**What do we mean by "The Law"? The definition can be broad or narrow:**

* **Torah - The first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch).**
* **History -** Creation, Salvation History from Abraham to the border of Canaan (our history too 1Cor. 10:1).
	+ **Prophecy** - both explicit and as portrayed by people, events, and rituals, some still unfulfilled.
* **Various Commandments**
* **Regulations that defined Israel as a separated, holy, covenant community -** circumcision, Sabbath, festivals, food/purity laws.
* **Laws/conditions that applied to an agricultural community** in that particular land with its unusual topography and climate.
* **Regulations prescribing centralized worship** at the Tabernacle/Temple, including the priesthood and sacrifices.
* **Moral and spiritual commandments with a more universal application, concentrated in the Ten Commandments and the Two "Great Commandments".**

**We make these categories but they are not intrinsic to the Torah of Moses - see the "Book of the Law", E**xodus 20-23, to all of which the people gave their assent, Exodus 24:7-8.

There is a much expanded version of this in Lev. 1:1 - 26:2, where **every "category" is included and intermingled without distinction**, 26:46.

This is followed by **blessings for obedience** 26:3-13, and **curses for disobedience** 26:14-39 with the promise that God will restore Israel on the basis of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 26:40-45.

**Rabbis calculate that 613 commandments were given to Moses:**

The negative commandments number 365, which coincides with the number of days in the [solar year](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_year), and the positive commandments number 248, a number ascribed to the number of [bones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bone) and main organs in the [human body](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_body)(Babylonian Talmud,*Makkot* 23b-24a). There is not universal agreement on all the items to be included. The*[tzitzit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzitzit%22%20%5Co%20%22Tzitzit)* ("knotted fringes") of the[*tallit*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tallit) ("[prayer] shawl") are connected to the 613 commandments by interpretation: principal Torah commentator [Rashi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashi%22%20%5Co%20%22Rashi) bases the number of knots on a*gematria*: the word tzitzit (Hebrew: ציצת (Biblical), ציצית, in its [Mishnaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishnah) spelling) has the value 600. Each tassel has eight threads (when doubled over) and five sets of knots, totalling 13. The sum of all numbers is 613. This reflects the concept that donning a garment with tzitzit reminds its wearer of all Torah commandments. Many of the mitzvot cannot be observed now, following the destruction of the [Second Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple), although they still retain religious significance. According to one standard reckoning 77 positive and 194 negative commandments can be observed today, of which 26 [commands apply only within the Land of Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_and_customs_of_the_Land_of_Israel_in_Judaism) and, therefore, even pious Jews cannot keep them all**.**

**David** reduced them to **eleven**, (Psalm 15) answering the question:  “Adonai, who may live in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?

**Isaiah** reduced them to **six**, as it is written: “One who walks in righteousness, speaks uprightly, spurns profit from fraudulent dealings, waves away a bribe instead of grasping it, stops one’s ears against listening to infamy, and shuts one’s eyes against looking at evil, such a one will dwell in lofty security….”  (Isaiah 33:15-16)

**Micah** reduced them to **three**, as it is written: “It has been told to you what is good, and what God seeks from you: Only acting justly, loving goodness, and walking humbly with your God.”  (Micah 6:8)

**Isaiah** then reduced them to **two**, as it is written: “Thus said God: observe what is right and do what is right.”  (Isaiah 56:1) - The Two Great Commandments - but how?

**Amos and Habakkuk** reduced them to **one**, as it is said: “For thus said God to the house of Israel: ‘Seek Me and live.’” (Amos 5:4) “The righteous shall live by faith.”  (Habakkuk 2:4). **Paul**, Gal. 5:14, and **James** 2:8, did the same, each referencing Lev. 19:18, "Love your neighbour as yourself.

**In what context was the Law given at Sinai?**

**It was given to Israel after they had been redeemed and rescued from bondage in Egypt, in fulfilment of the Covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,** Exodus 3:4-8, 15-17, 20:2, and 33:1 etc.

They did not become God’s people at Sinai; that was a consequence of the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham was declared to be righteous by faith when he believed the promise, Gen. 15:6, and acted out his faith in obedience, Gen. 22:15-18, c.f. Rom. 4:3, 20-22, Heb.11:17-19, James 2:21-23.

**Exodus 19:3-6 begins the account of the giving of the Law** – how the redeemed people were to live as a Covenant community under the authority of their God and King. This would express their trust in Him and allow the blessings of Abraham to flow unhindered to them. It was never God’s intention that Israel should be justified by “the works of the Law”. The festival of Shavuot commemorated the Sinai event (and was a prophecy of Acts 2, when God the Holy Spirit came down to write the eternal Torah on the hearts of His redeemed, New Covenant, people).

**What was the central purpose of the Law?**

**It was to define Israel as a holy nation, separate from the Gentiles, in order to carry the promise of the Seed to its fulfilment, releasing the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles as well,** Psalm 86:9,Gal. 3. Meanwhile Israel, living under God’s Law, would be **a demonstration to the nations of the character of the one true Creator God,** Deut. 4:6-8.

**Distinctiveness and separation lies behind many of the food/purity laws.**

 A single Sanctuary/Temple for worship and sacrifice and annual pilgrimages reinforced the exclusive nature of the community of Israel. This separation was sometimes described as “the hedge of the Law”, (perhaps reflected in the parable of the vineyard, Matt. 21:33), designed to preserve national purity and worship from the influence of neighbouring nations with their idolatry and moral corruption. Outsiders (Gentiles) could join the community but only if they accepted the God of Israel and His requirements.

**How do the Abrahamic and Sinai Covenants relate?**

* **The Covenant with Abraham is unconditional but not unqualified.**

The **Land** aspect of the Covenant is **an everlasting Covenant with Abraham and his physical descendants through Isaac**, Gen. 13:14-15, 17:7-8, 25:5-6, 26:1-3, 28:1-4, 10-15,), 35:11-12, 46:2-4, 48:21, 49:29-32, 50:24-26, (c.f. Ishmael, Gen. 25:12-18 and Esau, Gen. 32:3, 33:16, 36:9, 31, 43).

**The enjoyment of that blessing could be suspended for a time** as a result of persistent unfaithfulness – as in the wilderness wanderings.

The Law stated this explicitly; Israel would experience **blessing if they followed God’s prescribed path**

as set out in the Law, Deut.28:1-14. The curses, Deut. 28:15-29:28, were intended as a strong disincentive, but were frequently ignored. Part of the task of the prophets was to remind a wayward people of the consequences of their foolish and reckless behaviour.

**The Babylonian captivity and exile** **was the ultimate consequence of persistent and repeated rebellion against the Law.**

Nevertheless there was **always the promise of restoration** upon repentance, Deut. 30:1-3 or, otherwise, an act of God’s sovereign grace 30:4-10 (see later).

The book of **Nehemiah** is an account of the process of the restoration and rebuilding following return to the Land. “Salvation History” was back on track towards the coming of the Seed but was about to be derailed again. **Nehemiah “saved the day” by his radical action to restore the “Hedge of the Law”.**

* **The Sinai Covenant was made exclusively with Israel** – “To those who ate the manna” (Jewish commentary). “He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel” Ps. 103:7.

**The commandments were given to Israel as a people chosen by God, for a particular calling**, Deut.7:6-16.

**The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 are prefaced by "I am the LORD your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt** ..." v2. This serves as an introduction to each separate commandment.

**Each section in Leviticus begins with the standard clause,** “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying “Speak to the children of Israel/Aaron and his sons, and say to them …””

**Deut. 4:1-40 recalls the great Sinai event when the LORD appeared and spoke His statutes and righteous judgements, specifically to Israel, including the Ten Commandments,** v13. “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you”. Exodus 31:13,

c.f. Ezek.20:12 and 22:8 “You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths”.

**The New Testament affirms this**. It is vital to note **Paul’s use of the pronouns “we” and “you”**.

When Paul addressed fellow Jews as “you” in **Romans** 2:11-18, 23, 3:1-2, 19, it is clear that he means **“you Jews”,** as a religious group, as over against **“those Gentiles”.**

In **Galatians and Ephesians**, the same distinction is made by including himself as a Jew, so the pronouns are “we” (Jews) and “you” (Gentiles).

**Failure to recognize this leads to serious confusion**, treating Gentile believers as if they were previously “under the Law” and, thus, needing to be liberated from it. This seems to me to be **a common misunderstanding and teaching**. In Gal. 2:11-17 Paul is specifically focussing on **fellow Jews** in relation to the Law, excluding **Gentiles as “sinners**” (a euphemism for those outside the scope of the Covenants, c.f. Rom. 9:4-5a, Eph. 2:11-12).

In Gal. 2:18-21 **Paul uses the pronoun “I”, making himself a personal example of the Jewish situation with respect to the Law**. In **Romans 7** he does a similar thing in greater detail, using the law of marriage as an analogy, v1-3. In 7:4 he addresses the Jewish members of the church as “you”, and in v5-6 includes himself in the word “we”. From 7:7 to 8:2 he personalizes the pronoun to “I”, offering himself as a prime example of his experience under the Law and his escape from the condemnation and power of sin through his relationship with the Messiah Jesus. The remainder of chapter 8 clearly applies fully to Jewish and Gentile believers as one group, with emphasis on the Spirit rather than the Law. Paul uses his testimony in a similar way in Phil. 3.

**Paul is clearly addressing Jewish believers in Gal. 3:10-13, 3:19-25 and 4:1-3.**

**In 3:1-9, 14-18 and 4:4-7** **he addresses Gentile converts**, and possibly Jewish believers who were reverting to their previous relationship to the Law, referring them to the overarching promise to Abraham that preceded the Law and persists after it has accomplished its purpose.

**The position of the Jews** was “**confined under sin by Scripture**”, 3:22, (the Law defined sin but did not give power to escape), **“kept under guard**”, v23, **“under a tutor … to the Messiah”,** v24-25, **“living as a slave”**, 4:1, **“under guardians and stewards”,** 4:2, **“children”** (in the sense of being legally incompetent to inherit), 4:3, **“in bondage under the elements of the world”** (external rituals and practices relied on for relationship with God or sources of spiritual life and power, c.f. 4:9-10 and Col. 2:8, 16-18, 20-23).

**The position of the Gentiles** was **different but similar.** They were also under law, but a different one, 4:8-9. They had been controlled by pagan beliefs and practices, in which they had trusted. Their religion had its own store of rituals as a source of security and prosperity – **“the weak and beggarly elements”.** Having been freed from all this through the Messiah, v7, they are being enticed to come under another law of external observance that had never previously been part of their lives, 4:10-11, 21.

Paul had travelled in the other direction, 4:12, and c.f. 2:18-21 and Phil. 3:7-9.

**Gentiles are not, and never have been, included in the Sinai Law in any respect whatsoever.**

* **The Abrahamic Covenant is permanent but the Sinai Covenant was temporary** and ceased to apply when the Messiah inaugurated the New Covenant, (which was implicit within the Abrahamic Covenant), Gal. 3:15-19, 23-25.
* **The Abrahamic Covenant included Jews and Gentiles in its scope**, Gen. 12:1-3.
* **Blessing.** This is a general term for God’s favour and gracious gifts. Jews and Gentiles would share in the spiritual blessings that the Messiah would release to the world – righteousness by faith in His atoning death and the gift of the Spirit, Gal. 3:1-14.

Physical protection and provision were more explicitly included for the physical descendants of Abraham, Gen. 15:14.

**“Seed” is understood in three ways.**

1) **Abraham would have many** **physical descendants**, “A great nation”, Gen. 12:2, “As the dust of the earth”, 13:16, “multiply you exceedingly”, 17:2, “Father of many nations”, 17:4-6, “Multiplying I will multiply your descendants”, 22:17, “Deut. 1:10-11.

2) **From those descendants “The Seed”** **would come,** Gen. 3:15, Gal. 3:16, 4:4, Acts 2:29-30, 13:22-23, Heb. 2:16.

3) **The seed is also a corporate term for all who are in the Seed, the Messiah**, Gal. 3:26-29.

* **A Great Nation.**

This primarily refers to the physical descendants of Abraham, Deut. 4:6-8, but has spiritual application as well, 1Peter 2:9.

* **A Great Name.**

This is personal to Abraham, “I am the God of Abraham”, Exodus 3:6, and “Friend of God” Isaiah 41:8.

* **The Land.**

**This promise was made exclusively to Abraham, and his physical descendants through Isaac, as an everlasting Covenant,** Gen. 17:19, 26:1-5, Exodus 3:6-8, and see earlier listing of Scriptures.

**How did the coming of Jesus change the situation?**

**Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew**, Gal. 4:4. There are many examples of this in the Gospels.

**He inaugurated the Kingdom of God** – This was a completely new concept to Judaism. The expectation of Jewish scholars, (and John the Baptist, Matt. 3:10-12, c.f. 11:2-6), was of the Messianic age that would precede the final judgement.

**The Kingdom of God as Jesus preached and demonstrated** was a kingdom in the hearts and lives of all who chose to follow Him, not the universal and personal rule on earth by the Messiah.

**A watershed** happened with the ministry of John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, Matt. 11:7-19. **John fulfilled the role of “the breaker”,** Micah 2:12-13 opening the confinement of the sheepfold (hedge of the Law) so that the sheep (Israel) could follow their Messiah King into the freedom of His new Kingdom.

**A transition** began with the coming of Jesus; **He fulfilled the Law and the prophets,** **climaxing in His death and resurrection**, making the Old Covenant obsolete and introducing the New Covenant.

**Anticipating the destruction of the Temple** (which would soon be redundant), John 2:19, Matt. 24:1-2, He declared Himself to be **the true temple**, Matt. 12:5-6, John 2:18-22, and indicated that payment of Temple tax was no longer mandatory, Matt.:17:22-27.

He claimed **lordship over the Sabbath**, Matt. 12:1-8.

**He** **declared the food laws obsolete**, Matt. 15:10-20.

**He stated that** **His imminent death was to fulfil the Scriptures**, Matt. 26:52-56.

These changes did not come into force until His death and resurrection, Heb. 8:13, 9:15-17 but He could speak of them as “done deal” while He lived.

Following His resurrection He explained that the recent events were in fulfilment of the Scriptures – Law and Prophets, Luke 24:25-27, and Law, Prophets and Psalms (writings), 24:44-46.

**Paul adopted the same procedure with Jewish leaders in Rome**, Acts 28:23.

**The sheep (believing Israel) were soon to be joined by the “other sheep” (Gentiles) in one flock with one Shepherd**, John 10:16, c.f. Matt. 10:5-6, 15:24 – **the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles was taken away by His sacrificial death**, fulfilling the Law that excluded the Gentiles and kept Israel confined, Eph. 2:11-22.

**Jews under the custodianship of the Law**, Gal. 3:23-25, 4:1-3 (note the pronoun “we” i.e. “we Jews”, c.f. 2:15), **and Gentiles** without the (Sinai) Law, Rom. 2:12-16, Eph. 2:11-12, are **both reconciled to God in one body through the cross, and full members of the household of God,** Eph. 2:16-19.

**What about the “Sermon on the Mount”?**

**Jesus affirmed the inspiration and validity of the Law and the Prophets in every detail,** Matt. 5:17-19.

**He was neither a lawbreaker nor a destroyer of the Law. His purpose was to fulfil it – to bring it to its true and intended goal**, c.f. Romans 10:1-4.

**Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Law** **by His perfect obedience**, John 17:4, Heb. 10: 5-7, **and His atoning death,** Heb. 10:8-10.

**Jesus said “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail”**, Luke 16:17.

**During His lifetime He** **fulfilled most of the prophecies** contained in the Torah, so clearly much more than “jots and tittles” have in deed passed from the Law. Some parts, particularly the full restoration of Israel, remain to be fulfilled, so **we need to pay heed to the as yet unfulfilled Scriptures** and give them their full weight. **Peter said “All things that God had spoken by His holy prophets” must precede the return of Jesus**, Acts 3:20-21

**Deut. 30:1-3 describes** **a conditional return** to the Land, on the basis of repentance; **v4-10 describe a different scenario** where the LORD takes the initiative, restoring a widely scattered people and then “circumcising their heart” to love the LORD their God …

**Ezekiel takes up this theme in chapter 34** where The LORD God seeks out His sheep and restores them to the land, v11-16, 23-30. He will do it **for the sake of His holy Name** – bring them to their own land and cleanse them and give them a new spirit, His Holy Spirit, 36:22-38. The process of national restoration is pictured in chapter 37 by the vision of the dry bones.

**Jesus made a number of statements arising out of the Law, some from the 10 commandments and some from other parts of the Torah**, Matt. 5:21-48. These statements are connected with the preceding verses, 19-20. **What are “these commandments” in v19?** Does this phrase link backwards to the Law or to the commandments that Jesus is about to give?

**The context is “the Kingdom of Heaven (God)”** – the new movement that Jesus has inaugurated (note that He is addressing His disciples, 5:1, not the crowd). The punctilious observance of the letter of the Law by the Pharisees did not even gain entrance to the Kingdom, let alone gain stature within it, v20, c.f. Nicodemus, John 3:3 etc.

We have already seen that Jesus, prior to the cross, declared all foods clean and cancelled the obligation for His disciples to pay Temple (redemption) tax, and proclaimed Himself as Lord of the Sabbath.

**So, what is happening in Matt. 5:21-48?**

Some interpret these statements as Jesus’ commentary on the Law that was given through Moses – revealing the inner meaning and spiritual significance and strengthening the practical application. Surely this does not do justice to the situation.

**Jesus is no mere interpreter of Moses** – He is the incarnate Lord who spoke through Moses, the Word made flesh, the eternal Torah in human form. On each occasion He refers to what has been said in the past, and then comes **“But I say unto you”.** This is **a new command, coming direct from the mouth of the Creator of Heaven and earth,** regarding the Kingdom He has come to establish - “all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John …”, Matt 11:13 (in the context of the Kingdom of Heaven that had just broken loose).

**We now have the law of the Messiah King Jeshua** in place of the temporary laws given for to a particular people for a specific period of time. **Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law from God**, Exodus 19:3, 20:21, and the people stood at the foot of the mountain, 19:17.

**Jesus left the multitudes and took His disciples with Him up a mountain to teach the laws of His new Kingdom,** Matt. 5:1.

**The teaching of Jesus, explained, modelled, amplified and applied by the Apostles, regulates the life of every disciple, both Jew and Gentile, without reference to the Sinai Law, including the 10 commandments.** This sounds like a very radical statement – it is, and it is gloriously true!

There is, of course, a **considerable area of overlap in ethical teaching**, which is unsurprising as both come from the same source, rooted in the unchanging character of God, but **now we are closer to the Source and have it fresh from His own lips.**

It is also **a dangerous truth** that can be misinterpreted and misapplied, as Paul noted in Romans 3:8, and 6:1. He did not argue for a return to the Law, v14-15, but a revelation of what it means to be united with Christ, v2-7.

**The Law is neither a means of justification nor the route to sanctification.** We are not to come under the “yoke of the Law”, Gal. 5:1 but rather to live in true liberty from the world and the flesh, in the life of the Spirit, 5:13-26. Sabbath and tithing illustrate the ambivalence of many Christians and Churches with regard to the Law – how do you respond to this statement?

**How does this affect Jewish believers in Jeshua?**

**Paul provides an ideal example**. He was an observant Jew, par excellence, Phil. 3:4-6, Acts 22:1-5. **He stated that he had died to the Law** as a result of being crucified with Christ, Rom. 6:14-15, Gal. 2:19-20. His focus has radically altered, abandoning the pursuit of righteousness by the Law in favour of righteousness by faith in Christ and his all consuming passion is to know Christ in increasing measure, and encourages others to do the same, Phil. 3:7-16.

**Paradoxically he died to the Law through the Law** – the Law that explained the need for and prophesied the coming of the Saviour who satisfied all its righteous requirements, Rom. 3:21-22, 10:4. He taught that the position of Jews under the Law was temporary and had been rendered inoperative by the work of Messiah, Gal. 4:21-25, 4:1-6.

It is quite clear that **Paul believed that he was free of all legal obligations to keep the written and oral commandments of the Sinai law.** Nevertheless **he retained his Jewish identity**, “**I am indeed** **a Jew** …” Acts 22:3, “I am **a Pharisee**, the son of a Pharisee …” 23:6, “I also am **an Israelite**, **of the seed of Abraham**, of the tribe of Benjamin …” Rom. 11:1. He referred to **unbelieving Jews**, who wished to kill him, Acts 21:36, as **“brothers and fathers”,** and **spoke to them in Hebrew**, Acts 22:1-2. He retained an abiding bond of identity with his people and a **deep emotional attachment** to them, Rom. 9:1-5.

When he travelled his first place of witness was **the local synagogue, on the Sabbath**, e.g. Acts 13:14-16, Rom. 1:16. He made special **collections for relief of needy Jewish believers** in Jerusalem, Rom. 15:25-32.

**He did not stir up controversy with fellow Jews about Jewish laws and customs**, Acts 24:12-13, but rather **expounded the message about Jesus from the Law and the Prophets**, e.g. 9:20-22, 13:14-4, 28:23.

**Paul continued to observe Jewish practices** **when it was appropriate or helpful in his ministry**, 1Cor. 9:20. He was eager to be **in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost**, Acts 20:16. He **participated in a religious ritual** in the Temple, supporting men who were marking the completion of a vow, in order to demonstrate that he was **not opposed to the keeping of the Law by Jerusalem Jews who believed in Jesus**, Acts 21:18-26.

It appears that there was to be a meeting at which Paul would address “the assembly” on this issue, but events prevented this from taking place, v27-28 ff. The issue seems to have **been a rumour that Paul was forbidding Jews to circumcise their children** and telling them to abandon Jewish customs, neither of which was true – **he personally circumcised Timothy**, Acts 16:1-3 and was now attending the Feast of Pentecost.

**Paul did not see these things as a matter of legal requirement** but as **expressing Jewish identity and solidarity with fellow Jews.** **He adapted** to the context for the sake of the Gospel, “to the Jews I became as a Jew …” 1Cor. 9:20, and “worshipped the God of his fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets”, Acts 24:14.

He even showed respect to a very hostile High Priest, Acts 23:1-5, c.f. Stephen Acts 7:1-2.

**Paul was comfortable in his Jewishness** but **would not allow its practices to be imposed as a matter of legal obligation**, Col. 2:16-23; Sabbath observance and food are matters of personal conscience and interpretation and love, Rom.14:1-13.

**Peter had a vision that demonstrated the purpose of the food laws** (keeping Jews separate from Gentiles) and applied Jesus’ teaching about declaring all foods clean, Acts 10:10-16. The remainder of the account describes the outworking of the vision, see v28-29, 34-35, 48 and 11:12 and 17-18. When Peter subsequently broke table fellowship with Gentiles, because of fear of the opinions of other Jews, Paul publicly rebuked him, Gal. 2:11-14. **He was also very blunt with those Jews who tried to impose Jewish law on Gentiles**, Gal. 1:6-9, 5:12, 6:12-13.

**Circumcision is a special case.** It was part of the Sinai Covenant, Lev. 12:3, but **its origins were in the Covenant with Abraham**, John 7:22, Gen. 17:9-14 and 23-27. It was a seal of the faith that Abraham already had, Rom. 4:11. Circumcision is not required for Jews or Gentiles on the basis of the Law of Moses, but it is essential for the **physical descendants of Abraham** until the end of time, 17:9-14. It became a particular issue as they entered Canaan, Josh. 5:1-7.

**It acts as a permanent identity marker**, Col. 4:11. By neglect or choice Jews could exclude themselves from Jewish identity and privileges – “cut off from his people, broken My covenant”, v14.

**Physical circumcision has no positive spiritual significance per se**, as recognized in the Law and the prophets, Deut. 10:16, 30:6, and Jer. 9:23-26. Paul made a similar point to Jewish believers, Rom. 3:25-3:2.

**What about Gentiles?**

**Gentiles have never been under the Law**. Their revelation of God came through **creation and conscience** and God will judge them on that basis, Rom. 1:18-32, 2:14-16. Paul spoke to the people in Athens in these terms, and then preached the message of the Gospel, without any reference to the Law, Acts 17:22-31.

**Gentiles do not become subject to the Sinai Law, in any respect, as an outcome of receiving the Gospel.** The elders in Jerusalem made this clear, Acts 15:28-29, repeated in 21:25. Paul was very sharp with Gentiles who had succumbed to the Judaisers in their midst – “you must be mad!” Gal.3:1-4, 4:10-11.

**They must not exchange their previous yoke of pagan practices for another one, Jewish Law**, 5:1. The same danger still faces us today, sometimes under the guise of “Torah studies” - not simply as a desire to learn from that era of “salvation history” but to add to the simplicity of the Gospel, Gal. 1:14, 2Cor. 11:1-4. Beware of “angels of light” 2Cor. 11:13-15, Gal. 1:8.

**How does it affect the unity of the Body of Christ/Messiah (Messianic Congregation/Christian Church)?**

**“… He (Jesus) broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments, in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity …”** Eph. 2:13-22.

This was not always the case in the NT church and through the centuries and is not universally true today either.

**For many years after the ascension of Jesus the church was almost exclusively Jewish** and continued to worship in the Temple, Acts 3:1, 5:12, 20, and 42. By the time Paul made his final visit to Jerusalem at the Feast of Shavuot this seems to have remained the case.

While **the church in Jerusalem** had freed Gentiles from observance of the Law, Acts 15:13-29, confirmed in 21:25, it **remained solidly Jewish**, v20-21, and followed Jewish practices and customs, including the Temple v23, 26. They expected Paul to conform and he had no difficulty in so doing within this context.

Conversely, **some churches were almost exclusively Gentile**, e.g. Corinth and such issues did not arise. Paul did not encourage them to adopt Jewish ways although he emphasized their heritage in and connection with all that had gone before, e.g. “Our fathers …” 1Cor. 10:1-11. Paul severely rebuked Jewish teachers when they tried to infiltrate the Law among Gentile believers.

**Rome was a mixed church that was having difficulties with unity and integration** – particularly as Jews had been temporarily excluded from the city by edict of Claudius, Acts 18:2, returning to find a Gentile majority in place. Each group seemed to believe its superiority over the other, Jews on account of their heritage and Gentiles who believed that they had replaced Israel. This is a key to understanding the epistle to the Romans.

**“Christian” treatment of Jews down the centuries has served to harden the hearts and strengthen the blindness of Jews to the Person of Jesus**, rather than “make them jealous” for that relationship. It is a sad story but, happily, there is evidence of change on both sides of the divide. Many Christians (sadly disproportionately few in Europe and N. America than elsewhere) are reaching out to Jews and to Israel in love and friendship, helping to heal the ancient wounds. **Many Jews are responding and standing in support of Christians who are suffering for their faith**.

**Messianic congregations are growing in number, including within Israel**. While there is relationship and fellowship between individuals and groups the distinctive character of churches and congregations persists and the membership either mainly Jewish or mainly Gentile. This can be seen as division and disunity, but is this necessarily the case?

**In the NT situation the church was not primarily an individual congregation but the body of believers across the city/region**, held together by their common faith in Jeshua, love for and recognition of one another, and respect for apostolic authority. There is room for multiple expressions of worship, each respecting the validity of the others. Jewish believers are free to worship in a Jewish way, welcoming others to join them as equals, (the older/younger brother idea seems foreign to the NT). Conversely Gentile believers should not manifest impatience and superiority, inquiring “Why do they not call themselves Christian Churches rather than Messianic Congregations?”, ignoring the centuries of pain and the implication for Jews of leaving their national identity and joining the “Gentile Tribe”, effectively cutting off the possibility of witnessing to fellow Jews. The process of reconciliation is painful and, for some, even dangerous so we need wisdom and patience in the process, and preferring one another in love.

**In the NT we see a process of transition following divine intervention**. John and Jesus inaugurated a new movement in history, the Kingdom of God, but the transition to its final expression is still in progress. During His life time Jesus spoke of changes that would only take place after His sacrifice as if they were present tense, but did not immediately implement them.

**The gathering of the “other sheep” did not begin to happen until years after His departure**, and the truth about this did not register with the Jerusalem church till the episode of Peter’s visit to Cornelius and Paul’s subsequent missionary activity. Paul was given a personal revelation of the mystery of the inclusion of the gentiles as gentiles, Eph. 3.

**We should not be impatient with one another but be encouraged that Arab believers are understanding the mystery of Israel in God’s purposes and Jewish believers are embracing fellowship with them**, both groups risking misunderstanding or worse, and that young Arab and Jewish believers are committing themselves to one another in a counter- cultural way.

**Some pitfalls to avoid**

* **Gentile believers should resist the temptation to take on the external trappings of Judaism** – it is false and often looks ridiculous to other Christians and puts them off the truths of God’s purposes for Israel. You are a Gentile – love Israel but also be authentic.
* **It is good to learn from the whole of Scripture but beware of a false approach to “Torah studies”** that will bring you into bondage to the Law.
* **The modern “Two Covenant Theology” is a heresy.** There is only one way to the Father – through Jesus. The idea that Jews have a different track, as descendants of Abraham is false. They, like Gentiles, are saved by sharing a faith like Abraham’s, not by faith in Abraham.

**Do we have any laws to keep now?**

**Yes, lots of them! We are free to be the people we were made to be.**

1. **The Law of Christ and his Apostles**; Gospels, Acts, and Letters - Gal. 6:2 is one example.
2. **The Law of Love**, e.g. John 15:17, Rom. 13:8-10, Gal. 5:14, James 2:8, 1John 4:21.
3. **The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**, Romans 8:2, Gal. 5:18.
4. **The Law of Liberty**, James 1:25; freedom from the power of the flesh and the world, Gal. 5:16, 6:14-16.
5. **The Law written on our hearts in the New Covenant**, replacing the one that is now obsolete, Heb. 8:8-13.