

An Assessment of the “Divine Invitation” Teaching

being primarily

*A Critical Review of
“One Law and the Messianic Gentile”
Messiah Journal 101(Aug 2009), 46–70*

by

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Tim Hegg • TorahResource • 2009

Introduction

The recent issue of *Messiah Journal* (#101, Aug, 2009) published by First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ) has taken many of its readers by surprise. The article “One Law and the Messianic Gentile” (pp. 46–70) authored by Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster has boldly stated the desire of FFOZ to distance itself from the “One Law” theology that characterized the ministry for the past number of years. The authors make it clear throughout the article that this is a return to their original position regarding Gentiles and the Torah, and that their foray into the “One Law” teaching resulted from allowing their zeal to run ahead of their scholarship.¹ We are now to be assured that things have been put in order, and that in their current teaching, a more mature approach has been achieved in which scholarship has appropriately bridled zeal. In other words, their new position, which they label “Divine Invitation,” is entirely worthy of our trust.

The arguments they make may seem formidable when first read, at least for the most part. But a closer look reveals some very troubling issues. There are also some curious examples of proof-texting which call for a more thorough investigation, as well as some leaps in logic that can only be described as sophomoric. When one reads the article with a discerning eye, one is not so sure that a more mature and trustworthy scholarship is now at work.

Going Beyond the Message of the Apostles

The article opens with a short historical narrative, describing a meeting that took place in 2004 with Dr. Dwight Pryor, a meeting that impacted the authors significantly. Dr. Pryor pointed out to them that their theology of the Torah and its present day application to Gentiles was something that did not “come from the apostles.”² They recount Dr. Pryor’s argument in these words:

They [the Apostles] never did settle on a theology of Torah concerning the Gentiles, perhaps because of their expectation of the imminent return of Yeshua. I would be very cautious about advancing a theology that the apostles did not raise.³

The presupposition of such a statement is that the Apostles, who were disciples of Yeshua, did not consider Moses to have given a theology of the Torah that pertained to Gentiles. The scenario that is presented is that the Apostles found themselves in uncharted waters when it came to the question of

1. p. 69.
2. p. 47.
3. Ibid.

Gentile believers and their relationship to the Torah.

But it also proceeds on the premise that the Apostles had the authority to annul, amend, or suspend Torah commandments with respect to Gentile believers, or at least to redefine them against the obvious meaning of the Torah texts themselves. From what other premise could the argument be derived? For the Torah clearly speaks to the place of the “foreigner” within Israel, and that there is to be one Torah for both the foreigner and the native born.

The argument that the Apostles were silent regarding the Gentile believer’s obligation to obey the Torah is built upon the idea that the Apostles were given authority to adjust the Torah’s requirements for Gentile believers. In light of Matthew 5:17–20 and 23:18–20, one wonders how such a premise could be maintained. One is dismayed to discover that the answer given by the authors is, in fact, that in the Torah, the “foreigner” (גֵּר, *ger*) who joins Israel to worship Israel’s God is to be interpreted as a “convert” who has gone through the proselyte ritual and as a result has been granted “legal status as a Jew.” So the meaning of the Torah texts pertaining to foreigners who join Israel are interpreted against their historical grammatical sense, giving precedence to the later rabbinic interpretation as evidenced in the Lxx. Accepting the rabbinic view, the FFOZ authors can conclude that the Torah actually does not have anything to say about Gentile relationship to the Torah. Whenever we read “stranger” or “alien” or “foreigner” as having the same relationship to the Torah as the “native born,” we are to interpret the text as speaking of a “proselyte” or “convert to Judaism.” We will discuss this issue below.

An Argument from Silence

But for now let us consider their opening argument, that the Apostles never settled on a theology of Torah for the Gentile believers. This is an argument from silence, and silence offers no premise for a valid conclusion. What the Apostles did not say, we cannot know. For the sake of inquiry, let us put the argument into a syllogism:

Major Premise: The Apostles said nothing explicit about Gentile obedience to the Torah

Minor Premise: The Apostles did say something explicit about Jewish obedience to the Torah

Conclusion: Therefore the Apostles taught that Gentiles were not required to keep the whole Torah

If we were to accept as valid this argument from silence, then the following conclusions based upon silence could also be taken as valid (even though they are blatantly false):

Major Premise: God said nothing in the Torah to prohibit polygamy

Minor Premise: God explicitly prohibited same sex unions in the Torah

Conclusion: God considers polygamy legitimate within the scope of marriage

Major Premise: Yeshua was silent when challenged to save Himself from the cross

Minor Premise: Yeshua directly answered those who challenged Him in other situations

Conclusion: Yeshua’s silence is evidence of His inability to save Himself

Consider this: nowhere in the Apostolic Scriptures do the Apostles clearly state that Jewish believers in Yeshua must keep the Sabbath. Indeed, there is no reiteration of the Sabbath commandment whatsoever in the Apostolic Scriptures. Should we conclude from this that the Apostles never did settle on a theology of Sabbath for the Jewish believers?⁴ Likewise, the Apostles are silent about many other Torah commandments. We never hear them talk about the commandments prohibiting cross-dressing,⁵ tattoos,⁶ necromancy,⁷ or abortion.⁸ Nor do we hear them teaching the positive commandments regarding mezzuzot,⁹ tithes,¹⁰ and a host of other matters directly referenced in the Torah. Remarkably, if we restricted our reading to only the Apostolic Scriptures, we would know nothing of Yom Kippur.¹¹ Does the silence of the Apostles about Yom Kippur teach us that they no longer observed this most solemn day? No, of course not.

The fallacy of the argument from silence is that one cannot be certain what the silence means. For instance, Yeshua's silence while on the cross did not signal His inability (as those who mocked Him charged) but had a different purpose. Likewise, we may postulate various explanations as to why the Apostles offered no detailed teaching on the extent to which Gentile believers are obligated to keep the Torah. Based upon the specific instructions of Yeshua in Matt 5:17–20 and 28:19–20, however, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Apostles expected Gentile believers in Yeshua to obey all of God's commandments as they grew in their understanding of the Scriptures, including the Torah. This is an argument based upon the direct words of our Messiah, not something derived from silence. As such, it is far more convincing than the case for "Divine Invitation" which the FFOZ authors derive from Apostolic silence.

Challenging the Notion that Yeshua and His Apostles were Silent about Gentiles and the Torah

The major premise, that the Apostles never settled on a theology of Torah for the Gentiles, is itself suspect. On the contrary, the Apostolic Scriptures have much to say about the Gentiles and Torah, and it all started with the teaching of Yeshua Himself. In Matthew 5:17–20, Yeshua makes it clear that He did not come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets. Rather, He came to fulfill them, that is, to make them

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4. I will discuss Galatians 5:3, "...every man who receives circumcision...is under obligation to keep the whole Torah," below.
 5. Deut 22:5.
 6. Lev 19:28.
 7. Deut 18:11.
 8. Ex 21:22f. David Instone-Brewer has suggested that the Jerusalem Council included the prohibition against infanticide in the Apostolic Decree. See his article "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 52.2 (June, 2009), 301–321.
 9. Deut 6:9; 11:20.
 10. E.g., Deut 14:22. The only mention of tithes in the Apostolic Scriptures is in observations of what was practiced by some of the Pharisees (Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12) and by Melchizedek (Heb 7:8–9). The Apostles never reiterate the positive commandments regarding tithing found in the Torah.
 11. A possible (though quite obscure) reference to Yom Kippur might be seen in the articular use of νηστεία (*nesteia*, "fast") in Acts 27:9, though this could not be recognized unless one already knew the tradition of fasting on Yom Kippur. One knows that the author of Hebrews is talking about the High Priestly duties on Yom Kippur (Heb 9) only if one has prior knowledge of Yom Kippur from the Torah.

active and effective in the lives of all who would follow Him.¹² He goes on in this text to emphasize that not even the smallest stroke of the Torah will pass away as long as heaven and earth remain. He promises that whoever lives out the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom, while those who annul even the least of the commandments and teach others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom. Then He ends His comments with this astounding statement:

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:20)

The Pharisees and scribes were known for their meticulous attention to each aspect of the commandments, so Yeshua is calling His disciples to a very high standard of righteous living, one that not only takes seriously the Torah commandments, but does so from a humble heart of faith that allows the rule of love to be a primary motivation for obedience.

Some might suggest that these words were spoken to Jewish people and therefore apply only to Jews, not to Gentiles. But this perspective is controverted by the instructions Yeshua gives to His disciples just prior to His ascension:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:19–20)

The phrase “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” makes it clear that Yeshua’s teaching in Matt 5:17–20 was to form a core aspect of the “curriculum” the disciples were commissioned to teach the Gentiles. This being the case, the Torah, including the smallest stroke, was just as applicable to those called to salvation from the nations (Gentiles) as it was to the disciples of Yeshua themselves, all of whom were Jewish. The Greek of this phrase is even more exacting. A wooden translation would be: “teaching them to keep all, as many as, I commanded you.” The word combination πάντα ὅσα (*panta hosa*), which is translated in the *NASB* “all that,” is found 21 times in the Apostolic Scriptures,¹³ and is an emphatic way of describing “all, every, as much as.” The *NIV*, *NET*, and *CJB* capture the meaning a bit more: “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” So this was to be the message of the Apostles as they initiated the ingathering of the nations. All that Yeshua commanded them to do, they were to teach the believing Gentiles to do as well.

What is more, Yeshua’s posture toward the Gentiles as portrayed in the Gospel records is very interesting. He set the paradigm in place which Paul reiterates: “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Yeshua sends His disciples to the “lost sheep of Israel” as the first priority in the proclamation of the Kingdom.¹⁴ But in telling them not to go into the cities of the Gentiles, He was not suggesting that

12. For further study on the meaning of πληρῶσαι (*plerosai*), “to fulfill,” in Matt 5:17, see my paper “What Does ‘Plerosai’ (to fulfill) Mean in Matthew 5:17,” available in the “Articles in English” section at www.torahresource.com.

13. Matt 7:12; 13:44, 46; 18:25; 21:22; 23:3; 28:20; Mark 6:30; 11:24; 12:44; Luke 18:12, 22; John 4:29, 45; 10:8, 41; 16:15; 17:7; Acts 3:22; 5:36-37

14. Cf. Matt 10:6; 15:24.

the Gospel of the Kingdom was for the Jewish people only. Rather, He was setting the procedure for how the Gospel of the Kingdom was to be disseminated. First the good news was to be proclaimed in Jerusalem, then in Judea, expanding to Samaria, and then, and only then, to the furthest reaches of the world. His commissioning the Apostles to go into the nations and make disciples, then, signaled the beginning of the final expansion of His kingdom.

Yet even during the initial phase, when He instructed His Apostles to go only to the “lost sheep of Israel,” His interaction with Gentiles gave a clear foreshadowing of His plan to send His disciples to evangelize the nations.¹⁵ Surely, Yeshua speaks of Gentiles as “pagans” (Matt 5:46–47; 6:7; 18:17; 20:25–26), that is, as those who do not know or do the Torah of God.¹⁶ Yet to draw the conclusion from these references that Yeshua had an entirely negative perspective toward Gentiles is unwarranted. Gentiles are included among those who receive healing at the hand of Yeshua (Matt 4:24–25; 8:5ff; 15:21–28), with the Syro-Phoenician woman being marked out as having “great faith.” And His final directive to the disciples before His ascension, opens the mission to the Gentile nations in clear and direct terms. The Gentiles were to become His disciples as well. Thus, while the initial phase of Yeshua’s mission was directly to His own Jewish people as a matter of priority, the vision of gathering in the elect from the nations is known and expressed from the beginning by His reaching out to Gentiles.

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, has much to say about the Torah. Consider, for instance, Rom 2:13, “for it is not the hearers of the Torah who are just before God, but the doers of the Torah will be justified.” For Paul, “doing the Torah” is a mark of one’s right-standing before God—being justified. In the verse just previous, Paul speaks of those “without the Torah,” which must be referencing Gentiles, and in the following verses, he references Gentiles who “do the things of the Torah” even though they did not grow up being taught the Torah. So his remark in v. 13, that “the doers of the Torah will be justified,” certainly encompasses both believing Gentiles and Jews. Further, the statement that “the doers of the Torah will be justified” certainly does not sound like an invitation to keep Torah. Paul presents doing Torah as an essential mark of genuine faith.

In Rom 3:27ff, which forms the conclusion of his treatise proving all (Jew and Gentile) to be sinners, Paul effectively leaves no possible way of salvation besides that of faith in Yeshua. In so doing, he affirms that God is the God both of Jews and Gentiles since He justifies both on the same grounds. For those Jews who believed that their observance of the Torah was what defined their Jewishness, and that their heritage to Jacob was the grounds for their salvation, they may have reasoned that Paul’s Gospel

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15. For articles on the matter of Yeshua’s relationship to Gentiles in the Gospels, particularly Matthew, see Gene R. Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs’: Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew,” *JETS* 45/1 (March 2002), 73–97; Brendan Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name ‘The Gentiles Will Hope’ (Matt 12:21): Gentile Inclusion as an Essential Element of Matthew’s Christology,” *Australian Biblical Review* 50 (2002), 55–73; John C. Hutchison, “Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew’s Genealogy,” *BibSac* 158:630 (April 2001), 152–64; Douglas R. A. Hare, “How Jewish is the Gospel of Matthew?,” *CBQ* 62/2 (2000), 264–277; Julius J. Scott, “Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matt 10:5–6; 15:21–28,” *JETS* 33/2 (1990), 161–69; Michael F. Bird, “Who Comes from the East and the West” Luke 13:28–29 / Matt 8:11–12 and the Historical Jesus,” *NTS* 52/4 (2006), 441–57.
16. Yeshua would have most likely used the word גוֹיִם / גוֹי (*goy, goyim*), translated into the Greek as τὰ ἔθνη (*ta ethne*), the common translation of גוֹיִם / גוֹי in the Lxx. If Yeshua were speaking Aramaic, He would have most likely used the word גַּו (*gav*) or גו (*go*) or even perhaps חַנְפָּא (*chanfa*), “godless, alienated from God.” The Peshitta uses حنفا (*chanfa*) in Matt 6:7; 10:5; 18:17; Mark 7:26; John 7:35; Acts 18:4, 17; 1 Cor 5:1; 10:20, 27; 12:2; 1 Pet 4:3.

made obedience to the Torah irrelevant. Anticipating their thinking, Paul concludes the chapter (v. 31) by stating: “Do we then nullify the Torah through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Torah.” This bold statement regarding the establishment of the Torah for all believers in Yeshua, whether Jew or Gentile, is presented as the inevitable outcome of faith, not as something required for Jewish believers but optional for Gentile believers.

In Rom 8:1–4, Paul draws a conclusion to the dilemma set forth in the previous chapter. There, the struggle for righteousness that exists between the flesh (the remaining sinful nature) and the new heart (or “new man,” Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) is portrayed, a struggle that leaves Paul saying, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” The opening of Rom 8 gives the answer: though the Torah was weak because it could never provide the power to overcome the sinful disposition of the flesh, God is not weak. He condemned sin in the flesh through the work of His Son, Yeshua.¹⁷ And, because of what Yeshua accomplished, the one who believes in Him is given the Spirit Who supplies the means to subdue the flesh. What is the outcome for the believer? The requirement of the Torah, which is that one should keep the commandments contained therein, is “fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (v. 4). Paul’s point is clear: it is the purpose of the indwelling Spirit that those He indwells should have the requirement of the Torah fulfilled in their lives. It is the mission of the indwelling Spirit to bring all whom He indwells to live out the “requirement of the Torah.” This is no “invitation.” It is the inevitable outcome of the work of the indwelling Spirit.

James has something to say about the Torah as well. Consider James 4:11,

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the Torah and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah but a judge of it.

This whole exhortation makes no sense unless James begins with the presupposition that being a “doer of the Torah” is the proper way of life for all who are believers. Note also that “doer of the Torah” (ποιητῆς νόμου) in this verse echoes the same expression found earlier in James 1:22, “But prove yourselves doers of the word (ποιηταὶ λόγου), and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” In the following verse, “doers of the word” are further defined as “effectual doers” (ποιητῆς ἔργου) of the “perfect Torah, the Torah of liberty” (1:25).¹⁸

Even these few examples bring into question the idea that the Apostles were silent about obedience

17. That is, Yeshua took the condemnation which the Torah required, and thus “there is no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua,” Rom 8:1.

18. If the argument is raised that the Epistle of James was written to Jewish, not Gentile, believers, one needs to realize that in the communities of The Way, there was no such homogeneity. Surely all early communities of Yeshua followers were made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, even if in the earliest stages the Jewish believers were in the majority. Moreover, even if one were to accept that the addresses of James’ Epistle were primarily Jewish, this in and of itself would not preclude James’ teaching being applicable to Gentile believers as well. If one were to adopt the position that the words of a biblical author applied only to the specific, historical addresses, very little of the Tanach could have application to Gentiles. Yet it is clear that the Apostles regularly quote the Tanach as applicable to the Gentile believers, showing that they did consider the words of Moses and the Prophets as having direct application to all who were in Messiah, regardless of their ethnicity or people-group identification.

to the Torah for Gentile believers in Yeshua. But there is one more curious anomaly in the opening statement of the article under review. The authors proceed on the idea that Dr. Pryor was correct in stating that the Apostles never formulated a theology of Torah for the Gentiles. Then, in the remainder of the article, the authors seek to prove that the Apostles did indeed formulate a theology of Torah for Gentiles, which they label as “Divine Invitation.” So which is it? Did the Apostles have a theology of Torah for the Gentiles or not? Their interpretation of Acts 15 and 21 seems to argue that the Apostles had a clear theology of Torah for the Gentiles, namely, that they were required to maintain the moral or ethical aspects of the Torah, but that they were only invited to receive the rest of the Torah. One cannot have it both ways. If the Apostles really were silent regarding a theology of the Torah for Gentiles, then one cannot posit the “Divine Invitation” model as though it were based upon the teachings of the Apostles. On the other hand, if the Apostles did offer a theology of Torah for the Gentiles, i.e., the theology of “Divine Invitation,” then to begin the article on the premise that the Apostles never formulated a theology of Torah for the Gentiles is self contradictory.

Nagging Problems: 2) Our Relationship to Greater Christianity

On pp. 49ff of the article, a list of “Nagging Problems” with the “One Law” is given. The first, that the Apostles never spoke about the relationship of Gentiles to the Torah, has been answered above. The second is that the “One Law” position “requires a broad and sweeping condemnation of virtually every Christian community in existence.” This grandiose statement is undoubtedly anecdotal but it does not state the reality. The fact that there are those who hold a “One Law” position and who openly condemn the Christian Church does not mean that the “One Law” position demands such condemnation. One would hope that there is the possibility of disagreement, even significant disagreement, without requiring attendant condemnation! Personally, I maintain ongoing dialog and friendship with numbers of Christian pastors and teachers in our city. We recognize where we differ theologically, but we also recognize core aspects of our faith that we hold in complete agreement.

But once again, the logic of this argument (and even the logic of a similar counter argument) leads to a fallacy, for anecdotal evidence may or may not accurately represent a universal reality. On p. 49 of the article, the authors give their definition of the One Law theology: “One-Law theology = The belief that Gentile and Jewish believers have identical obligations to Torah and liability for its transgression.” The conclusion that such theology “requires” the condemnation of the Christian Church simply does not follow from the definition given.

Indeed, one would have to conclude that even the “Divine Invitation” theology now espoused by FFOZ would require them to make some very grave assessments as to how the Christian Church has erred in aspects of its theology, for a good deal of the Christian Church has taught replacement theology which the “Divine Invitation” position most assuredly repudiates. For when “Divine Invitation” insists that Jewish people have a divine mandate to keep the whole Torah, it is making a bold statement that the Church has not replaced Israel, and that Jewish people continue to have a responsibility as Jewish people to God and His Torah.

Moreover, the “Divine Invitation” model is a two-edged sword. FFOZ hopes that one edge will cut

through the “One Law” perspective and the errors they claim it contains. But to be consistent, should not the other edge of the sword go after the Christian theology that teaches the utter abolition of the Torah for Jews and Gentiles alike? They write about the “gravity of the situation” brought about by the “One Law” position (p. 52) yet suggest that their “Divine Invitation” theology will allow them to embrace the greater Christian Church. How so? If the One Law teaching has, in their opinion, brought about a great deal of “bad fruit,” what is their assessment of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who have followed the teachings from Christian pulpits and abandoned their Jewishness altogether? How will their new “Divine Invitation” model allow them to embrace the greater Christian Church in light of the fact that Christian theology on the matter of Torah denies a “Jewish mandate” so tenaciously maintained by “Divine Invitation?”

Nagging Problems: 3) Compromising the Distinction between Jews and Gentiles

Once again, this assessment is derived from anecdotal evidence and is not based upon anything inherent in One Law theology itself. As a strong proponent of the One Law position, I have consistently taught that Gentiles who come to faith in Yeshua do not “become Jews,” but remain redeemed Gentiles who join the remnant of Israel and therefore demonstrate the faithfulness of God to the Abrahamic promise.

But this whole matter of maintaining a distinction between Jews and Gentiles needs to be considered more thoroughly. Much depends upon the vantage point of the one making the assessment. What I mean by this is simply that for “outsiders,” that is, for those outside of a Torah community who are assessing what they see of the community, it may well appear that Gentile members of the community are Jewish. This is because the Gentile members of the community participate in activities that have traditionally been labeled as “Jewish.” But for those within the Torah community itself, things might be seen quite differently. I know this is the case in our own community. It is not uncommon for a non-Jewish member of our community to relate his or her experience, in which someone in their neighborhood, or in a public place, asks them if they are Jewish. The question is reasonable because they’re wearing tzitzit, or buying kosher foods, or picking up challah for their Shabbat meal. The answer the inquirer receives, however, is something like this: “No, I’m not Jewish, but my Messiah is, and I’m seeking to walk in His footsteps.”

It seems that this same kind of scenario obtained even in the 1st Century. The idea that Jews were easily recognized as distinct from their Gentile friends is not well supported by the historical data. We do know that many Gentiles regularly visited synagogues in the early centuries,¹⁹ and even though many did not undergo rabbinic conversion, they adhered to a great deal of traditional Jewish *halachah* and lifestyle. Significantly, the *fiscus judaicus*, the so-called “Jewish tax,” was assessed upon all who adhered to “Jewish practice,” that is, who had a lifestyle characterized by Torah observance. Even before the second revolt, according to Suetonius, during the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) his agents assessed the *fiscus judaicus* upon those they presumed to be “Jewish” on the basis of their lifestyle.

19. See Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (Yale, 2000), pp. 115, 121, 272–75, 350; Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Diaspora Setting* (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 113–16;

Domitian's agents collected the tax on Jews with a peculiar lack of mercy; and took proceedings not only against those who kept their Jewish origins a secret in order to avoid the tax, but against those who lived as Jews without professing Judaism.²⁰

Thus, the “outsiders” saw little difference between a Torah observant Jew and Torah observant Gentile. Shaye Cohen makes this same point:

In this chapter I have argued that, rabbinic evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, the diaspora Jews of antiquity were not easily recognizable—if, indeed, they were recognizable at all. Jews looked like everyone else, dressed like everyone else, spoke like everyone else, had names and occupations like those of everyone else, and, in general, closely resembled their gentile neighbors. Even circumcision did not always make male Jews distinctive, and as long as they kept their pants on, it certainly did not make them recognizable. Like many other diaspora peoples ancient and modern, the Jews of antiquity succeeded in maintaining their identity without become conspicuous.

How, then, did you know a Jew in antiquity when you saw one? The answer is that you did not. But you could make reasonably plausible inferences from what you saw. First, if you saw someone associating with Jews, living in a (or the) Jewish part of town, married to a Jew, and, in general, integrated socially with other Jews, you might reasonably conclude that that someone was a Jew. Second, if you saw someone performing Jewish rituals and practices, you might reasonably conclude that that someone was a Jew. Each of these conclusions would have been reasonable, but neither would have been certain, because gentiles often mingled with Jews and some gentiles even observed Jewish rituals and practices. As a result, these reasonable conclusions would lead you to label some gentiles as Jews ... By observing Jewish practices and by associating with Jews, gentiles will have been called Jews and will have been mistaken for Jews.²¹

So the matter of Gentiles living a Torah lifestyle and, as a result, being mistaken for Jews, is not something new. This phenomenon obtained in the early centuries as well. Most interesting for our discussion, however, is that it was not the Jewish community that was up in arms over Gentiles appearing as Jews, nor was it the pagan government of Rome. It was the leaders of the emerging Christian Church that spoke against such practices among the Gentiles. Indeed,

Church fathers repeatedly warn their flocks to distance themselves from Jews and Judaism. Ignatius so admonishes with church members in Philadelphia (Asia Minor), and the author of the *Martyrdom of Pionius* admonishes Christians not to seek refuge in synagogues during persecutions. Origen cautions Christians not to discuss on Sunday matters they had heard raised the previous day in the synagogue or to partake of meals in both church and synagogue. Ephrem is distressed with members of the church who are attracted to Jewish customs and feasts, and, finally, Jerome expresses dismay at Christians who turned to Jews for the correct interpretation of a passage from Jonah.²²

Therefore, if FFOZ is so concerned about the loss of distinction between Jews and Gentiles which they attribute to the One Law position, how much more should they be concerned about the Christian

20. Robert Graves, *The Twelve Caesars* (Penguin, 1979), p. 308.

21. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness* (Univ of California Press, 1999), 67–8.

22. Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, Op. cit., p. 272.

Church in general. For by far the greatest number of believing Jews who have entirely assimilated into a Gentile lifestyle is to be found in the modern Christian Church. Yet FFOZ proposes that the Divine Invitation model they have adopted (in contrast to their previous One Law teaching) allows them to affirm the Christian Church. To be consistent, however, they should be even more vocal in their opposition to the assimilating theology and tactics of the Christian Church, which has stripped countless numbers of Jewish believers of their Jewish identity.

The fact that FFOZ has charged the One Law position as failing to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles brings up another interesting issue: such a charge presumes that FFOZ has come to a clear definition (at least for themselves) as to what exactly determines Jewishness, a matter that has been an ongoing debate among Jewish scholars since ancient times.²³ Has FFOZ accepted the definition given by the UMJC in their “Defining Messianic Judaism,”²⁴ a definition that affirms the Reform Judaism position? And an even bigger question is this: Does FFOZ now accept the UMJC stance on Gentile conversion to Judaism? Is a Gentile who undergoes the “Conversion Ritual” under the auspices of a UMJC Rabbi now considered a Jew by FFOZ? What about a Gentile believer who finds a traditional rabbi who will perform the necessary conversion ritual? If, in fact, a divine mandate to keep the whole Torah is reserved for Jewish people alone, then defining who is Jewish and who is not takes on a high level of importance.

The authors seek to prove that the distinction between Jew and Gentile includes the fact that Jews and Gentiles have different roles within the context of Torah obedience. Their method of proof is what is called a *non sequitur* in formal logic.²⁵ That is, they offer examples of role distinctions clearly taught in the Scriptures, and then proceed to conclude that such examples prove similar distinctions regarding Torah observance for Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua. Citing Gal 3:28, the authors note that while Paul makes the categorical statement that there is “neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free man; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua,” in other contexts he makes clear distinctions in the roles of slaves and free men as well as males and females. The conclusion is then reached that Paul also must have made distinctions regarding the roles of Jew and Greek (=Gentile) in matters of Torah observance. Putting their argument into a simple syllogism will show its fallacy:

Major premise: Paul teaches distinctive roles for males and females.

Minor premise: Paul teaches distinctive roles for slaves and freemen.

Conclusion: Therefore, Paul must teach distinctive roles in Torah observance for Jews and Gentiles.

23. See Meryl Hyman, *Who is a Jew?* (Jewish Lights, 1998).

24. Available at: http://umjc.net/resources-mainmenu-101/documents-mainmenu-110/doc_download/14-defining-messianic-judaism.

25. A *non sequitur* is when a conclusion is reached which does not contain a common element with the major and minor premises of the proof. An example of *non sequitur* is: *Major:* All men are males; *Minor:* All women are females; *Conclusion:* Dogs are neither male nor female. This is a *non sequitur* because neither the *major* nor *minor* premises include the designation “dogs.” Or to put it more simply, what is stated about one class (humans, in this case) does not necessarily exclude another class (e.g., canines). See R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, שפר ההגיון *The Book of Logic* (Feldheim, 5755), pp. 145–52.

The conclusion obviously does not follow (it is a *non sequitur*) from the premises. The fact that in other texts Paul distinguishes between roles for males and females, as well as for masters and slaves, tells us nothing about the roles of Jews and Gentiles in the realm of Torah obedience. In fact, in this text, Paul is not saying that “people with different roles all have the same access to salvation.” He rather has listed six categories of people within the Jewish culture of his day, three that have societal advantage (Jews, males, and freemen), and three that are at a disadvantage in the society (Gentiles, females, and slaves). His point is that societal ranking makes not one iota of difference when it comes to membership in God’s redeemed people. So he did not choose the categories of people based upon their different *roles* but based upon their different *station in life*.

The FFOZ authors state “the apostolic community maintained a clear and certain distinction between who was Jewish and who was Gentile” (p. 50). They then proceed to show that Paul taught slaves to obey their masters and masters not to become slaves (citing Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; 4:1; 1Tim 6:1; Tit 2:9; 1Cor 7:23). They also show that Paul gave men and women different instructions (citing Eph 5:22–28; Col 3:18–19; Tit 2:4–5). But when it comes to citing texts to prove the “clear and certain distinction between who was Jewish and who was Gentile,” they offer the body analogy used by Paul to describe the *ekklesia* (believing assembly) and the notice that Paul’s mission was to the Gentiles, while Peter’s was to the Jews. They also state that the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) would have been entirely unnecessary if the Apostles had not made a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Why did they not cite specific texts to show that Jews and Gentiles have different roles in regard to Torah observance? If this were as “clear and certain” as are the distinguished roles of slaves/masters and husbands/wives, we would expect the supporting texts to be cited.

But once again, the FFOZ authors have formulated a poor argument. For proving that Yeshua and His Apostles maintained a distinction between Jews and Gentiles does not prove that Jews are obligated to the whole Torah and Gentiles are not. Putting their argument into a syllogism makes this plain:

Major Premise: The Torah prescribes specific commandments for groups A & B respectively

Minor Premise: The Torah prescribes specific commandments for groups C & D respectively

Conclusion: Therefore, the Torah prescribes specific commandments for groups E & F

The logical fallacy is obvious: the conclusion cannot contain elements not found in the premises. Putting this same syllogism into the current topic could look something like this:

Major premise: Yeshua and His Apostles taught that Jews are not Gentiles.

Minor premise: Yeshua and His Apostles taught that Gentiles are not Jews.

Conclusion: Therefore, Jews are required to keep the whole Torah and Gentiles are not.

Once again, the conclusion does not follow from the premises. The proper conclusion would be: “Therefore, Yeshua and His Apostles taught a distinction between Jews and Gentiles.”

That Yeshua and His Apostles taught a distinction between Jews and Gentiles is obvious. Yeshua

told His disciples to go to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” and “do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans.”²⁶ Obviously He was distinguishing these people groups. Likewise Paul, in his Olive Tree analogy (Rom 11) describes Jewish people as “natural branches” and Gentiles as “wild branches.” When he says in the same chapter that “salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them (Jewish people) jealous,” the distinction between the two groups is clear. In fact, theologically speaking, there is an utter necessity to retain this distinction because the faithfulness of God to the covenant He made with Abraham promises that both the descendants of Jacob as well as “all the families of the earth” would be divinely blessed. God is not the God of the Jews only. He is also the God of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29). This is an eschatological certainty; for we read in Revelation that the redeemed people of God are comprised of “people from every tribe, kindred, and tongue” (Rev 5:9). People group distinction is not erased by salvation—it is established as proof of God’s faithfulness.

But the biblical fact that ethnic distinctions are maintained within the realm of God’s saving work in Messiah does not prove a Torah mandate for Jews as contrasted to a “Divine Invitation” for all others. A Jew who seeks to obey the whole Torah and a Gentile who seeks to obey the whole Torah remain distinct in that one is a Torah observant Jew and the other a Torah observant Gentile. Contrary to rabbinic teaching that the Torah belongs uniquely to the Jewish people, Israel’s prophets spoke of the day when the Torah would come to all of the nations.²⁷ God gave the Torah to Israel who was to be His servant to carry it to all the peoples.²⁸ Yeshua, as *the* Servant of God *par excellence*, therefore commissions His Apostles to teach the Torah, even the smallest stroke of it, to those who would become Yeshua’s disciples among all the nations (Matt 28:19–20). The Torah is not “Jewish.” It is God’s revealed instructions to all of mankind²⁹ and the precious possession of all who are His children.

Moreover, just because Paul’s primary mission was to the uncircumcised (Gentiles), and Peter was known as the Apostle to the circumcised, does not prove that each taught their respective groups a different list of Torah commandments to follow. Both Paul and Peter evangelized and taught Jews and Gentiles, as the book of Acts clearly shows. That each had a specific people-group emphasis in their mission did not restrict their efforts to one people-group or another. Paul is regularly in synagogues in his diaspora journeys, addressing both Jews and Gentiles.³⁰ The fact that Jewish believers in Jerusalem had believed a falsehood about Paul, namely, that he was teaching the Jewish people living in the diaspora to “forsake Moses...” (Acts 21:21) would indicate that Jewish people were in attendance when he taught.

Nor does Paul’s analogy of the believing community as a “body” in which different parts have different roles teach us anything about different categories of commandments mandated for different members of the body of Messiah. Paul is not suggesting that “the foot” (for instance) is mandated to keep the

26. Matt 10:5–6; cp. 15:24.

27. Is 2:3; 42:4; 51:4; 56:8; Mic 4:2.

28. Is 42:6; 49:6, cp. 51:4. In these Isaiah texts, note the parallels: “covenant to the people” // “light to the nations | “Torah will go forth from Me” // “My justice for a light of the peoples”.

29. E.g., 2Sam 7:19 (תּוֹרַת הָאָדָם, “Torah of mankind”); Qoh 12:13 (כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הַמִּצְוֹת, “for this [keeping the mitzvot] is for all mankind.”); Is 2:3; 42:4; Mic 4:2.

30. Cf. Acts 13:16, 26; 14:1; 17:1–5, 17; 18:4; 19:10, 17; 20:21; 21:21.

Sabbath, but “the hand” is not. Or that there are different categories of commandments for different members of the “body.” Differing roles do not *necessarily* indicate different sets of rules. We can use this analogy to illustrate the principle: the hand, foot, tongue and ear have different roles in the human body. But all must equally avoid fire to escape pain. Each part, with its distinct role, is subject to the law that fire will bring pain. In the same way, each member of the body grows to be like Messiah by the same means: the indwelling Spirit Who has written the Torah upon the heart of each believer.

Indeed, Paul used the metaphor of the human body to emphasize unity, equality, and oneness in the whole process of sanctification. Note how Paul concludes this pericope:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Messiah; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. (Eph 4:11–13)

Every part of the body participates in moving toward a single goal, namely, a maturity level that matches the fullness of Messiah. The whole point in Paul’s “human body” analogy is that each member is a necessary part of the whole that receives its life from the head, Who is Messiah. Differing roles do not suggest different means of sanctification. In fact, Paul emphasizes just the opposite: in the diversity of gifting and service, each member of the body has the same standard and means of sanctification.

Legal = Ethnic Status

The statement in the last paragraph of p. 50 mixes two classes as though they are one: “The notion that the apostles made no legal or ethnic distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers is not sustainable.” This statement takes as axiomatic that “legal” and “ethnic” are one and the same, a position that accords with the prevailing rabbinic teaching during the Apostolic era. But just because the rabbis taught this to be the case does not mean Yeshua and His Apostles agreed with this rabbinic perspective.

According to the earliest strata of rabbinic literature, the prevailing rabbinic ruling was that ethnic status determined legal status. The oft repeated dictum of m.*Sanhedrin* 10.1, “All Israel have a place in the world to come,” (where “Israel” is defined by the rabbis as Jewish by birth or by conversion), is representative of this.³¹ But the question that confronts us is this: Did Yeshua and His Apostles accept this viewpoint as God-given or did they consider it an ethnocentricity developed by the rabbis?

Paul’s language in Ephesians 2, for instance, clearly suggests that he did not agree with the “ethnicity=legal status” scheme of things. When in v. 19 Paul uses the term συμπολιται (*sumpolitai*), “fellow citizens” to describe Gentile believers, he has utilized a legal term describing a legal status, i.e., citizenship. The same may be said of his use of οἰκεῖοι (*oikeioi*), “household members” in the same verse. This

31. Note that Mishnah *Avot* traditionally begins with this statement from m.*Sanhedrin* 10.1. Kehati (*The Mishnah: A New Translation with Commentary by Rabbi Pinhas Kehati*, 21 vols: Tractate Pirkei Avot (*Eliner Library*, 1994), 13.4–5) remarks that it became the tradition to recite this opening mishnah before each chapter of *Avot* when it is read or studied on Shabbats during the summer season.

word, which can mean “connected by bloodline,”³² describes not only a fact of reality (i.e., bloodline) but also a legal status. He is not saying that believing Gentiles have had a blood transfusion. What he is saying is that believing Gentiles have a legal status within the household of God equal to that of Jewish members.

The fact that in Eph 2:12 Paul employs legal terminology when he describes the Gentile believers as *formerly* “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel” but now “brought near” in Yeshua, shows once again that legal status is clearly Paul’s point. For membership in a commonwealth (πολιτεία, *politeia*) is a legal issue.³³ So for Paul, one’s legal status within the body of Messiah is not tied to one’s ethnicity or a declaration of ethnicity. It is based upon the common faith which Jew and Gentile have in Yeshua.

Surely Paul recognized the societal laws set in place by rabbinic authorities, which were predicated upon the “ethnicity=legal status” ruling. You can’t fight city hall. But this does not mean that Paul agreed with this rabbinic dictum. Did God sanction the division of the Temple precinct into the “court of the Gentiles,” the “court of women,” and the “court of Israelites,” or was this the result of a developing Pharisaism? We do not find any such divisions in the Tabernacle or in Solomon’s Temple. Just because Herod followed the rabbinic instructions when he expanded the Temple mount, erecting the *soreg* to separate Jew and Gentile, does not mean that Yeshua, Paul or the other Apostles agreed that such divisions were divinely sanctioned. Yeshua’s righteous indignation against the money changers (Matt 21:13; Luke 19:46) makes it clear that He did not entirely endorse the actions of the Temple authorities when it came to how they administrated the Temple precincts.

Likewise, Paul’s insistence that the “wall of partition” had been abolished in the death of Messiah (Eph 2:14) would strongly suggest that when it came to a person’s membership in the assembly of believers, the rabbinic separation based upon “ethnicity=legal status” was fully rejected.³⁴ If the rabbinic laws held sway in Jerusalem’s Temple, separating Gentiles from Jewish worshippers at pain of death, that was a matter of civil law. But such legal separation had no place in the Messianic community, which Paul characterizes as the “household of God” (1Tim 3:15). For Paul, Jews remained Jews and Gentiles remained Gentiles, but their legal status as covenant members in the household of God was the same because it was based upon “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5).³⁵

32. Cf. Is 58:7 (Lxx); 1Tim 5:8.

33. Note the use of πολιτεία in 2Macc 13.14, where Judah Maccabee charged his soldiers “to fight nobly, even to the death for the laws, temple, city, country, and commonwealth....”

34. See my paper, “The ‘Dividing Wall’ in Eph 2:14 – What is It? Who Made It? How was It Broken Down?” – available at www.torahresource.com.

35. I do not mean to imply by this that Jewish people who do not accept Yeshua as their Messiah are no longer Jews. Paul’s “Olive Tree” metaphor makes it clear that natural branches which have been broken off because of unbelief may yet be easily regrafted by God’s sovereign grace. Moreover, it is clear that unbelieving Israel remains within the broader circle of God’s chosen people—they are beloved because of the fathers (Rom 11:28f). But ethnicity or people-group identification (=being Jewish) will not ultimately suffice. Even as Yeshua taught that a tree which bears no fruit is cut down and cast into the fire (Matt 3:10; 7:19; Luke 3:9) and branches that bear no fruit are cut off, allowed to wither, and then burnt in the fire (John 15:2, 6), so Paul considers branches broken off because of their unbelief to be in a most vulnerable state. Unless they are grafted back in (which could only happen when their unbelief is reversed), they will remain forever severed from the rich root that supports the branches.

Nagging Problems: 4) The Issue of Circumcision and Gentile Exemption & Gal 5:3

In order to prove their point, that God does not require Gentiles to keep all of the commandments, the FFOZ authors turn their attention to Galatians 5 and the issue of circumcision.

If Gentiles were under the same obligation to Torah as Jewish believers, then they should not have had an exemption from the commandment of circumcision. The epistles of Paul, however, go so far as even discouraging Gentiles from receiving circumcision. Paul warns the Gentile believers: “And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah” (Galatians 5:3). The obvious inverse of this is that a person who does not undergo circumcision is not “under obligation to keep the whole Torah.” (p. 51)

In making such an appeal to Galatians 5:3, however, the FFOZ authors may have undermined the very thesis they hope to prove. Here is why: they present Gal 5:3 as though Paul is warning Gentiles that if they receive circumcision (i.e., convert to Judaism), they will be required to keep the whole Torah. As such, they would be liable to the punishment of the additional commandments they would take upon themselves.³⁶ But such an interpretation of v. 3 overlooks the immediate context. If we read even the verse that precedes and the verse that follows, a different picture emerges.

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man³⁷ who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah. You have been severed from Messiah, you who are seeking to be justified by Torah; you have fallen from grace. (Gal 5:2–4)

The FFOZ authors lead their readers to believe that in v. 3 Paul is teaching an “exemption” from circumcision for the Gentiles, and even discouraging them from receiving circumcision. At the same time, they use this text to teach that anyone with the “legal Jewish status” is obligated to keep the whole Torah. When they write that Paul is “discouraging Gentiles from receiving circumcision” (p. 51), they are obviously leaving the door open for Gentiles to receive circumcision if they so desire. Given this possibility, they interpret Paul’s words here as a warning to the Gentiles contemplating ritual conversion:

In Galatians, Paul warns Gentile believers away from making that legal conversion to become Jewish, and one reason he cites is that undergoing circumcision will make them liable for all of the commandments

36. Note what the authors write on p. 51: “In Galatians, Paul warns Gentile believers away from making the legal conversion to become Jewish, and one reason he cites is that undergoing circumcision will make them liable for all of the commandments (and punishments).”

37. It is interesting that Paul uses the Greek *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthropos*) here rather than *ἀνὴρ* (*aner*), which we might expect. *Anthropos* generally refers to people in general (like Hebrew *אָדָם*, *adam*) while *aner* designates a “male” as distinct from a “female.” When Paul writes, “I testify again to every man (*anthropos*),” we might understand this to mean “every person.” The English translators all use “man” since “circumcision” is the issue being discussed. But if we understand Paul’s use of “circumcision” here to be a short-hand reference to becoming a proselyte, then women could well be included in his use of *anthropos*.

(and punishments).³⁸

Read in context, however, v. 3 is not warning Gentiles who might become proselytes that if they do so, they will be liable for more commandments. On the contrary, Paul makes it clear that “receiving circumcision” is also a rejection of Messiah and the salvation He has procured for those who receive Him. Thus, there is no “Divine Invitation” for Gentiles to receive the circumcision Paul speaks of in this passage. If the authors intend to use this passage to prove that Gentiles do not have to obey the Torah commandment of circumcision, then they must likewise agree that Paul is not offering an *exemption* but is declaring a *prohibition* for Gentiles to be circumcised. This would in turn mean that the “Divine Invitation” for Gentiles to embrace Torah is a limited invitation. Or to put it another way, if this text proves that Jews are *required* to keep the whole Torah, then it also proves the Gentiles are *prohibited* from keeping the whole Torah because they are prohibited from “receiving circumcision.”

The general argument presented by the FFOZ authors is this:

Major premise: If there is one exception to the rule there are many exceptions to the rule.

Minor premise: Paul exempts Gentiles from the Torah commandment of circumcision.

Conclusion: Therefore, there are other Torah commandments besides circumcision that Gentiles are not required to obey.

But we have seen that in Gal 5:3, Paul is not giving an *exemption* from “receiving circumcision,” he is *prohibiting* a Gentile believer from “receiving circumcision.” Therefore, their argument should be:

Major premise: If Gentiles are prohibited from keeping one commandment, then they are prohibited from keeping other commandments.

Minor premise: In Gal 5:3, Paul prohibits Gentiles from “receiving circumcision.”

Conclusion: Therefore, there are other Torah commandments besides circumcision that Gentiles are prohibited from obeying.

Perhaps now you understand why I say that the authors have gotten more than they bargained for in their use of Gal 5:3. Their position, that God has extended a “Divine Invitation” to Gentiles to embrace

38. In the endnote (n. 9), the authors suggest that the proselyte would be liable for the capital crime of violating the Sabbath. True, the Torah makes Sabbath violation a capital crime (Ex 31:15). But the Yerushalmi indicates that for 40 years prior to the Destruction, the Great Sanhedrin (before which capital crimes were judged) did not try capital crimes: “For forty years, until the Temple was destroyed, the privilege of trying capital cases was withdrawn” (y.*Sanhedrin* 18a). In the Bavli we read: “For forty years, until the Temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin went into Exile and dwelt in temporary quarters . . . and they did not judge capital cases” (b.*Sanhedrin* 15a). There are examples, however, of executions mentioned in the Mishnah (cf. m.*Sanhedrin* 7.2, cp. t.*Sanhedrin* 9.11 – this deals with the daughter of a priest caught in adultery). There are no examples, as far as I know, of capital punishment carried out against someone found guilty of Sabbath violations. See S. Safrai, “Jewish Self-Government” in *Jewish People in the First Century*, 2 vols in Safrai and Stern, eds. *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Fortress 1974), 2.398–400.

the “whole Torah,” is controverted by their interpretation and use of this text. Accordingly, they must amend their “Divine Invitation” to mean a “Divine Invitation” to *some* of the Torah, not to the *whole* Torah. And if Gentiles are only “invited” to keep some of the Torah, what other commandments are out-of-bounds for Gentiles?

If the FFOZ authors respond that what Paul is prohibiting to the Gentile believers is rabbinic conversion as a means of salvation, then they cannot also interpret Paul’s statement here as an *exemption* from the Torah commandment of circumcision. For the Torah commandment of circumcision³⁹ is not one and the same with the later rabbinic proselyte ritual.

If the response is that Paul is simply stating a well-known fact, that anyone who has the “legal status as a Jew” is obligated to keep the whole Torah, then the question remains whether Paul agrees with this or if he is simply stating a cultural reality. But even if this is the case, it would only prove that this was the socio-religious norm among the pre-destruction Judaisms. It would not prove that Paul endorsed the rabbinic teaching that only those with legal Jewish status are required to keep the whole Torah.

“Foreigner” (ger) in the Torah Should be Interpreted as “Proselyte” or “Gentile Convert to Judaism”

As noted above, the appeal made to Gal 5:3 by the FFOZ authors seems to indicate that they are equating the Torah commandment of circumcision with the rabbinic proselyte ritual. Is it possible that Paul would have agreed with this viewpoint? Surely the rabbis of the 1st Century understood circumcision in this way,⁴⁰ but that is because they anachronistically interpreted circumcision in the Torah by the much later ritual of conversion developed by the rabbis sometime following the Maccabean period. Lawrence Schiffman makes this point when he writes:

Y. Kaufman is probably correct in assuming that there could not have been an institution for religious conversion at this time [pre-Maccabean]. According to him, conversion was originally accomplished by attachment to the land and collective fate of the people of Israel. The early Second Commonwealth, however, was a period of transition. The old process, followed for example by Ruth, had gone out of use, yet the later methods of conversion, based upon a conception of Judaism as a religion rather than Israel as a national entity, had not yet developed.⁴¹

In the article under review, the FFOZ authors have accepted the rabbinic notion that when the Torah speaks about a foreigner having the same Torah as the native born, it is describing a foreigner who has undergone a ritual conversion. In fact, they use a circuitous argument to suggest that Yeshua and His Apostles also held this viewpoint.

Here is their argument: 1) often, when the Hebrew word גֵּר (*ger*, “foreigner, stranger, alien”) is found in the context of Torah observance, the Lxx translation uses the Greek προσήλυτος (*proselutos*) which

39. Gen 17:10ff; Lev 12:3.

40. E.g., see *Sifre* §108 (Jacob Neusner, *Sifre to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation* (Scholars Press, 1986), 2.148–51).

41. Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was A Jew?* (KTAV, 1985), p. 15.

came to mean “proselyte” or “Gentile convert to Judaism”; 2) since the Lxx was a recognized translation among the 1st Century Judaisms, and was used by the Apostles and the apostolic community, they must have agreed that *proselutos* (meaning “Gentile convert”) gives the proper understanding of גֵּר (*ger*) in these instances in which it is so translated by the Lxx. Here is what the authors write in reference to Numbers 15:15–16:

The Greek Septuagint gives us an insight into how the apostolic community would have understood and interpreted the passage. Under the influence of the LXX, they would have interpreted Numbers 15:15–16 to read as follows: “As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for Jews and for the proselyte, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as a Jew is, so shall the proselyte be before the LORD. There is to be one Torah and one ordinance for Jews and for the proselyte who sojourns with you.”

But this argument contains a number of obvious fallacies.

1) *The Lxx was received as representing the proper interpretation of the Tanach* – The first fallacy is the notion that the Lxx would have necessarily molded the understanding and interpretation of the Tanach for the Apostles and the apostolic community. Surely the Lxx had an influence upon the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures, as witnessed by its use in the quotes and allusions from the Tanach found in the Apostolic Scriptures. Yet it is not uncommon to find quotes from the Tanach that are clearly not from the Lxx. For example, in the Pauline epistles, he quotes or makes clear allusions to the Tanach 111 times.⁴² Of those which are quotes, 51 are from the Lxx, while 38 differ in some respect with both the Lxx and the Masoretic text as we now have them. In some of his quotes, he corrects the Lxx in favor of the original Hebrew and even appears to quote directly from the Hebrew against the Lxx.⁴³ This would indicate that while the Lxx was very popular, perhaps even being read in the synagogues of Paul’s day,⁴⁴ it was not relied upon necessarily as offering the “final word” on how any given Tanach text should be interpreted. It is unreasonable to conclude that the Apostles, who had at their disposal the Hebrew text of the Tanach, would always or even regularly give priority to the Lxx when it was at variance with the Hebrew itself.

2) *A translation expresses the theology of those who use it* – A second fallacy in the argument is that a given translation of the Bible fully expresses the theology of those who use that translation. For instance, would anyone in our day argue that when a teacher regularly uses the *ESV* he is indicating that the *ESV* articulates the details of his own theological position? Of course not. We all recognize that any translation of the Bible has its strengths and weaknesses. Why would we think that it was any different with Yeshua, His Apostles, and their disciples? And all the more when we remember that Hebrew was the mother tongue of the Apostles and the early followers of Yeshua, not Greek. The Hebrew text itself would have undoubtedly been a primary reference point in the theological discussions of the Apostles and messianic leaders, as well as in their reading and interpretation of the Tanach text.

42. See Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, 2nd edition (TorahResource, 2008) p. 143 for the details and sources.

43. E.g., Rom 11:35; 1Cor 3:19; 2Cor 8:15; 2Tim 2:19. See E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Baker, 1981), p. 12.

44. Cf. b. *Megilah* 9a.

3) *A Bible translation provides the proper interpretation of the original text* – A third fallacy in this argument is that a Bible translation, even one as popular as the Lxx in the 1st Century, provides the proper interpretation of a biblical text. The idea that the Lxx’s use of προσήλυτος (*proselutos*) to mean “Gentile convert, proselyte” proves to us that the Apostles and early apostolic community agreed with this meaning of the word, is a leap in logic. Perhaps a modern analogy will help illustrate this point. From the appearance of the King James Version in 1611 to our present times, every English translation of the “New Testament” translates the Greek word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) with the English “church” in all but a handful of its occurrences. Moreover, in these translations the word “church” is universally understood to mean “the Christian Church.” Does the fact that *ekklesia* is now universally presented in all English Bibles to mean the “Christian Church” prove that this is the correct meaning? No, of course not.⁴⁵ Likewise, it is a fallacy to presume that the Lxx translation of גֵר, *ger*, “foreigner, stranger, alien” by the Greek *proselutos*, “proselyte” or “Gentile convert,” proves that the Apostles and the communities they founded agreed with the theology that influenced this choice of words in the Lxx.

4) *The Greek noun proselutos in the Lxx means “proselyte,” i.e., Gentile convert* – A fourth fallacy in the argument is that when someone in the apostolic era heard or read the Greek word *proselutos* (and cognates), they naturally understood it to mean “Gentile convert.” It is true that the Septuagint’s choice of *proselutos* to translate *ger* in specific texts was influenced by the rabbinic theology of conversion extant at the time of the Septuagint’s formation.⁴⁶ Yet there is also evidence that the Greek word *proselutos* had not completely shifted to a technical, religious term (i.e., meaning “convert”) by the time the Torah was translated into Greek. As Kuhn notes:

The final development of “proselyte” as a technical term to denote the Gentile who becomes a full Jew by circumcision irrespective of his national or social position did not take place in Palestinian Judaism but in the Judaism of the Graeco-Roman diaspora.⁴⁷

This is proven by those instances in the Lxx where *proselutos* is used both of the foreigner as well as of Israel itself. Note the following:

You shall not wrong a stranger (*proselutos*) or oppress him, for you were strangers (*proselutoi*) in the land of Egypt. (Ex 22:21[Lxx v. 20])

You shall not oppress a stranger (*proselutos*), since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger (*prose-*

45. The theologically driven translation of *ekklesia* by our English word “church” is evident when one realizes that *ekklesia* is found throughout the Lxx, which our modern versions never translate by the word “church. In addition, in a number of instances in Acts, *ekklesia* denotes a mob, not a religious gathering of believers in Yeshua. Note Acts 19:32, 39, 40 where *ekklesia* is translated “assembly” or “gathering.”

46. See the comments of Emmanuel Tov, “The Septuagint,” Mulder and Sysling, eds. *Mikra in Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Fortress, 1988), p. 175; Kuhn, “προσήλυτος” in *TDNT*, 6.730; Terrence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Fortress, 1997), p. 55f. For a more detailed study of גֵר and its translation by προσήλυτος and πάροικος in the Lxx, see my *FellowHeirs* (FFOZ, 2003), pp. 5–16.

47. Kuhn, “προσήλυτος” in *TDNT*, 6.730.

lutos), for you also were strangers (*proselutoi*) in the land of Egypt. (Ex 23:9)

The stranger (*proselutos*) who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens (*proselutoi*) in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:34)

The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens (*proselutoi*) and sojourners with Me. (Lev 25:23)

Clearly, the use of *proselutos* as a designation for Israel in these texts cannot mean “proselyte.” In fact, the translation of these verses by the *Stone Tanach*⁴⁸ shows the manner in which current rabbinic theology has produced a thoroughly prejudiced translation. One example will suffice:

The proselyte (*ger*) who dwells with you shall be like a native among you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were aliens (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt—I am HASHEM your God. (Lev 19:34)

The obvious reason for translating גֵּר (*ger*) as “proselyte” in the first half of the verse, and the same word (גֵּר, *ger*) as “aliens” in the second half, is to conform the verse to fit the translator’s theology. It would clearly not do to designate Israel as “proselytes” in the land of Egypt! But “proselyte” does fit their needs in the first clause because they want only a convert to be fully accepted within the boundaries of Judaism. So they translate the same word two different ways in the same verse to fit their theology rather than being honest with the text itself.

One other text should be mentioned in discussing the use of *proselutos* in the Lxx: Is 56:3ff. In this text, Isaiah speaks of the “foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD” (בְּנֵי־הַנֶּכֶר הַגֵּלְיָהוּ אֲל־יְהוָה), who is characterized as one who “keeps from profaning the Sabbath” and who “holds fast My covenant” (v. 6). The Hebrew בְּנֵי־הַנֶּכֶר (*ben haneichar*) and its plural, בְּנֵי הַנֶּכֶר, (*b’nei haneichar*) is found only in this text. The Hebrew noun נֶכֶר (*neichar*) means “foreigner,” but also carries a heightened sense of “foreign” in terms of having a connection with idolatry. Thus the word is used of “foreign altars” (2Chron 14:2) and of “foreign gods” (Deut 32:12; Mal 2:11; Ps 81:10). Isaiah’s use of the word here, therefore, highlights the fact that these foreigners were clearly from outside of the people of Israel. What is interesting is that the Lxx does not translate *ben haneichar* or *b’nei haneichar* with the Greek *proselutos* as we might expect. It uses ἀλλογένης (*allogenes*), a word the Lxx translators never use to translate the Hebrew גֵּר, *ger*. Yet note how Isaiah describes these “foreigners.” They are attached to the LORD, they minister to Him, they keep the Sabbath, they hold fast the covenant, they offer sacrifices in the Temple, and they are given a name better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name “which will not be cut off.” Though they are likened to eunuchs in that they have no ability to produce progeny with an ancestral claim or advantage, they participate in the millennial Temple with all the privileges and responsibilities of native born sons and daughters. Here Isaiah paints the picture of how God intends worship within His “House of prayer for all peoples” to be conducted. And apparently the translators of the Lxx found no difficulty with this picture, for they do not utilize *proselutos* to translate *ben neichar* even though

48. R. Nosson Scherman, ed., *The Stone Edition: Tanach* (Mesorah Publications, 1996).

these “foreigners” obviously observe commandments and fulfill functions that the later rabbis would have considered applicable only to those with a legal Jewish status.

These examples offer substantial evidence that the Greek word *proselutos* does not consistently denote a “proselyte” in the Lxx, and that in some cases, a foreigner not designated by *proselutos* in the Lxx functions in all the capacities of the rabbinic convert. The notion, then, that whenever 1st Century Jews read *proselutos* in the Lxx they automatically understood it to mean “a Gentile convert” is not consistent with the data.⁴⁹ Nor is it proven that only foreigners who were considered as converts by the Lxx were treated as full-fledged covenant members who were required to keep the whole Torah.

In this regard we should also mention Acts 13:43.

Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

What is curious is Luke’s combining of “God-fearing” (σεβομένων, *sebomenōn*) with “proselytes” (προσηλύτων, *proelutōn*). In a number of other occurrences of *sebomenos* in Acts, it designates “God-fearers,” a class of Gentiles who were connected with the synagogue even though they had not undergone formal conversion.⁵⁰ Some commentators just conclude that Luke has either wrongly mixed the two terms in Acts 13:43 or a gloss somehow entered the text.⁵¹ Others suggest that Luke uses *sebomenos* here purely as an adjective, yielding “devout proselytes.”⁵² Still others think that Luke speaks of a combined group of “God-fearers” and “proselytes.”⁵³ Regardless of how one interprets Luke’s combination of these words, it may well indicate that designations such as *sebomenos* (“one who worships God”), *phobumenos* (“one who fears God”), and *proselutos* (“foreigner,” “convert”) were still in the process of becoming technical terms at the time of Act’s composition.

The logical fallacies in this argument, then, along with the lexical data supplied for the Lxx’s use of *proselutos*, should be sufficient to dismiss it altogether. To postulate that the Apostles and the apostolic community accepted the rabbinic *ger* = “Gentile convert” (proselyte) in texts like Num 15:15–16 simply cannot be sustained. Since the rabbinic proselyte ritual did not exist until the Maccabean period, it is entirely anachronistic to read it back into the time of Moses and the writing of the Torah. Rather, the Hebrew noun *ger* (גֵר) should be interpreted in its normal sense, that is, “foreigner,” meaning “someone who leaves his native land to seek shelter and residence in another place.”

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49. This conclusion is also buttressed by Philo’s use of προσηλύτος in *Spec.* 1.51, where he clearly uses the word to denote those who have “come over” to the worship of Israel’s God and not of a “legal convert” in the rabbinic sense.
50. Acts 13:50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13.
51. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westminster, 1971), p. 413, n. 5. However, Bruce has shown that there is no manuscript evidence to support the explanation of a gloss, F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 272f.
52. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts in The Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 229; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 414.
53. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker, 2007), pp. 461–62. Cp. also Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, 5 vols. *Diaspora Setting* (Eerdmans, 1996), 5.46–49.

A Better Interpretation of Galatians 5:3 in Context

The controversy in Galatia, which Paul addresses in his epistle, is whether legal Jewish status is necessary for salvation. While there has been much debate over whether Galatians was written before or after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, it seems to me that the greater weight of the evidence supports the view that it was written before. This seems reasonable because had Paul written his epistle to the Galatians after the Acts 15 council, we would expect him to make an appeal to the council's decision in addressing this same issue in Galatia.⁵⁴ Yet we never hear about the Apostolic edict in the Epistle to the Galatians. If we take the view that Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians before the Jerusalem Council, then it may well be that this controversy (and perhaps similar ones in other locations) is what prompted the meeting of the Jerusalem Council in the first place.

Given that the primary issue being addressed in Galatians is whether or not Gentile believers had to gain legal Jewish status in order to be full-fledged members of God's household, we may be quite certain that Paul uses the term "circumcision" as shorthand for "becoming a proselyte," that is, submitting to the rabbinic ritual of legal conversion.⁵⁵

With this in mind, let us look more closely at Gal 5:1-4, and particularly at v. 3, which is used as the fulcrum in support of the "Divine Invitation" teaching propounded in the article under review.

Paul begins chapter five with this admonition:

It was for freedom that Messiah set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

In order to understand his reference to "slavery," we must briefly consider the previous context. In 4:21, Paul addresses a specific group: "Tell me, you who want to be under Torah, do you not listen to the Torah?" Here, to be "under Torah" means to accept the rabbinic teaching that legal Jewish status secures one's salvation. So Paul is addressing those Gentile believers who are being influenced by some of the Galatian teachers to believe that rabbinic conversion would assure them right standing with God. To show them the error of such teaching, Paul uses the Sarah/Hagar story as an allegory (4:22–31). In this allegory, he likens the person who is trusting in his legal Jewish status to the "Hagar plan." This is when Abram and Sarai relied upon the flesh (Hagar) to produce the son of promise. Their plan birthed Ishmael, who was born into slavery as the Genesis narrative makes clear. In contrast, Isaac, the son of promise, comes not by human means (reliance upon the flesh) but is clearly the result of God's miraculous intervention, for he was conceived in Sarah after she had reached menopause (Gen 18:11).⁵⁶ Paul's

54. See my commentary on Galatians, pp. 2-6 (available in pdf format from www.torahresource.com) for further information on the date of Galatians.

55. See the comments of James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 264–69; Hans Deiter Betz, *Galatians in Hermenia* (Fortress, 1979), pp. 258–59; Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Fortress, 2002), p. 88 – "It cannot be proven, but is generally agreed among interpreters who may disagree about virtually everything else regarding what this letter meant or means, that the context of this language regarding circumcision is that which arises in terms of Jewish proselyte conversion."

56. The Hebrew is: *חָדַל לְהִיזֵת לְשָׂרָה אֶרְחַב בְּנָשִׁים*, literally "it had ceased to be for Sarah, the manner according to women."

statement at the end of chapter four (4:31) sets the stage for his teaching in 5:1–4: “So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.”

Thus, the slavery of which Paul speaks in the opening verse of chapter five is reliance upon one’s ethnic status (=flesh) for salvation. It is slavery because ethnic status must be maintained. There is always the possibility of being “cut off from one’s people.” It is slavery because God does not accept ethnic status as a means of righteousness, so the one who relies upon his legal Jewish status is “working for nothing,” which is the essence of slavery. This “yoke of slavery” is then described in 5:2–4 as receiving circumcision, i.e., reliance upon rabbinic conversion for one’s salvation.

The structure of vv. 2–4 will help us understand Paul’s message. Note the parallel arrangement:

- A1 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision,
- B1 Messiah will be of no benefit to you.
- A2 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision,
- B2 that he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah.
- B3 You have been severed from Messiah,
- A3 you who are seeking to be justified by Torah;
- C you have fallen from grace.⁵⁷

What do we learn from the parallel arrangement of these three verses? First, it is clear that Paul is referring to the same subject throughout all three stanzas. This is made clear by the repeated phrase “receive circumcision” in the first two sentences (A1 & A2), which is parallel to “seeking to be justified by Torah” (A3) in the last sentence. Thus, “seeking to be justified by Torah” defines what Paul means by “receive circumcision.” He is clearly talking to those who are being persuaded that ritual conversion to Judaism (receive circumcision) is the means of being righteous (justified) before God.

Second, the dire consequences for those who rely upon the flesh are noted in three parallel phrases marked B1, B2, and B3:

- B1) Messiah will be of no benefit to you,
- B2) he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah
- B3) you have been severed from Messiah.

Each of these three phrases is saying the same thing, with different words. The point is that those who are seeking to be justified by a Torah ritual will ultimately be lost, which is what the summary phrase

57. Parallel structures, especially within a Semitic culture, are identified by the repetition of a single theme. The repeated “receive circumcision” in the first and second sentence signals that Paul is using a parallel structure. Even though Paul undoubtedly wrote Galatians in Greek, his Hebraic thought and style could easily find its way into the body of the Epistle. In the graphical representation, the A and B labels relate to the first and second clauses of each sentence. In the last verse, the order changes. That is, in the first two sentences the order is A–B, while in the last sentence, the order is B–A. This is not uncommon in Hebrew parallelism, where clauses are reversed in order to emphasize the two that are then put next to each other. In each case, the A clause describes the action (becoming a proselyte) and the B clause describes the resultant condition (estrangement from Messiah). The final sentence contains a third clause, which is taken as a conclusion to the whole.

(C), “you have fallen from grace,” expresses.

Third, the phrase “justified by Torah” (ἐν νόμῳ δικαιώσθαι) gives us insight into how Paul is using the word “Torah” (νόμος, *nomos*). We know that he is talking about the rabbinic proselyte ritual (receiving circumcision), and that “seeking to be justified by Torah” is another way of describing this. But where in the Written Torah is there any indication that a Gentile could gain righteousness before God by gaining a “legal Jewish status” through conversion? Obviously the Written Torah never teaches such a thing. This offers a strong case for understanding Paul’s use of *nomos* (Law/Torah) here to refer to the Oral Torah⁵⁸ in which the procedure by which a Gentile could gain legal Jewish status originated.⁵⁹

Given the fact that *nomos* (Torah) in verse four refers to Oral Torah, it is reasonable to understand the same term in verse three in the same way. Note the parallel structure once more. Each of the sentences has an A and a B phrase. The A phrases all reference the rabbinic proselyte ritual. The B phrases all give the consequences from Paul’s perspective. Thus, the B phrase in v. 3, “he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah (as defined by the Oral Torah)” is the negative consequence of receiving circumcision. We can graphically display it this way:

(A1) if you receive circumcision	(B1) Messiah will be of no benefit to you
(A2) the one who is receiving circumcision	(B2) is obligated to keep (do) the whole Torah
(A3) you who are seeking to be justified by Torah	(B3) you have been severed from Messiah
(C) Conclusion: you have fallen from grace	

What is made clear by the structure of these verses is that being obligated to keep the whole Torah is considered by Paul to be the negative consequence of receiving circumcision. But why would Paul consider keeping the whole Torah to be a negative? In Romans he declares that the Torah is righteous, holy, and good—and that it is spiritual (Rom 7:12, 14). Moreover, in Rom 3:31 Paul affirms that by faith the Torah is established, and in 8:4 he teaches that those who walk by the Spirit actually fulfill the requirements of the Torah.

Yet here, in Gal 5, Paul lists “obligated to keep the whole Torah” as parallel to “Messiah will be of no benefit to you” and “you have been severed from Messiah.” Why? The answer is twofold.

First, we must understand that when Paul says “obligated to keep the whole Torah,” he is referring to the Torah that would be incumbent upon a Gentile convert. This means he is emphasizing that the “whole Torah” would include the many additions to the Written Torah found in the traditions of the rabbis, known as the Oral Torah. This in turn helps to define what Paul means by “obligated,” for the Gentile convert would, in the conversion process, be submitting to the established rabbinic authorities rather than to the authorities in his or her own messianic community. What would happen, for instance, when

58. In the 1st Century, the word “Torah” (Greek *nomos*) could refer to the written Scriptures as well as to the Oral traditions of the Sages. It could also refer to both as a single body of legislation, because in praxis, the *halachah* of the Sages was often the filter through which the Written Torah was read. For more information on the relationship of the written and Oral Torahs in the early centuries, see my paper, “Can We Speak of ‘Law’ in the New Testament in Monolithic Terms?”, delivered at the 2000 NW Regional ETS Meeting and available at www.torahresource.com.

59. See t.*Demai* 2.5; m.*Pesachim* 8.8; m.*Eduyyot* 5.2; b.*Yevamot* 46b–47b; b.*Shabbat* 31a.

the authorities who oversaw the conversion process told the new convert that he or she could no longer freely eat at the table of Gentiles?

Second, since the “whole Torah” in this context would include the rabbinic additions to the Written Torah, the convert would be promising to obey “traditions of the elders,” some of which actually set aside the very commandments of God according to Yeshua (Mark 7:8–9, 13) and were a burden rather than a joy (Matt 23:4). Paul knew this from his own experience before coming to faith in Yeshua, when he sought to establish his own righteousness based upon his Jewishness, a status maintained by adherence to the Torah as defined by the rabbinic authorities of the day. Paul is telling the would-be convert about the burden the rabbinic additions would bring, emphasizing the same point that James would later make at the Jerusalem Council when describing the rabbinically defined *halachah* of the Torah as a “yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

For though the prevailing rabbinic perspective was that “all Israel have a place in the world to come,” according to some of the rabbinic rulings, maintaining one’s status in Israel required a scrupulous adherence to the Torah *as rabbinically defined*. The penalty of *karat*, “being cut off from one’s people” was always present. What if one entered the Temple precincts in an unclean state as defined by the growing rabbinic *halachah* on purities?⁶⁰ What if one desecrated the Sabbath by transgressing one of the many rabbinic restrictions,⁶¹ or uttered the Sacred Name according to its letters?⁶² What if one ate meat from an animal that had been improperly slaughtered and therefore ingested its blood?⁶³ These were all severe offenses that could attract the penalty of *karat*, “being cut off.”⁶⁴

Surely rabbinic Judaism as it was being formulated in the pre-destruction era did not expect perfect obedience to the Torah in order to maintain one’s legal status as a Jew. The rabbis emphasize the compassion and forgiveness of God for the repentant sinner who complied with the Torah’s instructions for restoration after committing transgressions. But the language of some of the early Rabbis seems to suggest that one could, through one’s own transgressions, forfeit one’s place in the world to come:

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (Is.

60. The Pharisees and Essenes (Dead Sea Community) added a good many extensions to the purity laws set down in the Books of Moses. These additions included impurity from: [1] the non-Jew (cf. m.*Pesachim* 8.8; m.*Shekalim* 8.1; t.*Yom HaKippurim* 4.20; Josephus, *Ant* 18.90), [2] main residence of a non-Jew (m.*Oholot* 18:7, 9), [3] land outside the Land of Israel (b.*Shabbat* 14b; t.*Parah* 3.10), and [4] contact with idolatry (m.*Shabbat* 9.1; m.*AvodahZera* 3.6). In addition to these, impurity of the hands was also an extension, meaning that a person in a state of purity could not touch food or anything else for which purity was required until he had first washed his hands. The entire Mishnah tractate *Yadaim* is given to the subject of ritual cleanness and uncleanness of the hands.

61. The rabbinic *eruv* is but one example of the rabbinic extensions placed upon the Sabbath laws of the Written Torah.

62. m.*Sanhedrin* 10.1

63. Cf. Lev 7:27. For the many rabbinic extensions regarding ritual slaughter, see Mishnah *Chullin*.

64. The fact that Paul was willing to give his back to the whip no less than five times (2Cor 11:24) shows that disregarding the rabbinic *halachah* could result in severe measures. Someone unwilling or unable to endure such punishment would have found himself cut off from the very community he hoped to join through his conversion. Paul’s willingness to endure the punishments meted out by the synagogue authorities was to retain his membership in the unbelieving Jewish community in hopes that he could “by all means win some” (1Cor 11:22) For the rabbinic procedure of administering lashes, cf. m.*Makkot* 3.

60:21). And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: (1) He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, (2) and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and (3) an Epicurean. R. Aqiba says, Also: He who reads in heretical books, and he who whispers over a wound and says, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you (Ex. 15:26).⁶⁵

One time R. Reuben spent the Sabbath in Tiberias, and a certain philosopher came across him. He said to him, “What is the most hateful in the world?” He said to him, “This is one who denies the One who created it.” He said to him, “How is it possible that [God] then said to [to Moses], *Honor your father and mother..., You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet* (Ex 20:12–17)?” He said to him, “Lo, a person does not deny a matter of detail before he already has denied the main Principle, and a person does not turn to a matter of transgression unless he already has denied the One who gave a commandment concerning it.”⁶⁶

R. Eleazar of Modin said: He who profanes the sacred things, and he who despises the festivals, and he who shames his fellow in public, and he who violates the covenant of our father Abraham (peace be upon him), and he who interprets the Torah not according to the Halakhah, even though he may boast of Torah knowledge and good deeds, he has no portion in the world-to-come.⁶⁷

[Mishnah]: R. NEHUNIA B. HA-KANEH USED TO SAY A PRAYER AS HE ENTERED THE BETH HA-MIDRASH AND AS HE LEFT IT — A SHORT PRAYER. THEY SAID TO HIM: WHAT SORT OF PRAYER IS THIS? HE REPLIED: WHEN I ENTER I PRAY THAT NO OFFENCE SHOULD OCCUR THROUGH ME, AND WHEN I LEAVE I EXPRESS THANKS FOR MY LOT.

[Gemara]: Our Rabbis taught: On entering what does a man say? ‘May it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that no offence may occur through me, and that I may not err in a matter of halachah and that my colleagues may rejoice in me and that I may not call unclean clean or clean unclean, and that my colleagues may not err in a matter of halachah and that I may rejoice in them’. On his leaving what does he say? ‘I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash and Thou hast not set my portion with those who sit in [street] corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labour and they labour, but I labour and receive a reward and they labour and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction... When Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai fell ill, his disciples went in to visit him. When he saw them he began to weep. His disciples said to him: Lamp of Israel, pillar of the right hand, mighty hammer! Wherefore weepest thou? He replied: If I were being taken today before a human king who is here today and tomorrow in the grave, whose anger if he is angry with me does not last for ever, who if he imprisons me does not imprison me for ever and who if he puts me to death does not put me to everlasting death, and whom I can persuade with words and bribe with money, even so I would weep. Now that I am being taken before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives and endures for ever and ever, whose anger, if He is angry with me, is an everlasting anger, who if He imprisons me imprisons me for ever, who if He puts me to death puts me to death for ever, and whom I cannot persuade with words or bribe with money — nay more, when there are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehinnom, and I do not know by which I shall be taken, shall I not

65. m.*Sanhedrin* 10.1 (Neusner’s translation).

66. t.*Shevuot* 3.6. (Neusner’s translation). Denying God was tantamount to blasphemy.

67. m.*Avot* 3.11. (Kehati’s translation); cp. b.*Sanhedrin* 90a. The Gemara on the phrase “whoever interprets the Torah not according to the Halakhah” will be found in b.*Sanhedrin* 99a.

weep? They said to him: Master, bless us. He said to them: May it be [God's] will that the fear of heaven shall be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood. His disciples said to him: Is that all? He said to them: If only [you can attain this]! You can see [how important this is], for when a man wants to commit a transgression, he says, I hope no man will see me. At the moment of his departure he said to them: Remove the vessels so that they shall not become unclean, and prepare a throne for Hezekiah the king of Judah who is coming.⁶⁸

These few examples show that in the teaching of some of the early Sages, one could not trust that one's legal status as a Jew was enough. Transgressions could negate one's righteous standing before God by altering one's legal status.

In the above quote from the Bavli (*Berakot* 28b), the Gemara begins with a *baraita*, introduced by "Our Rabbis say," indicating an old and well received tradition. This *baraita* indicates that some who "labor" do so in a way that leads to destruction because they do not sufficiently labor in accordance with the established *halachah*. And the deathbed words of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (40–80 CE), who was considered to be one of the most pious of his time, indicate that he had no confidence that he would be received as righteous by the Almighty and given a place in the world to come. This was obviously quite unsettling for his disciples.

It was this uncertainty—this element of striving to "remain" within the circle of acceptance before God through doing "the whole Torah"—that Paul describes as slavery, as opposite of the freedom possessed by one who is "in Messiah Yeshua."

In this regard, it is worth mentioning James 2:10, the only other time that the phrase "the whole Torah" is mentioned in the epistles.⁶⁹

For whoever keeps the whole Torah (ὅλον τὸν νόμον) and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

James may have in mind those who considered themselves righteous on the basis of their own piety but who showed partiality to various classes of people in the synagogue. Were they degrading the "common folk" (*Am HaAretz*, literally, "people of the land," meaning "uneducated") in the community? The treatment of the *Am HaAretz* in the rulings of the Sages⁷⁰ comes to mind. Those who saw themselves like the Pharisee in Lk 18:11, "I'm glad I'm not like other people," who assessed themselves as keeping "the whole Torah," were actually stumbling by their own pride and were guilty of transgressing the whole Torah in James' estimation.⁷¹

Before we conclude our brief study of Gal 5:2–4, it will be helpful to address the concluding state-

68. *b.Berakot* 28b. (Soncino). I have given the full quote in order to allow the reader a better understanding of the context.

69. In Matt 22:40, Yeshua teaches that the "whole Torah and the Prophets" depend upon the two commandments, to love God and love one's neighbor. The Greek text utilizes the same words as in Gal 5:3 – ὅλος ὁ νόμος κρέματα καὶ οἱ προφήται, but the addition of προφήται, *prophetai*, "Prophets" makes it clear that Yeshua is talking about the Written Torah, not the Oral Torah.

70. Cf. *m.Demai* 2.2–3; *m.Eduyot* 1.14; *m.Avot* 2.5, "He [Hillel] would say, "A coarse person will never fear sin, nor will an *Am ha-Aretz* ever be pious...."; *m.Toharot* 4:5; 7:5.

71. See the remarks of Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (Baker (reprint), 1978), pp. 88–89.

ment of Paul: “you have fallen from grace.” This does not mean that those Gentiles who had professed faith in Yeshua, and who were contemplating a ritual conversion, would lose their salvation if they carried through on their plans. It means that their decision to trust in the flesh (rabbinic conversion) proved they never had genuine faith in Yeshua. Whatever they had previously confessed would then be shown to be spurious. The phrase “fallen from grace” means to leave the path of grace—to stumble off of the way that leads to life. Dunn’s remarks are apropos:

...like a withered flower falling off from its stem to the ground (Jms 1:11; 1Pt 1:24 [cf. Is 40:6]), or like a ship failing to hold the course which leads to safety and falling away into disaster (cf. Acts 27:26, 29). God’s grace in Christ...is like the stem which supports the flower and through which the life-sustaining sustenance flows. Or like the channel which leads to safety between the rocks of disaster, a course from which they were in danger of being driven by dangerous currents and cross winds.⁷²

Conclusion on Gal 5:3 – We have seen that the phrase “obligated to keep the whole Torah” is used by Paul as a negative assessment, parallel to “the Messiah will be of no benefit to you” and “you have been severed from the Messiah” (the B phrases on pp. 22–23). The reason Paul uses the phrase “obligated to keep the whole Torah” as a negative assessment is because he is talking about those who would submit to the rabbinic proselyte ritual, and would thus believe that their “legal Jewish status” provided them a right-standing before God (justified by the Torah). Paul is reminding them that their newly acquired “legal Jewish status” could only be maintained by “keeping the whole Torah,” so their “righteousness before God” would remain contingent upon their performance of the Torah, both written and oral. This, Paul maintains, is slavery, not freedom. For God never promised righteousness on the basis of “Jewish status.” Moreover, a commitment to maintaining the traditions of the rabbis would require them to neglect or even disregard commandments specifically given in the Written Torah. For Yeshua Himself taught that one who lives in strict adherence to the traditions (Oral Torah) could, in some cases, be required to set aside the commandments of God (Mk 7:9). The oath that a convert would make to “keep the whole Torah”⁷³ was understood to be the Torah as defined and expanded by rabbinic *halachah*. Understood in this way, the “whole Torah” would be a burden that would bring slavery, i.e., working hard to retain one’s legal Jewish status with the hope that this would be received by God as righteousness.

The FFOZ authors, however, have taken Gal 5:3 out of its context and interpreted it to be a positive statement, that someone with a “legal Jewish status” is obligated to keep the whole Torah. They then posit that the inverse must therefore be true: one who does not have “legal Jewish status” is not obligated to keep the whole Torah. They have interpreted this verse against its context and have taken the word “Torah” (νόμος, *nomos*) in v. 3 to mean the Written Torah even though in the very next verse, the phrase “you who are seeking to be justified by Torah” makes it clear that “Torah” in this context in-

72. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 268–69.

73. Note b.*Shabbat* 31a, which contains a *baraita* and describes the response of Shammai and Hillel to a Gentile seeking to convert. The text makes it clear that a candidate for the proselytizing ceremony had to agree to take upon himself the requirements of both the written and Oral Torahs. Cp. also t.*Demai* 2.5, “A proselyte who took upon himself all the obligations of the Torah except for one item, they do not accept him.” See also Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* (KTAV, 1985), p. 23.

cludes the traditions of the elders, or the Oral Torah. Paul is addressing those seeking to be justified by gaining “legal Jewish status” through conversion. This is something formulated in the “traditions of the elders” or Oral Torah, not anything found in the Written Torah. Paul is not saying to the Gentile believers “you can but you probably shouldn’t.” He is prohibiting them from submitting to the rabbinic conversion ritual because to do so is tantamount to denying Yeshua.

Nor is the obligation to “keep the whole Torah,” referred to by Paul in this verse, one that is fulfilled before God.⁷⁴ The obligation Paul refers to here is an obligation to those who would administer the conversion ritual, that is, the rabbinic authorities. They would obligate the convert to obey the “whole Torah,” meaning the Written Torah as defined by their legally binding *halachah*.

Therefore, Gal 5:3, properly interpreted within its context, offers no basis whatsoever for the “Divine Invitation” doctrine being taught by the FFOZ authors. It simply affirms what the rabbinic authorities would require of a Gentile convert, not what Paul or the other Apostles believed was approved by God or His Messiah, Yeshua. Indeed, Paul makes it clear to the Galatians that Gentile conversion under the rabbinic proselyte ritual was not an option. He rather gives an ultimatum in this text: those who would “receive circumcision” were severed from the Messiah. We see, then, that instead of being a solid fulcrum to leverage the “Divine Invitation” doctrine, Gal 5:3 turns out to offer no support for this teaching whatsoever.⁷⁵

Bad Fruit

One of the arguments set forth in this article to show the fallacy of the One Law position is that the One Law teaching has produced bad fruit. Because of the authors’ extensive travel within the Messianic movement, they consider themselves to be qualified fruit inspectors. While they rejoice in seeing “the Word of God taking root in people’s homes and communities and bearing fruit in changed lives,”⁷⁶ they bemoan the fact that “the One Law message sometimes brings disunity, fracturing, and dysfunction.”⁷⁷ They consider these negative aspects to be grave.

Primarily the “bad fruit” observed by the authors in their travels is in the realm of relationships. From their perspective, since the One Law mandates the whole Torah for Gentile believers, this has caused them to sever relationships with Christian friends and family, with the Christian Church in general, with other Messianic congregations, and even among themselves. Moreover, since “it is common for One-Law Messianics to eschew ‘rabbinnics’ and criticize the ‘traditions of men,’”⁷⁸ they not only burn their bridges to the Christian Church, but they also have no desire to forge relationships with the wider Jewish community. Believing that they have been “given a mandate to keep Torah outside of the Jewish people, it grants them an entitlement to define how to keep Torah.” Thus individuals and groups form

74. Cf. Gal 5:7–8. The draw to become converts was clearly not something that could be called “obedience to God.”

75. That Gal 5:3 forms a crucial text for their “Divine Invitation” teaching can also be seen in the recent blog by D. Thomas Lancaster, “One Simple Verse,” available on the FFOZ website.

76. p. 51.

77. p. 52.

78. Ibid.

their own way of keeping Torah, and the result is confusion and disunity.

Indeed, this sounds like a problem that needs fixing! But lest we think that this bad fruit is peculiar only to the current Messianic movement, we should be reminded that similar confusion and disunity occurred in the early centuries of the emerging Christian Church as well. The only things missing are the public executions and actual wars that erupted over their theological differences. We also should consider that the current divisions among modern Jewish denominations are the result of some fairly bitter disagreements in the history of Judaism from the middle ages to the present. The current struggle between Orthodox and Reform or Conservative groups in Israel today is proof that even traditional Judaisms do not enjoy a Shangri-La unity. Reading David Berger's book, *The Rebbe, The Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*,⁷⁹ one comes face to face with the division among Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism in our own times. Berger asserts that according to received Orthodox *halachah*, based upon Mishnah *AvodaZera*, those among the Lubavitchers who continue to affirm both the messiahship and divinity of the late Rebbe, Menachem Schnerson, are guilty of idolatry.⁸⁰ This means that as far as Berger is concerned, rabbis who continue to affirm the Rebbe as Messiah should be stripped of their rabbinical ordination and not allowed to teach or act as an authority in any situation.⁸¹ Likewise, the issue of the messiahship of the Rebbe has caused bitter divisions even within the Lubavitchers themselves, resulting in public lawsuits over ownership of the groups' physical assets.

Such conflicts and disunity are not something new in the history of Judaism. Read the story of Shabbetai Tzvi, who was proclaimed as the Messiah, amassing a huge following by 1666. But in September of that year, he accepted conversion to Islam rather than face death, and ten years later he died. The aftermath of the fallen "Messiah" was devastating for his many followers, even though some continued to follow his teachings. Small groups (Shabbateans and Dönme) remain to this day, mostly in Turkey.

Or consider the strong words of the Pharisees against the Sadducees, or the self-portrayal of the Qumran sect as the only true and holy community in Israel.⁸² The disputes over calendar issues brought some of the Pharisees and Sadducees to undermine each others' *halachah*,⁸³ and was one issue (among others) that may have caused the Qumran sect to abandon Jerusalem for the desert.⁸⁴ There was plenty of "bad fruit" among the Judaisms of the 1st Century if "bad fruit" applies mainly to disunity and confusion.

By referencing a few of these historical and even current situations, I'm not trying to diminish the problem of confusion and disunity within our own Messianic movement which the FFOZ authors are

79. David Berger, *The Rebbe, The Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

80. Ibid., p. 93. Note also Appendix II, pp. 159–177. Surely Orthodox Judaism must make the same assessment of Messianics who affirm Yeshua as the Messiah and as the divine Son of God.

81. Ibid., pp.143ff.

82. b.*Pesachim* 57a; m.*Sanhedrin* 10.1 (where those who deny the resurrection [=Sadducees] do not have a place in the world to come, and are therefore not counted as "all Israel," who do have a place in the world to come); 1QS 8:21 teaches that anyone "who enters the council of holiness... who breaks one word of the law of Moses" is to be banished. Thus, the Qumran sect saw themselves as keeping the whole Torah perfectly, unlike all sects outside of theirs.

83. m.*RoshHaShanah* 2.1.

84. See Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (Fortress, 1999), pp. 157–58.

pointing out. I'm simply trying to make a point based upon historical observations. And it is this: very often, renewal or reformational movements have their fair share of confusion and disunity. Sociologically, it is almost to be expected. The same phenomenon occurred in the time of the Protestant Reformation, as well as in the counter Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church. In comparison to these, the problems evident in the Messianic movement are not nearly on the same scale, but they result for some of the same reasons.

Part of the reason (from a sociological perspective) that disunity and confusion often accompany renewal or reformational movements is because the very impetuses needed to fuel the movement in the first place are deeply held convictions by those who begin and carry the movement forward. Swimming against the current requires a high level of determination and effort, a willingness to endure suffering, and even some chutzpah. But most of all it requires deeply held convictions, the sort that are not easily given up. Yet while such deeply held convictions are necessary for the movement to maintain, it is often the case that not everyone agrees about what should and should not constitute these convictions. Thus, the "nature of the beast" is that deeply held convictions clash, resulting in disunity and confusion.

Mid-course corrections usually don't work. This is particularly true when leaders (or even a single prominent leader) introduce a correction that entails abandoning or modifying convictions. This is because those who disagree with the changes view the leader(s) as abandoning the very tenets that fueled the movement at its beginning. The leaders are considered either to be cowards or traitors. The inevitable result is a division in the movement, creating two or more distinct movements. This, of course, is the history of denominationalism, whether within Protestant Christianity or contemporary Judaism or any other religious movement.

A far better way is for the leaders of the movement to convince the majority of those within the movement that some of the core convictions need to be modified. Of course, this requires a number of important elements, which is why this route is rarely taken. It requires a sufficient number of competent teachers who can effectively and convincingly communicate the changes to those within the movement, and it takes a great deal more time. It also requires a mechanism to gain the audience of those who make up the movement itself. All of these factors make this second option much more difficult.

In what way, if any, can this brief excursion into social theory aid us in assessing the current state of affairs within the present Messianic movement? First, while we bemoan the disunity and apparent confusion extant within the movement, we should not necessarily jump to the conclusion that this "bad fruit" is entirely the product of an errant theology. Some people will take even good, biblically based theology and derive errant praxis from it. This can be seen even among those who first come to faith in Yeshua. In their exuberance for their new found faith, they may come across to their friends and family as judgmental and abrasive. They may express the Gospel more as a "billy club" than the loving expression of God in Messiah. This does not mean that the Gospel they have embraced is wrong. It simply is the result of their own excitement mixed with a lack of mature understanding. This is unfortunate but it is the reality of our fallen world.

Second, how would the "Divine Invitation" model fare any better in terms of enhancing relationships, or curbing the disunity and confusion? If Gentile believers take FFOZ's encouragement to embrace all of the Torah, and, as FFOZ teaches, to do so in accordance with how greater Israel has defined

the Torah, then would not these Gentiles look like Jews in their manner of life and their religious practice? Would not this “blur the distinction” between Jew and Gentile? If a wife who is a Gentile believer accepts God’s invitation to keep the Torah but her believing husband declines that same invitation, how will this work? Under the “Divine Invitation model,” is FFOZ proposing that in this scenario the wife should also decline the “Divine Invitation” to Torah? What about Gentile believers who agree with the “Divine Invitation” teaching, but choose differing *halachot* in living out the Torah? Will this produce unity or does FFOZ expect that this will result in various expressions of Torah observance, such as we find in Modern Orthodox Judaism as over against Hasidic Orthodox Judaism? Should Gentiles who embrace “the invitation” follow Sephardic or Ashkenazic *halachah*? Would it be okay for a Gentile to accept the voice of Conservative Judaism in determining exactly how the Torah should be lived out?

And how would this work in a Messianic congregation? Could there be congregational meals where food is shared among Jewish believers (who are mandated to follow *kashrut* as defined by “greater Israel”), Gentile believers who have embraced some but not all of the *kashrut* laws (they are bearing as much as they can), and Gentile believers who have decided to decline “the invitation” to the “non-moral” commandments of Torah? What about a Gentile who decides he or she wants to “take the whole yoke of the Lord?” Is FFOZ ready to endorse some form of a “Messianic conversion ritual?” What is to take place within a family where the father is legally Jewish, and the wife is not? Is the wife then mandated to keep the whole Torah? What about the children? Or consider the scenario of a Jewish family that adopts non-Jewish children. Are the children eventually extended the “Divine Invitation” or should they be raised believing that they have an obligation to keep the whole Torah? My point in suggesting these scenarios (and there are obviously many more) is that the “Divine Invitation” model does not, in fact, solve the issue of “bad fruit.” It has all the potential of creating even more.

Third, the method employed by FFOZ to make what they feel is a necessary correction to the movement should be reassessed. A surgeon may make a proper diagnosis of a patient’s malady, but if he uses improper surgical techniques to address the problem, he may still end up doing great harm to the patient. Even if one were to agree that FFOZ has correctly assessed the problems facing the current Messianic movement, their method of addressing the problem is ill-conceived. If it took them (by their own admission) five years to reconsider and readjust some of their own deeply held convictions, why do they think that their constituency could, in a couple of months, make the same reconsiderations and adjustments by reading a few articles and blogs? Their shotgun approach evidences a lack of mature thinking and wisdom.

Fourth, one of the root problems facing the Messianic movement, and specifically the Torah movement within Messianism, is the lack of trained leadership. Pure motives and a genuine love for God are not enough when it comes to fulfilling the duties of leading and teaching within a faith community. For example, a person may have a genuine love of and appreciation for piano concerti, but unless they are trained and disciplined to acquire the requisite skills to play the piano, their attempts at performing a concerto themselves will be greatly diminished or even impossible. The rigor of a quality biblical education not only provides the future leader/teacher with the necessary skills to handle the biblical text, it also builds stability through an academic maturity that is able to properly assess the various teachings or doctrines that confront the community.

Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council

The FFOZ authors point to Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council as clear proof that the Apostles did not expect Gentile believers to be obligated to the whole Torah (pp. 53–56). Their argument may be summarized as follows:

1. The purpose of the Jerusalem Council was to determine whether Gentile believers needed to be “circumcised and placed under full obligation to the Torah of Moses in order to be ‘saved’ and attain status within the community of Israel” (p. 53).
2. Since the moral and ethical imperatives of the Torah were assumed to be incumbent upon Gentile believers, the issue confronting the Council was whether the Gentile believers were also obligated to obey the specific aspects of the Torah (including circumcision) which were “generally regarded as incumbent upon Jewish people but not upon Gentiles” (p. 53).
3. The Council was concerned with the Gentiles’ relationship to the “Torah of Moses” (v. 5) not the additional Oral Torah of the rabbis.⁸⁵
4. When James refers to “the yoke that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (v. 10), he was referring to the “Torah of Moses.” The fact that the Council clearly affirmed that no such yoke should be placed upon the necks of the Gentile believers proves that the Apostles did not obligate them to the whole Torah.
5. In giving the four stipulations to the Gentile believers (vv. 20, 29), the Apostles left the Gentile believers “with an ambiguous and tenuous status among the people of God that can best be described as that of a God-fearer: a monotheist non-Jew worshipping in a Jewish context” (p. 55).
6. The notice in v. 21, that “Moses from ancient times has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,” did not imply that James and the other Apostles saw “learning Torah in the synagogue or taking on additional observances a prerequisite for the Gentiles, nor did he submit that advice to Gentiles. The matter about hearing Moses in the synagogues was not included in the letter that the apostles sent out to the believing communities” (p. 55).

This argument sounds very convincing. But a closer look reveals some slight of hand in the way Luke’s text is being used. Note first of all that the authors slip in the phrase “placed under full obligation to keep the Torah of Moses” as the necessary result of circumcision.

The council of the apostles in Jerusalem met to determine whether Gentile believers should be compelled to be circumcised and placed under full obligation to the Torah of Moses in order to be “saved” and attain status within the community of Israel. (p. 53)

85. This point is clarified in a blog article posted at the FFOZ website subsequent to the appearance of the article under review (http://ffoz.org/blogs/2009/09/an_unbearable_yoke_acts_1510.html).

Here the authors fall prey to the logical fallacy of “begging the question.”⁸⁶ By adding the phrase “placed under full obligation to the Torah of Moses,” they have stated as fact what they intend to prove, namely, that Gentiles who do not submit to ritual conversion are not obligated to keep the whole Torah.

What Luke wrote in the opening verse is this:

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. (Acts 15:1)

Luke says nothing about “placed under full obligation to the Torah of Moses” when he introduces the reason for the Jerusalem Council. Luke says that the issue confronting the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile believers had to undergo rabbinic conversion to Judaism in order to be saved.

But why did Luke add the phrase “according to the custom of Moses” (τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως)? If, as the FFOZ authors presume, the Torah commandment of circumcision was understood to apply to Gentiles only in regard to legal conversion, then the phrase “according to the custom of Moses” seems superfluous. Luke could have simply explained the viewpoint of the Judeans this way: “Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved.” It is probable, however, that Luke added “according to the custom of Moses” in order to show that the issue at hand was not the Torah commandment itself but the rabbinic understanding of it as it pertained to Gentiles.⁸⁷

The word ἔθος (*ethos*, “custom,” “habit”) is found 10 times in Luke-Acts.⁸⁸ In Lk 1:9, the phrase “according to the priestly office” describes how the priest was selected for burning incense by the casting of lots.⁸⁹ The word is also used in Luke’s Gospel of the “custom” of going up to Jerusalem for Pesach (Lk 2:42), and of Yeshua’s “custom” of going to the Mt. of Olives (Lk 22:39). In Acts, besides denoting the custom of Roman jurisprudence and culture (16:21; 25:16), the word is found in contexts similar to 15:1, that is, to refer to “Jewish custom(s).” Of particular interest for our study is 21:21–

and they have been told about you [Paul], that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

The most natural way to understand this final phrase, “nor to walk according to the customs,” is that it adds something additional to the previous two accusations, i.e., “to forsake Moses” and “not to circumcise.”⁹⁰ In other words, it refers to the rabbinic *halachah* that had become the accepted interpretation and

86. “Begging the question” is a logical fallacy in which one assumes as true the very thing one is trying to prove.

87. Note in this regard the textual variant contained in D, and echoed in the margin of Harklean Syriac (sy^{hmg}), which replaces τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, “according to the custom of Moses” with καὶ τῷ ἔθει Μωϋσέως περιπατήτε, “and walk according to the custom of Moses.” The best explanation for the variant is that “custom of Moses” was understood to mean “according to the prevailing Jewish *halachah*.” The variant is therefore explanatory.

88. Luke 1:9; 2:42; 22:39; Acts 6:14; 15:1; 16:21; 21:21; 25:16; 26:3; 28:17. Of the 12x this ἔθος is found in the Apostolic Scriptures, 10 occur in Luke-Acts.

89. Cf. m. *Tamid* 5.2–6.3. Casting lots to determine which priest was privileged to offer incense for the day is not found in the Torah itself but was the “priestly custom.” Cp. Josephus, *Ant* 18.29, “it was the custom of the priests (ἐν ἔθει τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν) to open the Temple gates just after midnight.”

90. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 648 considers the verse to address three com-

extension of the Written Torah.

We should also note the phrase “the custom of Moses” found in Acts 6:14, which records the words of false witnesses at Stephen’s trial:

for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Yeshua, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

Here the customs of Moses are said to be “handed down” (παραδίδωμι, *paradidōmi*). Notice the same language is used in Mk 7:13 when Yeshua charges some of the Pharisees with setting aside the very commandments of God:

... invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down (παραδίδωμι); and you do many things such as that.

The phrase “handed down” is the common way of referencing the Oral Torah as it is passed from generation to generation. Note the opening of *Pirkei Avot*:

Moses received (קִיבֵּל, *qibeil*) Torah at Sinai and handed it on (מְסָרָה, *mesarah*) to Joshua, Joshua to elders, and elders to prophets, and prophets handed it (מְסָרוּהָ, *mesaruha*) on to the men of the great assembly. They said three things: Be prudent in judgment. Raise up many disciples. Make a fence for the Torah.

Having demonstrated that Luke used the word *ethos* (“custom”) to refer to legal traditions not explicitly found in the Written Torah, it would appear very likely that the phrase “according to the custom of Moses” in Acts 15:1 refers to legal rabbinic *halachah*, not only to the Written Torah. Thus, Luke alerts us at the very beginning of Acts 15 that the issue before the Council was whether Gentile believers should be compelled to submit to the rabbinic proselyte ritual, which meant submitting to the rabbinic legal *halachah* of circumcision (“custom of Moses”). That a convert had to pledge his willingness to obey both the written and the Oral Torahs has already been demonstrated.⁹¹

The FFOZ authors, however, see it differently:

Though I have been unhappy to admit it in the past, the Torah under discussion in Acts 15 is none other than “the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5), the same “Law of Moses” that Peter and the other Apostles observed. For me, identifying it as the Oral Torah and then setting that Oral Torah in antithesis to the Written Torah was an evasion tactic.⁹²

But does the phrase “Torah of Moses,” whenever it is encountered, refer only to the Scriptures or Written Torah? Is this what the phrase meant to the believing Pharisees who voiced their concern at the

plaints; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westminster, 1971), p. 609 understands ἔθος to be “the legal prescriptions.”

91. See n. 73 above.

92. D. Thomas Lancaster, “An Unbearable Yoke,” http://ffoz.org/blogs/2009/09/an_unbearable_yoke_acts_1510.html.

Council?

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile believers] and to direct them to observe the Torah of Moses. (Acts 15:5)

When these Pharisees spoke of the “Torah of Moses,” it is highly unlikely that in their minds they were excluding the legal rabbinic *halachah* (Oral Torah) by which they defined and expanded the Scriptural commandments.⁹³ What is more, while it may well be true that in the pre-destruction era, the Oral Torah (in some cases) was viewed as subordinate to the Written Torah,⁹⁴ it is also true that the received *halachah* of the rabbis was accorded divine authority since it was believed to have been given to Moses at Sinai.⁹⁵ The rulings of the Sanhedrin were referred to as “Torah,”⁹⁶ and in some instances, legal *halachot* not found in the Scriptures are stated to have originated with Moses. Note m.*Peah* 2.6 –

R. Simeon of Mispah sowed [his field with two types of wheat]. [The matter came] before Rabban Gamaliel. So they went up to the Chamber of Hewn Stone, and asked [about the law regarding sowing two types of wheat in one field]. Said Nahum the Scribe, “I have received [the following ruling] from R. Miasha, who received [it] from his father, who received [it] from the Pairs, who received [it] from the Prophets, [who received] the law [given] to Moses on Sinai, regarding one who sows his field with two types of wheat: “If he harvests [the wheat] in one lot, he designates one [portion of produce as] peah. “If he harvests [the wheat] in two lots, he designates two [portions of produce as] peah.”⁹⁷

Here is a legal ruling from the time of Rabban Gamliel (1st Century CE) that is attributed to Moses, but which is not found in the Scriptures. Clearly the “Torah of Moses” could be used to reference far more than the Written Torah. Indeed, the Oral Torah at times took on equal or even greater *de facto* authority⁹⁸ than the Scriptures. As Urbach notes:

The Torah is not according to Nature, whereas Hellenistic Judaism transformed the Written Law into ἄγραφος νόμος [unwritten law], and unwritten law according to the inner meaning of the concept. At the same time the opposite development occurred in the understanding of the term ‘Oral Law’ in the Rabbinic world up to the time of the destruction of the Temple. The tradition of the fathers, the enactments, and the

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93. See Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (Brazos, 2005), pp. 237–38, who quotes Halivni and Fishbane to substantiate that Oral Torah was obviously extant before its codification in the later rabbinic corpus. See also n. 54 above.
94. See E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Trinity Press, 1990), p. 125; for an example from rabbinic literature that puts rabbinic rulings as less authoritative than Scriptures, see b.*Chullin* 98a.
95. See the comments of E. P. Sanders, *Ibid.*, pp. 122f. The idea that the Oral Torah was given at Sinai grew until in the Bavli, even what a diligent student would teach in the future, was said to have been given at Sinai, b.*Berachot* 5a; b.*Megillah* 19b; See the comments of Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah* (Continuum, 2005), pp. 552ff.
96. m.*Sanhedrin* 11.2.
97. Cp. also m.*Eduyot* 8.7; m.*Yadaim* 4.3; t.*Yadaim* 2.16.
98. Even someone like E. P. Sanders, who disagrees with Jacob Neusner over whether the authority of Oral Torah was equal to that of Written Torah in the pre-destruction era, admits that in a *de facto* sense, the Oral Torah at times had equal authority with the Written Torah. “... it is nevertheless the case that, in terms of what people did, it [Oral Torah] was at least as binding as the written law.” (E. P. Sanders, *The Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, Op. cit., p. 104).

decrees became Torah alongside the Written Torah. It was not the exegetical dialectic nor the discussion that decided, but the authority of the institutions. The institutional character of the ancient Halakha is confirmed also by the two features that characterize it — the absence of controversy and anonymity. The expositions of the Scribes were recognized as Halakhot only in so far as they corroborated and validated traditions and enactments, testimonies and practices in the possession of the Sages.⁹⁹

With these data in mind we should understand the phrase “custom of Moses” in v. 1 as well as “the Torah of Moses” in v. 5 to reference more than what is found in the Written Torah of Moses. This is substantiated by Luke’s use of *έθος* in his Gospel as well as in Acts, which most often speak of extra-biblical, rabbinic *halachah*. Moreover, since v. 5 describes what the believing Pharisees were saying, it is more likely that their reference to the “Torah of Moses” was meant to include not only the Written but also the Oral Torah. They were demanding that Gentile believers undergo ritual conversion in accordance with the legal *halachah* (Oral Torah) of the rabbis.

What was the answer of the Council to the demands that Gentile believers should be compelled to undergo rabbinic conversion in order to be saved? It was a clear and unequivocal “No.” The Apostles affirmed that salvation rested upon faith in the person and work of Yeshua: “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they [Gentiles] also are” (Acts 15:11).

The theological verdict of the Council, that the Gentiles were not required to convert under the auspices of the rabbinic rulings, was based upon two additional criteria:

- 1) Peter’s eyewitness account (15:7–8): the Gentile believers had been given the Spirit in the same way as the Jewish believers received the Spirit at Shavuot (Acts 2), proving that God had received the Gentiles strictly on the basis of their faith in Yeshua. If God had received the Gentiles it was clear that the believing Jews should likewise receive them;
- 2) The fulfillment of prophecy (15:13–18): James quotes Amos 9:11–12 (with allusions to other texts as well)¹⁰⁰ and concludes that this prophecy was being fulfilled in that Gentiles were coming to faith in Yeshua and being added to the believing Jewish community.

But for James and the Council to affirm this decision did not necessarily settle the issue for those who were quite convinced that conversion was the only possible way that Gentiles could be saved. And by all accounts, this was the prevailing view among the Pharisees who comprised the majority sect in the Apostolic era. While the strong and clear answer of the Council may have convinced many of the believing Jews, one could imagine that not all were so easily persuaded. What is more, we should not presume that the synagogues of The Way were comprised entirely of believers in Yeshua. There undoubtedly were Jewish members who were still in the process of being personally convinced that Yeshua of Natzeret was the true Messiah. Given this scenario, a social and cultural reality still remained, for the long standing Jewish tradition which considered Gentiles to be irreparably “pagan” could not im-

99. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Harvard, 1975), pp. 292–93.

100. So Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church” in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Palestinian Setting*, Bauckham, ed. (Eerdmans, 1995), p. 453.

mediately be overcome by even the authoritative voice of the Jerusalem Council.

It is this social/cultural issue of the integration of the Gentile believers into the predominately Jewish community of believers, that the FFOZ authors seem unwilling to address in the article under review, and particularly in their treatment of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council. They do state categorically that “In the Apostolic era Gentile believers were adjunct members of the Jewish community.”¹⁰¹ As proof they cite the article “The Omnipresence of the God Fearers” by Louis H. Feldman.¹⁰² In fact, Feldman’s article never hints that Gentile believers in the 1st Century were “adjunct members of the Jewish community” or anything of the sort. Feldman’s subject is the presence of God-Fearers or “sympathizers” in the early centuries, which he supports from literary and inscriptional evidence but he gives no assessment as to how they were ranked within the synagogue community. He also makes it clear in the summary to his article that there is no certainty by which the God-fearers in Acts could be identified as “sympathizers,” the group his article intends to identify. In fact, Feldman ends by affirming that while there is some evidence for “God-fearers” or “sympathizers” in the 1st Century, clear and substantial evidence for a class of Gentiles who “observed some of the practices of Judaism without becoming full Jews,” is not found until the 3rd Century CE.¹⁰³ Therefore, the statement by the FFOZ authors, that “Gentile believers were adjunct members of the Jewish community,” is unsupported by the source they quote.

In not addressing the social/culture issues that the believing Gentiles faced as they sought integration with the synagogues of The Way, the authors have also failed to give any explanation why the Jerusalem Council settled on the specific four stipulations which they list.¹⁰⁴ I have shown elsewhere that viewing the Four Prohibitions as representative of the so-called Noachide Laws (a common explanation) is unfounded.¹⁰⁵ Nor can the choice of these four stipulations be adequately explained by appeal to groupings of laws in Leviticus¹⁰⁶ or to those commandments which, in rabbinic *halachah*, must be obeyed even at pain of death (no idolatry, no incest [includes adultery], no murder).¹⁰⁷

The most adequate explanation for the Four Prohibitions is that they prohibit common practices associated with the pagan temples¹⁰⁸ and were therefore understood as such (without further explanation),

101. P. 70, n. 10 of the article under review.

102. “The Omnipresence of the God Fearers,” *BAR* 12.5(Sept/Oct 1986), accessed via Accordance Bible Software.

103. *Ibid.*

104. There are some very interesting textual variants in the two listings of the Four Prohibitions given to the Gentile believers, found in vv. 20, 29. For a discussion of these variants, as well as the variation of the order in which the Four Prohibitions are listed when v. 20 is compared with v. 29, see Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 248–51. The FFOZ authors make no mention of these variants and variations in the order of the two lists, something that would seem to be important since these form the substance of the epistle the Apostles sent to communicate the Council’s decision.

105. Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (TorahResource, 2008), pp. 245–47; See also my paper, ““Do the Seven, Go to Heaven?” An Investigation into the History of the Noachide Laws,” presented at the national ETS Meeting, Nov, 2006, available at www.torahresource.com.

106. See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 464–67.

107. *b.Sanhedrin* 74a. This explanation fails to explain the prohibition against “meat strangled,” since this was clearly not a commandment for which the rabbis expected a person to die.

108. For a more complete explanation, see Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, pp. 247–59; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 460ff.

since Gentiles with a history in the pagan temples would immediately recognize the association. So the primary purpose of the Four Prohibitions was to assure the believing Jewish community that the believing Gentiles had made a clear and permanent break with their former idolatrous practices.

This explanation for why the Council chose these Four Prohibitions also affords an important additional insight. The Council was not speaking about legal ranking within the synagogue community, marking the difference between those who were “legally Jewish” and those who were not. They rather were addressing the very practical issue of how believing Gentiles could be welcomed into the Jewish community in the face of long standing social and cultural prejudice against non-Jews.

This in turn helps explain why James includes the notice in v. 21 that “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” Most commentators admit that this verse is difficult to explain.¹⁰⁹ But some things are evident. First, Luke begins with the connective γάρ (*gar*), “For,” which connects the statement to the previous verse as additional support for what is stated there. In other words, v. 20, which contains the Four Prohibitions, is the basis for the statement in v. 21. The sense can be plainly stated by paraphrasing these two verses like this: “The believing Gentiles are to abstain from these four things, for Moses is preached and read in every city, in synagogues, every Sabbath.” In other words, since the Torah was the central subject of study in the synagogues, the believing Gentiles must understand that their lifestyle would be constantly inspected by the light of the Torah. But Marshall offers a second suggestion:

Alternatively, the point may be that if Christian Gentiles want to find out any more about the Jewish law, they have plenty of opportunity in the local synagogues, and there is no need for the Jerusalem church to do anything about the matter.¹¹⁰

Even though the FFOZ authors discount this explanation,¹¹¹ it not only is a viable interpretation, but it also fits with the best explanation for why the Apostles chose these specific Four Prohibitions. James and the Apostles gave the Gentiles the “fences” necessary to help them be accepted within the synagogue community. One could imagine Jewish believers, especially those who were “zealous for the Torah,” were taken aback at such a short list of requirements for the Gentiles! But James immediately explains why: “For Moses is preached . . .” The Gentiles will grow in their learning and obedience to the Torah through their inclusion in the synagogue community. The underlying basis for such an arrangement was that the Gentile believers had been given the Spirit of God, as Peter attested.

And this brings up another important point. The rabbinic *halachah* required that the convert or prose-

109. Haenchen (*Acts of the Apostles*, Op. cit., p. 450) notes that Dibelius considered this verse “...among the most difficult in the New Testament.”

110. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (IVP, 1980), p. 254.

111. P. 55, “However, James did not make learning Torah in the synagogue or taking on additional observances a prerequisite for the Gentiles, nor did he submit that advice to the Gentiles. The matter about hearing Moses in the synagogues was not included in the letter that the apostles sent out to the believing communities.” On the same page: “If the apostles intended for the Gentiles to eventually learn the Torah and practice it, they never stated that expectation.” To this last quote, one might retort that the authors have accepted the silence of the Apostles regarding the moral and ethical expectations for the Gentiles. Why does an “assumption” work for that conclusion but not for this one? Moreover, would not the command of Yeshua in Matt 28:19–20 be a stated expectation that Gentiles should learn the Torah?

lyte be instructed and inspected in advance of the actual conversion ritual in which he would be declared an “Israelite in all respects”¹¹² and thus accepted within the community as a full-fledged member. Of course, it may well have often been the case that a convert was part of the synagogue community as a “God-fearer,” but a number of stories contained in the rabbinic literature of would-be converts represent the applicant as unlearned in the Torah.¹¹³ The Apostles, on the other hand, ruled that the believing Gentiles should be received on the basis of their faith in Yeshua. They were to be accepted into the community as full-fledged members *before* being instructed in the Torah and its *halachah*. After all, if God had accepted them (evidenced by giving them His Spirit), then it would be wrong to deny them full fellowship within the believing community. The Four Prohibitions are thus considered a “burden” because they were a necessary addition to their confession of faith in order to facilitate their acceptance within the thoroughly Jewish community. Instruction in the Torah, then, would be subsequent to their acceptance, which is what v. 21 is stating. Given this scenario, it is probable that James’ added comment had the Pharisaic believers (cf. v. 5) in mind. For though the Gentile believers were to be received on the basis of their faith, it was necessary that they would be taught the Torah and accept it as the pattern of a sanctified and sanctifying life in Yeshua.

The Unbearable Yoke

What was the “unbearable yoke” to which Peter refers in Acts 15:10?¹¹⁴ The FFOZ authors have interpreted the yoke to be the Written Torah, the commandments given by God at Sinai. They admit that numbers of Scriptures plainly declare that God’s Torah commandments are not burdensome, but they persist in their understanding of Peter’s words, that it is God’s Torah that neither the fathers nor the Jewish people in general were able to bear. They write:

But we still have not explained what Peter meant by referring to Jewish status and obligation to Torah as a burden that neither the apostles nor their fathers had been able to bear. Several things should be noted. To insist that Peter could not have referred to the Torah's obligations as a difficult burden simply because other texts contradict that sentiment denies a literate reading of Scripture. Peter was certainly able to articulate the idea that, though the Torah is a source of blessing and holiness, it is also difficult. A naïve, rigid, theological reading which cannot abide any hint of contradiction between one passage and another will find this difficult, but the Jewish voice, following what Marvin Wilson calls the contour of Hebraic thought, would find no difficulty in admitting, “The Torah is a great blessing and the commandments are not burdensome; but they are difficult!”

Most Messianic believers have not seriously taken on issues of biblical Sabbath observance or even the full implications of the Levitical dietary. Real, serious obligation to the whole Torah actually is difficult and comes only at great sacrifice. It is difficult. Often the complexities of integrating full compliance with the Torah into a Gentile family's life outside of non-Jewish space are overwhelming.¹¹⁵

112. b.*Yevamot* 47a–b.

113. One of the best known is b.*Shabbat* 31a.

114. See the comments on the “yoke” in Acts 15:10 in Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, Op. cit., pp. 241–44.

115. This is made explicit in an article posted on the FFOZ website subsequent to the published article under review. This

While the authors judge those who would disagree with their assessment as adopting a “naïve, rigid theological reading” of the Scriptures, one wonders at the lack of precision in their own interpretation of Peter’s words. For Peter does not say that the yoke some wanted to place upon the Gentile believers was “difficult” or “overwhelming” or that it required “great sacrifice.” What he says is that neither the fathers nor we “were able” to bear it (ὄν οὔτε οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἰσχύσαμεν βαστιάσαι). The Greek word ἰσχύω (*isxuō*) translated “able,” means “to be in possession of one’s physical powers,” “to have requisite personal resources to accomplish something,” “to be in control,” “to be valid or in force (in legal matters).”¹¹⁶ Peter is not saying that “it’s difficult but since we are obligated to this task, we bear up under it somehow.” No. He is saying that neither the fathers nor they had the requisite personal resources to bear the yoke. They did not continue forward while bent under the weight of this yoke. They faltered and fell. They could not bear it and thus they did not bear it.

If one interprets the yoke of which Peter speaks as the commandments of God, then one must also conclude (on the basis of Peter’s own words) that the commandments that comprised the yoke were beyond the capability of either the fathers or the Jewish people of Peter’s day to obey. This would be in clear contradiction to Deut 30:11, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.” Similarly, John would be in direct contradiction with Peter, for John states: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1Jn 5:3).¹¹⁷

Given the fact that Peter says the yoke was impossible for either the fathers or for them to bear, and that the Torah itself states that the commandment God gives is not too difficult, it seems certain that we should seek a different interpretation than the one given by the FFOZ authors.

With this in mind, let’s examine Peter’s speech more closely:

And God, who knows the heart, testified to them [Gentile believers] giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they also are. (Acts 15:8–11)

The main points that Peter makes are:

- 1) God had received the Gentiles into His family, proven by the fact that He gave to them His Spirit in the same way that He poured out His Spirit upon the Jewish believers (Acts 2).

article may be accessed at: http://ffoz.org/blogs/2009/09/an_unbearable_yoke_acts_1510.html.

116. *BDAG*, “ἰσχύω,” ad. loc.

117. Note also Philo’s comments on Deut 30:11 (*Rewards* 14 §80), “for the commandments are not burdensome or too weighty for the ability of you who are to live by them to obey, nor is the good which is promised to you removed to any distance, ether beyond the sea, or at the furthest extremities of the country, so as to require a long and painful journey to avail yourselves of it.” Nor did the lawgiver at once set out on his departure from earth to heaven, so that no one else being raised on high and borne aloft on wings could attain to the obedience which he enjoined; but the obedience remained near and very close to men, being fixed separately in three parts of us, in the mouth, and heart, and hands; that is to say, in the speech, and designs, and actions of every one.”

- 2) Since God gave His Spirit equally to Jewish and Gentile believers, the conclusion is that He made no distinction between them as members of His family.
- 3) Those who were insisting that the Gentile believers must submit to the rabbinic proselyte ritual were actually putting God to the test.
- 4) They were seeking to put upon the necks of the Gentile believers a yoke that neither the Jewish fathers nor the Jewish believers of Peter’s day were able to bear.
- 5) The conclusion of the Council was that the Gentile believers were saved in exactly the same way as the Jewish believers were saved — through the grace of the Lord Yeshua.

It will be important to highlight several aspects of Peter’s speech to the Jerusalem Council. First, the subject continues to be that of salvation. This reminds us that the primary issue being discussed by the Jerusalem Council was that of salvation. The giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles proved beyond doubt that God did not consider them “unclean.” He was willing to abide with them and in them, meaning that they had been cleansed and were fit to dwell with the Holy One of Israel. This also meant that the Jewish believers, if they were to separate themselves from the Gentile believers, would be putting themselves above God. No longer could the Jewish believers separate themselves from the Gentile believers over matters of table fellowship (as Peter had done previously) or because of other rabbinic *halachot* that restricted Jewish association with Gentiles.¹¹⁸ The Gentile believers were to be received as equal members of the family of God because God Himself had received them as such.

Second, those who were insisting that the Gentile believers had to go through a legal rabbinic conversion were actually “putting God to the test.” What does this phrase mean? The verb *πειράζω* (*peirazō*, “to test, tempt”) can have one of two general meanings. It can denote testing something to determine its true nature, and it can also describe the attempt to trap someone or lead them into improper behavior. In this second sense, *peirazō* is often translated by our English word “tempt.”¹¹⁹ In the phrase “putting God to the test,” the first meaning is obviously what is being used. When used of “testing God,” the word *peirazō* means to require something more of God in order to determine whether He will do what He has said He would. We find this same phrase (*πειράζω* + *ὁ θεός*, “to test God”) several times in the LXX:

They tested God again and again, and provoked the Holy One of Israel. (Ps 78:41)

But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert; (Psa. 106:14)

We also find the verb with prefixed preposition (*ἐκπειράζω*, *ekpeirazō*, a perfective form of *peirazō*), used a number of times in reference to “putting God to the test” –

You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah. (Deut 6:16)

118. E.g., m.*Oholot* 18.7.

119. *BDAG*, “πειράζω,” pp. 792–93.

And in their heart they put God to the test by asking food according to their desire. (Ps 78:18)

So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape. (Mal 3:15)

Yeshua quotes Deut 6:16 in His battle against Satan in the temptation pericope:

Yeshua said to him [Satan], “On the other hand, it is written, “YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.” (Matt 4: 7, cf. Lk 4:12)

The references to Israel testing God in the wilderness relate to their grumbling against Moses and their lack of trusting God that He would supply their needs as He had promised. At Massah, the Israelites charged Moses with bringing them to the wilderness to die, because they had no water to drink. This was actually a charge against God — whether He was able to preserve Israel as He had promised.

Yeshua quotes Deut 6:16 to Satan when he tempted Him to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple to prove that He was the Son of God. Yeshua did not need some extra-ordinary miracle to prove His Father’s faithfulness or His position as the Son of God. He had perfect faith, and thus He took His Father’s word as proof enough. To require some additional miracle in order to prove God’s faithfulness would at the same time prove His own faith to be deficient. Thus, what Satan wanted was for Yeshua to act in such a way that it would prove His own lack of faith in what the Father had already said: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). To do so would have put God to the test.

These texts help us to understand that “testing God” means to question the truth of what He has said or His ability to perform it. In short, to “test God” means to openly express (through word or action) one’s mistrust of Him.

How then does this apply to our immediate text (Acts 15:10)? The answer is clear: God had already shown that He made no distinction between Jew and Gentile as members in His family, for He had given His Spirit equally to Jewish and Gentile believers. There were no “adjunct members” or “visitors” in His family. All to whom He had given His Spirit were sons and daughters with equal status in His household. To compel the Gentile believers to convert in order to give them a legal status they otherwise would not have, was to test God by questioning what He had already revealed, that in His family, believing Gentiles had the same legal standing as believing Jews. Peter understands this and makes it clear that those who were insisting on rabbinic conversion were actually putting God to the test by being unwilling to accept the clear revelation He had already given on the matter.

It is interesting that the FFOZ authors do not comment on Peter’s statement in Acts 15:9, “and He made no distinction between us and them.” In an article that has as one of its primary points that the One Law teaching blurs role distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, one would think that at least some comment would be forthcoming on a verse that directly speaks to the issue of distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Messiah.

A third important point Peter makes in his speech is his reference to the yoke “which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear.” As noted above, the interpretation of the FFOZ authors, that this yoke consists of God’s commandments, is unsustainable. For Peter is not saying that the yoke was difficult or

wearisome, but that it was impossible to bear. He states categorically that neither the Jewish fathers, nor the Jewish believers themselves were able to bear this yoke. Peter cannot be stating that God’s commandments are impossible to obey. So if the yoke of which Peter speaks is not God’s Torah, what is it?

Anyone who is familiar with the words of Yeshua in the Gospels will immediately link the words “yoke” and “burden” to the well-known sayings of our Lord. Consider Matt 11:28–30.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Here we find both concepts: He calls to those who are “weary and heavy-laden.” Heavy-laden means those who are carrying a heavy burden. He invites such people to abandon the yoke that has caused so much weariness and to receive His yoke, which He describes as “easy” (χρηστός, *xrestos*), which means “comfortable” or “well-fitted.” An actual yoke, used to harness beasts of burden, had to be made in the correct proportions to fit the animals. Likewise, Yeshua’s yoke was fashioned to fit those He calls to wear it.¹²⁰ Then He describes His “burden” as “light” (ἐλαφρός, *elaphros*), meaning “not heavy.”¹²¹ This corresponds to the words of Moses in Deut 30:11, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.” Here, the word translated “difficult” is נִלְפָּ (pele’) which often carries the meaning “miraculous,” “wonderful,” and thus “unusual,” “out of the ordinary.” In Deut 30:11, *pele’* means “too difficult” or even “impossible.” Note that the same word is found in Gen 18:14, “Is anything too difficult (*pele’*) for God?” So Moses is saying that the commandments of God should not be considered “too difficult” or “impossible” to keep. Similarly, Yeshua’s yoke and His burden is well fitted and light—it is therefore easy to bear.

In Matt 23:4, Yeshua describes the burden which the scribes and Pharisees put upon the people: “They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.” What is the picture here? Though the word “yoke” is not used in this text, the reference to “shoulders” may carry a similar metaphor. The heavy burden is placed upon the shoulders, yet those who have bundled the burden in the first place (thus purposefully making it heavy) do nothing¹²² to remove the burden.

Is it possible that Yeshua has a text like Ex 23:5 in mind when He makes this statement? “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.” In Yeshua’s statement, the word “move” in the phrase “they themselves are unwilling to move them,” is the verb κινέω (*kineō*), which can mean “to remove.”¹²³ If Yeshua does have a text like Ex 23:5 in mind, then the picture is this: the scribes and the Pharisees bundle a heavy load, place it on the shoulders of people, and when the people fall under the weight of that load, they are not motivated by compassion or mercy to help remove it. What Moses commands to be done

120. If Yeshua spoke in Hebrew when He gave this teaching, He may have used the word נִאֲמָ, *na'im*, “pleasing, pleasant,” which is the word chosen by Delitzsch in his *Hebrew New Testament*.

121. Hebrew לָקַל, *qal*, used also by Delitzsch, *Ibid*.

122. To “lift a finger” is the easiest thing to do, so their failure to do even that amounts to doing nothing.

123. So *BDAG*, “κινέω,” ad. loc.

for an animal, the scribes and Pharisees are unwilling to do for their fellowman. In amassing their *halachah*, they had neglected the weightier matters of the Torah, that is, justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Mat 23:23). These are the three by which Micah sums the Torah:

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice (מִשְׁפָּט, *mishpat*), to love kindness (חֶסֶד, *chesed*),¹²⁴ and to walk humbly (לִכְתּוֹב עֲנָוָה, *hatznei'a lechet*) with your God?¹²⁵ (Mic 6:8)

Now if this is the picture we are to see in Yeshua's description of the heavy burden tied upon peoples' shoulders by the scribes and Pharisees, then it fits well with what Peter states in Acts 15. The yoke, (with the burden it presumes), is too heavy for anyone to carry. The fathers and their progeny fell under the weight of this yoke.

Paul uses similar language in Gal 5:1, where he speaks of a "yoke of slavery," a slavery he defined in the previous chapter (in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah) as a reliance upon the "flesh," that is, one's legal Jewish status. Thus both Peter and Paul use the same metaphor of a yoke to describe an unbearable burden that in the end offers nothing by way of righteousness before God.

So what is the yoke that Peter describes as impossible to bear? It is the burden bundled up by the scribes and the Pharisees — the layering of legal *halachot* upon the Torah, making the commandments of God a burden rather than a delight.¹²⁶ But it was even more than this. It was the well established rabbinic teaching that one maintained one's covenant status (which provided a righteous standing before God) through a scrupulous adherence to the rabbinically defined Torah. As noted above,¹²⁷ even some of the most pious rabbis in the apostolic era were unsure whether they had sufficiently maintained their Torah observance in order to merit a place in the world to come.

On p. 54 the FFOZ authors make another categorical statement:

Aside from these four "essentials," the apostles felt led of the Holy Spirit to lay upon the Gentiles "no greater burden." In the epistle that the council sent to the Gentiles, James clearly stated that the council did not demand full Torah observance from the Gentiles:

They follow this statement with a quote from Acts 15:24, but instead of quoting from the *NASB* as they do throughout the article, they switch to quote from the *NKJV*. They give no explanation for why they would suddenly quote from the *NKJV*, and the casual reader might not even notice the change. The rea-

124. The Greek word for "mercy" in Matt 23:23 is ἔλεος (*eleos*) and in the Lxx of Mic 6:8, חֶסֶד (*chesed*) is translated by the same word, ἔλεος (*eleos*).

125. The Lxx translation of this last phrase departs slightly from the Hebrew: ἔτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ κυρίου θεοῦ σου, "to be ready to walk with the Lord your God." Both to "walk humbly" and to "be ready to walk" may denote an attitude of attentive faithfulness.

126. Even as Yeshua implies when He taught (Mk 2:27), "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Pharisaic teaching would have affirmed that "man was made for the Sabbath," i.e., the people should conform their Sabbath activities to many legal *halachot* added to the Torah by the rabbis in order assure that the Sabbath was made holy according to their understanding.

127. See pp. 27–29 above.

son they switched English translations, however, is because they wanted to include a final phrase which is only found in the later manuscripts, and thus represented in the *KJV* and its more modern counterpart, the *NKJV* but not found in the vast majority of other modern English translations.

Acts 15:24 <i>NKJV</i>	Acts 15:24 <i>NASB</i>
Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, <u>saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”</u> —to whom we gave no such commandment—	Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,

The underlined words in the *NKJV* are missing from the *NASB* and the vast majority of modern English translations, and for good reason. The added phrase is not found in any of the earliest manuscripts.¹²⁸ But because it fit the authors’ agenda, they quote from the *NKJV* without alerting their readers to the textual problem that exists. There is no need to hide the facts if we are honestly seeking the truth.

So the underlined phrase in the *NKJV* of Acts 15:24 has very weak textual evidence to support it. It therefore should not be received as an accurate description of what the Apostles actually said and should be disregarded as a later, interpretive scribal addition.

Acts 21

The story of Acts 21 is well known. Paul had returned to Jerusalem after his third journey throughout Asia Minor. The news of his work among the communities of The Way had preceded him, but a false rumor had been propagated among the believing Jews in Jerusalem, that Paul was telling the Jewish believers in the diaspora “to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs” (v. 21). This rumor was apparently well known, for James and the other Jerusalem elders anticipated the problem in advance of Paul’s arrival. They therefore put into place a plan to demonstrate Paul’s own Torah observance and by this, to prove that the widespread report was false.

Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Torah. (Acts 21:23–24)

In following the counsel of James and the elders, Paul would be making a two-fold statement: 1) he was, like the many Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Torah observant, for he was himself engaged in fulfilling the requirements of the Nazarite vow he had taken while traveling;¹²⁹ 2) the Gospel he was proclaiming

128. The added phrase, λέγοντες περιτέμνεσθαι καὶ τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον, “saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law,’” is found in 1505 C E Ψ M sy. The phrase is missing in P^{33.45vid.74} ⋈ A B D 33. 81 pc vg co.

129. Cf. Acts 18:18.

was not an anti-Torah message in any way. As the Apostle of Yeshua, he was fully affirming what his Master had taught, that He had come to establish the Torah, not to abolish it (Matt 5:17–20).

But how would such a rumor have gotten started in the first place? Why would anyone have thought that Paul was teaching the Jewish believers in the diaspora to forsake the very commandments of God, or to negate the covenant of God’s chosen people Israel? The only possible explanation would be Paul’s approach to the Gentile believers. In following the decision of the Jerusalem Council, Paul was teaching the believing communities of the diaspora that the Gentile believers were to be received on the basis of their confession of faith in Yeshua, demonstrated by their willingness to break completely with their former life of idolatry by full compliance with the Four Prohibitions. This is how Paul speaks of the Gentile believers in his epistle to the Thessalonians, written soon after the Jerusalem Council.

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (1Thess 1:9).

Note also that in 1Thess 4:1–9, Paul emphasizes the need to flee from “immorality,” which is the *porneia* (“fornication”) component of the Four Prohibitions. And in his epistle to the Corinthians, written not long after 1Thess, he speaks directly to the issue of *porneia* connected to the pagan temples (1Cor 10:7–8) as well as “meat offered to idols” (1Cor 10:23–28).¹³⁰

The point is this: when Paul was traveling in the diaspora, he was teaching that the Gentiles should be received as full members within the believing community without requiring them to become proselytes. For the believing Pharisees in Jerusalem, the very group that had insisted at the Jerusalem Council that Gentiles “must be circumcised” before they could be received into the community as equals, Paul’s teaching was a negation of the Torah as they defined it.

So the interpretation of Acts 21 is tied to one’s interpretation of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council. As I have already shown, the Jerusalem Council decided that believing Gentiles should be fully accepted within the believing community since God had received them, “making no distinction between” them and the believing Jews (Acts 15:9). Then, as the believing Gentiles were received as true brothers and sisters in the Lord, they would learn what the Scriptures taught and would grow in their understanding and acceptance of God’s instructions (Torah).

This is precisely what James and the elders state. Paul was teaching that Jewish believers should continue in their Torah obedience, following the example of Yeshua Himself. Regarding the Gentile believers, they were to be received into the community with a view to learning and accepting the commands of God as they grew in their understanding of the Scriptures:

But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from

130. Note that in 1Cor 10:28, Paul chooses a different word for “meat sacrificed to idols” (ιερόθυτος, *hierothutos*) than the word used in 8:7, 10; 10:19, which is εἰωλόθυτος (*eiðlothutos*), the term used in Acts 15 in the Four Prohibitions. This suggests that Paul made a difference between meat eaten within the context of the pagan temple itself, and meat that may have been purchased at the local market, which may have come from the pagan temple. In other words, Paul understood the *eiðlothutos* (“meat offered to idols”) of the Four Prohibitions to be meat consumed in the idolatrous ceremonies of the pagan temple itself.

meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. (Acts 21:25)

Thus, James and the elders of Jerusalem simply reiterate the decree of the Jerusalem Council. Paul was not teaching against the Torah, but was putting into place what the Council had decreed. The rabbinic viewpoint was that before Gentiles could be received as equals, they would need to be taught the Torah and the traditions of legal *halachah* attached to it, and then be granted “legal status” through becoming proselytes. The Jerusalem Council rejected this, stating that the Gentiles were to be received on the basis of their faith, and then taught the Torah as the description of the righteous life they were to live as those who had been born from above and endowed with the Holy Spirit.

Once again, while the FFOZ authors present Acts 21 as a “slam dunk” for their “Divine Invitation” position, in reality it is only when Acts 21 is read with preconceived conclusions that it fits their argument so nicely. Did Paul teach Jewish believers that they should keep the whole Torah? Yes, that is clear. But did he teach the Gentiles that they were not required to obey all of God’s commandments? Acts 21 does not state that. It simply says that Paul taught the Gentile believers to comply with the Four Prohibitions of the Jerusalem Council. We have already determined that the purpose of the Four Prohibitions was to overcome the social and cultural divide between Jews and Gentiles, so that they would be received within the believing community with a view to learning and obeying the Torah.

One-Law for Different People

A recurring argument set forth by the FFOZ authors is that there is one Torah but that not all of the commandments in the one Torah apply equally to everyone. In this argument for the “Divine Invitation” approach, they point out that in the Torah, specific laws are given for specific sub-groups within Israel. Thus, there are specific laws for men that do not apply to women, and *visa versa*. There are laws for priests that do not apply to non-priests, and laws for kings that apply only to royalty and not to the general population. From this they imply that there must also be laws that apply to those with “legal Jewish status” but do not apply to Gentiles.

I’ve already noted the fallacy in this line of reasoning,¹³¹ but this matter is worthy of a few more comments. First, the reason the FFOZ authors can point to cases where certain Torah laws apply exclusively to a sub-group within Israel is because the Torah makes such distinctions explicit. But when asked if the Torah is equally clear about commandments that apply only to a sub-group defined as “legally Jewish,” they are silent. When confronted with the clear statements of the Torah that there is “one law for native born and alien,”¹³² their only recourse is to reinterpret the word “alien” (*ger/toshav*) to mean “proselyte” in order to maintain their thesis that the full Torah applies only to those who are considered “legally Jewish.” This, as I have shown above, employs a hermeneutic of convenience, for the whole idea of a Gentile being given “legal status as a Jew” through a conversion ceremony was the later idea of the rabbis, something that developed following the Maccabean era. To read this back into

131. See pp. 12–14 above.

132. Cf. Lev 16:29; 17:12, 15; 18:26; 24:16; Num 9:14; 15:15–16, 29–30; 19:10; 35:15; Deut 31:12.

the Torah is entirely anachronistic.

But not only have the FFOZ authors resorted to an unsustainable interpretation of *ger* in the Torah, they have also used an analogy that shows the illogical nature of their argument. On p. 58 they use the illustration of a soccer team to explain their view that some of the Torah commandments apply uniquely to those with “legal Jewish status” and are not required for Gentiles. They note that the rule prohibiting the use of hands when playing soccer applies to all the players except the goalie even though there is one rule book for all the players. This is hardly a good analogy, for anyone who has read the international rule book for soccer knows that it has specific sections dedicated to the rules pertaining to the different positions. There is only one goalie on the team, and the rules governing a goal tender therefore apply only to the goalie. This would be analogous to the laws of the Torah that apply specifically to the High Priest and not to anyone else. In other words, when a rule applies uniquely to only one player, the rule book makes this explicit. But where in the Torah are there specific instructions that certain laws apply only to the native born and not to foreigners who have joined themselves to Israel by faith in Israel’s God? Or to use the soccer analogy, where in the Torah is the specific section that deals with the laws that pertain only to native born and not to foreigners? There is none. On the other hand, there are repeated notices in the Torah that the same laws apply both to the native born and the foreigner who has attached himself to God’s people. The simple and straightforward reading of these passages leaves no doubt on the issue.

If one were to point to the Torah requirement that all who eat of the Pesach sacrifice must be circumcised (Ex 12:48–49), this only proves that the same law applies both to the native born and the foreigner in the matter of eating the Pesach sacrifice. Likewise, when Lev 23:42 states that “all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths” during the festival of Sukkot, it is complemented by the fuller instructions in Deut 16:13–14 which applies the commandment of observing Sukkot to the *ger* as well. The same is true for a text like Deut 14:21, that allows giving or selling to a *ger* or a *nochri* (“foreigner”) an animal that has died of itself. If this verse is read in light of Lev 17:15, which considers the *ger*, like the native born, to contract ritual impurity by eating an animal that has died or been killed by a predator, one must seek a way to reconcile the apparent contradiction. The best explanation is that the *ger* or *nochri* of Deut 14:21 refers to a sojourner who has not attached himself to Israel and accepted Israel’s God as his God. In other words, the *ger* or *nochri* in Deut 14:21 is not a covenant member among God’s people.¹³³

If the analogy of the soccer team were to be used more precisely to convey the “Divine Invitation” perspective of the FFOZ authors, then we would expect to find somewhere in the rule book that a non-goalie player could undergo some special ceremony by which he would be given the legal status of a goalie and therefore could legally use his hands on the ball whenever he was near the goal, in the goalie box. Such a suggestion, of course, is nonsense, but it highlights how inappropriate the analogy is to the current discussion.

Equally inappropriate is the idea that adoption is a good analogy to explain why Jews and proselytes

133. In the Lxx of Deut 14:21, גֵּר (*ger*) is translated by πάροιχος (*paroikos*) and נֹכְרִי (*nochri*) by ἀλλότριος (*allotrios*) indicating that the Lxx translators were influenced by the emerging rabbinic rulings extant at the time the Lxx was being translated. See the remarks of Terrence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Fortress, 1997), p. 55.

are mandated to obey the whole Torah, while Gentiles are simply invited to obey it all.¹³⁴ In the first place, one wonders if the FFOZ authors have ever experienced the actual life-setting of raising adopted children. If they had, one is quite certain that they would not have used this illustration. For those of us who have raised adopted children together with our own natural born children know beyond doubt that having two sets of rules would never work. Indeed, our adopted children came to understand their new identity as members of our family not only because we express precisely the same love and concern for them as we do for our natural born children, but we also require of them the same “house rules.” They learned to see themselves as truly our own children because they were required to adhere to the same standards as our natural born children. This highlights a most important reality: as parents we confirm our love for our children when we discipline them for disobedience. The discipline itself, when administered properly, is a very real expression of love. A child who is allowed to do what is prohibited to the other children intuitively senses that there are different levels of love being expressed by the parents. “Whom the Father loves, He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives.”¹³⁵

But not only is the adoption illustration contrary to a real life setting, it is theologically wrong-headed. The analogy presumes that Jewish people are the natural born children while Gentile believers are adopted.¹³⁶ But the Scriptures themselves teach something quite different. Ezekiel portrays God’s choosing of Israel and their exodus from Egypt as an act of adoption. Israel was an aborted child (Ezek 16:1–5) born of pagan parents (Amorite and Hittite).¹³⁷ God, in pity and mercy, saw the abandoned baby squirming in its own blood, and took the child to be His own (Ezek 16:6), declaring him to be His first-born (Ex 4:22). Indeed, the language of election or choosing is set against the Ancient Near Eastern understanding of adoption, which was often done to give the adopted person a legal standing.¹³⁸ Israel becomes a legal covenant partner with God on the basis of His having chosen them.

It is against this backdrop of adoption that Paul describes Israel as adopted sons of God:

who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 9:4–5)

But it is also true that Paul uses the same terminology for all believers, both Jew or Gentile, who

134. See this analogy on p. 62 of the *MJ* article under review.

135. Heb 12:5–6, quoting Prov 3:11–12.

136. For more on the subject of “adoption” as a theological term designating a legal status within God’s covenant people, see my *FellowHeirs*, Op. cit., pp. 44–48.

137. Note also that the ceremony of the first fruits included the mandatory phrase, “My father was a wandering Aramean,” Deut 26:5.

138. Thus, adoption could result in giving someone the status of “son” or “daughter,” but also “brother,” “sister,” or even “father.” From Nuzi we discover that a husband could adopt his wife, giving her the status of “sister” or “sister-in-law” which would secure the transfer of family inheritance to her in the event of his death (see Knobloch, “Adoption” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. [Doubleday, 1999], 1.76). Likewise, in a Babylonian text, slaves are adopted in order to give them their freedom (J. J. Rabinowitz, “Semitic Elements in the Egyptian Adoption Papyrus Published by Gardiner,” *JNES* 17[1958], 145–46). It was not uncommon for a Suzerain to adopt a vassal king in order to give him royal, family status (Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90.2[1970], 191).

have been chosen by God unto eternal salvation through faith in Yeshua:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15)

And in Gal 4, Paul applies the designation of “adoption as sons” to all the believers in Galatia, Jew and Gentile alike:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Torah, so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The Greek word being translated as “adoption as sons” is υιοθεσία (*whiothesia*), which includes in its meaning the legal aspects of adoption.¹³⁹

This is precisely John’s point when he writes:

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:10–12)

Notice carefully that John says “to them He gave *the right* to become children of God.” The word translated “right” is ἐξουσία (*exousia*) in the Greek, which carries the sense of “legal right, authority.” Those who receive Yeshua for Who He truly is, that is, the promised Messiah, are granted legal standing as children of God. This also is the language of adoption.

Thus, the Bible makes it clear that all whom God has chosen to be in His family, whether Jewish or Gentile, are adopted children. The only natural born son is Yeshua, Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁰ Our legal status as true sons and daughters is not the result of anything inherent within us, nor anything that we have done. We are *bona fide* sons and daughters in God’s family because He chose to adopt us. This means that we all, whether Jew or Gentile, have the same legal standing in God’s family because we all are adopted sons and daughters.

The Noachide Laws

On pages 58–60 of the article under review, the FFOZ authors discuss the matter of the “Noachide Laws.” I have already mentioned that the Noachide Laws cannot be used as a backdrop for explaining the Four Prohibitions of the Jerusalem Council¹⁴¹ since there is no evidence that such a body of laws was recognized in the pre-destruction era.¹⁴² Nor is there any early evidence in the rabbinic literature that the

139. *BDAG*, “υιοθεσία,” p. 1023.

140. Matt 1:20; Lk 1:35.

141. See footnote 105 on p. 40.

142. The Noachide Laws are not mentioned in the Mishnah. Their first listing is in the Tosefta (*t.AvodahZera* 8.4) which was compiled in the 3rd Century CE and probably not finalized until around 300 CE. Yet even in the Tosefta, there is

rabbis who first conceived of the Noachide Laws considered them as a means of righteousness for Gentiles. Here is a concluding paragraph from my article on the Noachide Laws:

Yet most important for the current study is the fact that nowhere in the early rabbinic literature is there contained the teaching that Gentiles who live in accordance with the Noachide Laws (however they may be formulated) are reckoned as righteous, given a legal status within the community of Israel, and therefore have a place in the world to come. Such an extrapolation is found only in the later rabbinic teachings (as that of Rambam). To the extent that the Sages developed the Noachide Laws, they did so in order to develop *halachah* for social interaction between Jews and Gentiles as well as to build a theological foundation for God's just condemnation of the nations. What we do not find in the early rabbinic materials is that the Noachide Laws were formulated to provide a way for Gentiles to have a legal, recognized status within the Jewish community.¹⁴³

On p. 60 the FFOZ authors rightly describe the Noachide laws as a deficient guideline for godliness:

At First Fruits of Zion, we reject the concept of the Noachide Laws as the full extent of a Gentile believer's obligation to the Torah. The Noachide laws were originally intended as a baseline standard whereby God judges the pagan nations, not as a path of godliness. They are wholly inadequate as the basis of a functional religion.

They go on to admit that the "Noachide laws also fail to offer a solution regarding a Gentile believer's relationship to the Torah."

Then, in the final paragraph of the section on the Noachide Laws, they encourage those Gentiles who have accepted the Noachide Laws as God's will for their lives, to continue in their belief.

For those Gentiles who are convinced that the Noachide laws are the correct path for the Messianic Gentile, we encourage you to walk out those commandments in fidelity to Yeshua, and we encourage you to participate with greater Messianic Judaism to whatever extent you are able.

One would think that the authors would be a bit more concerned about people who are content to nurture their souls on a theology that is "wholly inadequate for religion."

Divine Invitation and the Didache

The FFOZ authors consider the *Didache*, also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, as offering to its readers a window into how the early communities of Yeshua followers handled the question of Gentile obligation to the Torah. In *Didache* 6.1–3 the rule regarding the "yoke of the Lord" is given:

See that no one leads you astray from this way of the teaching, for such a person teaches you without re-

debate about what laws comprised the Noachide legislation and how many. This in itself would indicate that even in the late 3rd Century CE there was no universally received definition of what exactly comprised the Noachide Laws.

143. Tim Hegg, "'Do the Seven, Go to Heaven?' An Investigation into the History of the Noachide Laws," (ETS Meeting, Nov, 2006), 15. This article is available at www.torahresource.com.

gard for God. For if you are able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect. But if you are not able, then do what you can. Now concerning food, bear what you are able, but in any case keep strictly away from meat sacrificed to idols, for it involves the worship of dead gods.

But this is not exactly how the FFOZ authors present their “Divine Invitation” model. The *Didache* indicates that accepting the entire yoke is necessary to be “perfect,” that is, “fully mature,”¹⁴⁴ but then gives leeway to those who are unable to bear it all. So this is not an “invitation,” it is a concession. Those who do not “bear the whole yoke of the Lord” do not reach full maturity, and it may be that the concession is granted as a temporal measure until such time as the person is able to “bear the whole yoke of the Lord.”¹⁴⁵

The FFOZ authors, however, interpret the *Didache*’s words as offering two options: either bearing the whole yoke, or bearing as much as possible. That is, “if you can keep the whole Torah, do so. But if you decide not to bear it all, that’s okay too.” They then suggest that their interpretation of the text offers a general description of how the early assemblies of The Way approached the issue of the Gentile believer and the Torah. To do this, they start by placing the date of the *Didache* as contemporary with the communities of Yeshua.

Scholars agree that it preserves the early voice of “Jewish Christianity,” and a few scholars date it as early as 50–70 CE, making it contemporary with Paul’s epistles and the Jerusalem Council.

The source they give for dating the *Didache* so early is Jonathan Draper’s article “‘Christian Judaism’ in the *Didache*.”¹⁴⁶ What they do not mention is that the vast majority of *Didache* scholars, including Draper himself, opt for a date later than 50–70 CE. Draper thinks the *Didache* may have been written in the late 1st Century, but not later than 100 CE.¹⁴⁷ That puts it 30 or more years after the Jerusalem Council, not contemporary with it. In fact, anyone familiar with the current state of affairs within current *Didache* research would recognize that there exists no thorough consensus on the date or provenance of the work.

In spite of the lack of consensus regarding the date of the *Didache*, the FFOZ authors are quite certain that the *Didache* is a witness of the Yeshua communities contemporary with the Apostles. Thus, when *Didache* 6:2–3 enjoins upon the reader that in regard to the Torah, one should “do as much as you are able to do,” the FFOZ authors boldly state that “this is clear and solid direction from the early com-

144. The Greek word is τέλειος (*teleios*) which has the sense of “reaching the goal,” “attaining an end or purpose.”

145. This is the view of Draper, “Torah and Troublesome Apostles in the *Didache* Community,” *NT* 33.4[1991], 368. But see n. 147 below.

146. To be found in Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered* (Fortress, 2007), pp. 267–83. See also Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Royal Van Gorcum/Fortress, 2002), p. 48.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 260. As an aside, Draper also took the position that the *Didache*, in giving the Gentile believer the option to “do what you can” (*Did* 6.2–3), still required the Gentile to become a proselyte eventually. “The *Didache* allows the proselyte flexibility about the timetable, but at the end of the day, it is required of him/her that he/she become a full Jew in order to attain salvation” (Jonathan Draper, “Torah and Troublesome Apostles in the *Didache* Community,” *Op. cit.*, 368). Milavec disagrees and seeks to undo Draper’s thesis. See Aaron Milavec, *The Didache* (Newman Press, 2003), pp. 771–82. Milavec’s perspective is primarily based upon showing that the phrase “the yoke of the Lord” in *Did* 6.2 does not, in fact, refer to the Torah but to the “Way of Life” taught in the earlier chapters of the *Didache*.

munities of Yeshua” (p. 61). One wonders how such a bold statement could be made in light of the fact (admitted by the FFOZ authors themselves) that the date of the *Didache* is still unsettled among the top ranking *Didache* scholars. But even a greater difficulty is the fact that *Did* 6.2 does not say what the FFOZ authors want it to say. If “the yoke of the Lord” means the Torah (as the authors affirm), then this text makes it clear that only those who “bear the full yoke” will be “perfect” (*teleios*), i.e., attain spiritual maturity. In light of the close affinities between the *Didache* and the Gospel of Matthew, the words of Yeshua in Matt 5:48 may well inform what is meant by “perfect” in this text: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Here Yeshua may be echoing Duet 18:13 “You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”¹⁴⁸ According to *Did* 6.2, if one wants to be “perfect,” one must bear the whole yoke.

But regardless, the *Didache* is one source, and surely not an inspired one. While it offers an important witness to early practice among at least one believing community,¹⁴⁹ there is no certainty that it reflects even wide-spread practices among the post-destruction communities of The Way. We know, for instance, that the *Didache* community differed in a number of ways from that of the Nazarene sect. One difference is obvious: the *Didache* specifically requires that the community meet on Sunday for the eucharist, a sacred meal that functions in the capacity of a sacrifice:¹⁵⁰

On the Lord’s own day (κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου) gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who has a quarrel with a companion join you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice concerning which the Lord said, “In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is marvelous among the nations.” (*Did* 14.1–3)

The opening phrase, “On the Lord’s own day” is a translation of κυριακός (*kuriakos*, literally “belonging to the Lord”) coupled with κύριος (*kurios*, “Lord”). This combination is unusual.¹⁵¹ In Rev 1:10 John uses a different phrase: τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα “the day belonging to the Lord.” He does not use both *kuriakos* and *kurios*. The use of *kuriakos* and *kurios* together, strongly suggests that the *Didache* is specifying Sunday as the proper day for the eucharistic celebration, since *kuriakos* was very early used as a

148. The Lxx translates תמיך (*tamim*, “without defect”) with the same Greek word found in Matthew’s text and in the *Didache*, namely, τέλειος (*teleios*).

149. In response to the thesis proposed by Kraft (*Barnabas and the Didache. The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* 3 [Thomas Nelson, 1965], p. 4) that the *Didache* stands in the tradition of the “church manual tradition,” Draper warns that one should not read the genre of the later *Didascalia* (3rd Cent) or the *Apostolic Constitutions* (4th Cent) back into the period of the *Didache*. Rather, the *Didache* would better be compared to the *Manual of Discipline* found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and thus understood to be the product of a single community (Jonathan Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research: An Overview” in Draper, ed., *The Didache in Modern Research* [Brill, 1996], p. 20).

150. The question of what θυσία (*thusia*, “sacrifice”) means here is debated. If it refers to the elements of the Eucharist as a “sacrifice,” then this is the earliest reference to what later became the accepted understanding in the emerging Christian Church. It could just as well refer to the eucharistic prayer that is offered (“giving thanks,” εὐχαριστία, *eucharistia*). See the comments of Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache in Hermeneia* (Fortress, 1998), p. 197, and especially ns. 23 and 24.

151. As far as I know, the combination of κυριακός (“belonging to the Lord”) and κύριος (“Lord”) is found only here.

technical term to designate the day of resurrection, which the emerging Christian Church uniformly accepted as Sunday. Thus, the phrase in the *Didache* would mean “the resurrection day of our Lord,” that is, Sunday. That *kuriakos* by itself became a technical term in the 2nd Century meaning “Sunday” can be seen in Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Magnesians* (written before 107 CE), where the single word *kuriakos* is put in opposition to the Sabbath:¹⁵²

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day (μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες), on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death — whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master — how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead. (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9)

It is possible that *Did* 14.1 is designating the eucharist to be celebrated after the Sabbath had been concluded, i.e., after sunset, and thus at the beginning of the first day of the week according to Jewish reckoning.¹⁵³ Even if this were the case, however, the eucharist, which held a significant place in the worship ceremonies of the *Didache* community, is clearly to be held on Sunday. Niederwimmer states that “The Didachist is not aware of a Sabbath celebration in the community.”¹⁵⁴

In contrast, the Nazarenes were known for their Torah observance, including the observance of the Sabbath. The historian Epiphanius gives this description of them:

But actually they remained wholly Jewish and nothing else. For they use not only the New Testament but also the Old, like the Jews. For the Legislation and the Prophets and the Scriptures, which are called the Bible by the Jews, are not rejected by them as they are by those mentioned above. They are not at all mindful of other things but live according to the preaching of the Law as among Jews: there is no fault to find with them apart from the fact that they have come to believe in Christ. For they also accept the resurrection of the dead and that everything has its origins in God. They proclaim one God and his Son Jesus Christ. They have a good mastery of the Hebrew language....Only in this respect they differ from the Jews and the Christians: with the Jews they do not agree because of their belief in Christ, with the Christians because they are trained in the Law, in circumcision, the Sabbath and the other things. (*Panaron* 29.7.1–5)¹⁵⁵

My point in adding this short excursion is simply to emphasize that we should be cautious about taking the *Didache* as universally representing the Yeshua communities in the post-destruction era. There were already, at this early period, a number of sects within the believing communities and in some respects their theology and practice varied widely. The *Didache* represents one voice among many as we seek to unravel the early history of what eventually became the Christian Church of the later centuries.

Dividing the Torah into Moral and Ceremonial Commandments

152. See also the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* 9:35; 12:50 where *kuriakos* is used to designate the first day of the week.

153. See the discussion in Aaron Milavec, *The Didache*, Op. cit., pp. 572–77; Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Pontifical Gregorian Univ Press, 1977), pp. 113ff.

154. Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, Op. cit., p. 195, n. 9.

155. Quoted from Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Magnes Press, 1992), pp. 33–34.

In a web blog written subsequent to the article under review, the authors deny that they make a distinction between moral and ceremonial (or ritual) commandments in the Torah:

All of the Torah's laws are moral and ethical laws. Distinctions between moral and ethical laws are arbitrary. Cutting God's laws into artificial moral and ceremonial categories is a slippery way to handle God's Word. Idolatry, for example, is a ritual and ceremonial matter, but most would admit that the prohibition on idolatry is a matter of morality and ethical conduct. As our book Restoration says:

“At no point does Torah give any indication of a separation between moral and ceremonial law. The ceremonial laws of the prohibition on idolatry and the law of the Sabbath are listed along with the moral statutes regarding murder and theft. The Torah defines eating unclean animals as equally abominable as cross-dressing and necromancy. God has not distinguished between ritual and ethical laws.”

Therefore, Gentile obligation is not as simple as saying “You must keep the moral laws, but not the ritual laws.” That is not the conclusion we at First Fruits of Zion have drawn.¹⁵⁶

This bold statement makes one think that the FFOZ authors were not very careful in choosing their words when they wrote the article under review. For instance, on p. 49 they write:

Regarding the moral and ethical statutes of Torah, the teachings of Yeshua and the writings of the Apostles provide generous support for this position. Christians are not “free from the Law” in the sense that they are free to engage in deceit, adultery, murder, or immorality. No one would argue that a Christian is free from the obligation to love his neighbor and honor his parents. However, the commandments which are generally regarded as specific signs for the Children of Israel (i.e., the Jewish people) are neither practiced in Christianity nor regarded as binding on Gentile Christians. For example, the commandments to be circumcised, to wear fringes, to affix a mezuzah, to wear tefillin, to eat kosher, to keep the Sabbath, and to keep the appointed times are not generally regarded as incumbent upon Gentile Christians by Christianity, Judaism, or even most of Messianic Judaism.

Here, the authors clearly make a distinction between the “moral and ethical statutes of Torah” and the “commandments to be circumcised, to wear fringes, to affix a mezuzah, to wear tefillin, to eat kosher, to keep the Sabbath, and to keep the appointed times.”

Other comments throughout the article show that the authors do differentiate between “moral” and “ritual” or “ceremonial” aspects of the Torah:

Note that the moral imperatives and ethical authority of the Torah were not a part of the discussion in Acts 15. There was no disagreement as to whether Gentiles were to be held to moral and ethical imperatives. These were already well understood as essential. (p. 53)

As for their own authority, though, the apostles refused to lay any greater burden on the Gentile believers than the moral and ethical components of Torah and the four “essentials” of Acts 15. Beyond those essentials, they left the questions of further Gentile obligation to the specifically Jewish aspects of the Torah unanswered. (p. 55)

156. http://ffoz.org/blogs/2009/09/moral_vs_ceremonial_1.html

They were silent regarding any specific plan for Gentile believers to eventually become Torah-observant. They neither forbade the Gentiles from practicing the Torah nor required them to do so beyond a basic moral and ethical standard. (p. 55)

Needless to say, the authors of the Didache were not referring to the moral and ethical standards of Torah or Yeshua's ethical teaching when they prescribed taking on the "yoke of the Lord," for those could hardly have been presented as optional choices which a Gentile believer could choose to keep or ignore. (p. 61)

Jewish believers are under an obligation to keep the whole Torah—not for salvation, but as a matter of covenantal loyalty. Gentile believers, though saved by grace, are under an obligation to the full moral authority of the Torah, and they have an invitation to participate along with Israel in the aspects of Torah life which are specific to the Jewish people. We encourage them to do so. (p. 66)

This is all quite confusing. In the Ten Words, if the moral laws prohibiting idolatry and murder are listed right along with the positive commandments to sanctify the Sabbath and honor one's parents, how can these be distinguished from the others as "ceremonial signs which particularly defined Jewish identity"?

The apostles did not bind upon the Gentile believers those ceremonial signs which particularly defined Jewish identity, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, the calendar, and the dietary laws because the larger Jewish community of the time did not consider those things as binding upon Gentiles.¹⁵⁷

So did the Apostles agree with the FFOZ authors that it was fine if the Gentile believers kept only some of the Ten Words? Was it okay with them if their Gentile brothers and sisters in the Messiah ate unclean meat, even though the Torah labels this as detestable? Once again, the FFOZ authors try to have their cake and eat it too. They want to affirm the unity of the Torah, but then want to divide the commandments of the Torah into those which are universal (moral) and those that are not (ceremonial or ritual). They try to explain their division of the Torah by stating that the Torah assigns various commandments to various sub-groups, so that a moral commandment given to one group does not apply to other groups. But that is not how either Moses, Yeshua or His Apostles refer to the Torah. In fact, the use of the singular "the commandment" is quite often used to refer to the whole Torah, emphasizing its indivisible unity.¹⁵⁸ When the Torah gives specific commandments to specific sub-groups (male, female, priests, etc.), it does so explicitly, in clear terms. Apart from the clear and explicit statement of the Scriptures themselves, it is risky business to teach people that God's commandments do not apply to them.

157. Ibid.

158. In some cases, the singular מצוה (*mitzvah*) is coupled with plural חוקים (*chuqim*, "statutes") and משפטים (*mishpatim*, "judgments") which strengthens the idea that the singular *mitzvah* is used to emphasize the unity of the Torah, cf. Ex 24:12; Num 15:31; Deut 6:1, 25; 7:11; 11:22; 15:5; 17:20; 19:9; 30:11. Likewise, in the Apostolic Scriptures, the singular ἐντολή (*entole*, "commandment") is used at times to designate the whole Torah, cf. Matt 15:3; Mark 7:9; Rom 7:8–13; 1 Tim 6:14.

Members of the Covenant

In the article under review, the authors affirm that Gentile believers are members of the covenant made with Abraham (p. 60). But they appear to say that Gentile believers are not members of the covenant made with Israel (by which presumably they mean the Sinai Covenant).

We see a difference between Jews and Gentiles in regard to their obligation to certain aspects of Torah. The difference is that Jewish believers have a divine mandate to keep those elements as a part of covenant faithfulness and as an expression of their legal status as Jews. Gentile believers have the privilege of keeping those particulars as an expression of their status as sons of Abraham and disciples of Yeshua. (pp. 61–62)¹⁵⁹

After using the “natural child/adopted child” analogy to explain their understanding of how Jewish believers and Gentile believers relate to the Torah, they make this statement:

In a similar way, the Jewish people are held to a higher standard simply on the basis of their four-thousand-year-old covenant relationship with God and the commitments they made at Mount Sinai. By keeping the whole of Torah at this higher standard, Jewish people are to be a visible witness to humanity, a light to the Gentiles. (p. 62)

This makes it clear that the FFOZ authors do not consider Gentile believers to be members of the covenant God made with His people at Sinai. They may participate in aspects of the Sinai covenant, but they do so as guests not as covenant members. To illustrate: it is like going to a members-only reception. Everyone has to show their membership card to get in. Then a very prestigious member shows up with several friends who are not members, and simply tells the doorman, “They’re with me.” Similarly, Gentile believers participate in the covenant on Yeshua’s membership card.

This theological perspective may fit FFOZ’s “Divine Invitation” teaching, but it falls far short of measuring up to what the Bible says. First, it is clear when one studies the five books of Moses, that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are intertwined and theologically inseparable. Even before the actual giving of the Torah at Sinai, God had revealed to Abraham His commandments, statutes, and laws.¹⁶⁰ This is what God spoke to Isaac:

I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. (Gen 26:4–5)

With this in mind, consider Gen 18:19.

159. In this quote, the “certain aspects of the Torah” which Jews must keep but which are optional for Gentiles are apparently those commandments which the authors label as “ceremonial signs which particularly define Jewish identity,” e.g., circumcision, Sabbath, kosher eating, Festivals, tzitzit, and mezzuzah.

160. This is the conclusion of Abba Arika (usually referred to simply as Rab), the disciple of Yehuda HaNasi. See *b.Yoma* 28a. Rashi (on Gen 26:5–6) also reiterates this position, that Abraham was given knowledge of the Torah before Sinai.

For I have chosen him [Abraham], so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

The phrase “to keep the way of the LORD” is echoed by “to walk in the ways of the LORD” throughout Deuteronomy. For example:

Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. (Deut 8:6)

You have today declared the LORD to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. (Deut 26:17)¹⁶¹

Note the clear progression in Gen 18:19 (made emphatic by the use of “so that” [וְכִי]) – “I have chosen Abraham *so that* he may command his children ... *so that* the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” The blessing of the Abrahamic covenant comes upon those of his offspring who “walk in the way of the Lord,” that is, who keep God’s commandments. This means that the characteristic of Abraham’s children is that they keep God’s commandments. The promise made to Abraham is bound together with the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of God, that is, the Torah.

Note also how the unconditional promise of the Land, made to Abraham in Gen 15, is cast as conditional in the Exodus narrative. In Ex 23:20–33, God promises to send His angel ahead of Israel as they entered the promised Land, Who would guard them and deliver the peoples of the Land into their hands. However, possession of the Land, which God swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the unconditional promise of the Abrahamic covenant, is now conditional upon Israel’s obedience:

Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. (Ex 23:20–22)

Likewise, the unconditional promises of Gen 17:6–7 are made conditional upon Israel’s repentance and obedience in Lev 26:9–12.

161. The same phrase is found in Deut 11:22; 19:9; 28:9; 30:16.

Genesis 17	Leviticus 26
הִפְרֵתִי אֶתְךָ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד I will make you exceedingly fruitful (v. 6)	הִפְרֵיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶתְכֶם I will make you fruitful and multiply you (v. 9)
הִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ I will confirm My covenant between Me and you (v. 7)	וְהִקִּימֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם I will confirm My covenant with you (v. 9)
לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים וּלְיִרְעֶךָ to be God to you and to your descendants (v. 7)	הִיְיִתִּי לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי לְעָם I will be your God and you shall be My people (v. 12)

Indeed, the exodus from Egypt, and thus the bringing of Israel to Sinai to receive the Mosaic covenant, was based upon God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them. (Ex 2:23–25)

These data show that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are viewed as two covenants inextricably bound together as one whole. God’s promise to bless the seed of Abraham carried with it both God’s purpose and provision to make Abraham’s descendants righteous. God does not give His covenant blessings to the wicked. It was necessary, then, that those who would receive the unconditional blessings of the Abrahamic covenant should be righteous, not only in a forensic or “positional” sense, but in “doing righteousness and justice.” In this way, it is necessary for every covenant member to have the Torah, because it is in the Torah that God’s revelation and standards of righteousness and justice are revealed.

This fact, that the Abrahamic covenant envisioned God’s blessing upon “all the families of the earth,” and that God’s blessings comes not upon the lawless but upon those who keep His commandments, means that those who have Abraham as their father (Rom 4:11–16) and thus receive the blessings promised to him must also be given and accept the Torah as God’s standard of righteousness.

This need for the Torah to be the possession not only of the physical seed of Jacob, but also of the nations, forms the basis for David’s exclamation at receiving the covenant of dynastic kingship. Having received the promise that God would build him an eternal “house” (where בַּיִת, *bayit* means “dynasty”), David sits “before the Lord” in contemplation and then makes a most interesting statement:

Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. *And this is the Torah for mankind O Lord GOD* (וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הָאָדָם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה). (2Sam 7:18–19)

The final phrase is translated different ways in most English versions, but the Hebrew demands the

translation given above.¹⁶² What David had come to realize was that the promise of an eternal dynasty would be ultimately fulfilled in the reign of Messiah. This was Peter's point in his Shavuot sermon:

Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah ... (Acts 2:29–31)

What David further understood was that it would be through the reign of Messiah that the Torah would come to all mankind, and would thus be the means by which the promise made to Abraham would be fulfilled.

It is this binding of the covenants together as a unity to bring about God's purposes that brings Paul to write:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. (Eph 2:11–13)

Note carefully the phrase "covenants of promise." In the Greek, the word "promise" has the article, so a better translation would be, "covenants of *the* promise." Here, Paul speaks of "covenants" plural that carry forward "the promise." Paul understands the covenants of the Tanach to be bound together as a unity by which the promise of salvation comes to fulfillment in the Messiah.

Moreover, in this text Paul makes it clear that though the Gentile believers were formerly excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and were thus "strangers to the covenants of the promise," that has changed. Now that they have come to faith in the Messiah, the Gentile believers are considered by God to be legally members of the commonwealth of Israel and thus, legally, members in the covenants of the promise. In short, Paul teaches that God considers Gentile believers to have a legal status within Israel and thus within the covenants God made with Israel.

This fact also speaks to the issue of the New Covenant. According to Jeremiah 31:31–34, the New Covenant is made "with the house of Israel" and the "house of Judah." It consists of God writing the Torah upon the heart, which differentiates it from the Sinai covenant, characterized by the Torah written on tablets of stone.¹⁶³ Since in the New Covenant God would write the Torah upon the hearts of the "house of Israel,"¹⁶⁴ the covenant would be accepted and obeyed on a national level, unlike the Sinai

162. See Walter Kaiser, "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity" in John Skilton, ed. *The Law and the Prophets* (Presbyterian and Reformed Pub, 1974), pp. 298–318.

163. This does not negate the fact that in every generation there are those (a remnant) of Israel who individually have the Torah written upon their hearts by faith and therefore are not "breakers of the covenant." But Jeremiah's point is that the New Covenant, considered in its fulfillment, envisions such faith and subsequent loyalty on a national scale.

164. Note that in Jer 31:31, both the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" are named, but in v.33 only the "house of Israel" is mentioned. This would indicate that Jeremiah envisions the complete establishment of the New Covenant at

covenant “which they broke” (v. 32).

It is very interesting, however, to see how the Apostles understand the New Covenant. Paul, who is clearly designated as the Apostle to the Gentiles,¹⁶⁵ declares that God had made him (and others with him) a servant of the New Covenant. This means that Paul viewed believing Gentiles as being included within the membership of the New Covenant. This is based, no doubt, upon Yeshua’s declaration that His blood (sacrificial death) was for the establishment of the New Covenant.¹⁶⁶ This made it clear to the Apostles that all who were united with Him in His death were members of the New Covenant. Similarly, the author of Hebrews teaches that Yeshua is the mediator of the New Covenant,¹⁶⁷ meaning that He mediates the New Covenant with all those He represents as their High Priest.

The Apostolic Scriptures are very clear, then, that both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are members of the New Covenant by their union with Yeshua established through faith in Him. This means that as the believing remnant, they anticipate the eschaton in which “all Israel will be saved,”¹⁶⁸ that is, when the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah will be fulfilled.

Given this reality, that all who are believers in Yeshua (both Jews and Gentiles) are members of the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah, it also means that they equally have the Torah written upon their hearts. This metaphor, of the Torah written upon the heart, simply means that the Torah is that which stands as the acceptable standard for righteousness and that which governs the life of the believer through the inner working of the Spirit. It is unreasonable to think that Gentile believers have only part of the Torah written on their hearts while Jewish believers have the whole Torah written on theirs. In regard to the New Covenant, the Apostles speak of it as that which is the inevitable result of Yeshua’s death, and as encompassing all who are saved by faith in Him.

In conclusion, then, the progressive revelation of the Bible presents the historical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic) as divinely united to bring “the promise,” that is, to establish eternal redemption in Yeshua for all who are chosen. This eternal redemption is at the heart of Jeremiah’s New Covenant (“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,” Jer 31:34). When the Apostles apply the New Covenant to all who are in Yeshua (Jew and Gentile alike), they are making a bold statement about the equality of Jew and Gentile within God’s overall plan of salvation. Given the unified view of the historical covenants within the salvific plan of God, it is most reasonable to conclude that Gentile believers are to see themselves as *bona fide* members not only of the Abrahamic covenant, but also of the Mosaic covenant, living under the rule of the Davidic King, Who is our Messiah, Yeshua.

the time when the tribes are reunited into one nation in accordance with the words of the prophets (e.g., Is 11:12; Jer 23:3ff; Ezek 37:15ff).

165. Gal 2:7–8.

166. Lk 22:20.

167. Heb 9:15; 12:24 (though in this reference, the Greek has διαθήκης νέας rather than διαθήκης καινῆς as in 9:15. Whether the change of adjective signals some difference in the author’s mind is difficult to ascertain, but most commentators take διαθήκης νέας in 12:24 to be equivalent with διαθήκης καινῆς in 9:15).

168. Rom 11:26.

Summary & Conclusion

In this study, I have sought to make an assessment of the “Divine Invitation” teaching, which FFOZ has offered as their understanding of the Gentile believer’s relationship to God’s Torah. In making the assessment, I have primarily responded to the arguments published in the article “One Law and the Messianic Gentile” (*Messiah Journal* [101]). I have also responded to some statements in subsequent web blogs submitted for further clarification by the FFOZ staff.

I have pointed out that a number of their arguments do not stand the test of logical thinking. For instance, their opening argument that the Apostles were silent regarding the Gentile believer’s relationship to the Torah is controverted three ways. First, if the FFOZ authors honestly believed the Apostles were silent on this issue, they would not have proceeded to write a lengthy article explaining that the Apostles taught a “Divine Invitation” for Gentiles to keep the Torah. Second, arguments from silence tell us nothing. What the Apostles did not say, we cannot know. Third, I gave examples to show that both Yeshua and His Apostles *did* speak to the issue of a Gentile believer’s relationship to the Torah. Most foundational in this regard are Yeshua’s instructions to His Apostles that they were to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to keep all of the commandments that He had taught the Apostles (Matt 28:19–20). In light of His teaching in Matt 5:17–20, this included all the commandments of God’s Torah.

Another illogical argument which the FFOZ teachers often repeat, is that because the Torah gives specific commandments to sub-groups within Israel (e.g., priests, kings, men, women) we can rightly conclude that the Torah also has specific commandments that are required of Jews but not of Gentiles. The fallacy of this argument is that the Torah is specific when certain commandments are limited to a given sub-group within Israel, but no similar specificity is found enumerating commandments that are required of Jews but not of Gentiles.

In order to dismiss those texts in the Torah that specifically state there is to be one Torah (Law) for the native born and the foreigner, the FFOZ authors argue that in these texts, the Hebrew word *ger*, translated variously as “foreigner,” “stranger,” “alien,” or “sojourner,” actually means “convert” or “proselyte.” They believe that such an interpretation is legitimate because the Lxx uses the Greek term *proselutos* to translate *ger* in these cases and that, by the Apostolic era, the Greek word *proselutos* meant “a Gentile convert to Judaism.” I have shown, however, that the Apostles were not bound to the Lxx as an authoritative translation, nor is there any evidence that they accepted the Lxx as always giving the correct interpretation of the original Hebrew text, to which they undoubtedly had access. I further give evidence that the word *proselutos*, even in the Lxx, had not entirely gained the technical meaning “convert to Judaism.” Moreover, since the rabbinically conceived conversion ritual did not exist until the Maccabean period or later, it is entirely anachronistic to read it back into the time of Moses and the writing of the Torah. The word *ger*, therefore, should be interpreted within its original Torah context as “foreigner,” not “convert” or “proselyte.”

The FFOZ authors consider Gal 5:3 to be “one simple text” that unequivocally supports their “Divine Invitation” perspective. I have shown, however, that they have taken that verse out of context and have interpreted it against its contextual meaning. When Paul writes that “every man who receives circumci-

sion...is under obligation to keep the whole Torah,” the context makes it clear that he is not presenting this as an option for Gentile believers. For in the verse before and following their proof-text, Paul makes it clear that anyone who receives circumcision forfeits the benefit of Yeshua and actually becomes severed from Him. Moreover, it is clear that the “obligation” to which Paul speaks is not an obligation to God but to the rabbinic authorities who sanction the conversion ritual in the first place. Thus, when Paul uses the phrase “the whole Torah,” he means the Written Torah as defined and regulated by the rabbinic traditions, that is, the Oral Torah. Taken in context, the phrase “obligated to keep the whole Torah” is not a positive statement, but a negative one, parallel to “the Messiah will be of no benefit” and “severed from the Messiah.” Rather than being “one simple text” proving the “Divine Invitation” doctrine, in Gal 5:3 Paul presents an ultimatum to the Gentile believers in Galaita regarding rabbinic conversion, not an invitation to keep Torah.

Another argument waged against the “One Law” position is that it “requires a broad and sweeping condemnation of virtually every Christian community in existence.” Not only is this overstatement not true, but I have shown that the same argument could be used against the “Divine Invitation” position as well. For in stating that there is a divine “mandate” for those with a “legal Jewish status” to keep the whole Torah, one could equally say that this would require a “sweeping condemnation” of the Christian community, since by and large the Christian Church has taught that Christ abolished the obligation of the Law to all believers in Jesus.

The FFOZ authors blame the “One Law” teaching for the “bad fruit” they have witnessed in their travels among messianic groups. This “bad fruit” is defined primarily as “disunity and confusion” that exists within the Messianic Movement. But I have shown that such anecdotal evidence may indicate errant practice but it does not necessarily prove wrong doctrine. It is not uncommon that new believers in Yeshua act immaturely in their exuberance for the Gospel, but this does not prove the Gospel message they have come to espouse is errant. I also seek to remind the reader that some level of confusion and disunity inevitably exists in all renewal or reformation movements, and I give some historical examples. The solution to overcoming “disunity and confusion” is not necessarily to make “mid-course” corrections in doctrine but to train and educate leaders of local communities so that bad practice can be corrected.

One of the primary arguments of the FFOZ teachers against the One Law position is their reassessment of Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council) and Acts 21 (the rumors about Paul’s teaching). I show that the Jerusalem Council and their decision to give the “Four Prohibitions” to the Gentile believers fits well with the interpretation that the Apostles expected the Gentiles to learn and obey the Torah. What they did not do is require the Gentiles to learn the Torah and fully adopt a Torah lifestyle *before* they were received within the believing community. While this was what was required of Gentiles who converted to Judaism, the Apostles recognized that when the Gentiles were given the Spirit of God in the same way as the Jewish believers, this meant that God had accepted them as Gentiles—without requiring them to undergo a ritual conversion. And if God had received them, then the Jewish believers certainly should do the same. The Four Prohibitions were given, however, to overcome the social and cultural divide that existed between Jews and Gentiles, particularly over the matter of Gentile idolatry. This best explains why the Apostles chose the particular four items that made up the Prohibitions. All four are connected to

the worship within pagan temples. It also explains why the Apostles added that the Gentiles would be learning Torah each week as they attended the synagogue service.

The interpretation of Acts 21 is dependent upon one's interpretation of Acts 15. When the Apostles were anxious to prove that Paul was not teaching Jewish believers to abandon their Torah observance, it does not imply that they considered the Gentile believers to be exempt from certain aspects of Torah obedience. They were simply implementing the procedure laid out by the Jerusalem Council: accept the Gentile believers on the basis of their faith in Yeshua, and give them time to learn the Torah in order to obey it as the expected life of righteousness for all who walk in the footsteps of Yeshua.

One of the interpretive questions in Acts 15 is to what Peter is referring when he speaks of the "yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:9). The FFOZ authors have decided that Peter is talking about God's Torah, for they conclude that in many ways, the commandments of God are difficult to obey and require great sacrifice. But Peter did not say that the "yoke" was difficult or required great sacrifice. What he said was that neither the fathers nor the Jewish people in general have *been able* to bear the yoke. This means that it was impossible for them to bear it. This cannot be talking about God's commandments, since Deut 30:11 states "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you...", and in 1Jn 5:3 we read, "His commandments are not burdensome." Moreover, the "yoke" to which Peter refers in Acts 15:9 cannot be Yeshua's yoke, which He entreated His followers to take upon themselves, for He describes His yoke as "easy" (well-fitted) and "light" (not burdensome) (Matt 11:30). The best explanation for the "yoke" to which Peter refers is the burden of rabbinic legal *halachah* that had attached to the Torah, *halachah* to which a convert would be required to submit. Yeshua also refers to some of the rabbinic *halachah* as a burden placed upon the shoulders of people (Matt 23:4), as well as setting aside the commandments of God (Mk 7:9). This is the yoke that Peter describes as impossible to bear. It is something far different than the yoke Yeshua encourages His followers to bear.

I have also shown that the *Didache*, most probably a late 1st Century document, does not actually reflect the "Divine Invitation" model as the FFOZ authors claim it does. The text they use is *Did* 6.2, which instructs its readers: "if you are able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect. But if you are not able, then do what you can." This is not presenting an option but a concession. Only those who bear the whole yoke attain perfection (i.e., spiritual maturity). Those who are unable "to bear the whole yoke" should do what they can, but this is most likely a temporal concession until they are able to bear the full yoke. The FFOZ authors interpret it as presenting two options: bear the whole yoke, or bear what you are able. What they fail to see is that the only path to spiritual maturity, as far as the author of the *Didache* is concerned, is to bear the whole yoke. Therefore, the concession to "bear what you are able" is in view of eventually being able to bear the whole yoke. Moreover, I show that the *Didache* is not contemporary with the Jerusalem Council (as the FFOZ authors state), and that it only represents the teachings of one sect among the many sects that were emerging among the Yeshua followers at the end of the 1st Century. The *Didache*, therefore, should not be viewed as an authoritative document describing Apostolic doctrine or *halachah*.

In the printed article, the FFOZ authors make a clear distinction between the "moral" or "ethical" commandments of the Torah (which were required of the Gentile believers) and the "ritual" command-

ments given specifically to Israel as Jewish identity markers. In a subsequent blog, however, they deny that they make such a distinction. Given this disparity, one can only conclude that they have now moderated their position or that they were careless in the words they chose when writing the Journal article. Throughout the Scriptures, the Torah is consistently viewed as a unity and any attempt to dissect it into moral, ceremonial, and civil components is fraught with grave difficulties.

Finally, I show that separating the historical covenants in order to make Gentile believers members of the Abrahamic covenant but not members of the Sinaitic covenant, finds no support in the Scriptures. On the contrary, the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants are consistently viewed in the Scriptures as united within God's plan of salvation, culminating in the New Covenant. This is why Paul, in Eph 2:12, speaks of "the covenants (plural) of the promise (singular)." This means that both Jewish and Gentile believers are members of the Abrahamic *and* the Sinaitic covenants, having equal covenant privileges and responsibilities.

A Final Word of Encouragement

Many of you have been confused, discouraged, alarmed and even angered at FFOZ's reversal on the One Law teaching. In many ways, I understand these responses. As one of four leaders in our own Torah community, I recognize how the words of a teacher can deeply affect the hearts and lives of those he teaches. I further understand how difficult it is when trusted teachers abandon a core doctrine and ask those who have appreciated their teaching to follow them in their new direction.

But let me assure you that the case presented by FFOZ for "Divine Invitation" is not nearly as airtight as they claim. In a number of cases, their arguments fail to pass simple logic. In other cases, they quote scholars who, when read more thoroughly, do not support their position as strongly as they assert. They have reinterpreted Scripture on less than solid grounds, and have wrested texts out of their contexts to fit their new agenda. While not in any way impugning their good intentions, it is clear to me that their arguments are less than cogent, and are clearly not sufficient to sustain their new "Divine Invitation" teaching.

There may be, however, a silver lining in this cloud. I hope that this controversy forces many people to dig into the Scriptures for themselves in order to find the answers to the questions that have been raised. All too often it is easy for us to rely upon well-respected teachers and eventually to become somewhat dependent upon them for our spiritual nourishment. Surely it is God's plan that teachers and shepherds should feed His people the truth of the Scriptures, and that the people should appreciate their hard labors to do so. Yet there is always the necessity to follow the pattern of the Bereans, who, having heard the message of the Apostles, went back to the Scriptures to prove whether what they were being taught was worthy of acceptance. So if the current controversy becomes a strong motivation for making us all more like the Bereans, than this will have long-term beneficial effects upon the Torah movement in general. Do not be discouraged or downcast: God's word is alive and active, and the Spirit of God is able to illumine the inspired and authoritative Scriptures to make them applicable to our lives as He desires.

Furthermore, do not let anyone take away from you the position you have in Messiah. All who are in

Him are true sons and daughters, being chosen by Him to bear His name to a watching world. Whether Jew or Gentile, we are equally important and necessary in the family of God, for we have all been purchased with the same price, “with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah” (1Pet 1:19). Moreover, we should be wary of any teaching that tries to convince us that certain of our Father’s commandments are optional, especially when the plain reading of the Scriptures teaches us just the opposite. Let the word of God be your guide, and stand firm in its truth. And take these words of our Savior to heart:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,

for I am gentle and humble in heart,

and you will find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

(Matt 11:28–30)