

A Messianic Jewish Response to “One Law Movements”  
By Daniel Juster

For over 20 years the Messianic Jewish Movement and its theological leaders have been responding to what has been called “One Law Movements.” The term “one law” was not our chosen term but came from its proponents and not from those refuting it. The claim of several one law writings is that Gentile believers are responsible to keep all of the same commandments as Jewish believers. At minimum, representatives of this position will acknowledge at least one exception in regard to eight day circumcision for male infants. These writings seek to defend their “one law” interpretation in part from biblical texts in the Torah on the Gentiles who lived in the midst of Israel in ancient times. While we agree that there is one Torah of Moses that applies to all people, we believe the Scriptures teach explicitly that parts of it apply differently to Jews and Gentiles (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 7:17-20).

We can begin by stating unequivocally that Jews and Gentiles equally share in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), having equal worth and value in the eyes of God; and that God’s plan is to bless Israel and the Gentile nations (Gen. 12:1-3) by redeeming and reconciling them with Him and one another in Yeshua in such a way that the Jewish people and every people, nation, tribe, and language are preserved in their unique ethnic identities. We represent one of the Messianic Jewish streams that are passionately seeking to honor God’s healthy relationship order of mutual blessing in the Spirit between Jews and Gentiles in Israel's Olive Tree and commonwealth, the one new humanity in Yeshua (Gal. 3:8-9; Jer. 31:31-38 (30-37); Lk. 22:20; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:4-10; 22:12-14, 22-26; Rom. 11:1-32; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6).

Yet one law proponents, while at times appearing to affirm what we are saying on the surface, often carry an unproven assumption that the commandments of the Torah that applied to Gentiles who lived as residents in the midst of ancient Israel, are to now be *universally* applied in a parallel way for all Gentile worshippers of the one Creator God who follow Messiah Yeshua. While this has some surface appearance of logic and theological coherence, there are some faulty interpretive assumptions that work to erode the soundness of their conclusions. We need to be careful when applying the commands of the Torah that related to Gentiles in the midst of Israel, especially when applying them to Gentile believers among the nations who are not called to a Messianic Jewish Congregation. We will delve into these issues below.

It is vital that we have unity in the fact that the New Covenant Scriptures provide authoritative Halacha for the application of Torah. This Halacha fully takes into consideration the New Covenant order, Yeshua’s life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and the work of the Holy Spirit, as well as the present availability of the Kingdom of God to Israel and the nations within a now-and-not-yet framework of the New Covenant. For even where the New Covenant Scriptures do not explain in detail how Torah is to be applied, they do provide principles that help in applying them. For example, interpretations and applications of the Torah are to be in accordance with the Gospel, salvation by grace through a living faith in Yeshua

the Messiah, the leading and fruit of the Holy Spirit, and love for God and neighbor, and as we will see, a distinction between Jewish and Gentile calling (Matt. 5:17-48; 7:12; Rom. 3:20, 31; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Rom. 8:1-4; 5:5; Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 7:17-20; Rom. 11:25-29).

There are three papers that we believe are important in sorting out these “one law” issues, one by Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik<sup>1</sup>, one by Dr. David Rudolph<sup>2</sup>, and one that is the official stance of the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS)<sup>3</sup>. While not agreeing with all points, we are in general accord with the thrust of these writings.

Biblically, in responding to the one law interpretation, we want to begin with the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 where four significant prohibitions were given for the Gentiles who were being saved by the grace of the Lord Yeshua in the same way as Jewish people (Acts 15:4-21; Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 2:11-14). There are different approaches to the background for Acts 15, but only what can be warranted by Scripture should be accepted. One view is that the prohibitions are the minimum standards for maintaining table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. While there is truth to this view, there is arguably more to it. For example, not eating blood is a universal command given to Noah for all humanity.

The second view is that Acts 15 is based on Jewish and biblical universal law that is required for all human beings. This is true, yet we need to take note, that by highlighting only these four instructions, they were not trying to make a comprehensive statement of the “righteous requirements of the Law” for Gentiles (Rom. 8:1-4). For Gentiles believers are *not* free to dishonor their father and mother, murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet, etc. So, these four prohibitions can be seen as additional instructions of universal law that Gentiles might miss or might not adequately understand. This second view also tends to see the four prohibitions as linked to what became known as the “Noachide laws” for all humanity.

There is much value to understanding these prohibitions as being an application of universal law as the second view proposes. We also have the additional support of Yeshua and Paul’s words, which are very clear on matters pertaining to universal law for all disciples of Yeshua (Matt. 5:21-48; 15:19-20; Rom. 1:21-32; 8:1-4; 13:8-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 5:11-12; Eph. 5:3-5). Finally, as already mentioned above, some look to the text in the Torah about Gentiles who live among Israel and note that these four prohibitions are found there. Regarding this last approach, it is significant that the Apostles did not instruct the Gentile believers simply to embrace all of the specific Torah instructions for Gentiles who lived within the midst of Israel, including keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and the Holy Days. At the same time the Apostles didn’t forbid these practices for Gentile believers, as long as they were approached with clarity

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<sup>1</sup> Juster, Daniel, ThD and Resnik, Russ. (2005). One Law Movements - A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolph, David, PhD. (2021). One New Man, Hebrew Roots, Replacement Theology - *How to restore the Jewish roots of the Christian faith without getting weird*,

<sup>3</sup> International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS) Steering Committee. (2014). One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement

on the true Gospel as the way of salvation, the equality of Jews and Gentiles, and the distinction between Jewish and Gentile calling (Rom. 3:20-31; Gal. 2:11-16; 1 Cor. 7:17-20). Many Gentiles called to Messianic Congregations of various kinds have discerned a Spirit-led application to join their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters in the practice of the seventh-day Sabbath and the Holy Days. This is good and beautiful. Yet we believe to place seventh-day Sabbath keeping and the Holy Days *universally* upon all Yeshua-believing Gentiles in this age is incongruent with the Gospel and disregards the implications of clear New Covenant Scripture (Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5-12).

Historical, cultural, and grammatical biblical interpretation is vitally important, for wrong interpretation leads to wrong application. For example, the mention of Moses being taught in the synagogues (Acts 15:21) is capable of various interpretations and applications so that we need to be careful not to read into this statement something that the context doesn't support. Yet one law writers often claim that this statement in Acts 15:21 implies that Gentiles will learn to take on more and more of the Torah over time as they hear it among the Jewish community. And this will eventually lead to very little distinction between Jews and Gentiles in their practice. Hence, the supposed ideal of their understanding of "One Law." Yet, encouraging Gentiles to learn from the synagogue was not even in the apostolic letter written to the congregations! (Acts 15:23-29; 21:25). The text of the letter may merely mean that the four apostolic instructions would be well understood due to Moses being taught there. For the Law and the Prophets anticipated the coming of the Messiah for the salvation of the Jewish people and the Gentiles so that all could enter into the Kingdom of God in the New Covenant while remaining in their ethnic identities (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8; Acts 3:24-26; 15:11-21; 24:13-21; 26:22-23). In support for this view, Jacob in Acts 15:15-17 quotes Amos 9:11-12 which prophesied Gentiles coming under the rule of the Messiah, Son of David, yet remaining as Gentile people of the nations! (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8; Acts 3:24-26; 15:11-21; 24:13-21; 26:22-23). This view of unity with a distinction of calling between Jews and Gentiles is also consistent with Paul's apostolic rule for all the congregations (1 Cor. 7:17-20).

When Acts is read in conjunction with (1) Paul's teaching in Romans 14 on the liberty of a believer's conscience regarding the Holy Days; (2) Paul's exhortation in Galatians not to put wrong emphasis on the Holy Days, and (3) Paul's instructions in Colossians about not judging others on the basis of Holy Days, we see a common thrust toward liberty for believing Gentiles. In addition, Paul's Holy Spirit inspired apostolic rule for all the congregations (in 1 Cor. 7:17-20) teaches that each is to remain in the calling he or she had from birth, whether they are circumcised (Jewish) or uncircumcised (Gentile). This rule was in complete accord with the Acts 15 Jerusalem council. The entire thrust of the New Covenant Scriptures is that Gentiles have liberty to keep specific Holy Days on the biblical calendar or not to keep them.

The Bible enjoins very specific Holy Days to be kept by the Jewish people; they are the seventh-day Sabbath plus the Spring and Fall appointed times, which have 7 days of rest to be exact. Messianic Jews are to continue to steward their irrevocable gifts and calling, as a unique, but not superior, kingdom of priest within the priesthood of all believers redeemed from every nation (Rom. 11:29; 9:4-5; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:4-10). Some Hebrew Bible scholars think that the way

the Rabbinic calendar calculates days is different than ancient practice, but Israelis today generally keep the days according to Rabbinic tradition. We should note that in the first-century, the conditions of the various cultures of the Gentile nations would have normally precluded Gentile believers who lacked significant means from keeping the seventh day Sabbath and the Holy Days of the Spring and Fall appointed times. This was true for the great majority. However, because the early Church rooted itself in the life of Yeshua, over time Gentile Christian leaders embraced a calendar in which they honored three of the Feast days, albeit in significantly modified forms—Passover became Good Friday in commemoration of the sacrificial death of Yeshua, First Fruits became Resurrection Sunday, and Shavuot became Pentecost due to the outpouring of the Spirit. Their customs and their dating differed from Rabbinic practice, which is fine since according the New Covenant Scripture, Gentile believers are not universally required by God to abide by the Jewish calendar as Israel is called to keep it. So, does that mean that Gentile Christians shouldn't care about these matters?

We think that today the *teaching* of the redeemed Gentiles who celebrate Good Friday, Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost should seek to understand and honor the Jewish biblical roots of these days in addition to bringing out their New Covenant and prophetic meanings. Nevertheless, the thrust of the New Covenant is toward complete liberty for churches of the Gentile nations in regard to the keeping of these days. It is a matter of being led by the Spirit. Having said this, what would we like to see the churches do? As you read these guidelines below, note the distinctions made in practice for Gentile believers in pre-dominantly Gentile churches and those Gentiles called to Messianic Congregations. Again, these are not inferior or superior ways to be Gentile, but different callings of walking out unity in the one body of Messiah.

### **What Would We Want The Churches To Teach As Their Approach?**

1. Churches are called to *teach* about the “appointed times” - the Feasts (Holy Days) of Israel, and to bring out their original meanings in the Torah and their now-and-not-yet fulfillments in Yeshua. This is the clear implication of II Timothy 3:16-17 which speaks of all Scripture being profitable for instruction and training in righteousness.
2. Churches are called to be in *alignment* with the teaching of God's Word concerning the nation of Israel, and united with the Messianic Jewish believers as one body of Messiah (Rom. 9:1-5; 11:11-15, 25-32; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6; 4:1-16; Jn. 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 7:17-20).
3. Churches are called to teach the *principle* of living a sabbath (Shabbat) lifestyle with regular times of rest, renewal, and worship. In this age, for Gentile Christians, there is not an expectation of keeping the seventh day Sabbath. Yet to be clear, as the Holy Spirit leads, Christian churches may embrace the observance of the seventh-day Shabbat. If they do, it shouldn't be done in a way that claims they are doing so because they have replaced Israel. We also want to note that Gentile believers called to a Messianic Congregation are to practice Shabbat on the seventh day along with their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters. Also, predominantly Gentile churches who have Jewish believers in them are to encourage and support the Jewish believers in honoring honoring of the seventh day Shabbat, even if that means holding a distinct gathering for the purpose.

4. Churches should also feel free (as led by the Spirit) to celebrate the Feasts together with Messianic Jews at or near the times indicated by Scripture.
5. Gentile Christians in the churches may be led by the Spirit to keep the seventh-day Sabbath personally as their way of applying the Sabbath principle. However, they may also be led to keep Sunday or another day.
6. Gentile Christians are not required to keep the food laws of Lev. 15, but they may keep them for various reasons according to Romans 14. Gentile believers who are part of Messianic Jewish Congregations are expected to respect and honor the biblical food instructions whenever they are in shared space with Jewish people. In addition, out of conviction, many of these Gentiles in Messianic Congregations keep the same biblical food instructions as the Jews, both in their family and personal lives.
7. Gentile Christians as led by the Spirit may seek to learn from Rabbinic traditions as part of a growing understanding of the uniqueness of the Jewish people and God's faithful preservation of Israel. It should be remembered that, like all religious traditions, Rabbinic traditions include wonderful things and problematic things. The spirit and truth of the Scriptures is the test of what is good. Also, in learning and appreciating Jewish culture, Gentile Christians should be careful to avoid unhealthy or confusing cultural appropriation.

### **What We Believe To Be Wrong To Teach Gentile Christians**

1. We believe it is wrong to teach Gentile Christians of the nations that they are responsible to keep the *seventh-day weekly Sabbath* in this age and that they are sinning if they don't keep it. Again, we do affirm the Sabbath principle *for all* Gentile believers, and we also affirm that Gentiles who are called to Messianic Congregations are to walk in unity with their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters by honoring the seventh day Sabbath.
2. We believe it is wrong to teach Gentile Christians that they must keep keep the annual Holy days and that they are sinning if they don't or that it is better to do so. Again, Gentiles in Messianic Congregation fully participate in these days with their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters as a matter of community unity.
3. We believe it is wrong to teach that Gentile Christians are responsible to keep the food laws or that it is better if they do so. Again, Gentiles in Messianic Congregations do so in shared communal space with Jewish people, and many also do so in their personal lives and households because of their personal convictions (Rom. 14).
4. We believe it is wrong to teach Gentile Christians that it is better for them to keep Rabbinic traditions. Even among Jewish believers, Rabbinic traditions are to be incorporated in a Yeshua honoring way by the leading of the Holy Spirit and in a way that doesn't make void any commands of God (Matt. 15:3-9).
5. We believe it is wrong to teach that the traditions of the historic Church among the Gentiles are pagan just because a particular tradition is not taught in the Bible. While traditions need to be in accord with the spirit and truth of biblical teaching, they do not have to be just those that are explicitly commanded in the Bible. Acceptable traditions include worshipping as a gathered assembly on Sunday, as well as treating Sunday as a day for rest and renewal in honor of the Sabbath principle. We can also support the

Church calendar of Feasts that include Palm Sunday, Easter, All Saints Day, and Christmas. We think that portraying these traditions as inherently pagan is hurtful and divisive. Again, how these traditions are practiced is to be guided by the Holy Spirit and the spirit and truth of the Scriptures. With these qualification in mind, we affirm that the Church year is built around the celebration of the life of Yeshua, and that the content of its celebrations is generally biblical.

We believe every community and individual is to be led by the Spirit in these matters and that all practices are better if led by the Spirit.

In complementary distinction of calling from Gentile Christians, we assert that Messianic Jews are called to live out the biblical pattern of Jewish life described in the Torah as part of their gifts and irrevocable calling that is brought to fullness in the New Covenant (Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Cor. 7:17-20; Rom. 11:29; 9:1-5; Acts 21:20; Matt. 5:13-20; Acts 13:47; Isa. 49:6). This is part of being the first fruits of the Jewish people that sanctify the rest of the nations until the day when all Israel is saved and when the fullness of the Gentiles comes into Israel's Olive Tree (Romans 11:5, 11-15, 16, 25-29). As indicated throughout this response to "one law," we affirm that Gentiles who are called to Messianic congregations follow most of the same lifestyle patterns as the Jewish members. Yet as Gentiles in Messianic Congregations, they too are to maintain their Gentile identity in Yeshua (1 Cor. 7:17-20).

These principles we have briefly covered, if embraced, will help us honor and guard against an unintentional undercutting of the distinct identity, election and calling of the Jewish people which results when a wrong interpretation of "one law" is embraced. We believe there is a better way that both upholds the veracity of Scriptural Teaching and serves to restore and maintain healthy unity and honor between the saved remnant of Israel and all the nations, peoples, tribes, and languages in the one body of Messiah (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6-7; 1 Cor. 7:17-20; Acts 15:4-21; 21:20-21; Jn. 17:20-23; Rev. 7:4-10).