



Too Jewish!

I. Introduction

- a. Review—Fulfilling Messiah's Torah
 - i. Torah is the individual commands and their collection, written down for Israel
 - ii. Israel's Torah keeping indicates her heart-condition toward Adonai
 - iii. Continual call from the prophets to return to Torah
 - iv. Yeshua
 1. Torah will endure until all things pass away
 2. Torah cannot be kept without love
 3. Yeshua was "pro-Torah"
 - v. Paul spoke against the perverted use of Torah for the sake of gaining righteousness, while maintaining his positive view of Torah and Torah-keeping.
 - vi. Torah has been transformed by the blood of Yeshua, specifically in the area of the sacrificial system and the priesthood. The New Covenant does not negate the literal keeping of the commands of Torah itself.
 - vii. We are to understand Torah according to the fullness that Yeshua has brought to it.
 1. Yeshua's interpretation/explanation of how to keep Torah is the correct one.
 2. By keeping Torah, we learn about the person and nature of Messiah
 3. Through Yeshua, a change has been affected in us, the Torah-keepers, so that we can now truly keep Torah and live the abundant life of Messiah
 4. The mind controlled by the Spirit can "submit itself to God's Torah."
 - viii. My assertion: as the true covenant keepers, Messianic Jews are obligated to keep Torah.
- b. Especially in light of the major obstacles to Torah-keeping I mentioned in the previous session, if Messianic Jews are obligated to keep Torah, what does that look like?
- c. The obvious source for many in the Messianic Jewish Movement: Judaism.
- d. This session: attempt to answer the accusation of "too Jewish!" by exploring issues concerning three areas of Jewish life: religious Judaism, cultural Jewishness, and Torah-keeping.

II. Overview of how today's Jewish religion(s) came to be

- a. Judah went into captivity in Babylon in 586 BCE—early beginnings of the Synagogue
- b. Ezra and Nehemiah lead the return to the Land around 450 BCE—the Jews bring the synagogue with them from exile

- c. Development of the tradition of the Oral Law—the tradition that Moshe received additional instructions from Adonai that he did not write down in the Torah—Oral Torah carries equal authority as the written Torah
- d. Israel occupied, persecuted and faced other threats over the next several hundred years
- e. Oral Law attempted to preserve a post-Temple, Jewish way of life.
 - i. Tradition says Ezra founded the Great Assembly, the founders of Talmudic Judaism; established the authority of the Oral Law
 - ii. “Moses received the Torah on Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly,” thus establishing the Rabbis as God-ordained interpreters of the Law.
 - iii. Three leading maxims attributed to the Great Assembly
 - 1. Be deliberate in judgment
 - 2. Raise up many disciples
 - 3. Make a fence around the Torah
- f. By Yeshua’s day, Talmudic Judaism had already begun to fracture into sects; the largest were the Pharisees and Sadducees
 - i. Main differences (oversimplification)
 - 1. Sadducees—Torah is fixed; Scripture is supreme
 - 2. Pharisees—Torah is fluid; changing times require a changing Torah
 - ii. Destruction of Temple in 70 CE, the philosophy of the Sadducees gave way to that of the Pharisees, the forerunners of all modern Rabbinic Judaisms
- g. Between 200-600 CE, Oral Law codified—written down: a contradiction in terms
 - i. Talmud is made up of two primary parts:
 - 1. Mishnah—collection of philosophical codes of law
 - 2. Gemara and Midrash—an extensive analyses of and commentary upon the Mishnah
 - ii. Despite its fixed form, the Jewish philosophical approach to Talmud makes it an admirable pursuit to wrestle with its many and varied sayings. Quote from “Everyman’s Talmud” by A. Cohen.
 - iii. Philosophical and humanistic approach to Talmud has led to different Judaisms and individualism: the opposite of what Torah was meant to accomplish.
 - iv. Judaism today defines itself by relation to Talmud
 - 1. Value of Talmud: teaches the foundational doctrines of the Judaisms
 - 2. Talmud is a source for modern traditions and cultures
 - 3. As Messianics, we must be careful not to elevate its importance or alleged wisdom

III. The Value of Jewish Culture and Tradition

- a. Definitions
 - i. Culture: generic reference to lifestyle based upon upbringing, geography, environment, etc.
 - ii. Traditions
 - 1. Practices that develop out of a given culture
 - 2. Teachings of the Rabbis, the Sages of Judaism

- b. Two basic schools of thought in the Messianic Jewish Movement concerning Tradition (oversimplified)
 - 1. We can take it or leave it—it may reinforce our Jewishness, or it may be detrimental
 - 2. It is at the very core of who we are as Jews; only minor adjustments are needed
- c. My thoughts about tradition
 - 1. Tradition is to be passed from generation to generation, not learned out of a book.
 - 2. Traditions should grow out of necessity, rather than a desire for identity.
 - 3. My children’s Jewishness will not be maintained by their practice of traditions, but by their holding to the Scriptures and the Messiah.
 - 4. Traditions may or may not aid us—and may possibly impede us—in the keeping or observing of Torah.
 - a. Nevertheless, traditions have inherent, intrinsic value—they allow bonding over time and distance. How much more so, then, does the Torah?
 - b. Mark 7:6-9
 - c. Yeshua does not outright denounce the honoring of tradition, but He condemns the keeping of it causes the neglect of Torah.
- d. The problem: for most people, the perception of Jewish tradition and culture is one that it is indistinguishable from Torah-keeping

IV. Paradigm Challenger: Do Messianic Jews have to adhere to Jewish tradition in order to keep Torah?

- a. Tefillin (or Phylacteries)—the head and hand wrappings worn by devout Jews; similar to תפילה, t’filah (prayer)
 - i. Torah—Deuteronomy 11:18, “you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead”
 - ii. Tradition
 - 1. Talmud, Berakoth 60b, “commanded us to put on tefillin”
 - 2. Two-part practice—straps around the hand and arm; box attached to a band around the head
 - 3. Literal fulfillment of the command
 - iii. Yeshua
 - 1. Matthew 23:5, the scribes and Pharisees “broaden their tefillin”
 - 2. Yeshua does not condemn tefillin, only the way it is used, i.e. “to be noticed by men”. I would not take this as an affirmation of the tradition of tefillin
 - iv. Spiritual Application
 - 1. Does Torah speak of anything else being a sign on the hand or as frontals on the forehead?
 - a. Matzah, Exodus 13:9
 - b. First offspring of every womb, Exodus 13:16
 - 2. Compare De.11:18 with Proverbs 6:21, “My son, keep the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching (Torah) of your mother; bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck.”

3. Beginning to sound less literal and more figurative—it’s about taking Torah to heart, taking it seriously, so we can do it.
- v. Modern Practical Application
 1. Can Messianic Jews wrap tefillin? Nothing in Scripture against it, however, it is *unnecessary* to fulfill the command. Also, how do we know if it is “too broad” according to Yeshua’s standards?
 2. Does this tradition make us more Jewish? More importantly, when we wrap tefillin by orthodox halachah, are we symbolically saying we are binding ourselves to the Oral Law rather than Torah?
- b. “Kosher”
 - i. In Judaism, it’s really “Kashrut”—the way food is prepared, stored and served. My use of “kosher” is more limited: the specific kinds of animals that Israel is permitted to eat.
 - ii. “Kosher” laws: Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14:3ff
 1. “the creatures which you may eat” vs. “Detestable things to you, and they shall be abhorrent to you”
 2. In practical terms, this means abstention from: pork, shellfish, and certain other fish and animals. For Americans, besides pork (ham, bacon, sausage, pepperoni) and shellfish (shrimp, lobster, crab, clams, oysters), this would mean: ostrich, squid (calamari), catfish, alligator, rabbit, swordfish
 - iii. Tradition
 1. Separation of meat and dairy, based on an interpretation of Exodus 23:19, 43:26, Deuteronomy 14:21, “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”
 2. Kashrut extends this prohibition to any kind of meat and dairy at the same meal, plus separate sets of dishes, silverware, etc.
 - iv. What does Yeshua say about Kosher?
 1. Nothing.
 2. Mark 7—Yeshua “declared all foods clean” not about Kosher, but had to do with the traditions surrounding ritual uncleanness. Mark 7 does not redefine what food is, i.e. “kosher”.
 3. Side note: neither does Peter’s vision in Acts 10 nullify the Torah teachings concerning clean and unclean foods
 - a. Peter instructed to “kill and eat” unclean animals, but he responds in Acts 10:14, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean.”
 - b. Peter explains the vision in Acts 10:28, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.”
 - c. The vision was another correction of tradition—Jews are not forbidden from associating with Gentiles.
 - v. Spiritual Application
 1. Context
 - a. Leviticus 11:45, “For I am Adonai who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.”

- b. Deuteronomy 14:2-3, “For you are a holy people to Adonai your God, and Adonai has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. You shall not eat any detestable thing.”
 - 2. “Kosher” laws teach Israel about being a holy, set apart, unique, sanctified people.
- vi. Practical Application for Messianic Jews
 - 1. Separation of meat and dairy not commanded in Scripture
 - 2. What is commanded: not considering unclean animals as food
 - 3. Today, consider foods that have ingredients that come from unclean animals, i.e. anything made with lard
 - 4. What about turkey bacon or imitation crab meat?
 - 5. Bottom line: what is “food”?
- c. Are Jewish traditions, laws and customs necessary for Torah keeping? My answer is a simple “no.”

V. But that is not the end of the discussion!

- a. Does Jewish tradition have its place in the Messianic Jewish movement at all?
- b. As Messianics, we have two major, interconnected obligations: one to Messiah and the Scriptures, one to our Jewish people and heritage.
- c. Reasons given to keep the traditions (may or may not be valid)
 - i. To win unsaved Jewish to Yeshua
 - ii. To be accepted within the larger Jewish community
 - iii. It was part of our culture before we became believers
 - iv. To connect to our heritage as Jews
- d. Examples of Jewish traditions that *may* (or may not) be valuable to us in the Messianic Jewish Movement
 - i. “Rabbis” as congregational leaders
 - ii. Kippah and Tallit
 - iii. Liturgical Prayers
 - iv. Purim and Chanukah

VI. A Messianic Jew can never be too Jewish!

- a. Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly... but he is a Jew who is one inwardly... and his praise is not from men, but from God.”
- b. Religious and cultural Jewishness may make us look or feel more Jewish, but Torah-keeping according to Scripture is all that is *required*.
- c. Torah-keeping, Talmudic observances, and living culturally Jewish lifestyles are, in my opinion, three very distinct goals.
- d. Our obligation is to Torah; Jewish traditions are not binding in any way. It is not our Jewish culture that should define our Torah-keeping; it is our Torah-keeping that should define our Jewishness.
- e. Our responsibility is first to Adonai (that includes obedience to Torah), and second, to maintain a connection with our fellow Jews. Tradition and culture must not be kept at the expense of the Word.
- f. It is possible to keep Torah without Rabbinic and Jewish tradition. This does not mean that we denigrate the traditions, only that tradition is a separate issue. Let us not trust our future solely to the passing down of a cultural sense of “Judaismishness”, but let us impart a sound, compelling Jewish identity to the next generation by putting the Word first—and then seeing what happens.