

I wrote this letter in response to several questions posed to me by a sincere Orthodox Jewish friend, Michael. He maintains that I, as a Jew, need to live under the Law of Moses, regardless of the fact that I acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. His proof texts are Acts chapters 15 and 21. Although I do not have permission to web-post Michael's letter to me, I restate his thesis in this letter so as to provide you with the context.

Dear Michael:

Four times I read and then further studied the copy of your July 28, 1989 letter to Cardinal Lustiger (a Jewish believer in Jesus) which you sent to me. You told me before and now you have written to me that the Cardinal never responded to your letter "which itself [is] a sort of reply." Therefore I want to be sure to reply to you lest you think that all Messianic Jews do not reply to letters. I waited these several weeks since I did not want to be found shooting from the hip. Your arguments are thoughtful, therefore they deserve a thoughtful response. I wanted to consider them with due prayer and study. For the most part, and specifically concerning the portions in the Book of Acts which you use as proof texts, I was unable to get any significant insight from several respected scholarly texts. Thus, as I am exhorted in the scriptures, the Holy Spirit will himself teach me (1 Jn 2:27), and upon him I am relying regarding my own recent studies of those passages. I have found Bethel Ministries to also be a helpful resource and I have used some of their thoughts here when I reference other passages. Additionally, my daughter, who I hope you can meet some day, made several suggestions that I also included.

My main reason for spending so much time on this document is to first, make a defense for the hope that dwells within me, and second, in expectation that your eyes will be opened to truth. I hope that you will spend as much time considering this letter as I have spent studying your letter and researching these responses.

Let me begin by restating your thesis. You feel that as a Jew, regardless of whether I call myself a Christian or Messianic Jew, I should still live under the Law (the 613 commandments as you described them, although, as you know, one could probably only fulfill a small subset of these because many revolve around the Temple, which has not yet been reconstructed). Your proof texts are the New Testament passages in Acts chapters 15 and 21. Specifically, you feel that the Gentiles never would have been instructed in their freedom from the Law if the Messianic Jews themselves were not observing the Law. Likewise, in Acts 21, if Paul were not zealous for the Law himself and a devout follower of the Law, then why would he have gone into the temple and waited until the sacrifice was offered for him? These are good questions, and I will deal with them. I am concerned though that you have not specifically addressed my texts of defense as I wrote to you in my last letter, therefore I restate those here and expand upon them with many other references. Of course, we could not continue to dialog very long unless you address my rebuttal regarding these other passages. You cannot simply continue to cite the same two scriptural passages from Acts 15 and Act 21 and disregard all others.

Here I will again outline many arguments, which seem to counter your basic thesis. I will start in a general overview by citing many diverse passages including those from Paul's epistles since you also cite these, specifically Rom 11:29. Since you might want me to exclude all of Paul's epistles arguing that they were meant for the Gentile and not the Jew, I will also focus upon the Epistle to the Hebrews (although we do not know the author, it is clear that it was written to the Jew. You should re-read it to convince yourself of this fact), and other passages from Acts and the Gospels. Finally, I will deal directly with the two passages you cite: Acts 15 and Acts 21. Why do I even bother looking to other passages? Because scripture is the best assessor of scripture. One should not build a theology on one portion of scripture alone. I am sure you agree.

You have suggested that the Gentile be only under the law as given to Noah (Gen 9:1-7; you may eat all meat and plants, you can not eat blood, you shall not kill a man, etc.) while the Jew is under the Law as given to Moses. God never did away with the first law (to Noah), but for the Jew, he superseded it with a new Law (to Moses). Likewise, as it is written in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb 10:8-12), "God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel..." that will supersede the old covenant. With a change in the covenant was to come a superseding of the Law (although not a single letter of the Law will be done away with (Lk 16:17); it was fulfilled by Jesus, and with a change in the covenant also came a change in the priesthood "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Heb 5:6)). This "type" is seen in the saving law for our people in the Book of Esther where King Ahasuerus could not revoke the law of their destruction, but a new law was given which superseded the old law and provided a way of escape and life and victory (Es 8:8). The New Covenant that he promised our people (Jer 31:31) works in a similar fashion. Can you contest that there have been major laws (like that given by God to man through Noah) that have been superseded by new laws from God upon changes precipitated during momentous spiritual events like the deliverance of our people from Egypt? Then why do you consider it unlikely that a superseding of the Law given to Moses could occur upon the coming of the Messiah?

On two occasions you pointed out that since Christians are under grace, they have used it as a license for sin. I can not defend the actions of all Christians any more than you can defend the behavior of all Jews. But we must focus upon the text itself. It should be made clear that though Christians are not under the Law but under Grace, this is in no way a license to sin. Indeed there is an almost total lack of understanding concerning what grace is. Grace is not mercy. Grace is not overlooking our sins or failures or mistakes. Grace is not merely unmerited favor. Grace is not compassion. So what is grace? Grace is the God-given power and desire to do God's will. Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." This is what grace is. Grace is given to the humble, not the proud (Ja 4:6). If you are trying to be justified by the Law you have fallen from grace (Gal 5:4).

Christians under the New Covenant have a much higher calling to holiness than did the Old Testament saints under the Law of Moses. Does this sound like grace is a license to sin? That concept is a straw man that some (maybe even you) have constructed.

Again, we have a higher calling to holiness under the Covenant of Grace. Instead of committing the physical act of adultery to be guilty of that sin under the Law, under the Covenant of Grace you are guilty of adultery if you even look at a woman to lust after her (Mt 5:28). Instead of having to physically kill someone to be guilty of murder under the Law, now if you even hate your brother you are guilty of murder (1 Jn 3:15). Instead of having to bow down to an idol to be guilty of idolatry, now, if you are covetous you are guilty of idolatry (Col 3:5). More could be cited regarding this, but the point has been made clear. Because Christians are not under the Law, does that mean we can do whatever we choose? No. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the [Old Covenant] Law, but under Grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the Law, but under Grace? God forbid" (Rm 6:14-15). If we are not to keep the Law, then what did Jesus mean when he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments"? We are not under the Old Covenant Law, but there are more than 150 New Testament commandments. Jesus did not say if you love me, keep the Law, but again, "if you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15).

You cite Mat 5:17-19 and Lk 16:16-18 to note Jesus' reverence of the Law. But this was pointed out also in the context of those who were trying to justify themselves based upon the Law (Lk 16:15). And in the same passage, Jesus notes that the end of the proclamation of the Law and the Prophets had come. "The Law and the prophets were until John [the Baptizer]" (Lk 16:16a). So how long was the Law in effect for God's people who are born-again? "Til the Seed [Jesus] should come to Whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19); "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rm 10:4); "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17). Furthermore, are those who are under the works of the Law under a blessing or a curse? "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal 3:10). Are Christians under the curse of the Law? No. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3:13). Is anyone justified by trying to keep the Law? No. "No man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the Law is not of faith" (Gal 3:11-12). Did Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and pre-Law Moses, live by the Law or by faith? By faith (Heb 11:4-30). Why was the Law given later by Moses and what was the purpose of the Law? "It was added because of transgressions" (Gal 3:19); "The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal 3:24-25).

Concerning salvation under the New Covenant, is there any significance or distinction in being a Jew? No. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). If a person is a Christian is he of Moses' seed or Abraham's seed? "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). Furthermore, Paul says of himself, "We are Jews by nature..." (Gal 2:15) and then "...by the works of the Law shall no flesh [I assume that includes Jews] be justified." (Gal 2:16).

Should I observe feast days, etc. according to the Law? No. "After that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements,

whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid [for] you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal 4:10-11). What is the standing of those Christians, including Messianic Jews, who are trying to keep the Law? "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are [trying to be] justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal 5:4). What then is a person's obligation to God if he tries to keep the rituals of the Law such as circumcision (not for health reasons, but to keep the Law)? "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised [trying to keep the Law and thereby attain justification], that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (which no one ever kept, except Jesus, and if you break the Law at one point you are guilty of breaking the whole Law) (Gal 5:2-3; Js 2:10; cf. Rm 2:25-27). Therefore, if we are led by the Holy Spirit are we under the Law? No. "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the Law" (Gal 5:18).

Was the Old Covenant faultless compared to the New Covenant? No. "If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second" (Heb. 8:7). Is the New Covenant a better covenant? Yes. Jesus "is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

Adherence to the Law by a Messianic Jew would require (upon temple reconstruction, just as it is written) the offering of sacrifices for sin. But Jesus has already paid the price, once for all and "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:29). In fact, God takes no pleasure in other sacrifices (Heb 10:8) and "we have [already] been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb 10:10). And "if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Gal 2:21). You see, it makes no sense for a Messianic Jew, or any Christian, to follow the Law.

Further you argue that exclusion from the Law is only for the Gentile and not the Jew. I disagree. Why was the curtain in the temple torn upon the death of Jesus (Lk 23:45, Mat 27:51) if not as a testimony to the Jew? Why was Peter (the Jew) told, three times, to "Arise, Peter, kill and eat" what was formerly unclean food? And God further said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." (Act 10:13-16) Why did Jesus himself "declare all foods clean" (Mk 7:19) to the disciples (Jews) if not freeing the Jewish believers in Christ from the dietary restrictions?

Now let us consider specifically the two passages, which are your proof texts. Again, I preface this by saying that scripture must match up with scripture, and there is a compelling case that Jews should not be living under the Law, as I described above. In Acts 15:5 it clearly says that all this was precipitated by "certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed." Further, it was those Messianic Jewish Pharisees that said, " 'It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentiles], and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.' " So all this was coming from one sect, not the Messianic Jews as a whole community. No doubt, the Pharisees were the most religious about these past

obligations and any break from the practices of the Law would be personally difficult, even if they viewed it as permissible. Just like Peter, not a Pharisee, had to be told three times by God to arise, "kill and eat" (Act 10:13-16). It was utterly detestable. This is often still seen with Jews and Muslims who later choose to follow Jesus wherein the eating of pork is still detestable regardless of the freedom to do so. The key in this portion, however, comes when we consider Peter's testimony regarding the debate with the Pharisee-believers, "and He made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles] cleansing their hearts through faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" (Act 15:9-10). Does that sound like a man encouraging his Jewish brethren to continue in the practice of this futile Law observance? No. And recall that Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised (Gal 2:7).

In Acts 21, many of those local Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah were "all zealous for the Law" (Act 21:20b) so they too may have been of the sect of the Pharisees (although speculative). When Paul agreed to proceed with the four men under the vow and wait until "the sacrifice was offered for each one of them" (Act 21:26) (it never says he himself made the sacrifice, but maybe it is implied; I am not enough of a scholar on the subject to know), it never speaks of his intent for the entire situation. After careful study and pondering (like I said, I found none of these answers in other study texts), and in light of all Paul preached on the subject, I can only conclude that he was appeasing those "zealous for the Law" and bringing calm to the dangerous situation through regarding his brothers higher than himself. As he said in Romans 14:21 "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles." Paul says, in Romans chapter 14 that we should be prepared to do many things to bring peace, even though they have no spiritual significance in and of themselves. Could this be the reason for his actions in Acts chapter 21? Maybe. And it certainly fits all the other New Covenant teachings on the topic that Paul himself gave. You may say that Paul would never go to that extent to win the Jews to Christ or to calm a volatile situation. But consider this: "And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer [in Christ], but his father was a Greek." "Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." (Act 16:1, 3). So he was circumcised because of the Jews! And you would have to agree, circumcision is a painful event, especially for a grown man. Nevertheless, Paul and Timothy both felt it was worth it simply "because of the Jews." Likewise, "But not even Titus who was with me, although he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage." (Gal 2:3,4). So both Timothy and possibly Titus permitted themselves to be circumcised, at Paul's request, to calm a situation, much like that which was occurring in Acts 21. And even with Paul's attempt in Acts 21 to pacify the crowd, the Jews from Asia still committed mayhem (Act 21:27-31). My argument corroborates well with what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all that I might win the more. And to the Jew I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law

[!], that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without the law, as without the law, but not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without the law." (1 Cor 9:19-21). In all this he clearly states that he himself was not under the Law!

Considering that Paul asked Timothy to be circumcised, I must concede that it might not be against the New Covenant for Messianic Jews to follow certain pre-New Covenant Biblical laws of God like circumcision. But I do not personally believe that it is right for any Jew to have to follow the rules and regulations that the Babylonian Rabbis developed from the 2nd through the 4th centuries AD and then changed when they felt it necessary. Those rules are not necessarily from the Bible. Note that God gave to Abraham two blood covenants. The one was of territory, "In the same day the Lord made (cut) a covenant with Abram saying, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." The second was of family identity: "...This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised...and the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." Thus, it might be permissible for Jews who are followers of Jesus to follow certain Biblical rules but not to build a wall within the Body of Christ. "Give no offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." (1 Cor 10:32). The admonition to "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon or of the Sabbath days,"(Col 2:16) works both ways. Based on this study, I have come to appreciate that nobody should restrict Jews from certain Biblical observances such as circumcision, although Jews should realize that neither salvation nor justification comes through those practices. Likewise, Jews should not expect Gentiles or their fellow Messianic Jews to conform to rules that the New Covenant clearly does not require them to follow. "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." (Rom 14:22-23).

Therefore, if Paul did have a son (as you have presented to me hypothetically) (and interestingly, Paul did refer to Timothy as his beloved son, in Christ, 1 Tim 1:1), and if Paul did have his son circumcised, he might have done it for one or two reasons: (1) As a witness to the Jew, but not under obligation to the Law, as it were. (2) Since circumcision was given to Abram before God gave the Mount Sinai Covenant, the child might be circumcised, not to be justified (not to be made right with God), but in recognition of a family covenant relationship with Abraham. However, some might wrongly insist that Messianic Jews are to strictly observe the Law, including the Sabbath and the feast days, for one or several reasons. (1) Pride because of a false perception of superiority in being Jewish (indeed every people group feels that they are superior to another). (2) Deception by adhering to the false teaching of those who do not understand grace. (3) Ignoring the clear New Covenant teaching concerning the Law. (4) Declining spirituality since when true spirituality declines ritualism increases. (5) Confusion and thereby being led away from the truths of God's Word including the truth that Christians have a higher calling under the New Covenant. (6) A desire to disrupt an

unsuspecting Messianic Jew to draw him into a denial of Christ and having him submit to the bondage of the Law, by which no flesh can be justified.

You also are concerned that if the Jews do not keep this separateness by observing the Law, that Jews, as a distinct race, would fade away. I understand your concern, but I do not share it because I believe the scriptures make clear that which will occur. Of course, I hope that all Jews had their eyes opened to see that indeed Jesus is the Messiah. And one day, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). But fear not, God will keep the distinction secure. It is so written. See Rev 7:4-8; there will be a distinct people from each tribe, except Dan for its disobedience. Remember the Cohen gene; God has no problem distinguishing our people right down to the precise tribe.

Finally, you make the claim in your letter that anyone born to a Jewish mother is, according to rabbinic law, a Jew. I see no scriptural basis for this claim (a mother rather than a father) regardless of the age of this tradition (Jesus said the traditions of men have made the word of God of no effect. Mk 7:13). Consider some of the most prominent people of our heritage: Manasseh and Ephraim were the sons of Joseph and Asenath, daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as given by Pharaoh himself (Gen 41:45, 50-52). Asenath was unlikely to have "converted" to something that was detestable to an Egyptian (Gen 43:32) while living in Pharaoh's home. Yet through those two boys, two tribes were named. Likewise, Rehoboam, the third King of the twelve tribes (and the first king of the southern kingdom, Judah) was the son of Solomon and Naamah the Ammonitess (I Kg 14:21). And there is no indication that Solomon succeeded in converting his wives. In fact, just the opposite occurred (I Kg 11). Interestingly, the first recognition of a Jewish mother being sufficient to establish the Jewishness of her child was Timothy, a Messianic Jew, in ~50 AD in Acts 16:1 (cited above), and not by Babylonian Rabbis in about 1000 AD. But that passage in Act 16:1 never negated the fact that a father could be the source of the Jewishness.

In summary, though I am a Jew, I am not exhorted by the scriptures to live under the Law of Moses or the 613 laws as you call them. I live under the new Covenant of Grace, however. I do not mind continuing to dialog on this subject, but please do me the justice of specifically addressing my arguments rather than simply restating your two former proof texts. As I tell my students in chemistry, we can not simply look the other way when we are confronted by data that suggest that our thesis might be in error. We must face all new data with objectivity. Once you have addressed the arguments here, I will face any further scriptural data (not your rabbinical laws though) you put before me.

Please read the entire Epistle to the Hebrews with an open heart and mind. I am sure in your great studies you have read it before. But that was probably long ago. Please do it again, and if for no other reason, simply because I, as a friend and fellow Jew, am asking you to read it. In fact, one could argue that it was written specifically for you. It is the greatest overview of the Old Testament that I have ever read. You, too, would enjoy it much. May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob open your eyes to the truth.

Bless you.

Your friend,

Jim Tour