

# Keeping Torah in the New Covenant

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Earlier this month, I received an email from a believer (let's call him Thomas),"who read the introduction to my book "The Law of Messiah Compiled as *Mitzvot*," and wrote this to me:

"I do not understand the basis for your argument that there are two types of law – "covenant-dependent," and "covenant-transcendent." I understand what you are getting at, and almost agree, but you offer no reasoning for your argument."

Thomas was referring to a statement I made that was technical, but please try to follow this because I want to use it to make a point; the statement was:

"There are two categories of statutes commanded by God under the Mosaic Covenant – those whose literal compliance depends upon the Covenant's continued existence, and those whose literal compliance does not. We shall call the first of these, 'covenant-dependent,' and the second of these, 'covenant- transcendent.'"

The two terms that Thomas questioned ("covenant-dependent" and "covenant-transcendent") are expressions that are meant to explain commandments whose literal application and enforcement depend upon whether or not the Mosaic Covenant is still in effect. You know, Hebrews 8:13 says that it is aging and will soon disappear. I wanted to help Thomas understand, so I wrote back:

"Commandments that I call "covenant-dependent" are the ones that can be obeyed to the letter of the way they are written, only so long as the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant have continued to exist. The key conditions that have to exist to support covenant-dependent commandments are (1) a standing Jerusalem Temple in which animals are sacrificed, (2) a functioning Levitical Priesthood to conduct the sacrifices, and (3) a government of Israel that is led by a man of God's choosing. The other commandments – those that do not need those conditions – those are the ones I call "covenant transcendent."

I gave Thomas examples of both kinds of commandments. For a typical "covenant-dependent" commandment, I offered Leviticus 7:1-5, which reads:

"This is the law for the guilt offering: it is especially holy. They [meaning the *cohanim* (the priests) in behalf of individual Israelites] are to slaughter the guilt offering in the place where they slaughter the burnt offering, and its blood is to be splashed against all sides of the altar. He [meaning a priest] is to offer all its fat- the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the two kidneys, the fat on them near the flanks, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The *cohen* will make them go up in smoke on the altar as an offering made by fire to *ADONAI*; it is a guilt offering."

It is obvious that we cannot obey this commandment literally today. We have no functioning Levitical Priests (well, we have Art Cohen and last I looked he was still functioning, but you know what I mean). We also have no standing Jerusalem Temple, and no Temple altar. And even if we had those things, we wouldn't be burning up animals as guilt offerings, because Yeshua's sacrifice has become our guilt offering, so we no longer have the need to use animals. Clearly, this commandment is "covenant-dependent" because it depends on the Mosaic Covenant existing.

I then went on to give Thomas examples of commandments that are "covenant-transcendent," and quoted Exodus 20:12-13:

"Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which *ADONAI* your God is giving you. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false evidence against your neighbor."

This Scripture contains three separate commandments, each of which transcends the Mosaic Covenant because we can obey every one of them today exactly as written. None of them need the Temple or the priests or the altar.

Thomas then came back with an intriguing question; he asked:

"I don't see anywhere in Scripture that tells us what is in the New Covenant. What, in your opinion, comprises the New Covenant?"

I told him that his question was a good one, and I gave him an answer. But why am I telling **you** all of this? It is because the kind of questions Thomas was asking touches what I believe God wants us all to know about *Torah* in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is best described prophetically in Jeremiah 31:31-34, that I will read to you from the New King James Version because it is expressed there so beautifully; it says:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (NKJ)

During Mosaic Covenant times, all of the commandments given to Moses that he passed on to the Israelites were doable in every detail exactly as stated. However, Jeremiah prophetically foresaw a change in covenant where God's law would continue to exist, but where we would receive and respond to it differently than before. God's words to Jeremiah were:

“I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts”

and,

“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them..”

These things could only be accomplished by God drawing closer to us in the New Covenant, than He had to the Israelites under Moses. And if we read beyond the *Tanach* to the New Testament, we see how God accomplished it.

The prediction in Jeremiah 31:34, “*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,*” can only be explained by Yeshua's sacrifice; there is no other event in history that can explain it. According to Hebrews 9:24-26, Yeshua's sacrifice resulted in so complete an eradication of our sins that, for those who receive Him, our “*sins are remembered no more.*” The Hebrews passage that describes this reads as follows:

"For the Messiah has entered a Holiest Place which is not man-made and merely a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, in order to appear now on our behalf in the very presence of God. Further, he did not enter heaven to offer himself over and over again, like the *cohen hagadol* who enters the Holiest Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer death many times- from the founding of the universe on. But as it is, he has appeared once at the end of the ages in order to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself."

Also, 1 John 2:2 informs us:

"Also, he is the *kapparah* [covering] for our sins- and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world."

And Romans 4:24-25 tells us:

"They were written also for us, who will certainly have our account credited too, because we have trusted in him who raised Yeshua our Lord from the dead- Yeshua, who was delivered over to death because of our offences, and raised to life in order to make us righteous."

So, I believe that the first New Covenant element that God sent to us was none other than God Himself (in the person of Yeshua), and that first element paved a way for the second – also God Himself – but this time in the person of the Holy Spirit. We read of this second element in John 16:5-7 and Acts 2:1-4, and then 14-21 (that refer to Joel 3:1-5 (2:28-32)). First, Yeshua's words from the Book of John:

"But now I am going to the One who sent me. Not one of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I

tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don't go away, the comforting Counselor will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you."

And now, reading from Acts 2:1-4:

"The festival of *Shavu'ot* arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the *Ruach HaKodesh* [the Holy Spirit] and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak."

Now, jumping down to verse 14:

"Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: "You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! These people aren't drunk, as you suppose- it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: '*ADONAI* says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below- blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of *ADONAI* comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of *ADONAI* will be saved.'""

So, in response to the question, "What comprises the New Covenant?" My answer is that the New Covenant is a brand new way that God has provided for us to have a relationship with Him – a closer relationship – a one-on-one relationship; Hebrews 8:6 explains it this way:

"But now the work Yeshua has been given to do, is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as *Torah* on the basis of better promises."

What are those better promises? Well, instead of our having to communicate with God by way of prophets, statutes, and ordinances, we can now be cleansed of our sins by Yeshua's sacrifice, and then communicate with God directly through the Holy Spirit who, because of the cleansing, is now able to reside within us. We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

".. don't you know that your body is a temple for the *Ruach HaKodesh* who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God."

According to Hebrews, the two covenants – the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are very different. In the First Covenant, God spoke commandments to Moses from on high and, through Moses, told the Israelites:

"Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine (Exodus 19:5-6).

In response:

"All the people [of Israel] answered as one, [and said] 'Everything *ADONAI* has said, we will do.'" (Exodus 19:8).

But, of course, Israel didn't do what they promised, and broke God's covenant.

In the New Covenant, God does not have different moral expectations of us than in the previous covenant. That notwithstanding, the New Covenant is indeed "new" in the way that God communicates His will to us. In the Mosaic Covenant, God was more distant, and His will was conveyed through His commandments and through the prophets. In the New Covenant, by comparison, God has made Himself near to us through the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and He speaks to us individually. In those two ways, the two covenants are different as night and day.

God's expectation of the way we respond to the two Covenants is different as well. In the Mosaic Covenant, our response was:

"When we hear your commandments, we will obey."

In the New Covenant, our response should be:

"Lord, we now know you intimately because the Holy Spirit lives within each of us, and you speak to each of us as a father speaks to his son. In this new close relationship, we know your desire for us, and we obey you – not because we fear punishment – but because we love You and want to please You."

In our seeking to keep God's Commandments, our approach should not be one of "rule-keeping" (as it likely would have been under Moses), but rather one of looking to His Commandments to guide us in knowing His will. The knowledge that is acquired through the Scriptures is interpreted and explained to us by the Holy Spirit, so we can understand God's will for us in each of our special circumstances. Although the statutes of the Mosaic Covenant are no longer enforced in the same way that they were in the old days, they are exceedingly useful in helping us to know, understand, and appreciate God's law that has now (as Jeremiah prophesied) been put in our minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit.

One final thought:

"*Torah*" is too often thought of as consisting merely of the statutes and ordinances. Actually, "*Torah*" is much broader than that. The literal meaning of "*torah*" is "God's teaching" and, from a New Covenant perspective, it includes everything in God's written Word (i.e. the entire *Tanach* and New Testament), as well as everything He reveals to us by way of explanation and direction

prophetically. A New Covenant believer in Yeshua cannot, therefore, separate the keeping of *Torah* from discerning the will of God through the Holy Spirit.

The "covenant-dependent" and "covenant-transcendent" commandments that I quoted earlier were clear and unambiguous, but that is not always the case. Consider (for example) Exodus 23:19:

"You are not to boil a young animal in its mother's milk."

Also, consider Deuteronomy 6:6 and 8:

"These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart;" .. "Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead."

Is the Exodus 23 commandment intended to be taken literally? The rabbis have broadened its meaning to not cooking or eating dairy and meat during the same meal or within hours of each other. I, on the other hand, think it was intended to be literal, in opposition to a perverted heathen practice. How can we decide? Consult the Holy Spirit.

Does the Deuteronomy 6 commandment mean that God wants us to pray while wearing black boxes with Scripture on our arms and foreheads? That is the Orthodox interpretation. I, on the other hand, do not believe that the commandment is intended to be literal, but that it is intended as an exhortation for us to think and do according to the Word of God! How can we decide? Consult the Holy Spirit.

There are many such commandments in the Bible that need interpretation from the Holy Spirit. We could simply adopt whatever practices we find convenient, or embrace the practices of one authority or another, but I believe that God wants us to consult Him directly. There may, in fact, be different applications according to the communities in which we live, and each of our particular circumstances. We cannot know unless God reveals it to us, and He normally will not reveal it to us unless we ask Him.

That is the way I believe God wants us to keep *Torah* in the New Covenant. Relying on the Holy Spirit is the key. We cannot keep *Torah* by following rules without opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit for discernment and application.