which clearly states how the work of God's Spirit will cause His people to obey His commandments. This aligns with the Jeremiah 31:31-34 New Covenant promise of God writing His Torah onto their hearts. What detail *is seen* among Christian commentators, however, does confirm how via the power of God's Spirit, people will be able to follow His Law. Ralph P. Alexander summarizes,

"[I]n the new covenant the people would receive a new spirit, God's Holy Spirit...who would enable them to live God's law, strengthening them to follow the Mosaic covenant's commandments (v.27; cf. Rom 7:7-8:4; Heb, 8:6-10:39). The old Mosaic covenant would be written on the heart of those living under the new covenant (Jer 31:33). Therefore, the new covenant replaced the Mosaic covenant by adding those things that made it better, but not by eliminating the good, righteous, and godly Mosaic stipulations that described how to live a godly life. The new covenant provided forgiveness of sin once and for all and the Holy Spirit's indwelling."³⁰

In Ezekiel 36:25-27 we see how the promised New Covenant is not at all something completely divorced or separated from the Torah of Moses. There might be some different features seen in the New Covenant, that were not seen in the previous Mosaic Covenant, notably including: a permanent cleansing of sin, a new heart and spirit implanted into people, and an internalizing of God's Instruction. Yet, in contrast to the common thought that the New Covenant includes no commandments, an obedience to the Torah via the working of God's Spirit, in order to live a holy and sanctified life, is clearly present. Furthermore, in comparing and contrasting the previous perspective of Jeremiah 31:31-34 with this oracle, the only significant difference is that for Ezekiel the role of God's Spirit in causing people to obey Him is now unambiguous, as Block states, "Jeremiah and Ezekiel obviously have the same covenant renewal in mind, but what Jeremiah attributes to the divine Torah, Ezekiel ascribes to the infusion of the divine *rūah*."³¹

Like Jeremiah's previous oracle of the New Covenant, the essential reality of what Ezekiel describes is already present within the lives of born again Believers today, as a kind of realized eschatology. There is certainly more to come as God's wider prophetic plan manifests itself, but it is quite difficult to argue against how the Apostles saw the work of Yeshua bringing both purification from sin, and a new heart and spirit, to those who have placed their trust in Him. By receiving the Holy Spirit, redeemed individuals have been given a guarantee or a pledge of the things to come as they wait for the future age to fully come (Ephesians 1:14). **We can receive the**

²⁹ Duguid, 421.

³⁰ Ralph P. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *EXP*, 6:922; cf. Ezekiel 11:19-20; 18:31; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18.

³¹ Block, 357.

new heart of the flesh, and experience an intimate relationship with our Creator now, prior to complete restoration of Israel.

Even though the main part of the New Covenant depicted by the Prophet Ezekiel is accessible now, more awaits us. Only with individual people possessing new hearts can a redeemed Israel be eventually returned to the Promised Land and to prosperity. John B. Taylor notes how, "For [Ezekiel]...the restoration of Israel was the beginning of the last days, the age of the Messiah. In keeping with that idea, therefore, the covenant relationship between God and Israel would be renewed."³² As more and more people are not only given new hearts by the Lord, but as He sovereignly brings His people together and they recognize themselves as a part of Israel being restored, we will see the eventual completion of Ezekiel 36:28: "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God." The individual enactment of cleansing from sin, being given a new heart, and a Spirit-led Torah obedience will inevitably lead toward the future and corporate restoration of Israel.

Romans 11:26-27

"and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Romans 11:26-27 is one of the most easy references to overlook regarding the New Covenant, although the New American Standard is a notable English version that indicates quotations from the Tanach or Old Testament in SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS, meaning that some of you may have run across this before. Romans 11:26-27 includes quotations from Isaiah 27:9 and Jeremiah 31:33-34.³³

The allusion that we see to the New Covenant appears within a densely-loaded section of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul considers some of the First Century realities of his Jewish brethren largely rejecting the good news, and addresses the proper attitude that the non-Jewish Believers in Rome are to have, lest they think that God is completely finished with the Jews as *they* are the ones who have largely received the good news. Consequently, there exist many different views of Romans 11:25-36 in both today's Christianity and the Messianic movement, each of which is going to be controversial in some way.³⁴

The only thing that is probably clear from Romans 11:25-36 is that Paul labels it a "mystery" (Romans 11:25), with many rightly agreed that Paul is discussing the plan of God, some parts of which were only then taking shape in his day. The challenge, of course, is that anything that is specified as a "mystery" is going to create a diverse number of interpretations and conclusions, because these events are largely futuristic. For the purposes of our examination here, we are most concerned about the role of the prophesied New Covenant within this mystery, and the character of God's people that is supposed to be demonstrated as a result of its enactment—bringing about the restoration of "all Israel" (Romans 11:26).

In Romans 11:25-36 the Apostle Paul summarizes some important parts of God's salvation-historical plan. He observes how only by the coming in of the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:25) will the full salvation and restoration anticipated to Israel come to pass (Romans 11:26). This plan of salvation and restoration is substantiated in Romans 11:26-27 with direct allusions made from the Tanach. The non-Jewish Believers who receive Israel's Messiah have a responsibility within this salvation-historical plan to recognize the high value and original calling of the Jewish

³² John B. Taylor, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 232.

³³ Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 551.

Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 728 fn#76, is not totally convinced that Jeremiah 31:31-34 is in view.

³⁴ N.T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 688.

people (Romans 11:28-29), and how God will show them mercy (Romans 11:31). Implied in this is how this calling, which the First Century Jews should have been accomplishing—will now, because of circumstance, largely be accomplished by non-Jewish Believers. Nowhere is a replacement of the calling upon the Jewish people implied, but emphasized instead is how God's gifts to them and calling upon them are "irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

What gifts and calling would Paul be referring to? Somehow it is affected by his assertion, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Romans 11:28). In the Tanach, the calling upon Ancient Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6) and a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6), which in the Apostolic Scriptures are roles that both Jewish *and* non-Jewish Believers get to accomplish (1 Peter 2:9).³⁵ Those who would largely be receptive and open to the gospel message of salvation would naturally be those who would accomplish the calling and use the gifts of a spiritual priesthood and a holy nation. Paul recognizes the nations' reception of the gospel as a part of God's plan—but is quite concerned that no arrogance be expressed by them toward his own Jewish people (cf. Romans 11:17-21).

If in God's plan non-Jewish Believers are those who have largely been receiving the gospel of Yeshua's salvation, accomplishing the spiritual call originally given to Ancient Israel, and have become beneficiaries of the New Covenant—what does this mean? Paul expresses how "For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:30-31). Recognizing how God's mercy has been expressed to the nations—because of a widescale Jewish rejection of Messiah Yeshua—should manifest itself by these people, *in accomplishing the calling*, being great vessels of His mercy to the Jewish people. The Lord, after all, has to use redeemed people in order to demonstrate His mercy toward Jews who do not yet acknowledge His Son as Savior. And, those of the nations, having once been disobedient, should be grateful enough to express mercy, kindness, and love to the people who gave them the Savior. They are not at all to be arrogant or spiteful—and especially not "rejoice"—over a widescale Jewish rejection of the Messiah. They are to rather be moved by the Spirit to rectify such circumstances!

The controlling theme that Paul is discussing is, "I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). Many versions render the clause *to plērōma tōn ethnōn* (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν) as "the full number of the Gentiles" (RSV, NIV, NRSV), reflecting a Calvinistic idea that this is a pre-determined or predestined number of people who will receive salvation—but it is a view that is incorrect. Most important, for interpreting Romans 11:25, is the immediate prior usage of *plērōma* (πλήρωμα) in Romans 11:12—"their fullness" (NIV)—as regarding what D.S. Lim calls a "moral or spiritual consummation."³⁶ From a lexical standpoint *plērōma* can indeed mean "that which is brought to fullness or completion" (BDAG),³⁷ and the most significant part of being the "fullness of the nations" is a high moral, ethical, or spiritual quality that has been reached.³⁸ God's salvation-historical plan is to restore "all Israel" (Romans 11:26), His composite nation of Jewish and non-Jewish people as one ruled by the Messiah. This will not be accomplished, however, until the nations who have acknowledged Yeshua reach an extremely high level of spiritual maturity.³⁹

³⁵ Cf. Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15; Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6; 43:21; Deuteronomy 4:20; 14:2; and Hosea 2:23.

³⁶ D.S. Lim, "Fullness," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 319.

³⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 829.

³⁸ Something that is possibly captured in the CJB rendering "until the Gentile world enters in its fullness."

³⁹ There is certainly a linguistic connection between the Greek *to plērōma tōn ethnōn* and the Hebrew *melo-ha'goyim* (מְלֵאֵי הַגּוֹיִם), used by the Patriarch Jacob when describing the descendants of Ephraim (Genesis 48:19).

Paul's primary concern in Romans 11:25ff is the spiritual attitudes of non-Jewish Believers, but a secondary reference is probably the return of scattered Israel/Ephraim out in the nations to the fold of Israel, which also has to

The salvation-historical plan regarding the salvation of “all Israel” is seen in partial quotations that Paul makes from both Isaiah and Jeremiah in Romans 11:26-27:

“A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,’ declares the LORD. ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from now and forever’” (Isaiah 59:20-21).

“Therefore through this Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven; and this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin: When he makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalk stones; *when* Asherim and incense altars will not stand” (Isaiah 27:9).

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more’” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

These prophecies are referred to by Paul because they give an essential summation of what is to be inaugurated by the work of the Messiah: **a complete forgiveness of sins and restoration of Israel to a right standing before the Lord.** The need for this forgiveness is compounded not only as it concerns previous idolatry by Ancient Israel, but now it will concern a widescale Jewish rejection of the Messiah. While Paul surely believed in the fulfillment of the physical promises of Israel’s restoration, Everett F. Harrison observes, “The effect...is not couched in terms of material prosperity or marital invincibility, but purely in spiritual terms, in the forsaking of godlessness and the removal of sins by the Lord God. The references to covenant suggests that Jeremiah 31:31-34 was in the mind of the apostle along with the passages from Isaiah.”⁴⁰ N.T. Wright further states,

“This language of covenant renewal, replete with echoes of Joel 2, Ezekiel 36, and Jeremiah 31, also sends us back to Deuteronomy 30...[T]he substance of the covenant is this: God will take away Israel’s sins...[T]he hope of salvation lies in the Messiah as the *τέλος νόμου* (*telos nomou*), the Torah’s true goal [Romans 10:4], and in the renewal that remains available through him. God’s salvation must be found where God has accomplished it, revealed it, and proclaimed it.”⁴¹

Once “the fullness of the nations” arrives is on the scene—which we are concluding to be non-Jewish Believers accomplishing the highest level of spiritual maturity possible, truly demonstrating who Yeshua is by the power of the New Covenant—then the salvation of all Israel will be manifested in the corporate forgiveness of all Israel as these prophecies foretell. The role of referring to these verses from Isaiah and Jeremiah, by Paul, serves to represent a spiritual reality that even today has yet to *fully manifest* itself in corporate Israel. The basic reality of what is expected, though, is *already present* within the life of any individual who partakes of Yeshua’s salvation. And if it has been truly partaken of, then the work of God’s Spirit within a person is to cause him or her to be greatly thankful, and not arrogant and haughty.

Because of a widescale Jewish rejection of Yeshua, non-Jewish Believers who have received Yeshua are largely going to accomplish Ancient Israel’s original calling of demonstrating God’s goodness to the world (cf. Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:3). In spite of non-Jewish Believers being

take place in order for all Israel to be restored. But this is *only* a secondary thought of his, to the more pressing issue of the proper attitudes that non-Jewish Believers should have toward Paul’s own Jewish brethren who have largely rejected Yeshua—yet are still entirely deserving of being called “Israel.” The salvation of the Jews is something over which Paul was frequently anguished (Romans 9:3), which any true Believer should anguish over as well.

⁴⁰ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in *EXP*, 10:124.

⁴¹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:692.

those who will principally accomplish this call and operate in the gifts, the calling cannot be revoked from Paul's Jewish people (Romans 11:29). So, non-Jewish Believers not only in gratitude but also because of Biblical history, have to be highly respectful of the Jewish Roots of their Messiah faith. Douglas J. Moo notes how Paul's word "counters a tendency for Gentiles to appropriate for themselves exclusively the rights and titles of 'God's people,'"⁴² and this has to be shared regardless of the (small) number of Jewish Believers. Perhaps non-Jewish Believers are a part of Israel via their faith in Israel's Messiah (Ephesians 2:11-12; 3:6), but this by no means allows them to express gross disrespect toward Jews who reject Him—a problem confronted in much of the Epistle to the Romans. Ben Witherington III specifies this as, "His largely Gentile audience seems to follow the normal Roman understanding of Jews, namely that Jews are an inferior race and, more to the point, a religiously inferior race."⁴³

Paul's non-Jewish Roman audience—and by extension many of us today—have benefited from the promise of the New Covenant in no small part due to the widescale Jewish rejection of Yeshua. Too widely overlooked within the promises of the New Covenant is how it is to involve a significant obedience to God's Torah. When people are forgiven of their sins and filled with the Holy Spirit, the Lord is able to bring us into a proper obedience to His Law (Romans 8:1-4). Paul would not have opposed a proper keeping of the Torah by non-Jewish Believers, because it *first* involves being transformed by God's love (Romans 13:9-10) and hence being vessels of mercy toward his Jewish brethren who had yet to acknowledge Yeshua as Savior (Romans 11:31). Secondly, consider the testimony of non-Jewish Believers partaking of their heritage in Israel, following God's Torah beyond some basic issues of ethics or morality. If done properly with honor expressed toward Judaism, would this at all provoke some Jews to jealousy for faith in the Messiah (cf. Romans 11:11)?

The Christian community claims to have received the spiritual forgiveness and reconciliation that the Isaianic and Jeremianic prophecies decree. Sadly, in viewing a great deal of Christian history, not enough non-Jewish Believers have probably followed Paul's expectation of allowing the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the New Covenant, being able vessels of His mercy toward the Jewish people (Romans 11:31). Not enough respect and honor, at least until the latter half of the previous century (after the Holocaust), was expressed toward the New Covenant's origins and our Messiah faith's heritage in Judaism. Today, via the advent of not only interfaith dialogue by the growth of the Messianic movement, it is quite *possible* we are beginning to see Paul's expectation in Romans 11:25-36 come to pass.

In the course of religious history, if more of an emphasis *had* been placed by Church leaders on following God's commandments as a part of the New Covenant—requiring people to study and appreciate the message of the Tanach—then perhaps fewer conflicts between the Church and Synagogue would have been present. In Romans 11:25, Paul specifically targets non-Jewish arrogance or haughtiness toward the Jewish people—and so if we are non-Jewish Believers, we have to always remember the source from which our salvation comes—a Jewish people still deserving of being called "Israel." We have the responsibility to implement the New Covenant in our lives, obeying God's Torah by His Spirit, and provoking Jews to jealousy for faith in the Messiah (Romans 11:11)—stimulating them to ask questions as to why we follow God's commandments. For, it is only by receiving Yeshua that any of us—and most especially for Paul, his own Jewish people—can have forgiveness from our sins. In Wright's estimation, "Paul's kinfolk can, he hopes and believes, be provoked into seeing [mercy] by being 'jealous' of the way in which Israel's privileges are being enjoyed by Gentiles."⁴⁴

It has not been easy, even in today's broad Messianic community, to see Paul's desire really come to pass. Many non-Jewish Believers who have embraced their Hebraic Roots have taken it upon themselves to "correct" what they think are the many errors of Judaism, which often are just

⁴² Moo, 721.

⁴³ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 279.

⁴⁴ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:694.

miscellaneous nit-picking issues about mainline traditions that they have not really investigated.⁴⁵ As a result, it is not only various Christians who have some anti-Semitic issues to work through, and have failed to show honor and respect toward the Jewish people—but even a few Messianic non-Jews have shown arrogant sentiments. Contrary to this, those who have truly experienced God’s mercy at the expense of those whom Paul labels as “enemies” of the good news—**should be conduits of God’s same mercy to see those people come to salvation.** If the calling originally given Ancient Israel is now largely being fulfilled by non-Jews, why should we not express God’s love and goodness to the people who gave us the Messiah—especially if such a calling has not been nullified? Likewise, if we are mature Believers, we should also try to understand the diverse contours of Jewish religion before criticizing them.

The kind of evangelism of the Jewish people that is required in our generation is not at all the popular variety that we might see of passing out tracts on the streets of Tel Aviv. It is one directly related to the New Covenant promise of God writing His Torah onto our hearts, and in demonstrating good works to people at large (Matthew 5:16). This is a much more passive kind of gospel proclamation via acts of kindness, love, and service toward the Jewish people—as they witness the weightier matters of the Torah in action and God blessing us for our obedience. Evidencing who the Messiah is by Torah-required acts of goodness, the same calling that was originally upon Ancient Israel, will enable non-Jewish Believers to truly become that “fullness of the nations” (Romans 11:25)—**spiritually mature people who can be present to accomplish their role in the restoration of Israel.**

When is this restoration going to make place? Moo comments, “Israel’s partial hardening will last only *until* the fullness of the Gentiles comes in—and then it will be removed.”⁴⁶ It is too little to say that this is just some random group of people out in the world that will one day be integrated into the community of Israel. On the contrary, this people of God, taken from the nations, must be of an extremely high spiritual quality in order for His salvation-historical plan to come to pass. They must embody in their lives what Paul refers to in Romans 11:26-27, in order for the Jewish people, who do not yet recognize Yeshua, to want the same forgiveness of God that they experience. The self-inflicted hardening that might be on these non-Jewish Believers, blinded to the necessity to honor the Jewish people (Romans 11:29), must be removed. Following this, the hardening that the Jewish people themselves have experienced, in largely rejecting Yeshua, then needs to be lifted by Yeshua’s salvation. In Wright’s words this means, “Either the person comes to their senses, recognizes God’s forbearance, and repents; or they are fitted the more fully for the judgment that will ensue.”⁴⁷ This only intensifies the need for those of us who know the Messiah of Israel to represent Him properly, *especially to Jews* who do not yet know Him!

Paul’s response to everything that he says in this vignette of Romans is, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Romans 11:33). This is followed by a doxology in Romans 11:34-36, in which a variety of Tanach passages are quoted (Isaiah 40:13; Job 15:8; Jeremiah 23:18; Job 41:3).⁴⁸ In spite of the many unknown details, the effect of this is obvious: **Believers are to be driven to the Almighty to see that they are not arrogant toward the Jewish people, and that they are filled with His love and mercy toward them.** From this vantage point, the emphasis on being *plērōma* or “fullness” (Romans 11:25) places a very high responsibility on non-Jewish Believers to be spiritually mature people—especially those who feel a strong connection to Israel and the Jewish people. They might be a part of Israel via their faith, but the salvation of “all Israel” (Romans 11:26) that is coming includes the full nation restored via the Messiah *and many Jews* coming to acknowledge Him as King.

Only when a high level of spiritual maturity is reached by non-Jewish Believers, can the wider plan of Israel’s restoration be enacted. It includes a renewed respect for the Jewish people

⁴⁵ Consult the editor’s article “Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement.”

⁴⁶ Moo, 717.

⁴⁷ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:688.

⁴⁸ Aland, *GNT*, 552.

and Judaism on behalf of those from the nations. And, it most especially includes a more conscious enactment of the New Covenant of God's writing the Law onto the hearts of His people. Not only will this enable non-Jewish Believers to be proper vessels of Yeshua's love and grace demonstrated toward Jews (Romans 11:31), but the incumbent greater obedience to the Torah that will come will bring all of the redeemed together as a unique, composite nation of Israel, as was the Father's original intention all along. *Then and only then* will the physical, and not just spiritual realities, of the New Covenant begin to manifest. Working toward this in our day has not always been easy, but as the Messianic movement grows and matures, God's plan will undoubtedly move forward more steadily.

Hebrews 8:7-13

"For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, 'BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.' When He said, 'A new *covenant*,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."

Hebrews 8:7-13 is probably the most important passage in the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures as it concerns the New Covenant, specifically because it involves a direct quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34, actually noted by Paul Ellingworth to be "the longest quotation in the NT"⁴⁹ from the Tanach. What is the role of Jeremiah 31 within the argument of Hebrews? To a theologian like Leon Morris it means, "This long quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 makes the point that the old covenant under which Israel has had its religious experience is now superseded by a new covenant."⁵⁰ It certainly is unavoidable that the author of Hebrews believes that the New Covenant is a reality that has now been inaugurated, but it is also easily observed that not enough readers or interpreters pay close attention to what he actually says. Some details, both in terms of the translation of Hebrews 8:7-13 and its surrounding verses, and opinions of what this passage means, have to be weighed together.

When many of today's Christian Bible readers encounter the New Covenant of Hebrews 8:7-13, the fact that it includes such a large quotation from the Tanach or Old Testament is often glossed over. Such a quotation is not there to just "liven" up the words of the author's argument or message, but is there to make a serious theological point. The New Covenant is something that was anticipated by Israel's Prophets and has now been brought to the lives of Believers by the work of Israel's Messiah.

The challenge in evaluating the role of Hebrews 8:7-13, which quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, is that too many people approach the Epistle to the Hebrews with the wrong presuppositions. First of all, Hebrews was probably composed so that it could have been read out loud as some kind of a sermon or a speech, which means that it is rhetorically packed with information. Secondly, Hebrews was put together to analyze some very serious First Century issues, in particular for Jewish Believers. While modern interpreters commonly think that Hebrews pits an old Judaism against a new Christianity, and thus they consider God's Torah to be old and obsolete—if more

⁴⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 412.

⁵⁰ Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *EXP*, 12:77.

attention were given to detail then these conclusions would be shown to be quite anachronistic. Certainly, while Yeshua the Messiah is uplifted in Hebrews as superior to all things, the author employs a significant number of *qal v'chomer* or *a fortiori* arguments, “how much more...” These arguments demonstrate Yeshua’s supremacy over individuals like Abraham, Moses, or King David, or the Levitical priesthood and Tabernacle—but these figures of faith and the Levitical priesthood have to be highly lauded and respected in order for Yeshua’s supremacy to stand.

A main feature of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the shift that has occurred via the sacrificial work of Yeshua on the cross, from the Levitical priesthood to Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood, detailed previously in Hebrews 7:1-8:6. Hebrews 9:1-10:18 following, further describes how highly the author views the previous Levitical order, including many of the details of the Tabernacle and sacrificial service, comparing and contrasting it to the sacrifice and priestly ministry of Yeshua in Heaven. It is only by Yeshua’s sacrifice and priestly ministry that permanent atonement for sin can be made, which the Levitical priesthood ultimately could not provide.

Many First Century Messianic Jews, and even non-Jews who had come to faith in Yeshua, would have been shaken up if the Temple and Levitical priesthood had just stopped operating. Many of these Believers lived in the Diaspora, and they placed their trust in the final sacrifice of the Messiah—but they still knew that sacrifices were taking place all the way back in Jerusalem. If the Temple and Levitical priesthood were gone, could they *exclusively rely* on the sacrifice of Yeshua for the permanent atonement of their sins—without the safety net of thinking that at least something was continuing in Jerusalem? **This was uncharted territory for the First Century *ekklēsia* that the author of Hebrews addresses.** The seriousness of it is noted by Ellingworth:

“The concept of the new covenant is co-ordinate...with that of Christ’s priesthood, and serves to show that it is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a total re-ordering by God of his dealings with his people.”⁵¹

Too frequently, we think that the author of Hebrews is writing directly to us, and we totally forget what his words meant to First Century people who looked to Jerusalem and to the Temple as the total center of their religious belief. This is quite contrary to many of us today, who have seen the worldwide spread of the good news, and are more consciously aware of “The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it” (Psalm 24:1). Unlike many of the First Century Believers, even subconsciously, most of us do not see God as somehow being constrained to a specific location on the planet. We consider our Creator to compose far more than just the Temple or Jerusalem or even the Land of Israel. The author of Hebrews, writing in the mid-to-late 60s C.E., was perhaps seeing the Jewish revolt and destruction of the Temple on the horizon, and knew that what would come of it was going to shake the faith of many Believers.

Hebrews 8:7 opens up the author’s quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 with the word, “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.” There is an immediate question to be asked, because in a version like the NASU which employs *italics* for words added by the translators, it is easily seen that “*covenant*” is not in the original reading.⁵² And indeed, the Greek does read *Ei gar hē prōtē ekeinē ēn amemptos* (Εἰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ἐκείνη ἦν ἄμεμπτος), with the term *diathēkē* (διαθήκη) or “covenant” noticeably missing from v. 7: “for if that first were faultless” (YLT). While the New Covenant is something that features within the author’s discussion, what is *hē prōtē* really connected to? Is adding “covenant” an inappropriate value judgment, as made by most Bible translators? Grammatically speaking, given the surrounding context, there are four possible feminine nouns that can be associated with *hē prōtē*. *Diathēkē* or “covenant” is certainly one of them, but so are *skēnē* (σκηνή) or “tabernacle,” *hierōsunē* (ἱερωσύνη) or “priesthood,” or even *leitourgia* (leitourgία) or “ministry.” The latter three would be used as referents to the Levitical sacrificial system, which the author of Hebrews affirms is surpassed in effectiveness by the Melchizedekian priesthood of Yeshua.

⁵¹ Ellingworth, 409.

⁵² Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 259, places “covenant” in parenthesis ().

Hebrews 8:6, immediately preceding, does indicate how “now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” It affirms how Yeshua is *kreittonos estin diathēkēs mesitēs* (κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης), “he is the mediator of a greater covenant” (Lattimore). The author’s argument, though, is that it is **only by the enactment of Yeshua’s ministry or priesthood**, resultant of His sacrifice for sinful humanity and exaltation in Heaven, has the era of New Covenant actually been inaugurated. This is confirmed in the preceding words of Hebrews 8:1-4:

“Now the main point in what has been said is *this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law.”

Hebrews 8:1, in particular, is frequently left out of readers’ evaluations of what of Hebrews 8:7-13 really communicates—even though it clearly controls what the author is trying to communicate. What does he label what he is about to discuss? He calls it *kephalaion* (κεφάλαιον)—“Now this is my main point” (NEB). The discussion in Hebrews 8:7-13 is controlled by the change in priesthoods that Yeshua has brought by His sacrifice, which in turn enacts the power of the New Covenant. As William L. Lane describes, “By his life of perfect obedience and his death, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34. His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary guarantees God’s acceptance of his sacrifice and the actualization of the provisions of the superior covenant he mediated.”⁵³ Only by the priesthood of Yeshua in Heaven can the enactment of the New Covenant be realized.

Why is it important to recognize that the discussion of the New Covenant is placed within an overarching discussion about a change in priesthoods? It is because it affects how we read v. 7: “For if that first...had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second” (NASU). Is this the “first *covenant*,” meaning the Mosaic Covenant that had been delivered by God at Mount Sinai to His people? Or is this the “first *priesthood/tabernacle/ministry*,” which had been occupied by sinful human beings? The perspective of the author of Hebrews is that the Levitical priesthood was the problem, because it could not offer the permanent redemption that Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood offers (Hebrews 7:11, 28). No statement is ever given that the Law given by God is somehow bad or is somehow the problem, rather it is those sinful men who occupied the office of Levitical priest (Hebrews 7:27; 10:11) that requires the change. With Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood now in place, the essential reality of the New Covenant can be partaken of.

The New Covenant is inaugurated because God “find[s] fault with them” (Hebrews 8:8a). While it might be thought that this is mainly speaking of “the people” (NIV), it is more likely that “them” relates to “the priests” (Hebrews 8:4, RSV/NIV/NRSV/ESV) referred to earlier. However, such sinful and weak human priests do have “to offer up sacrifices, first for [their] own sins and then for the *sins* of the people” (Hebrews 7:27), so the sins of the people at large are still in the equation. Principally, in light of the wider issues, the New Covenant is inaugurated because of the poorness of the Levitical priests—not difficult to assert in the First Century C.E. due to the corrupt Sadducees—and secondly relates to the people at large. Yeshua exalted in Heaven now serves the people after His Melchizedekian order, bringing the essential reality of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophecy to those who were once served by the Levitical order. F.F. Bruce summarizes these expectations as:

“[T]he people’s life would be reconstituted on a new basis, and a new relationship between them and their God would be brought into being. This new relationship would involve

⁵³ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 1-8*, Vol. 47a (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 208.

three things in particular (a) the implanting of God's law in their hearts; (b) the knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience; (c) the blotting out of their sins."⁵⁴

It is at the point, in Hebrews 8:8b-12, where Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted by the author. Many pastors and lay readers quickly jump through the verses that describe the New Covenant or *diathēkēn kainēn* (διαθήκην καινήν), expelling very little time and energy thinking through or contemplating what the New Covenant specifically involves. So, when glossing through the single longest quote from the Old Testament in the New Testament, many of today's Christians errantly think that the Torah has no more validity or relevance in the post-resurrection era—when this is not at all what the Jeremiah 31:31-34 promise says! Furthermore, the author of Hebrews fully upholds how the New Covenant is delivered “WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH” (Hebrews 8:8b), and not to any separate “Church” entity. While the New Covenant affects all people, it is only accessible through Israel.

Something that we also have to remember is that Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted by the author of Hebrews from the Greek Septuagint, the ancient translation of the Hebrew Tanach employed by the Diaspora Jewish Synagogue (among as many as thirty-five quotes or allusions to the LXX are seen in Hebrews).⁵⁵ We should by no means make the mistake of thinking, when we go to look up a Jeremiah 31:31-34 in our Bibles, translated from the Hebrew Masoretic Text, that the author of Hebrews has somehow made a misquotation if things do not totally match up. (This is also true of other places in the Gospels or Apostolic Epistles where the Greek LXX, and not Hebrew MT, is quoted.). Witherington points out what we need to be aware of in Hebrews 8:8b-13:

“The Septuagint changes the Hebrew twice: it omits from Jeremiah 31:32 the phrase *although I was like a husband to them*, and in Jeremiah 31:33 ‘within them’ becomes ‘in their minds’ in the Septuagint.”⁵⁶

Hebrews 8:9, quoting from Jeremiah 31:32, specifies the reason why the New Covenant is to be enacted. The Lord says that it is “NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.” The LXX translation largely conforms to what is seen in the MT, with the exception of the final phrase. The actual Hebrew of this clause in Jeremiah 31:32 reads with *v'anoki ba'alti bam* (וְאֲנֹכִי בְעַלְתִּי בָם), meaning “though I was their husband” (RSV) or “though I espoused them” (NJPS). The Greek LXX, employed in Hebrews, contrasts this and has *kai egō hēmelēsa autōn* (καὶ ἐγὼ ἤμελησα αὐτῶν), “I had no concern for them” (NRSV).

Ellingworth thinks that “ἤμελησα is an LXX mistranslation of the Hebrew ‘although I was a husband to them,’”⁵⁷ even though he is examining it entirely from a text-critical point of view. It is certainly possible that the Septuagint Rabbis translated *ba'alti* as *hēmelēsa* to interject a theological opinion of God not concerning Himself with Israel for a season after they broke His covenant. But it is also very possible that the Greek LXX is translating an overlooked and ancient definition of the Hebrew verb *ba'al*. Gesenius' *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, for example, offers the definition “to loathe, reject,” absent from most lexicons. It compares the verb *ba'al* to its Semitic cognates in Arabic, and notes that “there are also other verbs, in which the sense of subduing, being high over, ruling, is applied to the signification of *looking down upon, despising, condemning*,”⁵⁸ hence by extension not having any concern or regard. This is obviously not a permanent action, because if it were, then the Lord would not seek to establish this New

⁵⁴ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 189.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ellingworth, pp 37-42.

⁵⁶ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 262.

⁵⁷ Ellingworth, 416.

⁵⁸ H.F.W. Gesenius: *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 130.

Covenant with His people. But it does indicate that for the season in which Jeremiah prophesied, Israel did need to be punished and He did look down on them with some strong displeasure.

Hebrews 8:10 continues with quoting Jeremiah's oracle from the LXX, where we also encounter some variation with the MT: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts." In either the Hebrew or the Greek the overwhelming consensus is that the critical part of the New Covenant is that God says, "I will place My Torah within them and I will write it onto their heart" (Jeremiah 31:32, ATS). The Hebrew reads *nattati et-Torati b'qirbam* (נָתַתִּי אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם), "I will put my law within them" (RSV). Sometimes this is rendered with "inmost being" (NJPS) or "inward parts" (JBK). The Greek, however, adds a distinct dimension to this, reading *didous dōsō nomous mou eis tēn dianoian* (δίδου δώσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν). The NIV of Jeremiah 31:32 follows the LXX reading in part and has "I will put my law in their minds." Whether the Torah is written on the inward parts, heart, and/or minds—still implies that it is written onto the very psyche of God's people

A second difference, while less notable but quite important, between the Hebrew MT and Greek LXX of Jeremiah 31:33, is that the Hebrew only employs *torati* (תּוֹרָתִי) meaning "My Torah" (ATS) or "My Teaching" (NJPS),⁵⁹ in the singular, and the Greek uses *nomous* (νόμους) or "laws," in the plural. Why does "laws" appear in the plural in the Greek? Donald Guthrie suggests, "It may be that the translator wished to emphasize the separate parts of God's law to distinguish these parts from the law of Moses as a complete unity,"⁶⁰ which would certainly be the view of a Reformed theology that artificially sub-divides the Torah into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws. Still, the plural "laws" might better suggest that as the Holy Spirit writes God's commandments onto the heart via the New Covenant, it is not something that happens all at once, and only takes place at the speed of an individual's sanctification—a speed *only to be determined by the Spirit*.

The contrast between the previous Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant inaugurated by Yeshua's priesthood, is that God's commandments would no longer just be written on stone (Exodus 32:15-16), but now on the heart. We see a definite shift from an external to an internal emphasis. The unique rendering of the LXX, adding how God's laws will be written on the human *dianoia* (διάνοια), only further buttresses how significant the New Covenant is. Not only will redeemed people be empowered by hearts that love God, but they will have minds that can compute who God is that will appreciate the value of His Law.

It is quite sad to see how many Bible readers just skip over the fact that the New Covenant promise includes an implantation of God's laws onto the psyche of His people. Permanent forgiveness for sins and a restored relationship with God are offered for sure (Hebrews 8:11-12)—and that is why the New Covenant is superior to anything which had preceded it! But, the New Covenant most definitely includes the clear imperative for those affected by it to obey God. Bruce makes a direct reference to Romans 8:1-4, about the work of the Spirit inside of Believers accomplishing "the requirement of the Law," also noting a variety of Tanach passages that describe obedience to the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26; Exodus 24:7).⁶¹ It is interesting to observe the viewpoints that are made by Hebrews commentators, who have to recognize, that to some degree or another, the Torah is connected to the enactment of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33), as opposed to the two being at odds with one another:

⁵⁹ Note that the UBSHNT, while largely being a modern Hebrew translation of the GNT, follows the Hebrew of Jeremiah 31:33 in Hebrews 8:10, employing *torati*. The CJB follows suit, having "my Torah."

⁶⁰ Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 174.

⁶¹ Bruce, 189, fn #54.
He also points out the Greek of Revelation 21:3, which employs the plural *laoi* (λαοὶ) or "peoples," meaning that Israel proper is not the only beneficiary of the New Covenant promise (Ibid., pp 189-190).

- William L. Lane: “The quality of newness intrinsic to the new covenant consists in the new manner of presenting God’s law and not in newness of content.”⁶²
- David A. deSilva: “it speaks of an internalization of God’s commandments, an internal knowledge of, and commitment to do, God’s laws.”⁶³
- Fred B. Craddock: “It is enough here to observe that the new covenant promises the inscribing God’s law on the hearts of believers and the forgiveness of sins. There is no offer of new content but a new manner of the law’s being presented and being appropriated.”⁶⁴
- Ben Witherington III: “The stress is on the *new* covenant, which will accomplish three new things...[including] God will put his ‘torah’ into their very minds/consciences/hearts, which stresses the inwardness or inward effect of this new sort of instruction.”⁶⁵

Generally speaking, while commentators like these have to acknowledge some role that the Torah or Law plays within the dynamics of the New Covenant, they then move on without paying a great deal of attention to it. No time is really spent discussing what it means for a redeemed person—as mentioned in Hebrews—to have the laws of God written on the heart and mind.

What “laws” (*nomous*, νόμους) are written onto the hearts and minds of God’s people? No mature Believer disagrees with the fact that what is Divinely implanted into their psyche is the requirement to love God and neighbor, considered by our Lord Yeshua to be the foremost of the commandments.⁶⁶ The bulk of the Torah’s commandments relate to such a love imperative, and detail what the proper ethics and morality of God’s people are to be, and how people are to interact with one another, showing one another value and respect. The real issue, as Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood has inaugurated the New Covenant, is whether this signals an end to things like the Sabbath rest, appointed times, or a kosher diet—all of which today’s Messianic movement believes were not annulled by Yeshua or the Apostles.

In principle, the Torah does certainly remain in effect for this era of the New Covenant, but with Yeshua’s priesthood there has come “a change of law” (Hebrews 7:12), as there are new post-resurrection realities to be considered. The thoughts of Old Testament theologian Walter C. Kaiser should be well taken here. He says, “Only those laws from which Christ releases his church may be jettisoned,”⁶⁷ meaning those things directly impacted by the Messiah’s sacrificial work. Kaiser and today’s Messianics actually have no disagreement on the validity of the Torah; we just differ on the matter of *how much* actually has changed with Yeshua’s arrival.

Issues like *Shabbat*, the appointed times, the kosher laws, circumcision, etc.—and passages within the Apostolic Scriptures that have been frequently interpreted as speaking against the passages—need to be worked through contextually and historically, *and with patience*. Have these things really been rendered inoperative in this era of the New Covenant, or have Bible readers possibly missed certain things from First Century Judaism, which can affect our interpretation of certain verses? This requires further study and research of the Gospels and Apostolic Epistles on the part of today’s Messianic going well beyond the scope of this article.

The great irony of common Christian interpretations and views of Hebrews 8:8b-11, quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34, is that while many haphazardly jump through the text and do not

⁶² Lane, 47a:209.

⁶³ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 285.

⁶⁴ Fred B. Craddock, “The Letter to the Hebrews,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 101.

⁶⁵ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 262.

⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

⁶⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 312.

sit down to consider it closely—and many Christian theologians, pastors, and teachers strongly insist that the Torah has been abolished—**most spiritual, evangelical Christians actually keep the majority of the Law of Moses.** Those who come from holiness and pietistic traditions have always looked to the Torah's instructions on how to be godly, ethical people who follow Christ. There are actually only *a few* course corrections that have to be enacted in terms of things which have often been viewed as just being “Jewish”—which today's Messianic movement is being positioned to present to our brothers and sisters in the institutional Church, as relevant for their lives, in the future. Specifically, these are areas that only an historically and Jewish-conscious reading of the Apostolic Scriptures will reveal, and often includes the consideration of data and research that previous generations did not have access to. (Learning how to approach this constructively with other Believers, guided by the Torah's imperative to love, may be a challenge in the short term.)

The greatest emphasis of the New Covenant promise, anticipated by Jeremiah 31:34, and quoted in Hebrews 8:11-12, is the intimate knowing of God and the permanent forgiveness He provides by the work of His Son: “AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, “KNOW THE LORD,” FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.” Yeshua the Messiah's priestly work is what has brought this reality into the lives of those affected by the gospel. **It is perfectly valid,** in the sentiments of evangelical Christianity, **to recognize that the New Covenant brings one into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.** Knowing the Lord does not just involve knowing about Him or being reckoned as a member of His people, but brings a new standing of intimacy and being with Him, where we can approach Him with all of our needs (cf. Hebrews 4:16).

Similar to the translation issues of Hebrews 8:7, where *diathēkē* or “covenant” (noted in the NASU by *italics*) does not appear in the source text, so is this issue present in the closing remark of Hebrews 8:13a: “[I]n the saying ‘new’” (YLT), *en tō legein kainēn* (ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινήν). Commentators are widely agreed that the vantage point is the author of Hebrews observing how the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple are soon on the horizon,⁶⁸ and with this we observe how the “setting aside” (Hebrews 7:18) of the Levitical priesthood (at least until the Last Days and future Abomination of Desolation) would occur. Witherington notes how “a few scribes (81, 104, 376) took the word *first* to refer to the ‘first tent,’ in Heb 8:13,”⁶⁹ indicating how not everyone has interpreted “covenant” to be the only subject matter. With Yeshua's new *priesthood*, or perhaps also *ministry* or even (Heavenly) *tabernacle* service, the Levitical service was going to fade into history.

For the remainder of Hebrews 8:13, there are also translation issues. The NASU renders this with “He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear,” yet there are actually two Greek verbs, with one of them used twice, both relating to growing old, that should be translated along “ageing” lines. The first of these is *pepalaiōken* (πεπαλαίωκεν), and as Ellingworth notes, “the active voice means ‘declare old,’”⁷⁰ as opposed to the more common “obsolete.” The second usage that concerns us is the clause *palaiousmenon kai gēraskon* (παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκων), employing the previous verb *palaioō* (παλαιόω), and another verb, *gēraskō* (γηράσκω). Just as *palaioō* means “to be old or antiquated” (LS),⁷¹ so does *gēraskō* similarly mean “to bring to old age” (LS).⁷² Most Bibles render these two participles together as “becoming obsolete and growing old” (NASU) or “old and worn out” (Good

⁶⁸ Guthrie, 178; Bruce, 195-196; Craddock, in *NIB*, 12:101; Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 263.

⁶⁹ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 259 fn #489.

Witherington does, though, argue for “covenant” being the real subject matter.

⁷⁰ Ellingworth, 418.

⁷¹ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 586.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 164.

News Bible). But a more accurate rendition of these two verbs is simply “growing old and ageing” (NEB).⁷³ LITV offers a good translation of Hebrews 8:13 in its entirety:

“In the saying, New, He has made the first old. And the thing being made old and growing aged is near disappearing.”

And what was preparing to disappear? If Hebrews was indeed written in the mid-to-late 60s C.E., then these are observations made between the thirty to forty year period *after* the sacrifice of Yeshua, His ascension into Heaven, and Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood inaugurating the era of New Covenant. As a result of this, the Levitical priesthood is considered to be “old,” and looking back on this two millennia later, it did disappear with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The First Century Believers need not have been disturbed because the new priesthood of Yeshua was already ministering *for them* before the Father in Heaven, with a still-functioning Levitical priesthood that was “growing old and ageing” (Hebrews 8:13, NEB).

Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood inaugurating the era of New Covenant is affirmed by the context of Hebrews ch. 9, which compares and contrasts the Levitical Tabernacle with the Heavenly service of Yeshua. Like Hebrews 8:7 and 8:13, most English translations of Hebrews 9:1 add “covenant” to their renderings, as seen in the NASU: “Now even the first *covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.” All the Greek has is *Eiche men oun [kai] hē prōtē* (Εἶχε μὲν οὖν [καὶ] ἡ πρώτη), leaving *hē prōtē* or “the first...” by itself. However, the subject matter of Hebrews 9 is easily discerned to be the Levitical priesthood, the Tabernacle, and sacrificial system. The author of Hebrews surely respects these things, and is quite knowledgeable of them, but they do take second place to what the Messiah has accomplished and what His new, or second priesthood has brought.

Because of the Messiah’s work, the essential reality of the New Covenant is already present via His priestly ministry functioning in Heaven for us. Yet just as the New Covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 anticipate, so does the author of Hebrews himself affirm how more is to come in the future. As he specifies later,

“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET” (Hebrews 10:11-13; cf. Psalm 110:1).

Here, the author of Hebrews mentions Yeshua’s single sacrifice as providing a permanent atonement for sins, unlike the Levitical priesthood which could not offer such permanent atonement. He also affirms how at Yeshua’s ascension, He sat down at the right hand of His Father, and how we are awaiting His return from Heaven for His enemies to finally be defeated. The author also states, “so Messiah also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him” (Hebrews 9:28), a reference to the resurrection of deceased Believers and the full consummation of a person’s salvation when the whole human being is restored (Romans 8:23). In the future Millennial age, the “setting aside” (Hebrews 7:28) of the Levitical priesthood will be over, as there will be Levites who oversee a restored Temple (Ezekiel chs. 40-44), which functions under the Messiah’s direct oversight (and who will be present to explain it to us!). Such will be the time when the physical promises of the New Covenant come to fruition, as corporate Israel is gathered together and restored to prosperity.

⁷³ Similarly appearing as “growing old and aging” in Bruce, 187.

Hebrews 10:14-18

“For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, ‘THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,’ *He then says*, ‘AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.’ Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.”

Hebrews 10:14-18 repeats a quotation from Jeremiah 31:33-34, even though it is a bit shorter than what was quoted previously in Hebrews 8:7-13. Ellingworth labels this section as “**The new covenant again.**”⁷⁴ This appeal to the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah appears within the overall discussion of Yeshua’s priesthood, and the unique things that His priestly service has inaugurated (Hebrews 7:1-10:18). Prior to this second quotation of Jeremiah 31:33-34, the author of Hebrews asserts that Yeshua’s single offering of Himself has taken away sins (Hebrews 10:11-12a), and that He has sat at the right hand of His Father in Heaven, supreme, waiting for His return to Earth to finally defeat His enemies (Hebrews 10:12b-13).

While the previous quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:7-13 serves to establish how Yeshua’s Melchizedkian priesthood has inaugurated the era of New Covenant, the quotation we see here further considers how Yeshua’s offering up of Himself has inaugurated the New Covenant and the permanent forgiveness of sins now available for people. The author recognizes, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). This is the single sacrifice of the Messiah for sinful humanity; it is not as though He has to be sacrificed over and over again for sins, nor that the presentation of Himself before the Father in Heaven as an acceptable sacrifice has to be continuous. Yeshua’s single *prosphora* (προσφορά) was accomplished at His ascension into Heaven, and now we live in the era of the New Covenant with permanent forgiveness and reconciliation with God accessible to us. While the comparing and contrasting themes of the Levitical priesthood and Yeshua’s priesthood are to be considered, the important point made here has to do more with the Messiah’s self-sacrifice. As Bruce summarizes,

“Christ...by his self-oblation has accomplished once for all what generations of Levitical sacrifices had never done...The sacrifice of Christ has purified his people from the moral defilement of sin and assured them of permanent maintenance in a right relationship with God.”⁷⁵

While Yeshua’s priesthood is considered superior to the Levitical priesthood, if for no other reason that our Lord performs important intercessory work before His Father in Heaven (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:23-25), the superiority of Yeshua’s priesthood to the Levitical priesthood is intensified by us recognizing the Messiah’s permanent atoning sacrifice on sinners’ behalf. Yeshua’s one sacrifice has brought a permanent perfection to the saints that the sacrifices offered *over and over again* by the Levitical priesthood could not bring. This perfection is a permanent action, seen in the perfect verb *teteleiōken* (τετελείωκεν), whereas being made holy or sanctified is a continual action performed upon Believers by the Spirit, seen in the present passive participle *hagiazomenous* (ἁγιαζομένους). The ESV captures the verb tenses a little better: “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Ellingworth also might clarify for you what the “perfection” brought actually concerns: “τελειόω [*teleiōō*] implies the fulfillment of the...goal, namely an access to God which was formerly open only to the high priest.”⁷⁶

Asserting how the single offering of Yeshua has brought permanent perfection and reconciliation with God, the author of Hebrews prefaces his Jeremiah 31 quote with the word, “the Holy Spirit also testifies to us...” (Hebrews 10:15). While the Prophet Jeremiah originally delivered the oracle quoted, the author ultimately regards it to be a Divine word. *What was*

⁷⁴ Ellingworth, 512.

⁷⁵ Bruce, pp 246, 247.

⁷⁶ Ellingworth, 511.

promised in the past by God is now to be realized in the present. Lane states, “What was a future expectation in the time of Jeremiah has become a present reality as a result of the event of Christ’s death on the cross.”⁷⁷

Hebrews 10:16-17 only offers selective quotations from Jeremiah 31:33-34, partially because a longer quote has been offered previously. Morris considers how “most commentators think the writer is here quoting from memory and giving the general sense of Jeremiah’s words.”⁷⁸ The only major change that is actually made by the author, perhaps writing from memory, is his usage of “with them” (*pros autous*, πρὸς αὐτούς) instead of “THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND...THE HOUSE OF JUDAH” (Hebrews 8:10). In Hebrews 10:16a the author writes, “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD,” as Yeshua’s single sacrifice has started the era of the New Covenant, the main substance of which is detailed in Hebrews 10:17.

We should not read too much into the author of Hebrews only using “with them” in Hebrews 10:16. In Ellingworth’s estimation, this may have been done to emphasize the broad-sweeping effects of the New Covenant, lest anyone think that the New Covenant was only promised to Jews. He comments, “in v. 16a, τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ [*tō oikō Israēl*] is replaced by πρὸς αὐτούς, thereby making it easier to apply the text to readers some of whom may be gentiles...There is, however, no discontinuity between the old Israel and the new; indeed, such language is never used in Hebrews.”⁷⁹ At the same time, given the fact that non-Jewish Believers are considered a part of the community of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12; 3:6) in Messiah, and since this is a repetition of a previously quoted passage, the readers or audience already know who the “with them” (Hebrews 8:10) pertains to. Our author is more concerned about the essential reality of the New Covenant here, and less concerned with the people to whom it was originally promised. The New Covenant affects everyone.

If the author of Hebrews really wanted to express complete discontinuity between Yeshua’s Melchizedkian priesthood, the previous Levitical priesthood, and the Torah or Law of Moses—treating the Law as being totally abolished—then given the shortening of quotations here in Hebrews 10:16-17, he could have skipped over the reference seen to “laws” and gone right to the New Covenant’s promise of forgiveness. But this is not something the author of Hebrews does. After affirming the New Covenant that the Lord will make, he affirms what He has spoken: “I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM” (Hebrews 10:16b). The fact that the Lord is going to write His laws onto the hearts of His people, immediately after His promise of a New Covenant is asserted, is pretty significant to just overlook. And do recall that the author of Hebrews recognizes that it is the Holy Spirit speaking this (Hebrews 10:15), as opposed to just a human man like Jeremiah. Bruce further describes,

“The new covenant, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, not only involved the implanting of God’s laws, together with the will and power to carry them out, in the hearts of his people; it also conveyed the assurance that their past sins and iniquities would be externally blotted out.”⁸⁰

The Levitical priesthood was put in place to deal with the transgression of God’s laws, and so the question can be asked: With permanent atonement now in place by Yeshua’s sacrifice, has God’s standard of holiness in the Torah been nullified as well? Lane considers Hebrews 10:14-18 to regard how “the old cultus and the law that prescribed it have been set aside,”⁸¹ although his reference to “the law that prescribed it” could be viewed as only pertaining to the Levitical priesthood and Tabernacle, and not the Torah as a whole. deSilva observes how the previous state

⁷⁷ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 268.

⁷⁸ Morris, in *EXP*, 12:102.

⁷⁹ Ellingworth, 513.

⁸⁰ Bruce, pp 247-248.

⁸¹ Lane, 47b:270.

of continually offering the Levitical sacrifices, “necessitated the new covenant with its new rites.”⁸² But what are those new rites?

According to the author of Hebrews, the rites of the New Covenant compose the “laws” of God. Even if we consider these “laws” to basically be the Torah written onto the hearts of His people, excluding the added commandments regulating the Levitical service (cf. Galatians 3:19)—that is still a considerable bulk of the Law! Yet all deSilva can define as the so-called new rites of the New Covenant is “the inscribing of the way of God upon the heart—[which is] fulfilled in Christ’s ministry.”⁸³ I do not disagree with this, as Believers surely are to emulate Yeshua’s ministry and obedience to the Father (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:11). The problem is that many interpreters and commentators leave out the specifics of what this means, and they fail to define what it means for the “laws” of God to be written on the hearts of the redeemed. The author of Hebrews surely expected “laws” to be *principally understood* as the Lord’s high standard of ethics and morality delivered in the Torah, and how responsible people are to conduct themselves—especially considering how permanent atonement has been offered, cleansing the conscience (cf. Hebrews 9:9, 14; cf. 12:24). Further in Hebrews 10:24, the author admonishes his audience, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” a major part of being made holy or sanctified (Hebrews 10:14). Such “good works” (RSV/NLT/ESV/HCSB) of helps and service are those first required of God’s people in the Torah.

Every Hebrews commentator has to deal with the claim that the New Covenant involves the writing of the laws of God onto the hearts of those redeemed by the work of Yeshua, even though what such “laws” really are often remain quite vague for them. About as negative as the comments get in regard to this, is a little disparaging of Jewish tradition as seen by Lane. He thinks, “the people of God are no longer confronted by an exterior law. It may also suggest that God’s word will no longer be carried in phylacteries upon the head and arms (Exod 14:16; Deut 6:8; Matt 23:5) precisely because it is impressed upon the center of human volition.”⁸⁴ I do not think any of us can honestly disagree with how the New Covenant does have more of an emphasis of impressing the message of God’s commandments onto the human psyche, than what preceded it in the past when it could at most be placed on durable stone. The challenge is that the Jewish tradition of wrapping *tefillin* (תפילין) every day is just as outward a rite as is Christian communion, which evangelical commentators are not going to look at negatively. And today, wearing a What Would Jesus Do? bracelet is not quantitatively different from the command to physically bind God’s word on the hand.⁸⁵

The purpose of the author of Hebrews appealing to the New Covenant promise is that the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood could not offer the permanent forgiveness that Yeshua’s sacrifice now provides. This is not something in discontinuity with the Torah, precisely because the New Covenant involves the writing of the Torah onto the hearts of God’s people. And, even those who fall into the paradigm of thinking that the Torah has somehow been done away with or abolished by Yeshua’s Melchizedkian priesthood, still have to recognize how the overall issue being considered is not the Law—but how the Levitical priesthood could not offer permanent atonement for sin via its sacrifices. Guthrie puts it this way:

“It cannot be doubted that since this main section of the epistle ends in this way, the perfection of the offering which Christ has made is intended finally to dispose of the continuous performance of the old cultus. A new era has dawned. A new covenant is in force which makes the Leviticus sacrifices obsolete.”⁸⁶

deSilva similarly has to recognize how the issue discussed is the Levitical sacrificial system:

⁸² deSilva, 324.

⁸³ Ibid., 327.

⁸⁴ Lane, 47b:268.

Further, Lane, 47b:268-269, seems to frown on any kind of continued remembrance of the Day of Atonement.

⁸⁵ Religious Jews only wrap *tefillin* during their morning prayers. Ironically, those who wear WWJD bracelets often do so all the time, including during their sleep.

⁸⁶ Guthrie, 209.

“The old covenant’s rituals were a perpetual reminder of the restrictions on access to God, and access to the holy place was never broadened to the worshipers no matter how many sacrifices and sin offerings were performed.”⁸⁷

Lane’s thoughts are a bit clearer than Guthrie’s and deSilva’s, even though he works from the incorrect premise of the “Old” and “New Covenant” being analyzed in Hebrews 7:1-10:18, and not the first and second priesthoods. In his words, the author of Hebrews, “recognized that the finished work of Christ on Calvary was the actual realization of the divine intention towards which the sacrificial cult and the prophecy were both pointing...The fact that the old sacrifices had been superseded by the unique offering of Christ implied that the old covenant...has been replaced by the promised new covenantal arrangement.”⁸⁸

If Guthrie, deSilva, and Lane had all employed terms like “old priesthood,” then they would do significantly more justice to the words seen in the surrounding context of Hebrews 10. Not to be overlooked here would be Hebrews 10:11, which notes how “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” This is to be contrasted to the self-offering of Yeshua, permanently atoning for sin, and inaugurating the New Covenant where God’s Law is written on the heart. Most importantly, Yeshua’s offering and the New Covenant provide the fulfillment of God’s promise, “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE” (Hebrews 10:17). By the sinful sacrifice of Yeshua, sinful humanity’s *anomiōn* (ἀνομιών), literally “lawlessnesses,” will be forgotten by the Heavenly Father.

What is meant by the author of Hebrews, after appealing to the New Covenant promises, saying, “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:18)? He is saying now that Yeshua’s single offering has provided permanent forgiveness “sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary” (TNIV). The sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood at most would be redundant memorials of what they pointed to in Yeshua’s permanent sacrifice, but with such everlasting atonement offered by Him—should the Temple be destroyed—Hebrews’ audience need not be too overly concerned or worried.

For a commentator like Witherington, what Hebrews 10:18 means is, “Christians cannot go back to the old way of doing things, for it is in Jesus’ community that...complete forgiveness...[is] now in effect.”⁸⁹ The reality provided by the work of Yeshua is *ouketi prosphora peri hamartias* (οὐκέτι προσφορά περὶ ἁμαρτίας), “an offering for sins is no longer needed” (CJB). As such, any major changes regarding the Torah in this New Covenant era relate to the sacrificial system and priesthood (Hebrews 7:12). The Messiah’s work has definitely brought about a new spiritual economy. Any changes in relation to the prior order do not at all concern the basic rules of how God wants His people to obey Him—the foremost of which would be the Ten Commandments. These would be some of the principal “laws” in the Torah that are written on the hearts of people by the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:17), which are contrasted in Hebrews 10:18 with the “lawlessnesses” that must be forgiven.

Craddock thinks that given the permanent sacrifice of Yeshua, and the fact that sacrifices need not be offered for the atonement of sins, that there is “no longer any need for the continuation of cultic acts that by their very repetition testified to their ineffectiveness.”⁹⁰ He is correct in his assertion that the repetition of the Levitical sacrifices is an indication that they were ultimately ineffectual in providing permanent atonement. The challenge is with those of us who as pre-millennialists believe that animal sacrifices, will in fact, be restored to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem one day. Do we believe this because we think that Yeshua’s sacrifice is ineffectual? No. We believe this will occur because of what we read to be unfulfilled Abomination of Desolation prophecies (i.e., Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The prophetic fulfillment of these words requires an operating sacrificial system and Temple in Jerusalem.

⁸⁷ deSilva, 324.

⁸⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47b:268.

⁸⁹ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 280.

⁹⁰ Craddock, in *NIB*, 12:116.

The perspective of the Epistle to the Hebrews, written to Believers in the mid 60s C.E., concerns what they would think and do with their faith in Yeshua should the Levitical sacrifices suddenly end. This occurred in 70 C.E. with the destruction of the Temple. Would they really be able to recognize Yeshua's sacrifice as final for their sins? The author of Hebrews says that they can have confidence in Yeshua's single offering.

The perspective of those of us living today is different. What will Believers think should animal sacrifices be restored to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem sometime in the future—even if it is just a part of the fulfillment of an important state in God's plan? They might not be required for the atonement of sins, but are we going to treat them as some kind of an affront to God? The author of Hebrews does not at all have the perspective that animal sacrifices themselves are bad or evil or sacrilegious; he just says that they cannot provide what Yeshua Himself has provided by His single sacrifice. These sacrifices, as he says, are “a shadow of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1-2ff).

Many of today's Christians, because of a mis-appreciation of the Tanach or Old Testament, would claim that any animal sacrifices offered on the Temple Mount would themselves actually be an “abomination.” They forget the fact that for almost forty years *after* the final sacrifice of Yeshua, the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices were still operating, and the Apostles—while looking to their Lord's single offering as final atonement—did not at all consider an operating Levitical system to be an “abomination.” They also lived in a Mediterranean world where the contemporary Greco-Roman also offered animal sacrifices, unlike those of us living today for whom it is quite taboo. Thankfully, though, most pre-millennialists would consider declaring the restoration of sacrifices on the Temple Mount, to be an “abomination,” as actually speaking against the sovereign plan of God as laid out in prophecy—even if they do not fully understand such a plan.

If you struggle with the idea that in the future, animal sacrifices will be seen on the Temple Mount as a part of end-time prophecy, try to consider the place of many religious Jews who have prayed for the reconstruction of the Temple for many centuries. Once such a Temple and Levitical system are restored, will religious Jews really feel the “forgiveness” of God that such sacrifices are to presumably offer them? Or, will such a restoration of the Levitical system seem somewhat hollow or empty, not really offering them the restitution or spiritual fulfillment for which they have been praying for so long? This is no different than the person who really sets his eyes on something that he really wants quite badly, but then once he is able to get it, the object he wanted is not as impressive as it was thought to be. In a similar vein, consider how the reinitiating of a Levitical sacrificial system may be what it takes to see the salvation of many religious Jews. As we wait for this, let us refine our understanding of the New Covenant, and make sure that those foundational Torah laws of love for God and neighbor, and service for others, are being practiced by us!⁹¹

The Bondwoman: Throwing Out the Mosaic Covenant?

When today's Christians encounter the various New Covenant promises in both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, it can frequently come as a shock that the New Covenant *most definitely involves* God writing the commandments of His Torah onto the hearts of His people. Recognizing how this begins with the imperatives to love Him and neighbor, and thus treating other people with respect, I would say that most in principle do not have a problem with consciously recognizing that the New Covenant involves forgiveness from one's sins, **and being supernaturally empowered to obey the Lord**. But, there are certainly a few people who do not appreciate being told that the New Covenant requires obedience to God's Law, and they will insist that some passages in the Apostolic Scriptures confirm this point of view.

⁹¹ For a further analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews, consult the editor's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

A few verses seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians, regarding the covenants made by God with His people, do get some traction when this subject matter comes up. It is not uncommon for today's Messianics to be refuted with the word: "for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar...But what does the Scripture say? 'CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN'" (Galatians 4:24, 30; cf. Genesis 21:10). Paul says that the Mosaic Covenant made at Mount Sinai with Ancient Israel is like Hagar, and that Hagar and Ishmael were supposed to be cast out. So, we must completely dispense with the Mosaic Covenant and the Law (and possibly even the Ten Commandments). In extreme cases, Galatians 4:30 is grossly misapplied to one thinking that the Tanach or Old Testament Scriptures should be excised from our regimen of Bible study and discipleship (which would notably run contrary to the imperative of 2 Timothy 3:16).

This is a classic case of not reading Galatians 4:22-31 closely enough, and placing it within the overall argument of the Epistle to the Galatians. In his writing to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul refutes the idea that the new, non-Jewish Believers he has recently ministered to (Acts 13:13-14:28) must become circumcised as Jewish proselytes to be fully incorporated into the Body of Messiah. This, he strongly argues, occurs on the basis of faith—just as it always has, affirmed by the Tanach Scriptures (Galatians 3:11; cf. Habakkuk 2:4). Paul's letter includes a great deal of clarification on the proper role of the Torah, principally in how it is to show people their need for the Messiah (Galatians 2:21; 3:13, 24). Yeshua the Messiah came into the world to redeem sinful people who stood under the Torah's condemnation (Galatians 4:4-5), and if the Galatians follow those outsiders errantly influencing them, then they will somehow find themselves back under that same condemnation (Galatians 4:21; cf. 6:13).

Within this part of Paul's letter, he uses an analogy to explain the Galatians' predicament, using the two sons of Abraham—Ishmael and Isaac—as his vantage point of comparison (Galatians 4:22). Ishmael represents a work of the flesh, and Isaac represents freedom and the promise (Galatians 4:23). Paul makes the very important point, which is too often overlooked: "This is allegorically speaking" (Galatians 3:24a), "These things may be taken figuratively" (NIV), or "These things are illustrations" (HCSB).⁹² In describing how "these *women* are two covenants [*duo diathēkai*, δύο διαθηκαι]" (Galatians 3:24b), and how the first of these is the bondwoman Hagar associated with the Sinai Covenant, Paul is by no means intending to associate the Sinai Covenant as being something whose original intention was to breed nothing but Ishmael-type children. This is evident in Galatians 3:25, because in his analogy, Paul says,

"Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai...and corresponds to **the present Jerusalem**, for she is in slavery with her children."

Too easily jumped over is how the Sinai Covenant is claimed to relate to *tē nun Ierousalēm* (τῆ νῦν Ἰερουσαλήμ) or "the now Jerusalem" (my translation), with *nun* regarding "the present time" (LS).⁹³ The Sinai agreement between Ancient Israel and God, which was originally supposed to be a great blessing to Ancient Israel and which included the Levitical sacrificial system, by this point in the First Century had become something that was largely making slaves because of the religious leadership. Paul is making an observation in his present day that the Sinai Covenant, as it was *currently practiced* by those in Jerusalem, is proving to be insufficient—especially now that Yeshua the Messiah has come on the scene, who provides permanent atonement (Galatians 2:20; 6:14). If the non-Jewish Galatians went through ritual proselyte conversion, they would become part of something that would make them spiritual slaves. Yeshua's word to the Pharisaical leaders, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15), should be well taken here.

⁹² The CJB has, "Now, to make a *midrash* on these things."

⁹³ LS, 537.

Contrary to the Galatians seeking such a negative status, Paul affirms to them how “the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother” (Galatians 4:26), appealing to the Tanach on how Isaac was the child of promise (Galatians 4:27-28; cf. Isaiah 54:1). Isaac was conceived by the natural relations of Abraham and Sarah, as opposed to the forced relations of Abraham and Hagar. To go through the forced proselyte circumcision of the Judaizers/Influencers would be like Abraham and Hagar being joined together, and giving birth to a problem child like Ishmael (Galatians 4:29), contrary to the natural activity of the Holy Spirit in maturing Believers (Galatians 5:22-26). So the appeal is, cast out this Hagar or *present Jerusalem*, and recognize yourself as a child of promise like Isaac (Galatians 3:31). The Galatians were to eject from their assemblies the Influencers that derided Paul’s apostleship (cf. Galatians 1:1), and would require the non-Jewish Believers among them to become proselytes to a system that would largely not aid them spiritually.

If Hagar represents the Sinai Covenant *having devolved* in the First Century to the point of producing slaves—because of the religious leadership in Jerusalem—then what is this second covenant that Sarah and the Heavenly Jerusalem are supposed to represent? Richard N. Longenecker rightly indicates what it is: “the New Covenant that is Christ-centered, which Paul proclaimed.”⁹⁴ This is the New Covenant that offers complete forgiveness from sins, complete reconciliation with the Father in Heaven, has a definite emphasis on love for God and neighbor (Galatians 5:14)—and includes an attendant, natural obedience to Him provided by the Spirit (Galatians 6:2), the “hearing of faith” (Galatians 3:2, 5, YLT). From Paul’s point of view, Believers live in the era where true leadership is found in the Heavenly Jerusalem where Yeshua the Messiah reigns supreme.

Things have certainly changed with the arrival, sacrifice, resurrection, and then ascension of Yeshua into Heaven. **Paul is connecting the Jerusalem above with the New Covenant.** Yet the issue in Paul’s mind is not the ethos or morality of the Torah’s commandments, or even practices such as *Shabbat*, the appointed times, and kosher laws. The issue is how the Sinai Covenant—especially considering how it became abused by the First Century—has now naturally given way to the New Covenant as salvation history has progressed forward. The essence of the New Covenant promise is that God’s Law can be written on the hearts of His people via the power of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). Paul’s instruction to the Galatians is, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Messiah” (Galatians 6:2), meaning that they were to surely follow the Torah, but follow it with the Messiah’s example in mind and with good works of love and service as paramount (Galatians 6:9-10). A life truly guided by the Spirit will not be one of condemnation under Torah’s penalties (Galatians 5:18).

It was never the intention of the God of Israel for the Sinai Covenant to place people into bondage, and lead to spiritual (bastard) children like Ishmael being produced. This is something that came about via fallen humans packaging it into a conversion-by-circumcision ideal many centuries later, frequently placing one’s ethnic status ahead of faith in God. When Paul asserts that the Jerusalem above is what the Galatians should be focusing on, a city that is “free,” he expects the Galatians to have the New Covenant enacted within their hearts via God’s Holy Spirit. *By no means is this a dismissal of the Torah’s code of holiness*, but it is a recognition that obedience to it comes via the indwelling of His presence inside of the heart, as inaugurated by the work of Yeshua and the full power of the gospel. This obedience not only brings true freedom and liberty for God’s people from the power of sin, but it also empowers them to fulfill His purpose for the Earth in being a blessing to all (Galatians 3:8; cf. Genesis 12:3).⁹⁵

The Ministry of Death versus the Ministry of the Spirit

Everyone who has come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, being cleansed of his or her sins and spiritually regenerated, has partaken of the New Covenant—a reality that has clearly dawned in

⁹⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), 211.

⁹⁵ For a further discussion, consult the editor’s article “The Message of Galatians” and his commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

this post-resurrection era, and is accessible to all who cry out to the Lord. Yet the New Covenant can *only be enacted* in the lives of those who receive Yeshua. The New Covenant is not some separate part of Scripture, but is, rather, a **spiritual condition or force to be reckoned with**. If a person has not partaken of the New Covenant promises of reconciliation with God and permanent forgiveness, now accessible by the sacrificial work of Yeshua, then what would such unregenerated people be affected by? The spiritual condition or force they would logically be affected by would be the ministry of death, or the condemnation pronounced upon unrepentant sinners. This is a spiritual condition of hostility toward, and exile from, God.

Even though it is common for one to hear a great deal of talk about the differences between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, too frequently what the “Old Covenant” specifically composes or represents is misdiagnosed. The term “old covenant” (Grk. *tēs palaiās diathēkēs*, τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης) only appears once in the Apostolic Scriptures, in 2 Corinthians 3:14:

“But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah.”

Most people who see Paul’s assertion here, simply assume that “the reading of the old covenant” means “the reading of the Old Testament” (NKJV), either the Tanach Scriptures or perhaps just the Torah of Moses. It might be concluded or thought that people who only read these Scriptures cannot see the Messiah whose life is recorded in the so-called “New Covenant,” but we have to remember that when Paul made this statement there was no “New Testament” written.⁹⁶ While today’s Messianics often use terms like Old and New Testament, in piecemeal, to refer to parts of Scripture, *because these are familiar terms used by scholars and laypersons alike*—neither the Tanach nor Apostolic Writings make up a “covenant,” but are simply the inspired words of God delivered through His human vessels. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that the terminology “old covenant” is not employed again until the late Second Century C.E., in the writing of Melito of Sardis—a gap of around 140 years.⁹⁷ Could the good Apostle Paul have used “old covenant” to mean something a little different than just the Tanach Scriptures?

We have to make some strong efforts to understand what the “Old Covenant” is *specifically defined* by Paul to be in the larger context of 2 Corinthians 3:2-18. It is correctly noted, in part, by J. Paul Sampley, how Paul is describing “that contemporary, non-believing Jews have hardened minds...when they read the ‘old covenant,’”⁹⁸ meaning that many of Paul’s Jewish brethren have some kind of an inability to see the Messiah. But whether this “Old Covenant” is actually the Torah proper—God’s Instruction to His people for holy living—should be disputed. Is the “Old Covenant” really the Mosaic Torah? Or, in contrast to the “New Covenant” of permanent forgiveness and reconciliation, is the “Old Covenant” the ministry of death and condemnation upon unrepentant sinners?

In his writing to the Corinthians, Paul commends his audience on how the unique work of the Holy Spirit has transformed their lives. He claims that they are like a letter, “known and read by everybody” (2 Corinthians 3:2, NIV). They “are a letter of Messiah, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:3). Immediately in 2 Corinthians 3, we see allusions to the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, and the unique work of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁹ Paul

⁹⁶ Witherington points out, “Paul is not claiming to be a minister of the New Testament, which did not yet exist” (*Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 379 fn#12).

⁹⁷ Ralph P. Martin describes, “Paul evidently coined the expression,” yet has to note, “its next occurrence is as late as Melito of Sardis, *On the Passion* (before A.D. 190)” (*Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, Vol 40 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986], 69).

Witherington similarly confirms, “The next” usage of this terminology “seems to be from Melito of Sardis late in the second century” (*1&2 Corinthians*, 381 fn#21).

⁹⁸ J. Paul Sampley, “The Second Letter to the Corinthians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 68.

⁹⁹ This is something acknowledged in various degrees by 2 Corinthians commentators:

then claims that the Corinthians' confidence can only come through the Messiah, the same as it is with him and his close associates (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). Their "adequacy is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5b).

From this point, in 2 Corinthians 3:6-18, Paul compares and contrasts what might be labeled as "A Tale of Two Ministries."¹⁰⁰ He claims that the Lord "also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). The point is made that the absolute letter of the Law will kill someone, as the Torah frequently prescribes a death penalty to those who violate its most serious commandments. Furthermore, any human-driven obedience to the Torah is futile in order to bring one redemption, and being driven by one's flesh to be "Torah observant" will not really bring one great blessings in life. Contrary to this, Paul and his associates are ministers of the promised New Covenant, which attendant with God's Spirit will bring one not just eternal life and restored communion with Him—but a blessed life on Earth.

Colin Kruse concludes that a proper obedience to God is a part of the ministry of the New Covenant, and that Paul's words are aimed against an improper usage of the Torah:

"The answer seems to be that...[the law] kills when it is used improperly, *i.e.* as a set of rules to be observed in order to establish one's own righteousness...To use the law in this way inevitably leads to death, for no-one can satisfy its demands and therefore all come under its condemnation...However, the ministry of the Spirit is quite different. It is a ministry of the new covenant under which sins are forgiven and remembered no more, and people are motivated and enabled by the Spirit to do what the improper application of the law could never achieve (*cf.* Je. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:25-27; Rom. 8:3-4)."¹⁰¹

The New Covenant is not the ministry of death or condemnation that Paul will proceed to detail (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). But, Paul does recognize the Divine origins and value of this ministry of death, because without it the superiority of the New Covenant could not be realized. He observes, "But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?" (2 Corinthians 3:7-8). When the Ten Commandments were delivered to Ancient Israel (Exodus 34:29-32), they surely were given via the awesome presence of God's glory that was reflected from Moses as His agent to the people. Yet when they were given to the people, all the people could do was be afraid, recognizing that if these statues were violated, it could be their death—as high penalties are frequently detailed throughout the Pentateuch to those who violate its most severe commandments, **especially the Ten Words.**

From Paul's perspective, what Moses originally brought down from Mount Sinai, could at most be written on stone tablets. ***Only remaining engraved on stone tablets, all it could largely be used for would be as a ministry of condemnation.*** He does tell the Corinthians, though, "if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory" (2 Corinthians 3:9). The previous ministry of condemnation had glory, but it is far surpassed by the ministry of righteousness now present in the New Covenant—which has the ability to supernaturally write God's Instruction via the Holy Spirit onto hearts (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). The fact that the previous era, dominated by the ministry of condemnation—is **now over**—is seen by Paul's continuing remark, "For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*" (2 Corinthians 3:10).

In 2 Corinthians 3:11, Paul asserts how "if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory." So, if the ministry of condemnation, which at best could be engraved onto lifeless albeit durable stone, had glory and Divine origins—then the New Covenant

Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *EXP*, 10:334; Martin, 52; Colin Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 91; Sampley, in *NIB*, 11:64.

¹⁰⁰ Witherington, *1&2 Corinthians*, 375.

¹⁰¹ Kruse, pp 92-93.

of the Spirit writing God's Instruction onto redeemed hearts surely has glory as it has the same Divine origins.

Too frequently overlooked here is that what Paul describes as being "brought to an end" (2 Corinthians 3:11, ESV)—in contrast to something that is "permanent" (ESV)—is the "ministry of death" or "ministry of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). This ministry or *diakonia* (διακονία), is the "performance of a service" (BDAG).¹⁰² While the ministry of condemnation is rendered inoperative in the era where Yeshua's sacrifice offers final atonement for sin, and the penalties of condemnation have been remitted (Colossians 2:14)—**the standard of God's holiness in the Torah is still with us.** To equate the holy commandments of God's Torah as being the "ministry of condemnation," would fail to remember how the New Covenant promises actually include the Law being supernaturally written on the heart by the Spirit. Kruse astutely observes,

"It is important to recognize that Paul does not imply that the law itself was fading away. The law as the expression of the will of God for human conduct is still valid. In fact, Paul says the purpose of God in bringing in the new covenant of the Spirit was precisely that the righteous demands of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4)."¹⁰³

Kruse further remarks that "the time of the ministry of the law has come to an end,"¹⁰⁴ which would not regard the Torah as a standard of how people are to live, but instead the "ministry of death" or "ministry of condemnation" that prescribed capital punishment. In the post-resurrection era, Yeshua the Messiah's sacrifice for sinful humans has nullified this condemnation—He has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us...having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14)—inaugurating the New Covenant with permanent atonement and forgiveness.

In 2 Corinthians 3:11, Paul employs the verb *katargeō* (καταργέω), "to cause someth. to come to an end or to be no longer in existence" (BDAG),¹⁰⁵ describing how the ministry of condemnation is no more: "if that which fades away [*katargeō*] was with glory..." It notably also appears in his assertion of Romans 3:31, where Paul asks, "Do we then overthrow [*katargeō*] the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (RSV). Born again Believers are very much called to recognize the importance of God's Torah, but how we uphold its validity is by the new "ministry of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 3:9) brought about by the Messiah's work and example left for us (Matthew 5:16-17ff).

Those who are redeemed people of the New Covenant are to possess the spiritual confidence that comes with it, like Paul and his associates who declare the good news (2 Corinthians 3:12). Their work is contrasted with previous servants of God like Moses, "who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away" (2 Corinthians 3:13), as Moses had to shield himself because of the glory shining forth from his face having been in God's presence (Exodus 34:33-35). And why did Moses have to wear this veil or covering? An extremely important thought, as offered by Peter Enns, is "we may think of Moses' veil functioning in a similar way to the veil or curtain in the tabernacle. Just as the people could not enter the Most Holy Place to behold God's glory, now they cannot behold the glory of God reflected in Moses."¹⁰⁶

The main reason Moses had to wear a veil was because of the sinfulness of the people, for whom he had to frequently go and intercede before the Lord as mediator.¹⁰⁷ The glory on Moses' face would eventually fade, simply because Moses was a human and would die. But, the description that Paul provides, with something having to block people and God's full presence, is well taken, notably because at Yeshua's crucifixion the veil in the Temple separating out the Holy

¹⁰² BDAG, 230.

¹⁰³ Kruse, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ BDAG, 525.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 587.

¹⁰⁷ Kruse notes how, "Rabbinic writings of c. AD 150 say that it was the effects of Israel's sin in making the golden calf while Moses was on the mount which resulted in their being unable through fear to look upon the brightness of Moses' face" (p 97).

of Holies ripped in two (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), depicting how access to God's intimate presence is now accessible. Paul's analogy is that in being unable to fully behold the glory resonating off of Moses' face, the Ancient Israelites could "not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end" (2 Corinthians 3:13, ESV). Moses wore a veil that represented how the presence of sin separates people from the presence of God. Paul makes the point that with such a veil, the Ancient Israelites were unable to clearly see the *telos* (τέλος) or culmination of what would be accomplished by the Messiah's ministry (cf. Romans 10:4, Grk.), the permanent atonement they needed—a future ministry for which Moses' ministry served as a prototype.

The sad observation that the Apostle Paul made in the First Century, was that it was not just the Ancient Israelites in the wilderness who could not see the Redeemer's ultimate ministry coming. 2 Corinthians 3:14 includes some loaded words:

"But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah."

The Ancient Israelites had hardened minds, lacking the spiritual sensitivity required to acknowledge how Moses wearing a veil depicted how God's holiness must be separate from sin. The dilemma for Paul was how this existed even in his time, as his own Jewish people largely were separated from God's presence because of the same reason.

When most people read 2 Corinthians 3:14, they simply assume that "reading of the old covenant" means hearing the Torah or Tanach Scriptures, as opposed to *hearing the Torah or Tanach Scriptures* from a particular vantage point or spiritual state. Do keep in mind that the New Covenant involves the internalization of such Tanach Scriptures upon a regenerated heart, and how Paul has previously defined what the New Covenant is: a "ministry of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 3:9) and not some new part of Scripture. Quite contrary to this, the Old Covenant would be the "ministry of death" or "ministry of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9).

When Paul claims that the Old Covenant is read, the ministry of death—he is speaking of the condemning aspects of the Torah pronounced upon sinners. When spiritually sensitive people hear such a ministry of condemnation read, they are cut to the quick by the convicting grace of God to repent of their sins, and are drawn to Yeshua's sacrifice at Golgotha (Calvary), which has removed the veil separating us from the Father's presence, but has to be removed from our individual, sinful hearts via personal salvation. Contrary to this, those who are hardened, still have a kind of veil or barrier separating themselves from the Creator:

"But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart" (2 Corinthians 3:15).

All the Torah could function as, for most of Paul's First Century Jewish brethren, was the Old Covenant ministry of condemnation, which Moses came to administer. They largely lacked the new heart promised by the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The status of having a veil or barrier placed between a person and God is not just a Jewish problem, but can be the problem of *any unregenerated person* hearing the Law read. When unregenerated or unsaved people hear from Moses' Teaching, all they can really do is be condemned. **They suffer from the power known as the Old Covenant**, not having the New Covenant's final atonement and permanent forgiveness present in their lives. Yet, as Paul so clearly states, it is obvious: "whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:16). The power of the Old Covenant of death and condemnation—exiling one from God—can be removed by the transforming power of the gospel, and the reality of the New Covenant of the Holy Spirit teaching His people can be enacted. Too often, though, many of today's Believers (even some well-meaning theologians) only see God's Torah as being something that can condemn people, in spite of it being "holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). Paul's perspective, however, is that sin takes advantage of the Torah by causing people to break it, which in turn is what separates people from God (cf. Romans 7:7-11). The issue of sin, and not some problem with God's holy Law, is what has been fixed by Yeshua's sacrifice.

Kaiser, an Old Testament theologian, naturally has a very high view of the Torah for Christians today. He recognizes how only faith in Jesus can render the barrier, curtain, or veil placed between God and sinful people inoperative. He describes how, "This blindness can only be

remedied and Moses' veil 'lifted' and the glory...revealed in its ultimate significance...whenever men and women turn to the Lord. Only then is the veil 'removed' (v. 14). Thus it is the 'veil' that is to be 'abrogated' or 'removed' according to Paul..."¹⁰⁸ The veil does not then, represent God's holy standard of conduct in the Law, but is the sad consequence of how a holy Creator must be separate from the presence of sin. Moses, as God's representative (2 Corinthians 3:13), had to be shielded because of the Israelites' sin. Similarly, unregenerated people have *to auto kalumma* (τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα) or "the same veil" (2 Corinthians 3:14) over their hearts. But contrary to having to shield others, like the presence of God radiating off of Moses, the barrier on a sinner separates the heart from God. Only by appropriating the sacrifice of Yeshua, can people have this barrier removed and can full communion with the Creator be restored.

Witherington disagrees that it is the veil which is nullified by faith in the Messiah, noting some grammatical points from 2 Corinthians. He states, "The neuter participle *to katargoumenon* [τὸ καταργούμενον], 'annulled,' agrees with 'that which was glorified' in v. 10 and so applies to the whole of the old covenant...Therefore, what is spoke of as annulled through Christ in v. 14 is probably the Old Covenant rather than the veil."¹⁰⁹ The grammatical points being what they are, Witherington's mistake is in failing to identify the Old Covenant *not* as God's standard of holiness contained in the Ten Commandments or Moses' Teaching—but with the ministry of death or condemnation which Yeshua has nullified. This Old Covenant would be the Torah's capital punishment declared upon sinners, a consequence which comes from violating the commandments now to be written upon the heart by the power of the New Covenant. The veil that Moses wore, like the curtain in the Tabernacle and Temple, is simply the epitomization of what the ministry of condemnation causes: **separation from God.**

The power of the New Covenant notably goes well beyond the Torah's commandments being written on the heart, and even the availability of permanent forgiveness with God. The New Covenant inaugurated in one's life enables us to fully see the Lord—as any heavy veil or barrier separating us from His presence, which existed over our hearts when we were unregenerated sinners—is now to be gone! The Holy Spirit offers Believers great freedom, as the ministry of condemnation is no more (2 Corinthians 3:17; cf. Romans 4:6-8; 8:1). This is why Paul can say how he and his ministry associates, unlike Moses who wore a veil representing God, can now in the New Covenant era go about bearing His presence as though they are unveiled (2 Corinthians 3:18a; cf. 3:6). Paul himself, after all, had an epiphany of the Lord on the road to Damascus that changed him from within (Acts 9:1-18). All Believers, as they grow in faith and knowledge of Yeshua, "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18b). We should possess the confidence to speak forth what He has done within us (2 Corinthians 3:12). And in bearing the Lord, the New Covenant imperative of proper obedience should certainly be present—as we should possess the ability to see the importance of Moses' Teaching with the veil removed!

We should also recognize how prior to the ministry and sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah, the most the Torah could really be manifest as was condemning statutes written on stone (2 Corinthians 3:3a). Now via ministry of righteousness and reconciliation He has brought, God's Instruction can be written "in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3b, KJV). Feinberg explains how, "Since the inward dynamic was absent in the old covenant, it could not be effective. There must be an inner force, a new power."¹¹⁰ The old covenant ministry of condemnation would need to be nullified in order for an era when all of God's people could fully obey Him by His Spirit, and be fully reconciled to Him.

Of course, when we consider the perspectives of the ministry of death/condemnation versus the ministry of righteousness brought about by Yeshua, there are naturally questions about the people who lived before the current era of the New Covenant. *We knowingly benefit from Yeshua's sacrifice*, but how could they be saved? The testimony of the Apostolic Scriptures is

¹⁰⁸ Kaiser, 313.

¹⁰⁹ Witherington, *1&2 Corinthians*, 380.

¹¹⁰ Feinberg, in *EXP*, 6:576.

clear that those who sincerely believed in the promises of God and redemption, did not die condemned to eternal punishment. Significant figures of faith are lauded in chapters like Hebrews 11, and the Messiah Himself speaks of sitting in the Kingdom with “with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Matthew 8:11), and “all the prophets” (Luke 13:28). Interestingly enough, the hardships Moses endured in Egypt are claimed to be on behalf of the yet-to-arrive Messiah (Hebrews 11:25-26).¹¹¹

Significant figures of faith who we read about in the Tanach Scriptures might not have lived in the time when permanent forgiveness and atonement were available via Yeshua, but we see the promise of a Redeemer delivered all the way back in Eden (Genesis 3:15). Faithful men and women of God, who would cling to the then-future promise of permanent restitution and cried out to Him for mercy, are those who would be considered “saved.” They placed their trust in permanent forgiveness being provided one day, the same way that we believe that permanent forgiveness is now accessible. If we find this difficult, then the long and short answer—for any generation—is that *only God* gets to determine who enters into God’s Kingdom. This is true of a person who lived in the previous era dominated by the ministry of condemnation, *or* in the present age dominated by the ministry of righteousness.

A “Renewed” Covenant?

It is quite frequent in quarters of today’s Messianic community to not hear the term “New Covenant” used in reference to the Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 promises, but instead hear the term “Renewed Covenant.” Many people, including myself once, have innocently used the term “Renewed Covenant,” without thinking it through clearly enough. Using the terminology “Renewed Covenant” is a tempting solution for people wishing to emphasize continuity between the promised *b’rit chadashah* (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה) and the previous Sinai Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), because for some people the term “New Covenant” equates to something completely removed and separate from the Tanach Scriptures. But, using the term “Renewed Covenant” actually creates some rather tenuous issues when fully evaluated.¹¹²

From a semantic standpoint, those who think that “Renewed Covenant” is what we should use, like to argue that the Hebrew adjective *chadash* (חָדָשׁ), often frequently defined as just “new” (BDB),¹¹³ should be considered “renewed.” Its related verb, *chadash* (חָדַשׁ), can mean “renew, repair” (BDB),¹¹⁴ and so *b’rit chadashah* should be “renewed covenant” to emphasize how it aligns with the character of the previous covenants.

No one who reads the promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 or Ezekiel 36:25-27 can discount the continuity between the previous Sinai agreement and this anticipated agreement. There is far more in common between the two than what many of today’s Christians realize. Yet, the uniqueness of this *B’rit Chadashah* is that permanent atonement and forgiveness are offered—which we believe has been provided by Yeshua’s sacrifice. Within such a promise, **God has no intention of renewing the ministry of death or condemnation** (2 Corinthians 2:7, 9), which Yeshua’s death has now rendered inoperative (Colossians 2:14).

¹¹¹ Also to be considered is how there are righteous persons depicted in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22ff), the former holding place for the righteous deceased who are now in Heaven following the ascension of the Messiah (Ephesians 4:8-9), awaiting the resurrection.

For a further discussion, consult the editor’s article “To Be Absent from the Body.”

¹¹² On an additional note, referring to the Apostolic Scriptures as the *B’rit Chadashah* also complicates things, because the Apostolic Scriptures or Writings compose the inspired texts of the First Century Messianic Believers—and do not necessarily make up a “covenant” between God and His people. Those who use the term “New Testament,” infrequently, in the Messianic community, do so only for the familiarity of those who are not that acquainted to neutral terms like Apostolic Scriptures/Writings or Messianic Scriptures/Writings.

More problematic, though, is that by referring to the Apostolic Scriptures/Writings as the *B’rit Chadashah*, various sectors of the Messianic movement have helped propagate the historically and textually invalid belief that the Apostolic Scriptures/Writings were all originally written in Hebrew.

¹¹³ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 294.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Also to be considered regarding the usage of *chadash* is what is to be made of God giving His people *lev chadash v'ruach chadashah* (לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה). Is this to actually be taken as being a “renewed heart and a renewed spirit”? Think about this: is the Lord simply going to take an old heart, **not filled with love for Him and neighbor**, and then make a few small fixes, “renewing” it? Of course not! God is not going to renew a sinful and unregenerate heart, performing the spiritual equivalent of bypass surgery, but still leaving the same old heart and old way of thinking inside of a person. Because of the presence of sin within us, we have to be given an entirely new heart and spirit by the Lord. This new heart, transplanted within us, will enable us to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7), and desire above all else to be in the will and presence of our Savior.

Referring to the promised *B'rit Chadashah* as the “Renewed Covenant” and not the “New Covenant,” in wanting to express continuity with the Torah and Tanach, is a misdiagnosis of the problem, and is even a bit superficial. The reason it is superficial, is that it largely misses the substance of what Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 promise. Both of these prophecies detail how God will supernaturally write His commandments onto the hearts of His people. In explaining the relevance of the Torah for all Believers today, should we not direct the attention of Bible readers to these prophecies? *What does it mean for God to write the Law onto the heart?* People need to read these prophecies verse-by-verse, and not skip over them any more. They need to carefully evaluate what the *B'rit Chadashah* actually is as stated in the text.

There is a sad misunderstanding in that people today often equate “new” to meaning that something is completely different, when it is not. When somebody goes out and buys a new car—a new car is *still a car*. A new car still has a chassis, wheels, and a motor—even if it might have some additional features, a different paint job, and other improvements that your previous car did not have. Similarly, the New Covenant is going to have quite a bit in common with the Sinai Covenant that preceded it. Kaiser recognizes,

“Some have argued that it was the Lord’s original intent to replace the old with a new covenant, but if that were true in every respect, then why does the new covenant repeat almost three-fourths of what had been in the Abrahamic-Davidic covenants? Rather than *superseding* the covenants of promise that had preceded it, it affirmed them as well as *supplemented* them.”¹⁵

Many commentaries on Jeremiah and Hebrews, where the terms *torah* (תּוֹרָה) and *nomos* (νόμος) appear relating to God’s “law” (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16), are often silent about what the transcription this Instruction onto the heart really means. It is naïve of any Bible reader to think that the Lord is only concerned about us expressing love for Him and neighbor, and this is the furthest extent of what it means for the Law to be written onto the heart. Even though these are surely the most important of commandments,¹⁶ more obedience to the Torah than just “love” is undoubtedly required. Dearman rightly describes how the Torah is “the verbal expression of [God’s] will.”¹⁷ Remarkably on Ezekiel 36:25-27, another Christian commentator, Miller, observes,

“[T]he Lord will make a new covenant and will effect in the minds and hearts of the people the will to obey, to live as God’s people, to acknowledge the Lord as their master, the one who secures their lives and provides for them.”¹⁸

Rather than use the term “Renewed Covenant,” today’s Messianic Believers need to focus on how obedience to God is a definite part of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 promises. Such obedience does indeed begin with manifesting His great love to all, but it should also be present in concrete actions of service to others (i.e., James 1:27), and in our daily lives as we strive to really understand what “Torah” is.

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 367.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

¹⁷ Dearman, 287.

¹⁸ Miller, in *NIB*, 6:812.

What has changed in this era of the New Covenant?

The New Covenant does share most of the features of the Sinai Covenant that preceded it, but there are certainly some changes that have taken place as well. The author of Hebrews observes how “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also” (Hebrews 7:12), with *nomou metathesis* (νόμου μετάθεσις) perhaps more precisely rendered by the CJB’s “a transformation of *Torah*.” Any changes that have occurred in the relationship of God’s people to His Law in the era of the New Covenant, are mostly qualitative as opposed to quantitative. The same Torah commandments remain in basic effect—and they all remain useful for study and reflection (1 Timothy 1:8)—although in light of what has come via the sacrificial work of Yeshua and His priestly service, there would be various amendments to consider.

For regenerated Believers who recognize Yeshua’s work for us, the presence of the Holy Spirit inside of Believers is to cause them to mature in faith, and as such the Torah’s principles will be steadily written upon the heart via the process of sanctification (Ezekiel 36:27). While the Holy Spirit could certainly move on people like various kings of Israel or the Prophets, prior to Yeshua’s sacrifice and *Shavuot*/Pentecost, it is more clearly evident in this post-resurrection and post-*Shavuot*/Pentecost era. Morris indicates how, “The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus mean that God has acted decisively to save a people. The God who saves people in Christ is the God of his redeemed in a new and decisive way.”¹¹⁹ Yet, even though we now are all affected by with this sacrificial work of Yeshua, such work is *undeniably consistent* with God’s character seen all the way from the beginning of the Tanach.

The “change of law” seen in this era of New Covenant would include a reorganization of various Torah commandments, but not some total widespread abrogation where all that is left is the command to love God and neighbor. Most of the Torah commandments that have run their course regulate an Ancient Near Eastern economy and technological level that no longer exists, which even the Jewish community today would recognize as defunct (even though they are relevant and quite beneficial for study).¹²⁰ The commandments regulating the Levitical priesthood have been set aside (Hebrews 7:18) until the future fulfillment of various prophecies, and the Millennial Temple operating with Yeshua’s oversight. Believers today benefit from the Melchizedekian priesthood of Yeshua in Heaven (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22). The death penalty for high crimes in the Torah has been absorbed in the sacrifice of Yeshua—the only possible exception being the death penalty for murder as a Creation ordinance (Genesis 9:5), even though that should be used quite infrequently.

Messianic non-Jewish Believers, who come from either a Reformed (Calvinist) or Wesleyan/holiness background, will have fewer difficulties than some others in integrating a Torah obedient life. These two theological traditions have historically believed that the moral law of the Old Testament is to be followed as a standard of Christian holiness and piety. Commenting on Matthew 5:17, John Wesley remarked that Jesus Christ came to fulfill “the moral law...To establish, illustrate, and explain its highest meaning, both by [His] life and doctrine.”¹²¹ And, most of the Torah’s commandments deal directly with ethical and moral matters, even though a Messianic viewpoint recognizes that the sub-divisions of Torah’s commandments into the “moral law” and “ceremonial law” are largely artificial.

Those Christians who presently follow what they consider to be the “moral law” of the Torah, have only a few more things to add to their regimen of obedience—those areas being various outward things that today’s Messianic movement believes God is restoring to His people like *Shabbat*, the appointed times, and kosher. As a Wesleyan, I have found a Messianic perspective on Torah observance to be quite compatible with my upbringing. I have also learned to not only appreciate the Torah as a special part of God’s revelation to humanity, but also how obeying God by His Spirit can be a great joy. In the words of the Psalmist,

¹¹⁹ Morris, in *EXP*, 12:78.

¹²⁰ Consult the editor’s article “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah.”

¹²¹ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, reprint (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 2000), 30.

“I hate and despise falsehood, *but* I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous ordinances. Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble. I hope for Your salvation, O LORD, and do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You” (Psalm 119:163-168).

These are words from someone who is grateful because of the Torah, not someone who frowns upon having to keep it as some kind of an impossible burden or inconvenience. These are the words of someone who recognizes his salvation in God, but how God expects us to obey Him.

Challenges do erupt when today’s Messianic Believers focus too much on “Torah observance” exclusively involving things like the seventh-day Sabbath, appointed times, or kosher eating. James the brother of the Lord taught, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). A true Torah observance will properly balance the keeping of various outward *and* inward commandments. Not much is achieved in our faith community today if we spend more time trying to figure out the best way to tie our *tzit-tzityot*, but our understanding of the Twenty-First Century’s significant ethical and moral controversies remains plebian. Dearman properly recognizes, “What is ‘new’ about the new covenant is not the covenant partner but the quality of the community created by God’s amazing acts.”¹²² I know that as a teacher I diligently work to help create that Messianic movement which has experienced the transformative power of the New Covenant, where God’s Torah manifesting itself by His love welcomes all into His presence. This is also a community where we have the Torah transcribed on our minds, so as to properly compute and discern the will of God for our complex modern and post-modern times.

Contrary to this, ancient Jewish groups like the Qumran community anticipated the New Covenant to simply be a more rigidly-enforced Torah upon Israel (CD 6.19; 8.21; 1QS 8.5; 9.3). Thompson describes, “The sectarians of Qumran understood themselves to be the men of the New Covenant. But the New Covenant for them was nothing more than the Mosaic Covenant with strong legalistic tendencies.”¹²³ Ellingworth also comments, “it was understood as a more rigorous re-establishment of Torah observance, with additional rules.”¹²⁴ The New Covenant period was intended to be one where the corrupt Saddusaical priesthood and sacrificial system were to be replaced with one that was not corrupt,¹²⁵ and the kind of lifestyle the Qumran community idealized could be enforced over all of the Jewish people—in what Morris calls as “a kind of ritualist’s paradise.”¹²⁶

For some of those who make up the self-labeled “Torah movement” in today’s Messianic community, what the Qumran community saw the New Covenant to be is not that dissimilar from what they see it to be. The intended spiritual and service dynamics of the New Covenant enacted by the love of God, are instead overlooked (and replaced) with a rigid and staunch legalism impressed, and fiercely judgmental attitudes toward others run rampant. The transforming power of the gospel is *secondary* to the Torah. Having a relationship with the Law is more important than having a relationship with *the Lawgiver*. Not enough grace and mercy are extended to people who do not see the Torah in the same way as *they do*—even other Messianics sometimes. Too many of those in the “Torah movement” judge the salvation of others, appropriating a job that is only occupied by the Lord Himself, as Yeshua alone can determine who is really “lawless” in the end (Matthew 7:23; 13:41).

The New Covenant era is marked expressly as an age of the Spirit, with the Holy Spirit writing God’s commandments onto the hearts of all His people. It is something that affects *kol-basar* (כָּל-בָּשָׂר) or “all flesh” (Joel 2:28, RSV)—not only a select few like kings or Prophets—and enables them *to do more* than just obey God’s commandments, but will cause people to

¹²² Dearman, 287.

¹²³ Thompson, 580.

¹²⁴ Ellingworth, pp 414-415.

¹²⁵ Bruce, 193.

¹²⁶ Morris, in *EXP*, 12:79.

“prophesy...dream dreams...[and] see visions” (Joel 2:28). Only by new hearts implanted by the Spirit can people extend God’s grace and mercy to those who need it.

A serious issue for some of today’s Messianics who consider themselves Torah observant, will be that for various people the Spirit’s process of writing God’s commandments onto their hearts might occur faster *or* slower than those of other people. Both the Septuagint and Hebrews note how “laws” (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16) are written onto the conscience of a Believer—indicating that *the Holy Spirit’s process* might occur in stages, as opposed to the whole Torah being written all at once. **And none of us has the right to interfere in the Spirit’s distinct and unique work within a person.** But what we can do is have Messianic assemblies where the leaders encourage their members to provide for a place where God’s presence and great love fill the hall, and where Believers can grow and mature properly in faith in a (safe) environment of love—and not an environment surrounded by fiercely judgmental and mean-spirited people! Such a place should stimulate a steady and stable spiritual growth.

The New Covenant, in slight contrast to the Sinai Covenant, does include a more individualistic emphasis (Jeremiah 31:34a). Also present in this era of New Covenant is a definite equalizing of the applicability of commandments, in light of the new status of people in the Messiah (Galatians 3:28; cf. Colossians 3:11)—which would not just include non-Jewish male Believers incorporated into the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), but also women being brought up to the same level as men. Pentateuchal commandments that are not specifically determined by one’s sexual anatomy, and which were originally given to Ancient Israelite men in the Ancient Near East, should now be *halachically* extended to women. No male in his right mind would try to honestly argue that in the era of the New Covenant, that only husbands are allowed to divorce their wives for infidelity (i.e., Deuteronomy 24:1), and wives have to remain wed to a disloyal husband—as wives should be allowed to divorce their husbands for the exact same reason! Also to be considered is that if a husband and wife are to be equal partners in marriage, in submission to each other (Ephesians 5:21ff),¹²⁷ while a husband possesses the ability to cancel the foolish words of his wife and daughters (i.e., Numbers 30:10-14)—wives should be allowed to challenge the foolish words of their husbands and sons. These are appropriate “changes” in Torah, which uphold the relevance of the commandments, but also recognize the egalitarian ideal of the New Covenant.

As we consider the unique dynamics of the New Covenant, and how it is “a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6), there will be a need for us to do more study and research into the Scriptures. When we read the Torah’s commandments, we have the rather serious responsibility to first read them in their original ANE context and how significant they were in comparison to the law codes of Ancient Israel’s neighbors. We then have to consider the Torah in light of the *halachah* of Yeshua and the teachings of the Apostles. Only after we do this, can we then consider their proper application in the Twenty-First Century. It might take a great deal of work and investigation for some of us, but that is why the New Covenant involves the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide the thoughts and inner workings of God’s people.

And what should we do if we violate the Torah? The very reason the New Covenant has been enacted is precisely because permanent atonement for sin is now available! Human nature is such that we will, at times—either knowingly or unknowingly—violate the Torah. Yet, having made that strong declaration “Yeshua is Lord” (Romans 10:9), we can claim His sacrifice when we are confronted with our mistakes. Many, if not most of these mistakes, occur just as new Believers commit themselves to a life of holiness and discipleship. Some people, recently turning their backs on sinful habits and behaviors—new babes in the Lord—fall back into doing inappropriate things in the process of early maturation. Paul might speak of such a person in Romans 7:19: “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.” **This is how important it is to have loving Messianic communities where people can be properly discipled and**

¹²⁷ This is addressed more fully from an egalitarian perspective in the editor’s commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

encouraged to grow. Trustworthy leaders and counselors, who have matured beyond the Romans 7 dilemma, can be there to aid the still-maturing.¹²⁸ As always, we should remember the steadfast fact, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

And should we be confronted with some sin, even as relatively mature Believers, the Lord is there to offer us forgiveness and proper cleansing.

Current and Future Expectations

The reality of the New Covenant is something quite important to us as men and women of faith, who believe that Yeshua’s sacrifice at Golgotha (Calvary) is the impetus that has inaugurated it. As our Lord Himself declared on that night two millennia ago, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). While today’s Messianics are rightfully keen to emphasize how this declaration was made at a Passover *sedar*, how often do we underplay that the New Covenant has been enacted *in His blood*? Yeshua’s humiliation on the cross for sinful humanity and the pain He endured for us, is what has brought us final forgiveness. Recognizing this and being supernaturally transformed, should *naturally* manifest itself in proper obedience. Obeying the Lord is the least we can do following the appropriation of His sacrifice, considering that our human disobedience nailed Yeshua to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

The New Covenant promises each of us a new heart, a conscience that has been cleansed from sin, and a new life where obedience to the Lord’s commandments and commitment to His mandate are manifest. This mandate primarily regards the accomplishment of the Torah’s proto-gospel message: “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3; cf. Galatians 3:8). Ancient Israel was given the commission, “So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:6). In the era of New Covenant when such commandments can be supernaturally imprinted on the heart and mind—should not our obedience to God result in us, at least passively, **testifying to the salvation we have in Yeshua by our actions** (cf. Matthew 6:16)?

The New Covenant promises, of course, do not just include profound spiritual realities that born again Believers have benefited from since the First Century. There are prophecies of Israel’s Kingdom being restored directly connected to the New Covenant. The *essential reality* of the New Covenant might be present today among the saints, but *more* awaits us in the future. How long it will be until we see those physical promises of all Israel brought into the Promised Land, and prospering once again—with the Messiah reigning as King—is a great question. Today’s generation of Messianic Believers, both Jewish and non-Jewish—with one group frequently demonstrating arrogance and suspicion toward the other group—may not be alive to see the Second Coming. Only the generation that has fully considered the ramifications of the New Covenant, not only in the restoration of the Torah to God’s people—but **also in possessing cleansed hearts and minds empowered by the Spirit, and guided by Yeshua’s love**—will be those who get to see the wider promises come to fulfillment.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A. Student, Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

¹²⁸ Be aware of how many Romans interpreters today are agreed that the “I” of Romans 7 is a hypothetical sinner, and not necessarily the Apostle Paul giving us autobiographical information. For a summary of this, consult J.M. Everts, “Conversion and Call of Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 158; and the editor’s article “The Message of Romans.”