

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Dissertation:

“The Role of the Law in the Sanctification of the Believer Today:

A Brief Introduction to Pronomianism”

Submitted to Dr. Myron Kauk and Dr. Todd Buck,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

BIBL989:

Dissertation Research and Writing (A08)

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April 3, 2024

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Dedicated to My Mother

There are so many people to acknowledge in helping me achieve this goal. My family has been a blessing—spiritually and financially—on this journey. I am grateful to my beloved wife Stacia and our sons, David and Noah, and daughter Rebekah (in Heaven), all three of whom were born as I worked on this dissertation. Again, I thank my mother, who lovingly and financially supported me, in addition to the contributions of my Oma and estranged father. I also wish to acknowledge the guidance of Dr. Kauk, Dr. Buck, and Dr. Cannon (and his family) and some of the theological influences on my life, ranging from John MacArthur and Charles Stanley, all the way to Tim Hegg and Walter Kaiser Jr. Above all, I'm most grateful to YHWH who created, rebirthed, and continues to work in this saved sinner. All glory goes to Him.

Introduction: The Law of YHWH is Perfect

In examining the theological landscape of Christianity today, one of the most contentious and controversial doctrines is that of the commanded instructions of God, i.e., the Law. Since it was first made known by man's conscience in Eden and later codified at Mt. Sinai, the Law has challenged believers of all generations since its nature is debated to the point that it has become misunderstood. From the halls of academia to the pulpit of the local church, the lecterns at seminaries, to study groups within homes, the Law has been cast as either a burdensome yoke and misguided means of salvation or a collection of rules and regulations by which believers may consciously choose to abide. Sadly, it appears today that the discussion on the Law has stagnated and there is no longer an appetite to seriously discuss this doctrine lest one be labeled a dissenter or, worse yet, a works-based believer.

Just as Martin Luther and numerous other Reformers protested against the Roman Catholic Church and restored the biblical understanding of soteriology, there should be a protest against the universal church's misinterpretation of the commanded instructions of God. The issue is not one pertaining to soteriology but sanctification. The Law cannot be—nor ever was—taught in Scripture as a means of salvation. That most of God's commanded instructions, particularly those in the so-called "Old" Testament, have been interpreted as abolished in part or whole strikes at the heart of how one understands the character, holiness, and divine will of God. While the majority of denominations and congregations worldwide do not fully embrace and practice the commanded instructions of God other than those labeled "moral," there are believers emerging within academia and local congregations which seek to restore a fuller adherence to the Law as a means of sanctification. The theological concept which they abide by has become known as pronomianism, which, simply stated, means being "pro" or "positive towards" the Law as opposed to antinomianism, being anti-Law.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation will survey the believer's relationship to the Law according to prominent individuals and denominations throughout Church history. While not an exhaustive treatment, it will identify the emergence of dominant interpretations that have been taught throughout the centuries and how notable differences have resulted in the absence of unanimity, posing more questions than answers. It will also analyze antinomian tendencies within Christian denominations today. The chapter will conclude by exploring examples of pronomian movements and practices throughout Church history, revealing that despite the contention of some, there were Christians who interpreted the entirety of the Law as remaining applicable to a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2 will define "pronomianism" as a concept by those employing the term directly or indirectly and follow with a redefinition that gives greater clarity. Thirteen principles will be contended for the movement to guide its role as a serious theological interpretation. Its tenets—physical circumcision, kashrut, and the appointed festivals—will be scripturally justified. The intention of this chapter is not to formulate a rebuttal to the interpretations of the majority view pertaining to key passages, but rather, to provide an overview of pronomianism and the current literature written by those who adopt or align with the theological position.

Chapter 3 will explore the practice and meaning of circumcision, contending that the practice itself was not condemned by the apostle Paul, but rather, its interpretation as a matter of soteriology. Scripture attests that both Jew and Gentile believers practiced this ritual as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, which Paul refers to as the gospel (Gal. 3:8, New American Standard Bible, 1995). As with any commandment of God, it should never be understood as relating to salvation but as a means of sanctification. The immediate claims of this theological position being associated with "Judaizing" will be dispelled, followed by contextual considerations of its practice in the life of a contemporary believer.

Chapter 4 will explore kashrut and contend that the designation of clean and unclean animals (and sole consumption of the former) is affirmed in the Scriptures. As these commandments were directly associated with the holiness of God, the notion that they were rendered inoperative challenges this divine attribute. This chapter, like the one thereafter, will also explore those passages from Scripture which are cited to argue the majority view that the Law—in part or whole—is no longer abiding upon the believer as represented by prominent figures within Christianity. It will respond with pronomian rebuttals that provide an alternative interpretation drawn from recent scholarship.

Chapter 5 will explore the appointed festivals of God, including Saturday Sabbath, highlighting that the Scriptures attest to their ongoing nature before, during, and after the ministry of Jesus Christ and His disciples. The festivals are important annual markers to the glory of God, each one prophetically connected to Christ, and their practice today preserves biblical history, strengthens the memory of the often-forgetful believer, and celebrates the sovereign accomplishments of God in the lives of His covenantal community.

The conclusion will argue that there is far more study to be undertaken regarding this emerging theological interpretation of Scripture.

The literal-historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics will be employed throughout the dissertation, challenging theological frameworks created post-Scripture by denominations in Church history that intentionally divide the canon of Scripture and render large portions of its contents abolished (Old Testament, New Testament, civil, ceremonial, and moral law labels, etc.). Select passages from Scripture will be exegeted to establish that the Law was not abolished by Jesus Christ but rather fulfilled to be emulated by His believers through discipleship as they are conformed into His image. The commandments are practiced to glorify God and do not contribute to the righteousness of a believer before Him. The absence of academic volumes dedicated to the study of pronomianism does not imply that there is no

validity in the theological interpretation, for discussion has appeared intermittently in scholarship. The numerous sources used to complement the pronomian contentions in this dissertation attest to this. Most notably within the denomination of Messianic Judaism and various Torah-observant independent congregations, the theological term “pronomianism” (pro-Law) has emerged in predominantly non-scholarly circles. While still evolving as a concept, it is the doctrine that affirms the operative nature of God’s commandments, specifically those in the Old Testament (henceforth OT). The mainstream Christian interpretation teaches that only the “moral” laws are binding on believers (whereas the “ceremonial” and “civil” laws are not). Pronomianism, however, teaches that all laws are to be practiced and are intended for universal application, not solely by the redeemed ethnic Jew. Pronomianism affirms that the laws in Scripture can still be applied, either literally or non-literally. The academic arguments for the Law being wholly fulfilled so as to be abolished or for two-thirds of the Law no longer being operative appear to be based on anti-Judaism, the specter of Hellenism, and faulty exegesis of Scripture. This has, regrettably, resulted in three false narratives: the Law is solely “Jewish,” the Law was historically understood to be salvific in nature, and the majority of the Law is no longer binding on a believer (while somehow maintaining that God and His attribute of holiness are unchanging).

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it (Matt. 5:17–18). The Law is perfect, full of wisdom, right, pure, enduring, and truly righteous (Ps. 19:7–10). The consequences and penalty for breaking the Law were nailed to the cross at the death of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:14), not the Law itself. The Law tutors Christians in the grace and truth that is Jesus Christ (John 1:17), whose orthodoxy and orthopraxy believers are to emulate through discipleship. The Law was never taught as a means of salvation by works but to demonstrate the need of salvation by the work of a Savior, Jesus Christ (Isa. 53:4–5). The Law cannot save and has never saved anyone. It has never been a means of works-based justification

(Eph. 2:8–10). Believers are to be neither against the Law nor fearful of it. The Law reveals humanity's sin nature, its need of a Savior, and a means of holiness separated from the nations. The Law is not a means of salvation; rather, it is one means of sanctification and produces fruit attesting to God's justifying work. For

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.
They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.
Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;
Let them not rule over me;
Then I will be blameless,
And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer (Ps. 19:7-14).

Chapter One:

A Brief Survey of Church History on the Role of the Law and the Christian and Evidence of Pronomian Practice

Pronomianism is a relatively new theological term. It is one that finds little presence in the library of academia in name but not in practice. Since pronomianism pertains to the relationship between the Law¹ and the Christian, it is necessary to briefly survey the scholarly literature that has been penned on this theological perspective. Such a survey must recognize that the majority of scholarship (and Christian denominations), conservative and liberal alike, teach that a notable number of the commandments of God as instructed throughout the Old Testament no longer apply to the post-first century Christian. There are differences in why this interpretation is reached and how to compartmentalize those laws that are relevant (i.e., “moral” laws), but the predominant view is that the Law is no longer to be practiced in its entirety.

Such an ecclesial survey is no easy feat. For example, the Reformed view contains a wide range of interpretations ranging from the theonomic and traditional, to Covenantal Theology, to New Covenant Theology (distinct from the former and the theological system known as Dispensationalism). Likewise, the role of the Law seemingly varies between classical, revised, and progressive Dispensationalism, not to mention the variations within Anglicanism, Baptist, Lutheranism, Pentecostalism, Eastern Orthodoxy Roman Catholicism, and those denominations outside of mainstream Christianity, such as Seventh-day Adventism. Then there is the rise of Messianic Judaism and those movements associated with the denomination (i.e., “Torah Observant”). This dissertation does not intend to exhaustively

¹ In using the term Law, while discussed more in the next chapter, the word is being used to encompass the majority of commanded instructions found in the first five books of the OT. While the term Law does not best capture the meaning of תּוֹרָה, it’s unfortunate translation means it would be difficult to contend a more accurate translation (i.e., Instruction) without confusing the reader. There will be times throughout the dissertation, that “Law” and “Torah” will be used synonymously, lest the context is stated.

explore differing views on the Law and the Christian and, by extension, the man-made dichotomy of the Law versus the gospel, nor to compare each of these denominational views with pronomianism itself. Yet this brief survey will form a helpful theological snapshot.

The Church post-First Century – from Alexandria and Antioch to Rome and the East

In the centuries after the ministry of Jesus Christ and His disciples, in which Gentiles were grafted into the predominately Jewish ekklesia of God,² there were three distinct schools of interpretation: the Alexandrian Fathers, the Antiochene Fathers, and the Marcionites. The Alexandrian Fathers divided the OT laws into the ceremonial and moral (the ceremonial laws being abrogated by Christ), maintained a continuity between the testaments (though not necessarily their equality or relevancy in all aspects), and held that the allegorical (spiritual) interpretation of Scripture was the purest approach, whereas the literal approach was sufficient for the lay believer.³ The Antiochene Fathers proceeded in the opposite theological direction;⁴ they advocated a literal rather than spiritual approach to Scripture, rejected allegory as a credible means of scriptural interpretation, and gave primacy to the New Testament (henceforth NT) to the extent that the OT was no longer authoritative. They

² Though speculative, Skarsaune suggests, “the earliest believers reacted in a consistently Jewish way by no longer holding the Torah to be the ultimate authority [for] there are ancient rabbinic sayings that indicate that in the messianic age there will be changes in the Torah, with some commandments being abrogated... although these sayings are largely suppressed in later rabbinic tradition, they show that the attitude of the early community was hardly un-Jewish in the context of pre-70 Israel.” Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 161.

³ John O’Keefe, “Alexandrian Exegesis,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception.*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 765–767.

⁴ An alternative perspective to these first two schools of interpretation is worth considering: that it was not exegetical but rather theological. Darren M. Slade, “Patristic Exegesis: The Myth of the Alexandrian-Antiochene Schools of Interpretation,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 2 (2019): 155–176.

argued that Christ's teachings overshadowed all those prior to Him.⁵ The Marcionites, named after a theological commentator who would rightly be labeled a heretic, rejected the entirety of the OT, including any allusions to or influence of it in the NT, and insisted that there be a distinction between the two testaments and their representation of God. Maricon theologially abhorred Judaism and appeared to teach a blend of Docetism and Gnosticism.⁶ It is worth noting that Gnosticism believed that the laws of the OT were not authored by God or even Satan but by a lesser god called Demiurge, who divided it into three sections: pure laws (i.e., the Ten Commandments), impure laws (e.g., laws pertaining to civil matters), and symbolic laws (e.g., those of a ceremonial nature, such as the festivals). Interpreting the spiritual as greater than the material, they did not see the physical value of the Law, especially after the arrival of Christ (cf. *Letter to Flora* preserved in Epiphanius' *Panarion* 33.3.1–7, 10).⁷

After the Roman Emperors Constantine and Theodosius integrated and legalized Christianity throughout the empire, the emerging Roman Catholic church officially divided the Law into three sections: ceremonial, civil, and moral. This tripartite division was pioneered by Thomas Aquinas in his foundational work *Summa Theologica* (particularly questions 99–105) written between 1265–1274.⁸ Aquinas believed that any adherence to those laws not categorized as moral was sinful and they were never intended for ongoing practice but rather served a temporary and now redundant purpose.⁹ After the 1054 schism

⁵ John O'Keefe, "Antiochene Exegesis," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 256–259.

⁶ Paul Foster, "Marcion: His Life, Works, Beliefs, and Impact," *The Expository Times* 121, no. 6 (2010): 269–80.

⁷ Su-Min Ri, "The Gnostic Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Canon & Culture* 3, no. 2 (2009): 53–89. Additionally, Manicheism, a hybrid of Buddhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, rejected the OT outright and had a strongly negative view of its contents (Augustine's *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*).

⁸ Centuries later, it was preserved as the confessional standard in creeds such as the *Belgic Confession* (1563; article 25) and *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563; article 7). Christian Reformed Church in America, *Belgian Confession*, <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/BelgicConfession.pdf>; Church of England, *Articles of Religion*, <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion>.

that differentiated the Roman Catholic church with Eastern Orthodoxy, the latter church went on to teach the preparatory nature of the OT, seeing it as unified with the NT yet interpreting it “spiritually” (a hybrid of allegorical, Christological, eschatological, moral, and typological approaches). The Law was understood to be pedagogical in nature, for “Paul declared the end of the old Law and the emergence of a new covenant mediated by Jesus the Lord... however, such a categorical attitude against the Law did not obstruct the way of using sapiential material (e.g., Proverbs, Psalms) for paraenetical purposes.”¹⁰ Therefore, in the mind of the Eastern Orthodox believer, the authority of the OT submits to that of the NT in light of Jesus Christ’s ministry.

The Church during the Reformation – Luther, Calvin, Anglicans, and Anabaptists

At the dawn of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the dissenting Catholic monk Martin Luther evolved on his views regarding the Law,¹¹ interpreting the moral laws of the Catholic tripartite model as the most important and binding on the believer while conceding passing value in some civil laws. Luther believed that the gospel and doctrine of grace overshadowed the OT, which, when preached, was to submit to the NT, though he acknowledged that some Law existed in the NT (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount). Furthermore, “Luther argued that even the Ten Commandments, which God gave Israel... are binding on Gentiles only because they agree with the New Testament and natural law, in

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (First Image Books: New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 1961–74.

¹⁰ Eugen J. Pentiu, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford Academic, 2014), 178; cf. 169–98.

¹¹ “I divide each commandment into four parts... first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and I consider what the Lord demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.” Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 34.

which God sets forth his plan for human life.”¹² His like-minded colleague Melancthon also adopted the view that the Law had an instructive use for Christians.¹³ In writing about the laws of God, Luther assumed his readers understood that his interpretation pertained only to laws focused on morality, not ceremony or government. Kolb and Trueman note that

Luther analyzed the social (or political) and instructional functions of God's law less than its crushing or theological function. He left its political function largely to secular authorities. His sermons and catechism are filled with examples of the law's instructional use, both in positive exposition of what God expects in every sphere of life from his human creatures and in negative criticism of what has gone wrong with the human performance. The latter instructional functions, of course, as accusation as well. The fact that the law functions apart from the intended use may explain why Luther did not indulge in extensive treatment of its uses.¹⁴

Luther then understood that the moral laws exposed sin and restrained it, but he did not formulate what this looked like on a practical level.

John Calvin pioneered a third function of the Law (*usus renatis*). He saw the moral laws as being the most important and consistent between the two testaments, while the civil and ceremonial laws possessed some, albeit less binding, value to the life of a believer. The whole encompassed “the religion handed down by God to Moses.”¹⁵ Calvin contended that “the law simply shows us our responsibility... the fact that we are required to act in certain ways does not imply that we have the power so to do... for the law simply reminds us of our obligations, while giving no power toward their fulfillment.”¹⁶ Calvin understood attention to

¹² Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 39.

¹³ Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), II.vii.1–15

¹⁶ Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 46.

the Law as sanctification that evidenced obedience to the will of God. This formed the foundation of the Reformed view on the Law. It taught that the Ten Commandments,

as an express summary of the principles and obligations of the moral law, remain in place. To this remaining moral law the Reformed assign three functions: The first use of the law is that of exposing sin. The second is that of restraining wickedness. The third is that of providing moral principles for guiding the life of the Christian believer.¹⁷

Luther and Calvin's writings contained more harmony than opposition. In many ways, their view overlaps with the view of Roman Catholicism, though they would dispute the latter's infusion of soteriology into the function of the Law.

Then came the birth of Anglicism, which created the "Thirty-Nine Articles" in 1571. The seventh article makes clear that Anglicans abide by the Catholic tripartite and believe only the moral laws remain. Sixteenth century theologian Richard Hooker, one of the founding fathers of Anglicanism, was undoubtedly Christocentric in his approach to the OT (cf. *Lawes*, I.14.4; 1:128.3–21). Regarding its laws, he made "much of the notion of *adiaphora*... [employing] this distinction between things that are necessary to salvation and those that are not... assert[ing] that in certain cases even laws established by God and revealed in Scripture may be alterable."¹⁸ Hooker seemingly rejected the immutability of Scripture and did not embrace literalism. As Joyce further illustrates, this interpretation did not apply to moral laws:

In Book III of the *Lawes*, where Hooker is addressing the question whether or not the laws that are set down in scripture are subject to change. During the course of his exposition, Hooker differentiates between the various types of ordinance given by God in the Bible. In one section of his argument he draws a distinction between the 'lawes of the two Tables which were morall', [Lawes, III.11.6; 1:249.23–5] and the 'positive' laws associated with Moses.

¹⁷ Kolb and Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva*, 45. Pronomianism would agree that these are some of the Law's functions.

¹⁸ A. J. Joyce, "Hooker on the Nature and Authority of Scripture," in *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2012), 121.

Again, following Aquinas closely, Hooker declares that moral laws are permanent and changeless and come direct from God; positive laws, however, relate to a specific time and place, are mediated through Moses, and receive the consent of the people; hence the scope of their authority is subject to limitation.¹⁹

Parallel to the Reformers, the Anabaptist movement emphasized moral laws and also gave primacy to the NT and its commands, relegating the OT and its non-moral laws to devotional and historical use. To the Anabaptists and their theological offspring, Christ has interpreted the Mosaic laws.²⁰ Church history scholar Synder, in systematically surveying the theology of Anabaptism, remarks that denominations born of the movement understand the “words of Scripture are all words of God, but they do not carry the same weight or significance in guiding the life of believers... [for] the Bible is not ‘flat’: the Old Testament has been superseded by the New, and within the New Testament Christ's words and example are definitive.”²¹ In considering both the OT and the NT in the matter of Christian ethics and, by extension, the value of OT laws, OT Mennonite professor Janzen is worth quoting at length:

It is better to begin with the genre of story than with that of law, as is done so often not only in Judaism but also in Christian and in religiously detached academic treatments of Old Testament ethics. Story is the literary genre that, next to actual cultic practice, was most important in the transmission of theological ethical instruction in ancient Israel itself. The central mode of transmitting biblical faith was recital. When the Israelite child asked his or her parents for an interpretation of their religious and ethical practices, the father was to reply by telling a story (Deut. 6:20–25). The Old Testament as a whole, in all its diversity, is in a sense a story. Even its legal collections, including the Ten Commandments, have been incorporated into that story in the final canonical text. They no longer function as self contained law codes, as they once did, but have become sermons heard by Israel in a particular story context, whether at Mount Sinai, as part of the proclamation of God's

¹⁹ Joyce, “Hooker on the Nature and Authority of Scripture,” 139.

²⁰ W. R. Estep, “Law and Gospel in the Anabaptist / Baptist Tradition,” *Grace Theological Journal* 12, no. 2 (1991): 189–214.

²¹ Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 162. To be fair, others contend that the generally detached view of the OT portrayed in early Anabaptism may not be historically accurate. J. M. Stayer, “The Varieties of Anabaptist Biblicism: The Weight of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha in Several Sixteenth-century Anabaptist Groups,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 88, no. 3 (2014): 365–72.

covenant (Exodus 20, Numbers 10), or on the Plains of Moab, where Moses exhorts the people to a new life in the new land that they are about to enter (Deuteronomy 12–26). In our quest for the Old Testament's ethical message, then, we stay closest to its own voice if we begin our search by listening to stories modeling the God-pleasing life.²²

In the contemporary Reformed view, there are many varying voices on how Christians are to approach and understand the Law. The main two are the traditional and theonomic approaches. The traditional approach teaches that the

new covenant is the sovereign administration of grace and promise by which the Father consecrates his people to himself by the blood of the Lord Jesus and by the presence of the Holy Spirit for the glory that he has prepared for the elect. This administration is the same in substance as the old covenant (the Mosaic administration), but different in form. The formal difference lies in the coming of Jesus Christ: his atonement, his present ministry, and the work of the Holy Spirit. While the saints before Christ enjoyed many benefits under the Law, the era of the Gospel presents even greater benefits. While the old covenant was an administration of grace, it was also rich in symbols (circumcision, temple, priestly service, the sacrificial system) pointing to the grace-to-come in Jesus Christ. While the new covenant has fewer symbols (baptism, Lord's Supper), it is an administration rich in grace.²³

This marks the clear distinction between the Law and the gospel according to the Reformed interpretation. Shaped by Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, VanGemeeren writes:

In the Mosaic administration both promises and threats were attached to obedience to the law. Positively, the threats themselves were intended to stimulate sinners to repent and to seek his grace. The threats, nevertheless, open up a function of the Law that is antithetical to the Gospel. The Law renders us without excuse, excludes us from the promises of life, condemns us (cf. Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19)... and cannot be fulfilled in the flesh on account of the weakness of our own nature (Rom. 8:3). Hope only lies in the Gospel, because Moses' law demands perfect obedience and righteousness (cf. Rom. 10:5). 103 The Law is not defective, but people are. They cannot be justified by the works of the law because they fail to keep the law... Every child of

²² Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 1–2.

²³ Willem A. VanGemeeren, "The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 36.

God under the old covenant was justified by the promise in Christ. The Law without Christ and the Spirit is dead and brings condemnation.²⁴

The moral laws, as opposed to the others, are seen as a means of sanctification that teach obedience, freedom, perfection, righteousness, and order.²⁵

The Reformed theologian's view of the Law and the relationship between the OT and the believer is more involved. They acknowledge "some discontinuities with the Mosaic law (or laws) are *redemptive-historical* in character and pertain to the coming of the new covenant and the finished work of Christ, while others are cultural in character and pertain to simple changes of time, place, or lifestyle... [though t]he latter are conceptually unrelated to the former."²⁶ This second point broadens the limiting label of moral laws and contends that the civil law must also be considered. Theonomists "repudiate the sacred/secular dichotomy of life that is the effect of certain extrascriptural, systematic conceptions of biblical authority that have recently infected the Reformed community."²⁷ Political institutions and their leaders are particularly important, for they have the greatest control and influence in society and must therefore align with the Messianic kingdom. This leads to reconstruction of every area of life in accordance with the "holy principles" of the Scriptures.²⁸ Simply stated, the "law revealed by Moses to Israel was intended as a model for surrounding cultures[;]" this, inconsistently, does not include those laws labeled as ceremonial by the theologian,²⁹ despite the expectation that in the OT, those that believe in God were to practise the appointed times.

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ VanGemenen, "The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective," 54. This then implies other such laws did not, an incorrect assumption to the Pronomian.

²⁶ Greg L. Bahsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 100.

²⁷ Ibid., 117.

²⁸ Ibid., 118.

²⁹ Ibid., 131.

The Church in Recent Centuries – Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology, and Pentecostalism

Centuries later, John Nelson Darby sought to compartmentalize the Scriptures into dispensations, in which God operated distinctly while also enacting progressive revelation between each. The dispensation of the Law, focused on Israel and the OT (and its laws), has been temporarily replaced by the dispensation of Grace, which focuses on the Church and the NT (and its teachings). Concerning what is now referred to as Classical Dispensationalism, Darby wrote in a letter to a fellow believer that certain theological concepts such as that of moral laws “are never found in scripture”³⁰ and “that he who had been under law was delivered from it, and that it was a schoolmaster up to faith; but that when faith came men were no longer under it.”³¹ Darby rejected the tripartite model, for “the apostle [Paul] speaks of the tables of stone as a ministration of death, and of the whole system received by Moses... as one whole.”³² He then goes on to make explicit his views on the role of the Law:

I do not believe the law or the law's authority is destroyed. I believe those who have sinned under it will be judged by it. I believe it will be written in the heart of Judah and Israel hereafter under the new covenant, the substance of which we have in spirit though not in the letter. It will never pass till it be fulfilled. But Christ is the end of it—the *τέλος*, the completion and end of it – for every one that believes. We are not under it, because we are dead and risen in Him, and the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives—applies to man in flesh; and we are not in flesh, but in the Spirit in Christ risen.³³

³⁰ John Nelson Darby, “Law,” in *Bible Treasury: Volume 2* (n.d.), <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-law/john-nelson-darby-jnd/bible-treasury-volume-2/1a65566>. This letter is an exhaustive treatment by Darby on his views on the Law, and the quotes cited are but a handful.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Scholars who found fault with Darby's theological framework proposed Revised Dispensationalism, which taught that the "New Testament does not reinterpret or transcend Old Testament passages in a way that overrides or cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers" and hence the "primary meaning of a Bible passage is found in that passage."³⁴ These believe that many of the ceremonial and civil laws will be reinstated in the literal Millennium,³⁵ for example, animal sacrifices.³⁶ Until such time, only the moral laws are binding, and only some. The "Law/Gospel issue is foundational to the system of theology commonly termed 'dispensational.'"³⁷ Ryrie makes a distinction between the Law Christ (God) gave to Moses and the "Law of Christ," and then confusingly states:

The Mosaic law has been done away in its entirety as a code. God is no longer guiding the life of man by this particular code. In its place He has introduced the law of Christ. Many of the individual commands within that law are new, but some are not. Some of the ones which are old were also found in the Mosaic law and they are now incorporated into the law of Christ. As a part of the Mosaic law they are completely and forever done away. As part of the law of Christ they are binding on the believer today.³⁸

It is understood, then, that the "Mosaic law naturally ended when God suspended his program with Israel (Rom. 9–11) and inaugurated his program with the church... [yet] God's moral law in and of itself does not change, but its specific application and structure in the Mosaic

³⁴ Michael Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles, CA: Theological Studies Press, 2017), 31.

³⁵ Matthew Bryce Ervin, *One Thousand Years with Jesus: The Coming Messianic Kingdom* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2017), 77–78, 105–16.

³⁶ Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Animal Sacrifice," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 17, no. 50 (2013): 59–61.

³⁷ Wayne G. Strickland, "The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 230.

³⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, "End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, no. 495 (1967): 246.

code ended.”³⁹ Ryrie contends that the Mosaic law is not rephrased but its principles remain. Furthermore, the purpose of the Mosaic Law was a demonstration of the graciousness of God, provision for approaching God, provision for worship, and governance for a theocracy,⁴⁰ in addition to exposure of sin and tutelage in the NT.⁴¹ Differing yet again, Progressive Dispensationalism went on to teach “dispensations [are] not simply [seen] as *different* arrangements between God and humankind, but as *successive* arrangements in the *progressive* revelation and accomplishment of redemption.”⁴² This seeks to minimize the previous tension between the dispensation of Law and that of grace yet maintains a view that only the moral laws are relevant to the contemporary Christian.

New Covenant Theology attempts to provide another option besides (Reformed) covenant theology and Dispensationalism. It differs from the former in that it

does not accept the Covenant[s] of Redemption... of Works... [and] of Grace... [but] views the Mosaic Law as a unit that cannot be divided... affirms that the Mosaic Law as a unit has been fulfilled and is no longer operative for Christians today.... teaches that Christians today are under only the Law of Christ... rejects infant baptism... [and] affirms that the church began at Pentecost and that Israel was not the church in the Old Testament.⁴³

Equally important are its differences from Dispensationalism.⁴⁴ New Covenant theologians teach that the tripartite model is foreign to Scripture and the “Mosaic Law has passed away

³⁹ Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 276–77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 236–39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 240–45.

⁴² Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 47.

⁴³ Michael J. Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (2007): 205–12.

⁴⁴ For example, in comparing New Covenant Theology (NCT) with Progressive Dispensationalism, Lehrer remarks: “[Progressive Dispensationalism] believes that if God says in later revelation that the

with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant... [for] God no longer requires people to follow the Mosaic Law.”⁴⁵ It has been replaced with the Law of Christ “that is applicable to believers today... [which] includes the commands given by Christ and His Apostles.”⁴⁶

The Pentecostalism movement today holds an indistinct view of the Law. Lacking a distinctive hermeneutic, Pentecostals are eclectic in their approach toward the OT and are inconsistent as to which, if any, laws apply today. They appear to be led by experientialism. Due “to their interest in Biblical narratives, Pentecostals use the Old Testament rather eclectically... [and] although some parts of classical Pentecostalism have tended to become legalistic, the legal parts of the Torah have not received much attention.”⁴⁷ Their focus is on narrative value in the OT, similar to that of Mennonites, yet they also distinguish between the Law and the gospel:

Pentecostals will ensure their exposition of Scripture distinguishes between the Old and the New Testaments to prevent misunderstanding over Israel and the Church or to avoid any number of other confusions but they do not first preach law and then gospel as an inseparable yet contrasting pair.⁴⁸

fulfillment of a particular promise is different than the original promise in its Old Covenant context, then the promise *as stated in its original context* must come to pass. The New Covenant fulfillment may expand the promise but it will not change it. NCT asserts that we must read the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament. This means that if the New Covenant fulfillment of an Old Covenant promise changes the nature of the original promise, then we *have no biblical reason to expect the Old Covenant promise will be fulfilled as the promise stood in its Old Covenant context.*” Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006), 224.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁷ Marius Nel, “Pentecostals’ Reading of the Old Testament,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28, no. 2 (2007): 537.

⁴⁸ William K. Kay, “Luther and Pentecostalism,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 37, no. 2 (2017): 92.

While little literature exists specifically on the Pentecostal view of the OT and its laws, it appears most adhere to either the moral laws only, or antinomianism.⁴⁹

The Church and Antinomian Tendencies—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow?

No church or denomination would boldly teach that they are actively against practicing the Law. They all contend to believe that all Scripture is inspired and unchanging and that there are sixty-six books in the scriptural canon. Practically, however, the story differs. The Law (and by extension much of the OT) is often neglected in the pulpit, for many of its books are no longer viewed as applicable to the Christian.⁵⁰ It has some value as narrative, for prophecies about Jesus Christ, and for broad principles, but the NT eclipses the OT in preaching and practice. Much of this is because of the lies taught about the OT, including that it is primarily for Jews, a boring history book, permanently obsolete, overly harsh in its depiction of God, hyper-violent, not spiritually enriching, not practically relevant, burdensome in its laws, and eclipsed by the focus on Jesus in the NT.⁵¹ While not

⁴⁹ Kelebogile Thomas Resane, “‘And they shall make you eat grass like oxen’ (Daniel 4:24): Reflections on Recent Practices in some New Charismatic Churches,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98, no. 1 (2017): 1–17.

⁵⁰ This is not a huge generalization. In a 2019 Pew Research study of 50,000 sermons across denominations, 90% of sermons name a NT book whereas 61% named an OT book. Furthermore, “smaller mainline congregations heard a reference to the Old Testament in 45% of their sermons, compared with 39% at larger mainline churches during the study period.” Pew Research Center, *The Digital Pulpit: A Nationwide Analysis of Online Sermons* (2019): 7, 20. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/12/PF.12.16.19_sermons.analysis.report.pdf. As Criswell rightly observed, the OT is “perhaps the most neglected area of the Bible in modern preaching... [and when used,] it is often only the text for some topical treatise that soon departs from its context.” He attributes this to “modern higher critical attacks on the inspiration of the Bible,” “lack of confidence in the Old Testament... [resulting in OT sermons that] are of necessity topical in nature... possessing little depth of scriptural content and context,” “its value for the New Testament believer is not always clear,” “a disbelief in the miraculous,” “it bores... listeners”, and “the lack of good, current exegetical and expositional commentaries on many of the books of the Old Testament.” W. A. Criswell, “Preaching from the Old Testament,” in *Traditions and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 293–97.

⁵¹ Brent A. Strawn, *Lies My Preacher Told Me: An Honest Look at the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021).

representative of all denominations, Litfin voices a common rhetoric found in Christendom regarding a believer's view of "works":

However important our actions may be (and they are very important indeed), and whatever else they may be doing (they serve a range of crucial functions), they are not "preaching the gospel." The gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching it is inherently verbal behavior. If the gospel is to be communicated at all, it must be put into words.⁵²

Though valiantly seeking to rationalize the importance of words over deeds, Litfin errs in overemphasizing the auditory over the active. Scripture makes clear that Christians are not only to be doers of the Law; they will be known by their fruit (James 1:22–26; cf. Matt. 7:16–20). To continue the agrarian analogy, God instructs and shows believers how to prepare an orchard and, if they follow His instructions, the work of their hands will result in a fruitful harvest. This love, once heard by the redeemed believer, is cultivated and put into action.

Yet most Christians do not believe this. As Reno summarizes, in discussing the Law

the theoretical gestures that have predominated over the last forty years are unified by a metaphysical abhorrence of law and preference for spontaneity. Terms such as "metanarrative," "univocity," "foundationalism," and "presence" suggest determinative principles and authoritative truths. Not surprisingly, these pronomian terms are consistently used to refute, denounce, or discredit.⁵³

Antinomian tendencies abound in mainstream Christianity, for it is erroneous to teach that some commanded instructions of God have continued while others have not. For example, while those in the Reformed circles boldly teach that they are for the Law, in fact, they practice one third of it (the so-called moral law). However justified exegetically, at the end of

⁵² A. Duane Litfin, "You Can't Preach the Gospel with Deeds: And Why It's Important to Say So," *Christianity Today* 56, no. 5 (2012): 41.

⁵³ R. R. Reno, "The Antinomian Threat to Human Flourishing," in *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections*, ed. Robert W. Jenson and Eugene Korn (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 135.

the day two thirds of the Law is no longer binding on the Christian. This is not pro-Law. To be fair, this is true of most denominations and is not an act conducted sinfully so as to see the Law as evil; it is a hermeneutical misinterpretation. As Averbeck rightly notes, there are several misconceptions about antinomianism: “God never really expected that ancient Israel should or would be able to keep the law,” “no one was ever successful at being ‘blameless in the law’” [despite Luke 1:5–6; Phil. 3:4–6], “the Mosaic covenant in which the law is embedded is all about works,” “the law is only a set of rules and does not call for genuine heart devotion to the Lord,” and “we are free from the law.”⁵⁴ Scripture attests otherwise.

Antinomianism, simplified, is defined as being against the Law. In that sense, all believers are antinomian, for “everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).⁵⁵ However, a more formal definition is not as unanimous as one would believe despite the contention of scholarship. Martin Luther may have popularized the term, yet he himself was inconsistent in his views of the Law, seeing it as obsolete in his early writings but then applicable in his later writings.⁵⁶ Jones, in his book on antinomianism, struggles to provide a cohesive definition. The closest is when he writes “antinomians... ridicule the idea that we must attempt to conform our lives to the pattern of Christ, but also to suggest that any work we perform is not our work but Christ’s... reject the idea that the law, accompanied by the Spirit, is a true means of sanctification... [and hold to] a radical opposition between the law and the gospel.”⁵⁷ Antinomians have been labeled as heretics

⁵⁴ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 258–62.

⁵⁵ “If Jesus wiped out the law, which defines sin, then there is no sin. And there is no death, which is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) By virtue of my grandmother or your grandmother dying, today, this is absurd. Further, when God gives His law, He says it is ‘for our good,’ not that it stands against us.” Luke Abaffy, *The Truth: Reformation 2.0* (ATS Press, 2022), 63.

⁵⁶ Tim Cooper, “Antinomianism,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland et al. (Cambridge University Press, UK: 2011), 22.

⁵⁷ Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 125–26.

bound for Hell in Church history, but this caricature is not held by all who use the term against another. Mayordomo also acknowledges the challenge of a definition:

In spite of its obvious derivation from Greek *ἀντί* (against) and *νόμος* (law), antinomianism is not a technical term to denote a clear-cut theological or philosophical position. It can be used loosely to refer to ideas which consider obligation to fixed religious or social laws somehow irrelevant for salvation or for moral behavior... In the absence of a unified normative legal Jewish system, an adjective like “antinomian” points semantically in no clear direction. This semantic vagueness contrasts with a clear pragmatic dimension: the term antinomianism has a predominant polemical function within religious debates, serving mostly to denigrate the opponent’s position as leading to moral anarchy. Furthermore, in its long history since Reformation times the term has become especially attached to discussions surrounding the relationship between gospel and law, grace and wrath, faith and deeds.⁵⁸

The word appears to be defined by one’s theological position and lacks a definition employed across denominational boundaries. It could refer to being against only the moral laws or extend to incorporate the ceremonial and civil. However, as most denominations have abrogated these last two man-made labels, in mainstream use of the term, Christians define antinomianism as against the moral law alone. This is both erroneous and inconsistent; one cannot charge another believer with being against one label of law (moral), yet themselves be against two labels of law (ceremonial and civil).

Forde, while employing the most basic definition of antinomianism, helpfully identifies three types of antinomianism in the church: overt, covert, and linguistic. He writes that the first “asserts that since Christ is the end of the law, law is no longer of theological import and should be removed from the preaching of the church... Law is not a theological matter now that Christ has triumphed.”⁵⁹ The second “passes for a more genuine form of

⁵⁸ Moisés Mayordomo, “Antinomianism,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2010), 234.

⁵⁹ Gerhard Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present,” *Dialog* 22, no. 4 (1983): 247.

piety and high ethical and moral seriousness... it resists overt antinomianism with a shocked disavowal, but then unwittingly takes over many of its arguments in a form which makes them infinitely more insidious and dangerous... [for] instead of a clear *end* to the law covert antinomianism tries to ameliorate the law's stringency by a *change* of the law, either in content or function."⁶⁰ The last "seeks to erase [language], to change it, to blunt its effect by dissolving it in a sea of pluralistic options."⁶¹ All of these tendencies have been evidenced within a Christian denomination. As there is not a fixed and certain definition of antinomianism, such inconsistencies plague the use of the word.

This is not to state that mainstream Christianity is antinomian. There are very few examples in Church history that evidence individuals and groups that are truly against all the laws of God. Both sides have been accused as such. A handful of examples will suffice. Roman Catholic Joachim of Fiore openly appears to be an antinomian according to *Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti* and *Expositio in Apocalipsim*. Martin Luther accused Protestant Reformer Johannes Agricola of being antinomian, and Richard Baxter encountered antinomianism in John Saltmarsh.⁶² Tobias Crisp, John Eaton, and Robert Towne were accused of being antinomian.⁶³ John Wesley believed that both Calvinists and Moravians were antinomian.⁶⁴ There are those who charge the theological framework of

⁶⁰ Forde, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," 249. This last statement does not apply to pronomianism as it does not seek to change the law's contention or function in order to align with a denominational interpretation nor to render it inoperative as a result of being fulfilled. Pronomianism insists on abiding by the laws of God as consistently as possible, only "changed" as guided by Scripture, e.g., the principlism of 1 Corinthians 5:1–3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶² Jong-Chun Won, "Luther and Puritans against Antinomianism," *ACTS 신학저널* 16 (2011): 93–123.

⁶³ David Parnham, "Motions of Law and Grace: The Puritan in the Antinomian," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 1 (2008): 73–104.

⁶⁴ Earl P. Crow, "Wesley and Antinomianism," *Duke Divinity School Review* 31, no. 1 (1966): 10–19.

Dispensationalism with being antinomian,⁶⁵ some non-denominational churches with teachers like Andy Stanley,⁶⁶ and Charismatic churches⁶⁷ and their teachers, like Steven Furtick.⁶⁸

While not using the terminology, Ernest de Witt Burton taught antinomianism when he delegated all laws of God beneath the banner of “legalism,” an often misused word:

The acceptance of circumcision is in principle the acceptance of the whole legalistic scheme... one cannot live the life of devotion to the keeping of the statutes, which legalism calls for, and at the same time a life in Jesus Christ and filial trust in the God of grace... Anticipating the objection that freedom from law leaves the life without moral dynamics, he answers in [Galatians 5:6] that faith begets love and through it becomes operative in conduct... [Jewish] offensiveness, the apostle implies, lay in the doctrine of the freedom of believers in Christ from the law... [for] men may obtain divine acceptance and a share in the messianic blessings through faith in Jesus, without circumcision or obedience to the statutes of Moses [i.e. the Law]... [Paul] has strenuously defended the view under obligation to keep the statutes of the law... without indicating that his thought was limited to any portion of aspect of it... The apostle's statements become intelligible and consistent only when it is recognized that he held that from the whole law as statutes, from the obligation to obey any of its statutes as such, men are released through the new revelation in Christ; and that on the other hand, all that the law as an expression of the will of God really requires... is love, and he who loves therefore fulfills the whole law.⁶⁹

His comments summarize the heart of the antinomian movement, which, sounding sweet, is in fact bitter, for the love expressed is divorced from abidance in God’s commandments (cf. John 14:15; 1 John 5:3)

⁶⁵ Robert A. Pyne, “Antinomianism and Dispensationalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 610 (1996): 141–54.

⁶⁶ Pulpit & Pen, “Andy Stanley Embraces Textbook Antinomianism,” *Pulpit & Pen* (2018), <https://pulpitandpen.org/2018/09/25/andy-stanely-embraces-textbook-antinomianism/>.

⁶⁷ Resane, “‘And they shall make you eat grass like oxen’ (Daniel 4:24),” 1–17.

⁶⁸ Todd Pruitt, “Is God a Law-Breaker?” *Reformation 21* (2016), <https://www.reformation21.org/mos/1517/is-god-a-law-breaker#.VwVavRjGPS9>.

⁶⁹ E. D. Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, vol. 36, *International Critical Commentary* (London, U.K.: T&T Clark International, 1988), 274, 277, 280, 287, 291–92, 294.

Where to from Here?

It would appear that the whole of Christianity has settled the matter on the relationship between the Law and Christian by contending that the Scriptures imply a tension between the Law and the gospel. Most claim that all roads lead to this unified theological conclusion. There are, however, stepping stones that reveal an alternative interpretation, one that theoretically and practically upholds *tota Scriptura* unlike any previous school of thought: pronomianism. That term, while only recently employed, is a concept peppered throughout the history of the ekklesia of God.

Todd classifies the three major views regarding the Christian approach to OT Law: Moral Law Christians, Ten Commandments Christians, and No-Old Law Christians. This dissertation will add a fourth classification. All denominations and their churches find their home in one of these schools of interpretation. Though each view is distinct, Todd admits “none of the views argues that Christians are under the jurisdiction of all the old covenant laws.”⁷⁰ The first school, “Moral Law Christians,” is summarized as follows:

“Moral Law Christians” affirm that Christians remain under the authority of some old covenant laws. Adherents of this view divide the old covenant laws into three major categories: (1) moral laws, (2) ceremonial laws, and (3) civil laws. Moral laws reflect the eternal character of God and thus set forth His standard of right and wrong for all people at all times... Once adherents of this view classify the various laws, they take an additional step and argue that Christians (and the entire world) must keep the moral laws but not the ceremonial and civil laws.⁷¹

The second school of thought contains “Ten Commandments Christians,” which

⁷⁰ James M. Todd III, *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 33.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

are very similar to the Moral Law Christians in that they argue that Christians are under the authority of the old covenant moral laws. These views are so similar that we could classify Ten Commandments Christians as a subset of Moral Law Christians. But Ten Commandments Christians separate themselves from Moral Law Christians by limiting the moral law to the Ten Commandments and their repetition/explication in later passages within the old covenant... So, instead of trying to decide which laws are moral laws throughout the books of Exodus–Deuteronomy, these Christians simply highlight the Ten Commandments as their basic guide to life. On a popular level, this view is probably the most prevalent.⁷²

The last school is “No-Old-Law Christians.” They argue

that believers are not under the authority of the old covenant laws in any way. Proponents of this approach disagree with the divisions of the Moral Law Christians and the continuing authority given to the Ten Commandments by Ten Commandments Christians. The result is an affirmation that the old covenant ended with Christ’s death and resurrection, thus freeing Christians from the obligation to obey the old covenant laws. No-Old-Law Christians do not affirm that Christians are free to do whatever they wish, because the Bible (especially the New Testament) contains many clear guidelines on how Christians should live their lives.⁷³

Almost all scholars, pastors, and theologians find themselves anchored to one of these schools. Their paths might look different, but their theological conclusion is unified: the Law is no longer a single unit and binding on Christians.

A fourth school of thought, however, is emerging. Christians in this category believe that the Law is not only operative, as opposed to being abrogated, but also that the tripartite model of ceremonial, civil, and moral law currently employed is detrimental and inconsistent as a theological framework. They understand that the Law has always been a means of sanctification, never intended by God to be salvific in nature, intended for all redeemed ethnicities (Jew and Gentile alike), and meant for literal practice. If a literal application is not possible, a believer can extract a principle or a paradigm applicable within their culture and

⁷² Todd III, *Sinai and the Saints*, 37–38.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 39.

geography. Pronomianism maintains a consistent affirmation that God—and His holiness—cannot change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) and that His whole counsel cannot be annulled (John 10:35; Acts 20:26–27; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Believers who accept these tenets are referred to as Pronomian Christians.⁷⁴

The role of the Law in the life of a Christian has generated much discussion throughout Church history. Regrettably, most of the conversations and commentaries have rendered most of the Law as abolished through being fulfilled, divided using a tripartite division foreign to Scripture, and mislabeled as ethnocentric despite its universal nature. Pronomianism, on the other hand, contends that the Law was intended to be one of many means of sanctification among the ekklesia of God, Jew and Gentile alike, practiced literally and paradigmatically by all believers till Heaven and earth pass away (Matt. 24:35). Even those within the Church that seek a positive view of the Law end up embarking on a cut, copy, and paste approach in which some aspects are maintained in full and others are disregarded. Gane helpfully summarizes these positions:

[1] The NT reiterates and reaffirms our need to observe a number of laws, especially from the Ten Commandments, and identifies love as the overarching value (e.g., Matt. 19:18–19; 22:37, 39; Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:6).2.... [2] The NT encourages more complete fulfillment of the law of love, in closer harmony with the creation ideal (“You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you,” Matt. 5:21–48; cf. 19:3–9).3.... [3] The NT describes ways in which humans depart from the creation ideal and violate divine values presented in OT law (e.g., Matt. 19:3–9; Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 5:1; James 4:1–4).4.... [4] The NT shows links between OT laws that we could otherwise miss (e.g., “covetousness, which is idolatry,” Col. 3:5; cf. Eph. 5:5).5.... [5] The NT applies OT law values to Christian life in ways that we may not think of but which generate further reflection on our part (“‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ ... Does he not certainly speak for our sake?” 1 Cor. 9:9–10; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17–18).6.... [6] The NT identifies some OT laws that Christians are not required to keep (Acts 15, circumcision; Col. 2:16–17, religious rituals prefiguring Christ’s sacrifice).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Or Christians who uphold “One Torah Theology.” See Chapter 2.

⁷⁵ Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 161.

A Brief Survey of Pronomianism throughout Church History

In anticipation of the next chapter, which defines pronomianism in full, it is helpful to identify evidence of pronomian practice throughout the history of the Church. This is the practice of commanded instructions generally abandoned or rejected by the majority of Christian denominations. History demonstrates, not total unanimity across the theological landscape, but individuals and small communities living out their faith in ways that uphold a pro-Law interpretation of Scripture consistent with their newfound faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The explorer of ancient literature does find negative commentary on those Christians that practice the Law. These negative analyses nevertheless highlight that these practices were more widespread than some contemporary commentators contend.⁷⁶ Two groups abide by the laws of God and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior: Jew and Gentile.

Regarding the first group, in the late second century *Dialogue with Trypho* by Justin Martyr, the Christian apologist recognized Jews who observe both the Law and Christ. Pritz notes that Justin

says that as far as he is concerned if they ‘wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses... along with their hope in this Christ... yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful... then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren’ [*Dialogue with Trypho* 47]... [and] goes on to indicate that for him the test is whether they believe in the Christ or not, and not whether or not they keep the Law.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ It is not argued that pronomian thought has maintained a consistent presence through Church history in that a thread of its existence can be traced from today all the way back to the biblical era. Rather, its thinking and practice is not merely a modern interpretation.

⁷⁷ Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1992), 20.

Furthermore, in 377 AD, Epiphanius of Salamis wrote the *Panarion*, where he discusses the sect called the Nazarenes.⁷⁸ Their description by Epiphanius is orthodox and differs only in their pronomian practices:

They use not only the New Testament but the Old Testament as well, as the Jews do. For they do not repudiate the legislation, the prophets, and the books which are called Writings by the Jews and by themselves. They have no different views but confess everything in full accord with the doctrine of the Law and like the Jews, except that they are supposedly believers in Christ. For they acknowledge both the resurrection of the dead and that all things have been created by God, and they declare that God is one, and that his Son is Jesus Christ... They are perfectly versed in the Hebrew language ... They disagree with Jews because of their belief in Christ; but they are not in accord with Christians because they are still fettered by the Law—circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest... [They are] found in Beroea near Coelesyria, in the Decapolis near Pella, and in Bashanitis at the place called Cocabe... since all the disciples had settled in Pella after their remove from Jerusalem—Christ having told them to abandon Jerusalem and withdraw from it... [and] despite their Jewish origin, they preach that Jesus is the Christ—something that is the opposite of those who are still Jews and have not accepted Jesus.⁷⁹

Pritz's exhaustive scholarship disproves Epiphanius's claims that the group were connected with heretics Elchasai (Elxai) and Ebion, a position held by most of the academic community.⁸⁰ The Nazarenes are also written about by fourth century theologian Jerome⁸¹ who, in a letter to Augustine, wrote that they "believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe" (*Letter 75*). It is not presumptuous to suggest that the

⁷⁸ *Panarion* 29.7.5. Not to be confused with the heretical Ebionites, as exemplified by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 5:61.

⁷⁹ *Panarion* 29.7.2–7.5, 29.7.7–8, and 29.9.3. Epiphanius and Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. Book I (Sects 1–46)*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 123–30.

⁸⁰ Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 35–39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 48–70. In particular, *Commentary on Isaiah* 8:14, 20–21, 9:1–4, 29:20–21, 31:6–9. Pritz's commentary is invaluable in understanding Jerome's view of the Nazarenes.

“Nazarenes” were the first pronomian Christians and evidenced a Christianity in which Torah observance was compatible with living out the teachings of the NT. Buchanan summarizes,

The church fathers accused the Jewish Christians of observing the feast days of the Jews. This does not mean that all Jewish-Christians observed all the feasts of popular Judaism or that they rejected all the feasts observed by Gentile-Christians. They observed the Sabbath and also the Lord’s Day. They celebrated Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, but they may also have celebrated the resurrection at Easter. They may or may not have observed the Jewish Feast of Weeks instead of, or in addition to, Pentecost. It is uncertain whether they observed New Year’s Day, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles with popular Judaism in the fall. The number of feasts celebrated may have varied from church to church. At any rate, Jewish-Christians were closer to popular Judaism in their observances than Gentile-Christians were, but Gentile-Christians were just as traditionally Jewish in their calendrical observances as were either Jews or Jewish-Christians.⁸²

Regarding the second group, Gentile believers who abided by the laws of the OT were acknowledged by those outside of the Israel, as attested by Josephus (*War of the Jews* 7.45; *Against Apion* 2.40), Epictetus (*Dissertationes* 2.19–21), and Juvenal (*Satires* 14).⁸³ Gentile Christians who observed the OT laws can be found in numerous post-first century writings, ranging from commentaries and homilies to letters and sermons.⁸⁴ An early example from 1 Clement, written by Clement of Rome towards the end of the first century, is full of statements that refer to a high and ongoing view of commandments from God, before and since the arrival of Jesus Christ (1 Clement 1:3, 2:7-8, 3:4, 7:2, 10:1-2, 13:3-4, 15:1-4, 27:2, 40:1-2, 43:1, 49:1, 50:4, 58:2).

⁸² George Wesley Buchanan, “Worship, Feasts and Ceremonies in the Early Jewish-Christian Church,” *New Testament Studies* 26, no. 3 (1980): 297. The weakness of Buchanan’s article is that he broadly assumes that Jewish Christians post-first century were not Trinitarians, however, this was not true of *all*, as evidenced by the Nazarenes.

⁸³ Toby Janicki, *God-Fearers: Gentiles & the God of Israel* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 42.

⁸⁴ Such an oddity is pseudepigrapha like the *Epistle of Peter to James* and its pro-Law rhetoric.

One of the earliest countries to adopt Christianity was Ethiopia in the fourth century AD. The type of Christianity that emerged was (unfortunately titled) “Jewish” in nature, which is to say, maintaining continuity with the OT. Today, as it was at the beginning, the denomination of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church upholds “the Mosaic food laws... customs pertaining to ritual cleanness... Circumcision of males on the eighth day is practiced [and] while the church does not officially recognize circumcision, it is regarded by the people as a ‘religious duty’... Sexual relations between husband and wife are also forbidden during the days of menstruation or any other impurity... [and] observance of the Jewish Sabbath as well as Sunday,” to list some of the main ones.⁸⁵ Their pronomian practices are some of the most consistent in Christianity.

A similar series of examples is found in early Syriac Christianity from the fourth century onwards. It “becomes clear that in the Syriac Churches or at least in a large number of them the reading from the Bible in the Eucharist included two Old Testament pericopes, the first one being taken from the Pentateuch, the Tora[h], and the second one from the Prophets, such as was the case in the Synagogue, on the Sabbath.” While most churches rejected the Saturday Sabbath, the *Apostolic Constitutions* refrains from such negative commentary.⁸⁶ Additionally, “there are strong indications that the Syriac churches till the Council of Nicea were Quartodecimans and that they celebrated Easter on the Jewish date, in the night from the fourteenth to the fifteenth Nisan, just as the Christians of Asia still did in the second century.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ John T. Pawlikowski, “The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4., no. 3 (1972): 190–91.

⁸⁶ G. Rouwhorst, “Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 1 (1997): 77, 81.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

In fifth to sixth century Britain, “it does not seem likely that the recommendations of Nicaea or the definitions of Augustine and other great councils and teachers were known to Patrick and the Christian communities he established.”⁸⁸ This is evidenced by Celtic Christian settlers’ practice of Saturday Sabbath.⁸⁹ Patrick and his followers had a high view of the Ten Commandments, and antinomianism and anti-Semitism were wholly rejected.⁹⁰ His involvement with the earliest Irish legal document, *Senchus Mór*, attests to the presence of the Torah.⁹¹ More formidable evidence of his pronomian thinking and the ongoing nature of the commanded instructions of God is in *Liber ex Lege Moisi* (Book of the Law of Moses), a law book that starts with the Ten Commandments and contains thirty five passages from the Torah to be practiced in everyday life.⁹² Celtic Christians understood that there were four laws: natural law (first revealed to Adam), the laws given to Moses, the laws given to the prophets, and the laws in the NT canon.⁹³ They saw the value of Law but also understood it had no bearing on justification.⁹⁴

Sabbath Observance

The Saturday Sabbath was practiced alongside Sunday observance far longer than many Christians are willing to admit, as attested by Church History. In his formidable work *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Strand notes that

⁸⁸ Leslie Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, UK: SPCK Publishing, 1972), 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12, 78–79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 209–16.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

in Rome and Alexandria... there was an evident early attempt by Christians to terminate observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, but elsewhere throughout the Christian world, Sunday observance simply arose *alongside* observance of Saturday [as attested by] two fifth-century church historians, Socrates Scholasticus [*Ecclesiastical History* 5.22] and Sozomen [*Ecclesiastical History* 7.19]... Thus, even *as late as the fifth century* almost the entire Christian world observed *both Saturday and Sunday* for special religious services.”⁹⁵

Strand continues to note that Hippolytus’ condemnation of fasting on both days (*Commentary on Daniel*, Book 4, 20:3) attests that it was still being observed, in addition to several positive comments on its observance (alongside Sunday) in *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.36, 2.47, 7.23, 7.36, and 8.33, Pseudo-Ignatius *Magnesians* 9:3-4, Gregory of Nyssa *De Castigatione*, Asterius of Amasea *Homily 5*, and John Cassian *Institutes* 3:2.⁹⁶ It is possible, because of their use of *Apostolic Constitutions*, that some Syrian churches observed Sabbath alongside Sunday Observance.⁹⁷ Early Celtic Christianity also observed Sabbath.⁹⁸ Seventh-day Sabbath was such an issue to some that it was outlawed at the Council of Laodicea (Canon 29), indicating that its practice was widespread.

Appointed Festivals post-First Century

Passover (Pesach) was practised in the second century by Christians and not seen as conflicting with those man-made festivals of tradition that arose alongside it (i.e., Easter):

⁹⁵ Another example of Christians in second century Lyons, namely Biblias, possibly highlights adherence to the Acts 15 teaching concerning kosher meat. Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 239.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 324–25.

⁹⁷ Sabbath is also mentioned in Gnostic works, such as *Gospel of Thomas* 27.

⁹⁸ Leslie Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, UK: SPCK Publishing, 1972), 78–79.

Second-century Gentile churches followed two calendar traditions concerning Gentile Passover. It appears that almost all of the churches in Asia (where Paul devoted much of his ministry [1 Cor 16:8, 19; Acts 19:10, 26]), as well as churches in Asia Minor, Cilicia, Syria, and Mesopotamia, observed Gentile Passover in accordance with the Jewish festival calendar, on the fourteenth day of the first month, the month of Nissan (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.1; 5:24:1; Athanasius, *Syn.* 2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 70.9.8–9; 10.3–5; Theodoret, *Haer. Fab. Comp.* 3.4).² Far from being a minor schismatic group, Christians who celebrated Gentile Passover on Nissan 14 stretched across a vast geographic region. Many of these Gentile Christians celebrated with Jews, and the similarity of their observance to Jewish Passover probably varied from community to community.⁹⁹

Second century Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus was an advocate for perpetuating the practice of Passover.¹⁰⁰ Also, Quartodecimans practiced Easter when Passover was celebrated (the 14th of Nisan) as they acknowledged the importance of the date on the biblical calendar.¹⁰¹

Pentecost (Shavuot) is referenced by Irenaeus (*Fragments of Irenaeus* 7) and Tertullian (*On Baptism* 19), both of whom spoke positively of the festival and did not condemn its observance.¹⁰² Likewise, Eusebius of Caesarea and John Chrysostom also looked favourably on the festival and its meaning,¹⁰³ in addition to Origen, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine.¹⁰⁴ Like Passover, it was a well-received and practiced

⁹⁹ David Rudolph, “The Celebration of Passover by Gentile Christians in the Patristic Period,” *Verge* 2:3 (2010): 4. Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, observed this practice as well. “Sadly, by the time of Augustine and Jerome, the church was convinced that obedience to any part of the Jewish law—even celebrating a Passover feast as Polycarp did in honor of Jesus’ Passion—was an ‘obedience unto death’ of a different sort than that spoken of in Paul’s letter to the Philippians and early Christian martyr literature. Much preferable is the position to which Trypho was able to move Justin Martyr and to which Irenaeus cautioned Victor. Obedience to Jewish law is neither a mortal sin nor grounds for excommunication.” J. B. Hatlem and D. J. Hatlem, “Unmuzzling the Ox: Should Torah be Normative for Gentile Christians?” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5, no. 1 (2011): 11.

¹⁰⁰ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History—Part 1: The Spring Festivals* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 105–6.

¹⁰¹ Of passing note, the Theodosian Code (Codex Theodosianus), published between 429–438 AD., notes disfavour of Jews practising Purim as hanging and burning effigies of Haman were likened to Christ’s crucifixion (16:8:18).

¹⁰² It is also mentioned in apocryphal works such as *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7.

¹⁰³ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History—Part 1: The Spring Festivals* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 171.

¹⁰⁴ Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History—Part 1: The Spring Festivals*, 173–77.

festival in ekklesia post-first century, albeit focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit. Early Celtic Christianity practiced the festival as well.¹⁰⁵

There is scant evidence for the Day of Trumpets (Yom Teruah) practiced among Christians, in its original form or reimagined. Yet John Chrysostom, in *Against the Jews* 4.7.4–6, infers that there were Christians who did.

Historically referred to as “the Fast,” the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was practiced by Christians, as seen in its condemnation in the *Epistle of Diognetus* 4:1, by Origen in *Homily on Leviticus* 12:2 and *Homilies on Jeremiah* 13:2, and by John Chrysostom in *Against the Jews* 1:5. Its theological components are expounded on in the *Epistle to Barnabas* (7:3–11)¹⁰⁶ and explored as a way of life in Hegesippus’ *Hypomnemata*.¹⁰⁷ Interesting, fifth century theologian Leo the Great (Sermon 90:1) commended its practice.¹⁰⁸ The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which has existed since the fourth century AD, created a festival called the “Feast of the Cross,”

which is linked to the New Year festival in a way that is similar to New Year and Yom Kippur in the Jewish calendar. Though the original function of these days has been generally lost, purification and atonement remain prominent themes in their observance by the church. New Year’s morning finds every Christian at the nearest river for a purification bath which, according to local belief, signals the beginning of the process cancelling all the sins of which he has been guilty during the previous year.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Hardinge, *Celtic Church*, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 163. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 148–61.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “Christians’ Celebrating ‘Jewish’ Festivals of Autumn,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature: Papers Delivered at the Colloquium of the Institutum Judaicum, Brussels 18–19 November, 2001*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 63–66.

¹⁰⁸ Janicki, *God-Fearers*, 97–98.

¹⁰⁹ John T. Pawlikowski, “The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4, no. 3 (1972): 192. Pedersen echoes all of these, adding only some slight differences, for example, the delay of infant baptism due to Leviticus 12:2–5 and the adoption of the Judaic tradition of reading the five

Tabernacles (Sukkot) is mentioned by John Chrysostom in *Against the Jews* 9:2 when he condemns those Christians that practiced the festival. Though speculative,¹¹⁰ it is possible that the Feast of Encaenia, observed as early as the fourth century, was based on either the festival of Tabernacles or Hannukah due to both its timing and length of observation.¹¹¹ It is possible that the “Holy Cross Day” observed by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches may also be a reimagining of Tabernacles.¹¹²

Summary

Church history reveals to believers today that the post-first century ekklesia underwent a radical theological shift that moved away from the teachings of the OT, retaining only those commandments labeled as moral in nature and ensuring a clear distinction from the Jewish culture associated with physical Israel. Over the centuries, Christianity evolved into a thoroughly Western religion, parting from its Eastern foundations and practices. The Law was framed irrelevant to the believer, particularly those laws labeled as civil or ceremonial in nature. This continued to the point that some embraced an antinomian-like view in fear of being mislabeled as legalists. Tracing these theological changes, one can see that the centuries after the ascension of Jesus Christ and the passing of His first generation of disciples shaped the entire trajectory of the relationship of the Law and the believer. It is

megilloth during the appointed festivals. Kristen Stoffregen Pedersen, “Is the Church of Ethiopia a Judaic Church?” *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 12, no. 2 (1999): 205, 211.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹¹ Matthew Black, “The Festival of Encaenia Ecclesiae in the Ancient Church with Special Reference to Palestine and Syria,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5, no. 1 (1954): 78–85; Michael A. Fraser, “Constantine and the Encaenia,” *StPatr* 29 (1997): 25–28.

¹¹² Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History—Part 2: The Fall Festivals* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 283.

imperative to revisit and study these cataclysmic centuries with fresh eyes to re-evaluate whether the theological course taken by the ekklesia was indeed scriptural or a cultural reaction that sinfully rendered the commanded instructions of God in an unfavourable light and can only be amended by a second Protestant reformation.

Chapter Two: Defining, Redefining, and Defending Pronomianism and Its Tenets

Pronomianism is not a theological interpretation being proposed in a theological vacuum. There is evidence, both in Church history and in recent scholarship, that pronomian thinking existed in the history of God’s ekklesia and is slowly emerging within the halls of academia. While the bridge between the seminary lectern and the congregational pulpit might not yet be established, the pronomian zeal that maintains a high view of Scripture and a disciplined approach to sanctification is not fueled by the desire to be different, more pious, or cause dissention. It is motivated by the goal of cultivating a Berean-spirit (cf. Acts 17:11), reforming according to the Word of God, and upholding the commitment of *tota Scriptura* (“every part of Scripture”). Pronomian thinking is totally dependent on Scripture, is discerning of denominationalism and tradition, and seeks to rectify the ongoing imbalance between orthodoxy and orthopraxy within the local congregation. In order to understand its resurgence and intentions of becoming a legitimate theological interpretation, it is important to explore the movements and individuals that contributed to it, whether they did so willingly or due to a rejection of those whose quest for knowledge resulted in misinterpretation.

What Is the Law, and What Was Its Function in Ancient Israel?

The Law¹¹³ is a part of what Christians refer to as special revelation.¹¹⁴ In discussing the concept, one must ensure that they are using correct definitions of the associated terms.

As Goldberg writes,

¹¹³ It is both frustrating and unfortunate that the term “Law” must be maintained in scholarship, which goes far beyond encompassing the five books authored by Moses, but is intended to be understood as those commanded instructions encompassing the entirety of Scripture.

¹¹⁴ There are two types of revelation that come from God. The first is “Special Revelation,” which is through Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 4:12) and through the Supernatural (separated into two

The term *Torah* comes from the Hebrew word *yarah*, meaning *throw, cast, or shoot*. A noun, *moreh*, meaning *teacher*, is grammatically the *hiphil* of the same verb, while another noun derived from the *hiphil* is *torah*, defined as *instruction*. So a good teacher aptly “throws,” or “casts,” instruction at his or her disciples... As the divine Teacher, or *moreh*, God has imparted His “instruction” or Word to Israel... Torah is therefore to be regarded as “from heaven” (God-breathed) and it comes to man through the “unveiling of His presence” (revelation). This meaning of Torah, as it is understood in the Scriptures, carries no taint of legalism, through what man *does to* Torah can at times become legalistic. In time, the word Torah also came to have several narrower meanings, referring first of all to the Torah of Moses, or the Mosaic Covenant (Constitution), which is also divine revelation.¹¹⁵

Schreiner provides a concise definition of the Torah, the Law of God:

Torah usually refers to what human beings are commanded to do. In some instances, a broader sense (that goes beyond commands and prescriptions) aptly captures the meaning of torah (e.g., Job 22:22; Ps. 94:12; Prov. 1:8; 4:2; 13:14; Isa. 2:3; 42:4; 51:4; Mal. 2:6–8), although even in some of these passages the instruction probably consisted of what was required by the law. In the vast majority of instances, however, the word torah focuses on doing what is commanded in the law, that is, the commands and requirements that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The emphasis on observing the law and carrying out what it demands is evident from the verbs of which torah is the direct object... Other terms that are used with the word torah and are roughly synonymous with it confirm that the term torah focuses on regulations and prescriptions. All these words convey the idea that Israel must obey what God has required in his law.¹¹⁶

subcategories: God’s intervention on earth and in the lives of people, whether physically or by other means (e.g., Exod. 3:1–4; 2 Cor. 12:1–7) and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., John 1:1, 14). The second is “General Revelation,” which relates to His creation (cf. Ps. 19:1–4; Rom. 1:20), which reveals design and order in everything in and around us. Both forms of revelation embody God’s truth (see below), however, “Special Revelation” holds the greatest authority, in particular the revealing of God’s Son and His Word.

¹¹⁵ Louis Goldberg, *God, Torah, Messiah: The Messianic Jewish Theology of Dr. Louis Goldberg*, ed. Richard A. Robinson (San Francisco, CA: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2009), 10.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 19–20. While Schreiner’s definition is relatively helpful it is lacking in key areas. It does not go so far as to denote the Law’s inspiration by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17) or its alignment with the unchangeable holiness of God (cf. Rom. 7:12), and it is incorrect that the application and knowledge of the Law was solely intended for (ethnocentric) Israel and therefore had no universal application.

Echoing Averback, there are three legitimate uses of the Law according to the Scriptures: the “law focuses on its effectiveness for showing that God is holy and righteous, but we as people are sinners, corrupt and in need of God’s grace,” the “law corresponds to God’s original intention to regulate His covenant relationship with Israel as a nation,” and the “law takes it to be a useful scriptural guide for the Christian life.”¹¹⁷

Equally important to understand is what the Law is not. It does not refer to both the written and so-called “oral” laws of the Scripture. The Scriptures seemingly refer to what is known as oral law.¹¹⁸ These oral laws are like, if not the same, as those laws created by man that were never intended to be seen as equal to the Scriptures but, because of sin, were taught as such (e.g., Mark 7:1–23). The negative commentary of laws throughout the letters of the Apostle Paul often refers to this man-made law (e.g., Col. 2:8) and false interpretations of the laws of the Torah.¹¹⁹ The dual commentaries of laws by the apostle Paul is not being disputed here.¹²⁰ However, to state that Paul interpreted the nature of the commanded instructions given to Moses as both good and bad would result in a contradiction. Sadly, many Christians have mistakenly equated the laws created by man with those of God and charged the latter as legalistic. This betrays not only a misunderstanding of the word legalism but upholds an inconsistent bibliology.

¹¹⁷ Richard E. Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 265.

¹¹⁸ Tim Hegg, “Can We Speak of The Law in The New Testament in Monolithic Terms?”, 9–11, *TorahResource*. Accessed November 12, 2023. <https://torahresource.com/pdf-articles/can-we-speak-of-the-law-in-the-new-testament-in-monolithic-terms.pdf>; Goldberg, *God, Torah, Messiah*, 17; Ariel Berkowitz, *The Torah of the Sages תורה שבעל פה: A Simple Introduction to the Oral Torah* (San Bernardino, CA: Shoreshim Publishing, 2022).

¹¹⁹ “No doubt, his negative statements are sparked by what he considers a false view of the law ([Rom.] 3:27; 4:2; 9:32; 10:5) which he cannot accept because of his insistence upon righteousness by faith.” Thomas C. Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* (Chico, CA: Scholars’ Press, 1981), 115.

¹²⁰ Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 19.

In the beginning, the commanded instructions were understood as relating to two broad groups: Jew and Gentile. To the Jew, the function of the Law was that their adherence to it would be a light unto the nations of the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6, 49:6).¹²¹ If one “is correct in seeing that *servant* is a corporate term here, then it is clear that Israel is being addressed and encouraged by the Lord to be that witness to the Gentiles[;] Yahweh will take hold of that remnant of Israel by the hand to guide them in this work of witnessing, just as certainly as he called them in righteousness.”¹²² Furthermore, the Law was a means of sanctification, one that separated them from neighboring nations while also distinguishing their nature so as to identify them as the people of God in whom they found their identity. When speaking of the believing Jew, one is referring to those also known as the “remnant,” believing Israel, not the greater nation of Israel (Isa. 10:20–21), most of whom persisted in their sins throughout history and rejected the salvific calling of God. The Gentile’s rejection of the Law has consequences. In this sense, the Law’s function was judgment. The standard of God for Israel was mirrored in neighboring Gentile nations (Lev. 18:26–28; Deut. 2:10–23; Amos 2:1–3). Scripture often attests to His standard for righteousness, specifically toward these nations (e.g., Isa. 13–23; Jer. 45–51; Ezek. 25–32; Dan. 2, 7; Amos 1–2; Obad.; Jon.; Nah.).

Through the progressive revelation of God, there appear to be three types of Law. The first is instructions that pertain to all believers. Believing Jews and Gentiles were the recipients. As Block reiterates,

God and Moses perceived obedience to the laws, not as a way of or precondition to salvation, but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved... [they saw] obedience to the law not primarily as a duty imposed by one party on another, but as an expression of covenant relationship... not as the precondition for salvation, but as the precondition to

¹²¹ Though not widely written on, Nagen writes on modern Judaism’s interpretation of being a “light to the nations.” Yakov Nagen, “Sharing Torah with the World: The Jewish People’s Responsibility to Non-Jews,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 54, no. 3 (2022): 29–50.

¹²² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 61.

Israel's fulfillment of the mission to which she had been called and the precondition to her own blessing... God's revelation of the law to Israel as a supreme and unique privilege... true obedience to the law to be the external expression of an inward disposition of fear and faith in God and covenant love toward him... the laws holistically, viewing all of life as under the authority of the divine suzerain... [and] the laws as comprehensible and achievable.¹²³

Block's last line is powerful. The Law of God is comprehensible and achievable.

Deuteronomy 30:11–14 is clear in that the commanded instructions of God are “not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach” (cf. Rom. 13:8–10). Jesus Christ, in fulfilling the Law and neutralizing the deathly consequences of breaking it, empowers believers to live it out as an act of love toward Him. The laws are not wearisome but easy, and their “burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30). Rather than abrogating the laws of Torah, Christ makes clear “whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). The only burdensome laws are man's, devoid of the Holy Spirit, which seek to replace or marry themselves to the holy instruction of God. Granted, while the culture of ancient Israel was different from that of Christians today, in some aspects the culture of the covenantal community is perpetual. Simply stated:

the divine laws are normative and prescriptive, not merely descriptive... [they consist] of his personal directives, which are based on his own character and behavior and cannot be separated from the relationship with him[...]
Obedience includes loving *the Lord*, walking in *his* ways, obeying *his* voice, and clinging to *him*.¹²⁴

The second type of law pertains solely to the Levites. A large portion of commandments are specifically for the tribe of Levi (Num. 1:50–51, 53; 3:5–10, 25–26, 31–

¹²³ Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 123–28, 134. He later highlights the “the essential theological and ethical unity of the two Testaments.”

¹²⁴ Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 18.

32, 36–37; 4:1–33; 8:23–26; 18:1–6). Many of these relate to the Temple and priesthood, were operative in the past, and have been temporarily suspended until the establishment of the literal Millennium (cf. Ezek. 43–46).¹²⁵

The third type of law encompasses man-made Rabbinical laws and the oral laws, which originate outside of Scripture. These legal traditions appear to have emerged prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt. 15:1–9; 23:13–30; Mark 7:1–22) and were practiced by the Pharisees (e.g., Acts 15:5) but not documented until after the biblical record in the Talmud (comprising the Mishnah and Gemara). Neusner and Chilton summarize that

the rabbis contend that the continuity of the Mosaic Torah is unbroken. The destruction of the Temple, while lamentable, does not mean Israel has lost all means of service to the Creator. The way of the Pharisees leads, without break, back to Sinai and forward to the rabbinic circle reforming at Yavneh. The Oral Torah revealed by Moses and handed on from prophet to scribe, sage, and rabbi remains in Israel's hands. The legal record of pre-70 Pharisaism requires careful preservation because it remains wholly in effect.¹²⁶

Historically, the oral law has not been a part of what Christians constitute as the Scriptures, though many scholars contend that it is an important historical resource to ascertain the possible cultural thinking of religious Jews in the first century AD.¹²⁷ The apostle Paul attests

¹²⁵ Hilton contends that there are three primary points as to why the Temple, though currently absent from the landscape of Israel, is important to the believer: it affirms our need for unity (for believers are not a substitute for the Temple but are likened to it), it “meets the physical limitations of a fallen world to experience the presence of God,” and it ensures “the unification of our senses for unfettered worship of God.” Benjamin Hilton, *Jesus Loves the Temple: Re-examining the Scriptural Idea of a Temple in Jerusalem from a Christian Perspective* (Israel, HaYovel Inc, 2020), 65–77.

¹²⁶ Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, “Preface,” in *Quest of the Historical Pharisees*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), ix. It is interesting to note that there are very few sources in the ancient world pertaining to the Pharisees and all that exist are not written by Pharisees, besides Paul.

¹²⁷ Young contends that the Talmud, while written far later, had its origins at the time of Jesus. Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

to the presence of the oral law in his writings, and it is the recipient of negative commentary in his letters, revealing a “double nomos.”¹²⁸

Joslyn-Siemiatkoski writes that “according to the rabbis, both the written and oral Torah were given at Sinai[;] wherever the written Torah was studied and taught among the people of Israel, beginning with Moses down to the rabbis, so was the oral Torah studied and taught.”¹²⁹ While Scripture never claims equality with man-made Rabbinical laws and the oral law, it does cite its existence. In exploring the oral law, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski rhetorically asks,

If the law given at Sinai and the gospel of Jesus Christ are not antithetical, or if the law does not pass away with the coming of Christ, what then is its status? If Gentiles are not required to keep the Torah in the same way as Israel but still are aware that Jesus viewed it with the utmost devotion, what would a positive Gentile Christian attitude toward the Torah look like?¹³⁰

Likewise, in his study on the Septuagint of Isaiah 8 and the translators’ use of pericope in this chapter (to explore the relationship between the Law and Gentile believers), Douglas makes some similar statements and notes that while the “Hebrew text of Isaiah never clarifies what this law entails or how exactly the foreign nations will ‘walk in God’s ways’ (Isa. 2:3), Isaiah LXX directs the reader toward an answer centered on observance of Mosaic law.”¹³¹ While not fully embracing the belief that Gentiles should embrace the Law, he does rhetorically ask in an endnote,

¹²⁸ Yael Fisch, “The Origins of Oral Torah: A New Pauline Perspective,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period* 51, no. 1 (2020): 43–66.

¹²⁹ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “‘Moses Received the Torah at Sinai and Handed It on’ (Mishnah Avot 1:1): The Relevance of the Written and Oral Torah for Christians,” *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 3 (2009): 455.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 465.

¹³¹ Alex P. Douglas, “A Call to Law: The Septuagint of Isaiah 8 and Gentile Law Observance,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 (2018): 103.

Does gentile acceptance of the law, for example, include full observance of Jewish dietary practice? Would gentile converts be indistinguishable from native-born Israelites, or would they retain their separate status? If they remained somehow distinguishable from native Israelites, would this distinction find halakic expression, and what would this expression entail?¹³²

This train of thought reveals that there are scholars across the theological horizon who can see an interpretation of Scripture that has the Law practiced by Jew and Gentile alike in the past (Exod. 12:38) and in the future (Isa. 2:2–3; 56:6–7). As such, adherence to the Law today is not as inconceivable as some might speculate from the seminarian lectern and the church pulpit.

“One Law/Torah Theology” as a Precursor to Pronomianism

Pronomianism is not the first theological interpretation that upholds a view that all God’s laws are to be practiced today by believers, Jew and Gentile alike. At the end of the twentieth century, Tim Hegg¹³³ is identified as being the grandfather of what has been labeled the “One Torah” (or “One Law”) position. Those who adhere to this position “believe the Scriptures (both Tanakh and Apostolic Scriptures) are clear in stating that the people of YHWH are one people, and that the Torah (the commanded instructions of YHWH) is applicable to all who are in Yeshua, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or station in life.”¹³⁴

¹³² Douglas, “A Call to Law,” 103.

¹³³ Tim Hegg “graduated from Cedarville University in 1973 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Music and Bible, with a minor in Philosophy. He entered Northwest Baptist Seminary (Tacoma, WA) in 1973, completing his M.Div. (*summa cum laude*) in 1976. He completed his Th.M. (*summa cum laude*) in 1978, also from NWBS. His Master’s Thesis was titled: “The Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant of Grant in the Ancient Near East.” [Hegg] taught Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Exegesis for three years as an adjunct faculty member at Corban University School of Ministry when the school was located in Tacoma. Corban University School of Ministry is now in Salem, OR. [Hegg] is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature, and has contributed papers at the annual meetings of both societies. Since 1990, [Hegg] has served as one of the Overseers at Beit Hallel in Tacoma, WA.” Tim Hegg, “Teaching and Support Staff,” *Torah Resource* (2023), <https://torahresource.com/about/torahresource-staff>.

¹³⁴ Tim Hegg, “Defending One Torah Theology,” *TorahResource* (2023), <https://torahresource.com/about/one-torah/>.

Furthermore, the “*biblical writers uniformly teach that covenant membership is gained through acceptance of God and His Messiah, resulting in submission to His Torah, and not on the basis of ethnic status.*”¹³⁵ In preferring the term “One Torah” (Torah Echad) over “One Law” (Mishpat Echad),¹³⁶ Hegg comments that using the term *one* Torah distinguishes his view from that which upholds the “Oral Torah” alongside the written Torah (as seen on modern Judaism and sometimes within Messianic Judaism and the Hebrew Roots movement), because

using the label “One Torah” will reinforce the well-known fact that the Hebrew word Torah means “teaching,” not “law.” Surely the Torah contains laws, commandments, statutes, ordinances, and so forth, but even these should be understood as communicating God’s teaching about what is righteous and what is unrighteous in His eyes. This speaks to the issue of “commandment” or “law” as mandated. Surely God’s commandments are His requirements or mandates for His people. He did not give us “suggestions.” He revealed Himself to us with the commandment “Be holy, for I am holy.” But if our hearts have been won over by His love; if we have been changed so that we “concur with the Torah of God in our inner man” (Rom 7:22); if we have come to see God’s Torah as “more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold,” then we have come to realize that God’s Torah—His teaching—is wisdom itself and we long to know it and to live it. We agree with the Psalmist when he wrote: “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourn” (Ps 119:54). God’s Torah is not a heavy burden because His yoke fits well and His burden is light (Matt 11:30). So if we abandon the label “One Law” and rather adopt the name “One Torah,” we will be reinforcing that we revere God’s Torah as His teaching about righteousness, gifted to us by His grace ultimately and finally revealed in Yeshua.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Tim Hegg, “Is the Torah Only for Jews? The Relationship of Jew and Non-Jew in God’s Covenant: A Response to the ‘Definition of Messianic Judaism’ by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations,” *TorahResource* (2010), <https://torahresource.com/whats-name-thoughts-one-law/>. In passing, it is erroneous to contend that those in this movement “inadvertently erase the ethnic distinction between Jews and Gentiles taught in the New Covenant Scriptures.” Gateway Church, “Unhealthy Theologies of Israel,” *Gateway Center for Israel* (2023), <https://centerforisrael.com/papers/unhealthy-theologies-of-israel/>.

¹³⁶ The latter term, though commonly cited, is not the preferred term among its adherents.

¹³⁷ Tim Hegg, “What’s in a Name? Thoughts on One Law,” *TorahResource* (2010), <https://torahresource.com/whats-name-thoughts-one-law/>.

Rudolph, while not supportive of “One Law/Torah Theology,” fairly identifies three levels: Hard, Soft, and Partial One Law. Hard One Law proponents “are typically Gentile believers who maintain that the Torah applies to Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way... [and] view the Church as largely apostate, and they see this as confirmed in the Christian embrace of alleged pagan practices.”¹³⁸ Soft One Law proponents highlight “the importance of gently instructing disciples of Jesus about the Torah in a way that is not imposing and that invites people to spend more time in this part of God’s Word... [and] emphasizes the role of grace, faith, and the empowerment of the Spirit in keeping the Torah, which leads to spiritual maturity... reject[ing] legalism... [and] aims to be non-judgmental even as it seeks to see all Christians embrace Jewish life.”¹³⁹ Partial One Law proponents blur “the lines of Hebrew Roots/One Law and Messianic Judaism, [and] this highly nuanced perspective tends to create confusion” as it maintains that Jewish believers in Christ must maintain an external appearance of their ethnic culture, as commanded (e.g. tzitzit, tefillin, and mezuzahs), whereas the Gentiles must not do so. Still, both are to abide in the same festivals (but again, not the same laws as instructed by the Torah).¹⁴⁰ Surveying the theological landscape, the second (Soft One Law/Torah Theology proponents) appear the most common by far, and their writings are scholarly in nature.

The criticism of One Law/Torah Theology is weak, and its loudest proponents often come from a theological bias of “bilateral ecclesiology”¹⁴¹ or have had alleged conflicts with those in the movement. An example of the latter, McKee paints broad strokes, writing that

¹³⁸ David Rudolph, “One New Man, Hebrew Roots, Replacement Theology,” *The King’s University* (2021): 8, <https://collective.tku.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/One-New-Man-Hebrew-Roots-Replacement-Theology.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 9. Interestingly, in light of McKee’s criticism of “One Law/Torah Theology” seen below, Rudolph actually considers McKee a proponent of “One Law/Torah Theology,” as he does Tim Hegg.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴¹ Daniel Juster and Russ Resnik, “One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community,” *Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations* (2005),

in practice, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement is not broadly facilitating assemblies and fellowships where study of the Torah and being disciplined in its precepts—as a person grows in the Messiah and His love—is what is emphasized. What people too frequently encounter from the One Law/One Torah submovement, is a great deal of legalism, judgmentalism, pride and superiority, a condemnatory spirit, and stifling environments widely devoid of the presence of God’s grace. Assemblies where “one law” or “one statute” is emphasized, hardly tend to be places where the Holy Spirit can easily write the Torah’s commandments on hearts and minds at the Holy Spirit’s pace onto a redeemed man or woman (cf. Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:25–27) as they grow in faith. Instead, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement is a place where rigidity and fundamentalism tend to abound, and even be encouraged.¹⁴²

It is interesting that McKee commends much of what One Law/Torah Theology teaches but differs on the texts used to contend for the position and has specific views on capital punishment.¹⁴³ McKee’s experiences cannot be discredited, but the behavior of some congregations cannot be used to smear an entire system of theology while acknowledging the merit of that theological train of thought.

It is hard to distinguish major differences between One Law/Torah Theology and pronomianism, other than personal opinions shared on Internet forums.¹⁴⁴ It could be argued that One Law/Torah Theology sounds too Hebraic or infers an OT focus; that, however, is a failure of mainstream interpretation to acknowledge that all Scripture is Torah (Jer. 31:33; 1 Cor. 14:21; 1 Tim. 5:17–18; cf. John 10:34; 12:34). Others would contend the monolithic

http://www.pma.org.au/uploads/3/4/2/7/3427709/juster_resnik_one_law_movements.pdf; Tim Hegg, “One Law Movements: A Response to Russ Resnik & Daniel Juster,” *TorahResource* (2005), <https://torahresource.com/one-law-movement-response-russ-resnik-daniel-juster/>.

¹⁴² McKee further laments “It cannot be denied how at least one of the “one law” passages pertains to uniform execution of sinners (Leviticus 24:22)... [yet, w]hat is this supposed to mean for us in a post-resurrection era where capital punishment has been decisively absorbed by Yeshua’s sacrifice (Colossians 2:14)?” J. K. McKee, “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism,” in *Messianic Torah Helper*, ed. Margaret McKee Huey (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2016), 267. However, this interpretation of Colossians 2:14 is not widely held by biblical commentators.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 267–68.

¹⁴⁴ Those points of contention raised by Juster, Resnik, Rudolph, McKee and others could, in reality, be the same toward those who call themselves pronomian Christians.

overtone of the word “Law” and argue that One Law/Torah Theology doesn’t differentiate between laws for, say, believers versus Levites. Pronomianism does contend that there is one Torah and that believers are to practice its commanded instructions so long as this practice does not evolve into a denomination.

Excursus: The Denomination of Messianic Judaism and the Hebrew Roots Movement

Before one defines pronomianism, it must be distinguished from the Messianic Judaism denomination and the Hebrew Roots movement. While Messianic Judaism is a denomination of Christianity, it also seeks to be identified as a legitimate branch of Judaism.

A full description is necessary:

Jewish life is life in a concrete, historical community. Thus, Messianic Jewish groups must be fully part of the Jewish people, sharing its history and its covenantal responsibility as a people chosen by God. At the same time, faith in Yeshua also has a crucial communal dimension. This faith unites the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church, which is the assembly of the faithful from the nations who are joined to Israel through the Messiah. Together the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church constitute the ekklesia, the one Body of Messiah, a community of Jews and Gentiles who in their ongoing distinction and mutual blessing anticipate the shalom of the world to come.... For a Messianic Jewish group 1) to fulfill the covenantal responsibility incumbent upon all Jews, 2) to bear witness to Yeshua within the people of Israel, and 3) to serve as an authentic and effective representative of the Jewish people within the body of Messiah, it must place a priority on integration with the wider Jewish world, while sustaining a vital corporate relationship with the Christian Church.... In the Messianic Jewish way of life, we seek to fulfill Israel’s covenantal responsibility embodied in the Torah within a New Covenant context. Messianic Jewish halakhah is rooted in Scripture (Tanakh and the New Covenant writings), which is of unique sanctity and authority. It also draws upon Jewish tradition, especially those practices and concepts that have won near universal acceptance by devout Jews through the centuries. Furthermore, as is common within Judaism, Messianic Judaism recognizes that halakhah is and must be dynamic,

involving the application of the Torah to a wide variety of changing situations and circumstances.¹⁴⁵

As such, Messianic Judaism contends two components to the *ekklesia* and therefore, two different means of sanctification. This is enshrined in the prevalent teaching of the denomination, known as “bilateral ecclesiology.”¹⁴⁶ Most congregations within Messianic Judaism are not always Gentile-inclusive, and the dual means of sanctification for these is problematic. As Kinzer, cited in an article by Reason, notes, “More leaders are concluding that Messianic Jewish congregations should be primarily Jewish... [Historically,] Messianic congregations have generally defined themselves as a place where Jews and Gentiles worship together, witnessing to the unity of Jews and Gentiles[, however, m]any in the UMJC [Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations] are seeing this as a defective definition[: c]ongregations may have Gentiles, but they are not part of the definition of the congregation, which is to be a Jewish space.”¹⁴⁷ This ecclesiological vision is thoroughly inconsistent with Ephesians 2:11–22. Yet, this thinking extends even to the halls of academia.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, “Defining Messianic Judaism,” *Messianic Jewish Theological Institute* (2023), <https://www.mjti.org/about/defining-messianic-judaism/>.

¹⁴⁶ It remains the chief ecclesiological interpretation in the denomination of Messianic Judaism. “First, the New Testament—read canonically and theologically in the light of history—teaches that Israel’s covenant, way of life, and religious tradition have enduring validity and importance, even when Israel proves unwilling or unable to explicitly recognize its Messiah. Second, the failure of the Gentile *ekklesia* to receive and confirm this truth contributed decisively to the rupture between the *ekklesia* and the Jewish people—a rupture that constitutes a debilitating schism in the heart of the people of God. Third, this schism was manifested first in the rejection of the validity and importance of the Jewish *ekklesia* and of its integration within the wider Jewish world, and the healing of this schism requires the restoration of such an *ekklesia*. The restoration of the Jewish *ekklesia* would link the Gentile *ekklesia* to Israel and enable it to legitimately identify with Israel’s history and destiny without succumbing to supersessionism. The restoration of the Jewish *ekklesia* would also enable the Jewish people to appreciate Yeshua-faith as an indigenous Jewish reality, extending the reign of Israel’s God among the nations.” Mark S. Kinzer, “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism and Its Implications for Christian-Jewish Engagement,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Praxis* 4, no. 2 (2013), <http://missiodeijournal.com/issues/md-4-2/authors/md-4-2-kinzer>.

¹⁴⁷ Gabriela M. Reason, “Competing Trends in Messianic Judaism: The Debate Over Evangelicalism,” *Kesher* 17 (2004): 62.

¹⁴⁸ “Paul has nothing but good things to say about good works, and he nowhere discourages good works... [for] striving toward holiness and doing the works of obedience are intrinsic to the Gentile’s hearing of and believing in the gospel of God... Nor do we find anywhere in Paul an instruction that Jews who believe in Jesus the Messiah must cease their Torah observance... the Torah-observant Jew may share life, worship, and

The Hebrew Roots movement is harder to define, as neither is it a denomination with a statement of faith, nor is there any consistency or unanimity among its proponents.

Definitions then, often are established by those who were formerly a part of it or those who acknowledge its many erroneous, often heretical, teachings. Himango summarizes some of their known teachings:

Flat earth[,] Wild conspiracy theories commonly treated as truth and even preached from the pulpit[,] A rejection of Christianity itself as a false religion[,] Seeing Christians and the Church as the Whore of Babylon rather than family in Messiah[,] A rejection of some New Testament books as canon[,] Derision of scholarship, producing an anti-intellectual environment that mocks learning, suppresses questioning, and generates echo chambers[,] Eth Cephher[,] Rejection of core Christian doctrines including the Trinity[,] Rampant sensationalism: many teachers make their living off incredible, sensational claims that have little or nothing to do with the Gospel[,] End-times date setting[,] Sacred name-only and rigidity around the name of God[,] Polygamy[,] A conflation of US Republican politics with Biblical values[,] British Israelism and other extreme forms of Two House theology[,] Little to no outreach and evangelization[, and] Very few actual good works despite much talk of them.¹⁴⁹

Himango, interviewing Ensley, echoes concerns with the movement, adding “[Pronomian Christianity] is distinct from Hebrew Roots (HR) and Messianic Judaism (MJ) and I’m doing my best to make that understood... it is distinct from HR in that it does not affirm many of the popular HR doctrines (flat earth, Arianism, etc.) and does not look like MJ liturgically (Hebrew liturgy, synagogue style, etc.).”¹⁵⁰ While there may be sincere and uninformed

table fellowship with the other, the non-Torah-observant Gentile... [for t]he Torah in its continuing role of distinguishing —not dividing—Jew (whether ‘Christian’ or not) from Gentile remains a basic presupposition in Paul’s thinking.” Douglas Haring, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 38.

¹⁴⁹ Judah Gabriel Himango, “Pronomian Christianity: An Alternative To Hebrew Roots and Messianic Judaism?” *Kineti L’Tziyon* (2021), <https://blog.judahgabriel.com/2021/11/pronomian-christianity-alternative-to.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Himango, “Pronomian Christianity.”

believers in the movement, they would do well to spiritually migrate to more theologically-sound horizons.

*What Is “Pronomianism”?*¹⁵¹

What does a practical display of loving Jesus by “doing” His commandments look like in Christianity? While church history attests to a great deal of ministries and works enacted for the glory of God, most have been anchored to predominately NT teachings and few are based on the OT. In dispelling the Law’s tripartite nature, however, students of Scripture are faced with uncharted study. Pronomianism forges a path into this realm.

Recent discussions have emerged from within Christendom utilizing this term, the earliest being from Reformed theological circles,¹⁵² most notably Bahnsen, who states that

a large variety of positions have been taken regarding God’s law stretching all the way from saying that there have been no changes in how the law should be observed (so that, for instance, animal sacrifices would be continued) to saying that everything has been changed because of the change of dispensation (so that the Christian ethic is totally restricted to the New Testament). Between the two extreme poles numerous other positions or attitudes (some pro-nomian, some antinomian) can be found with subtle variations distinguishing one school of thought from another in many cases.¹⁵³

The problem here is that the Theonomic Reformed definition of pronomianism appears only to concern itself with civil and moral laws. So, while helpful, it is incomplete and assists

¹⁵¹ This section is a heavily revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. Benjamin Szumskyj, “The Role of Godly Works in the Markan Shema: A Pronomian Response” (class paper submitted in NBST815: Gospels (B01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

¹⁵²Ralph Allan Smith, “Calvin’s Covenantal Pronomianism,” *Covenant Worldview Institute* (1994), https://www.berith.org/pdf/Calvin%27s_Covenantal_Pronomianism.pdf.

¹⁵³ Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2020), 1.

pronomian studies only to a certain point.¹⁵⁴ Recent discussions, however, emerging from a rejection of “bilateral ecclesiology” in Messianic Judaism and by extension the place of Gentiles in their congregations, have resulted in believers contending that pronomianism refers to all of God’s laws. Some early commentators detail their journey from denominationalism to simple pronomianism. Young states,

*How do we—Gentile Christians finding God’s Law as relevant to the modern believer—identify with God’s Law without separating ourselves from Historic and Modern Christianity? When a Christian asks about my theology, how do I explain to them that I eat clean foods, celebrate the Lord’s festivals, and rest on the Sabbath, without telling them something that either makes me sound like a Jewish convert or in a cult? What do we call this? Well, thankfully for us, there is a name for this. It’s called *Pronomianism*.*¹⁵⁵

While no formal definitions currently exist, Ensley writes one of the earliest¹⁵⁶ when he attests that pronomianism is the belief in “[1] Seventh-Day Sabbath observance[, 2] Observance of Biblical festivals of Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Day of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles[, 3] Observance of the Biblical (Leviticus 11) dietary laws[, and 4] Physical circumcision of males on the 8th Day.”¹⁵⁷ Ensley proceeded to

¹⁵⁴ The term “pronomian” also emerged in a commentary on the Gospel of John, in which Frederick Dale Bruner notes the pronomian nature of John’s writings but is not yet convinced of its development as a theological concept. In discussing John’s biography of Jesus, Bruner remarks, “Pronomianism is trying, rightly, to teach that believing Christians should seek to keep Jesus’ commands of love, as John’s Gospel will stress in Jesus’ Farewell Address, and as the First Letter of John stresses throughout... but, this pronomian position does not seem to sufficiently appreciate the *freedom* from the Law.” Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 394–95.

¹⁵⁵ Jeff Young, “God’s Law Is Relevant To Me. Am I Messianic Or Christian?” *The Created Order* (August 2020), quoted by Judah Gabriel Himango, “Pronomian Christianity: An Alternative To Hebrew Roots and Messianic Judaism?” *Kineti L’Tziyon* (2021), <https://blog.judahgabriel.com/2021/11/pronomian-christianity-alternative-to.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Joshua Ensley, “What Is Pronomian Theology?” *joshuaensley.org* (January 6, 2021), <https://joshuaensley.org/2021/01/06/what-is-pronomian-theology/>. Years later, Ensley wrote another article further explaining pronomianism. Joshua Ensley, “Pronomianism: What is It?” *joshuaensley.org* (December 9, 2023), <https://joshuaensley.org/2023/12/09/pronomianism-what-is-it/>.

¹⁵⁷ Another similar definition by McKenzie that mirrors Ensley’s adds, “We have faith in the effectual atonement of Christ (as the Law and the Prophets point only to Messiah),” “We do not syncretize pagan days, ways, or symbols into the worship of YHWH. We also do not observe or recognize Christmas, Easter, or other liturgical days like Lent, or “all saints day.” The origins of these “holidays,” are not found in the scriptures and

launch *The First Pronomian Statement* (formerly known as the *Rock Hill Statement*), which is an attempt to connect those who hold a pronomian view by a unified document.¹⁵⁸ Its

Preamble states,

Christians around the world are awakening to the validity and applicability of God's commandments. Over the past few decades, we have seen a surge in support for God's righteous Law and a recognition of the perpetual morality that is expressed within it. This First Pronomian Statement is, therefore, an attempt by some who call themselves Pronomian Christians to codify an official set of beliefs. This statement was drafted and published by those who believe that true Christian pronomianism yields the following beliefs. This statement will serve as an overarching standard of agreement for future Pronomian conferences and to help network existing Pronomians with each other. Signing the statement, however, does not mean that you are part of a new denomination or affirm some sort of ecclesiastical structure, but that you stand alongside other Christian men and women in affirming core Christian doctrines. As the Church continues to turn towards the renewal of God's righteous Law in its life, we hope that more and more Christians continue to agree to and sign this statement. May this First Pronomian Statement bring glory to God's name as it unites His people in allegiance to Him and His Law.¹⁵⁹

In this statement, article VI is most relevant regarding the role of the Torah (Law) when it declares, "WE AFFIRM that God gave His commandments throughout the Bible as a revelation of moral behavior and mankind's obedience is still expected. WE DENY that Christians should reject or ignore God's commands on account of God's grace."¹⁶⁰ Therefore,

therefore cannot be supported in biblical orthopraxy," and "[W]e believe that all parts of the Torah are applicable for modern practice and sanctification of the elect, unless that command is physically impossible to be walked out (for instance, the lack of a temple means those laws are, at least in the time being, moot)." Scott McKenzie, "Statement of Faith," *The Pronomian*, <https://thepronomian.com/statement-of-faith>. This webpage is now defunct.

¹⁵⁸ In the twentieth century, there have been attempts to establish creeds within Messianic Judaism. The proposed creed for a Hebrew Christian Church, pioneered by Sir Leon Levison, is perhaps the most pronomian of them all. Gershon Nerel, "Creeds Among Jewish Believers in Yeshua between the Wars," *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 34 (2001): 61–79.

¹⁵⁹ Joshua Ensley, "The First Pronomian Statement," *The First Pronomian Statement* (2022), <https://firstpronomianstatement.com>. Ensley believes that Pronomians are those that sign this statement (capital "P"), while those who observe the Law but do not sign the statement (e.g., Tim Hegg) are pronomians (little "p"). This does not seem to be a helpful designation.

¹⁶⁰ Ensley, "The First Pronomian Statement."

pronomianism affirms that such “works” for God are not salvific in nature but rather a sanctifying action that demonstrates a believer’s love of God practically, in light of grace.¹⁶¹

As Reno contends, “Christians do well to turn to Jewish thinkers, for they can help us formulate pronomian antidotes to our antinomian diseases.”¹⁶² There are those that have cautioned early that pronomianism itself should not evolve into its own denomination but rather remain a theological position within one’s denomination (or as a non-denominational Christian, for that matter). Caleb Hegg, son of theologian Tim Hegg, writes,

Some have attempted to make the term “Pronomian Christian” into a sect or a movement. This, however, is something we do not find helpful. God’s law should be the foundation of every Christian denomination and movement. Only those who are antinomian will find themselves at odds with this theological position. As believers we should continue to conform our lives to the very nature of God and the standard He has set forward for us. Such a standard is found within the pages of our Bible. This is not an outrageous claim, in fact, the majority of Christian denominations will agree to some extent with this position. If the law of God is not the standard for the believer in Jesus Christ, then what is the standard? It should quickly be noted that observance of God’s law will not gain anyone favor in God’s eyes, nor will it help justify us in any way. Rather, it is the natural want for followers of Christ to conform to our Lord’s commands. This may look different from community to community, but those who are justified by faith alone will naturally want to follow the Word of God. We see this said specifically in the book of James [2:14–26]¹⁶³

Hegg is correct in ensuring that pronomianism should not be seen as a sect (or denomination).

It is in a sense a movement, but one that identifies as a theological interpretation, a

¹⁶¹ Caleb Hegg beautifully states “with the penalty of disobeying the law taken away, the Torah itself becomes a perfect form of grace for the believer.” He goes on to say that this is seen through understanding God (“The law of God is a reflection of who He is... To be able to see a picture of who God is and what His nature is as a means of grace”), being like Christ (“The law of God is grace because it shows us how we are to follow, walk like, and conform to Christ”), pursuing holiness (“God has told us exactly how He operates through a covenant document... through grace He has given us clear instructions on our relationship with Him”), and understanding commands as blessings (“God’s commandments are not a burden (1 John 5:3) but are an outpouring of love and grace to the ones He has chosen to call His own”). Caleb Hegg, “The Grace of Law,” *Pronomian.com* (2022), <https://pronomian.com/the-grace-of-law/>.

¹⁶² R. R. Reno, “Loving the Law,” *First Things* 219 (2012): 34.

¹⁶³ Caleb Hegg, “In a Nutshell,” *Pronomian.com* (2022), <https://pronomian.com/pronomian-theology/>.

hermeneutic, rather than, say, the Hebrew Roots movement (which is without a theological foundation). McKee, in considering the concept, graciously notes that in “those identifying with the label pronomian... there does tend to be a very high respect for Christianity, for the legitimate contribution of evangelicalism, and there also tends to be a very high regard for biblical scholarship... pronomian[ism] wants to dismiss the errors and extremes of Hebrew roots... [which] has a tendency to treat everything that Christianity (particularly evangelical Protestantism) has done, as just one big lie, [as] sin, [and as] paganism.”¹⁶⁴ Pronomianism is driven toward a goal of identification as a serious theological interpretation consistent within mainstream Christianity and affirmed by scholarship.

Dispelling False Dichotomy 1: Law versus Grace (a.k.a., Law versus Gospel) ¹⁶⁵

It is common today for churches and some in academia to use the phrases “Law versus grace” and “Law versus gospel” when referring to the commonly understood differences between the doctrines before the life of Jesus Christ and those thereafter. The majority view holds that the Law was primarily for Jews and not intended for Gentiles (past or present), nor was it for Jewish believers in Jesus after His resurrection. Before Jesus, there lacked grace as believers were oppressed by the laws in the Torah, yet since His First Coming, these laws have been fulfilled (which is interpreted to ultimately mean abolished) and believers are no longer living “under the law” but under grace. The Law is seen as burdensome and interpreted by some as salvific in nature, whereas the gospel personifies Jesus Christ, is not burdensome, and declares that He alone saves. Much of this stems from

¹⁶⁴ J. K. McKee, “Pronomian: A Short Observation—Today’s McKee Moment,” *Messianic Apologetics / Outreach Israel Ministries*, November 4, 2022, YouTube video, 4:35, <https://youtu.be/DHLCT-crMSQ>.

¹⁶⁵ The first three false dichotomies presented here are a revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. Benjamin Szumskyj, “Reconsidering the Extent of the Law” (class paper submitted in THEO525: Systematic Theology at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2019).

the belief that there is a distinction between the “Old” Covenant and Testament and the “New” Covenant and Testament.¹⁶⁶

There is a problem with this view. Grace existed throughout all the OT, as Paul himself attests in Romans 4:16 (cf. Gen. 15:6; Heb. 11:8), while the laws in the Torah were never abolished by Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17; cf. John 14:15; 1 John 2:3), which Paul also attests (Rom. 3:31; 6:15; 7:7).¹⁶⁷ Whether the laws were exclusively for the Jews and not for Gentiles will be explored later in the chapter, but not once does Scripture state that the commanded instructions of God save.¹⁶⁸ There are also countless laws in the NT expected of believers, yet these are never criticized or ignored to the extent of those preserved in the OT. Furthermore, in tackling the perspective that the Law and the gospel are compatible, MaGee, in studying Romans 3:27–31, ascertains that “Paul’s concern in the section is to demonstrate the compatibility of his gospel of faith with the law as God designed it... [he] associates faith and the law to begin clarifying what characterizes the law as God intended it all along,”¹⁶⁹ adding that the Shema’s (Deut. 6:4-9) inclusion in Romans 3:30 demonstrates “that the Shema, the heart of the Mosaic Law, vindicates his gospel, [and] is able to reject the charge (μή γένοιτο) that his gospel of faith undermines God’s law.”¹⁷⁰ Faith, not works, is at the

¹⁶⁶ Ariel and D’Vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered*, 5th ed. (San Bernardino, CA: Shoreshim Publishing, 2012), 44–45.

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix 1: “A Pronomian Interpretation of Matthew 5:17–20.”

¹⁶⁸ “Good works are not antithetical to the good news. To the contrary, good works are part of that good news; God works on us and in us so that God can work through us. God justifies us freely by grace alone through faith alone, and good works necessarily follow justification as the ‘fruit’ or evidence of it. God regenerates and sanctifies his people as he prepares them for the glorification of the beatific vision, and God uses good works to do so. And God’s grace is even so amazing that it can transform broken and perverted sinners into agents of his redemptive work in the world.” Thomas McCall, Caleb T. Friedeman, and Matt T. Friedeman, *Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 188. While not adherents of pronomianism, there is much that does align.

¹⁶⁹ Gregory S. MaGee, “Paul’s Gospel, the Law, and God’s Universal Reign in Romans 3:31,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 2 (2014): 344.

¹⁷⁰ MaGee, “Paul’s Gospel, the Law, and God’s Universal Reign in Romans 3:31,” 345.

heart of the Torah's laws. MaGee's presupposition is that there is no tension between the laws in the Torah and the gospel of God which Paul speaks of in his epistle. While different, they do not conflict and contradict, but rather harmonize and are in unity with one another. His focus on Paul's reinforcement of the Shema's teaching in Romans 3:30 is quite profound, for the proclamatory verse that proceeds it establishes the flawless conclusion: because God is One, as taught in the Shema, which is representative of the entire Law (being the OT as a whole), the Law is not nullified but established. In other words, because Romans 3:30 is true, being a text that represents the Law, then the Law is still active, practiced, and valuable. Observance of the commanded instructions was both taught and expected from the first century and after.¹⁷¹

Dispelling False Dichotomy 2: Old versus New Covenant/Testament

The terms "Old" and "New" Testament are nowhere to be found in the Scriptures and come from a traditional interpretation of there being two covenants, Old and New (concluded from 2 Corinthians 3:14 and Jeremiah 31:31; Luke 22:20). It was an interpretation that emerged post-canon in the late second century, when Melito of Sardis referred to those writings of the Hebrews as being the "Old Covenant" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26.14)¹⁷². In the fifth century, translating the Greek manuscripts into the Latin Vulgate, Jerome rendered the word "diatheke" (covenant) to "testamentum," which then was adopted into the English language as "testament." This has divided the unity of Scriptures and caused

¹⁷¹ In studying the book of James, McKnight remarks that "James's theory of the Torah... is mediated to him through Jesus as the sage who interpreted the Torah itself through the Shema revised", summarizing his earlier belief that James was taught to be Torah-observant by his brother, Jesus. Scot McKnight, "The Law of Laws: James, Wisdom, and the Law," *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Identity*, ed. Susan J. Wendel and David M. Miller (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 120.

¹⁷² Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1989), 135.

it not to be seen as a single body of writings but rather separate. It also ensures that the earlier writings (and their distinct doctrines) are seen as less than the latter canon of writings.

Linguistically, that which is old will always be understood as inferior to that which is labeled new. 2 Corinthians 3:14 is the only place in Scriptures where the term “Old Covenant” is used. Here, the apostle Paul is speaking of an OT devoid of the Holy Spirit, whose absence is necessary in order to reveal Jesus within its writings, understand that He would fulfil the Law therein, establish a way that we might abide in Him and His teachings, and live out the prophecy of Jeremiah 31’s “New (Renewed) Covenant.”¹⁷³ As Hegg perceptively remarks,

The “old covenant” (used only one time in Scripture, 2 Corinthians 3:14) is an expression used only by Paul to refer to a Jewish person who reads the Tanach apart from the illuminating work of the Spirit. When this occurs, the Jewish reader does not see Yeshua in the Tanach because a veil lies over his heart. As long as he reads the Tanach as mere letters without the illuminating work of the Spirit he will never see the Messiah of Whom the Prophets spoke, and the Tanach does not lead to salvation. But when these same Scriptures, the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, are read with the veil removed by the Spirit, then these same words show him Messiah, and bring Him to saving faith. Without the Spirit the Tanach is the “old covenant,” but with the Spirit the Tanach leads to Messiah, the Torah is written on the heart, fulfilling the promise of the “new covenant” (cf. Jeremiah 31:31–34).¹⁷⁴

Likewise, the often-cited Hebrews 9:1 makes an editorial assumption as the word covenant *does not* appear in the original manuscripts. It is added, primarily by theological

¹⁷³ Unless quoting another author, the word “Renewed” will be in parenthesis between the words “New” and “Covenant” to contend that the covenant in Jeremiah 31 should be thought as of a renewal, both continuing and discontinuing aspects of the Mosaic Covenant, yet due to space, a detailed argument is beyond the purview of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁴ Tim Hegg, “Spirituality: Are We Better Off Now? A Response to a Commonly Held Position,” *TorahResource*, <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/spirituality-are-we-better-off-now.pdf>. Coward echoes these thoughts when he writes, “Christians believed that a new age of inspired revelation had dawned in Jesus, and that through him God has given the gift of the Spirit to every believer at baptism. This Spirit was judged to be the same Spirit that had inspired the prophets of old to speak God’s words, which were committed to writing. The early Christians also rejected the oral Torah of the rabbis as “making void the word of God” (Mark 7:13). They were convinced that a veil was drawn over the minds of the rabbis when they read the Scriptures, and that only when a person turned to Jesus was the veil removed (2 Corinthians 3:14–16).” Harold Coward, *Scripture in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 51.

interpretation, with a secondary justification on a possible understanding of the Greek construct. The author though, is not referring to a covenant but rather the (Levitical) Temple service and sacrificial system (cf. Heb. 8:7, 13).

Excursus: On “Covenant” Editorially Inserted into Hebrews 8:7, 13 and 9:1

Almost all English translations include the word “covenant,” usually in italics, in Hebrews 8:7, 13 and 9:1. It is not found in any of the Greek manuscripts; yet many scholars insist that Hebrews 8:7 is referring back to v.6, and therefore the absence of the word “covenant” is merely reflective of the topic discussed prior (known as an elliptical construction in which translators carry forward the antecedent from the previous verse). However, one does not have to disagree with the principles of Greek language to arrive at a different conclusion and maintain a consistent reading of the text without importing additional information on the New (Renewed) Covenant that is briefly spoken about in the studied text. McKee notes that

Grammatically speaking, given the surrounding context, there are four possible feminine nouns that can be legitimately associated with the *diatheke* or “covenant” is certainly one of them, but so are *skene* (σκηνή) or “tabernacle,” [Heb. 8:2, 5; 9:2–3, 6, 8, 11, 21] *hierosune* (ιερωσυνη) or “priesthood,” or even *leitourgia* (leitourgia) or “ministry/service.” The latter three would be used as references to the Levitical sacrificial system, which the author of Hebrews has affirmed previously in ch. 8, is surpassed in effectiveness by the Melchizedekian priesthood of Yeshua (vs. 1–4).¹⁷⁵

Taking an exegetical step back, 3:1 introduces the role of the priesthood, a ministry of the Temple, and Jesus’ role as High Priest. 4:14–16 continues to discuss the ministerial role of Jesus. All of Chapter 5 speaks about the priesthood and its ministry, both of Jesus and

¹⁷⁵ J. K. McKee, *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 129.

Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:9–18 speaks of “better things” and 6:19–8:5 is an exhaustive commentary on the ministry of the priesthood and the role of the High Priest, Jesus. Hebrews 8:6 begins with a discussion on this topic, pauses to speak of its relation to the “better” covenant, and then finishes the same sentence about the ministry. So, at the opening of 8:7, there is no indication that the topic has changed from ministry. Had the author wanted to refer to the above-mentioned Covenant, he would have. Hebrew 8:8–12 does explore the relation between the covenant and the Temple ministry, but then proceeds to continue the extensive commentary on the ministry and its “regulations of divine worship and the early sanctuary” (9:1) all the way to 10:18. While referencing covenant at times, the overwhelming focus is ministry, not covenant. This is further highlighted by the fact that Hebrews 8:1 uses the word “them,” not “it” or “covenant” when referring to that which has been previously discussed; it is about the ministry of the priesthood in the Temple, as represented by people.¹⁷⁶ It is the ministry that is becoming obsolete (until the Millennium; cf. Exod. 29:9; Num. 18:8, 19; 25:10–13; 1 Chron. 15:2), further affirmed by the prophecy of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:3) and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Hegg rightly summarizes that

The Greek of our verse seems to lack the completion of a conditional clause, for if we were to translate it woodenly, it would be; “For if that first was flawless, never a place for a second will be sought.” What is missing is the corresponding apodosis (“then”) for the initial “if” (prothesis). But such unfulfilled conditional sentences are not uncommon in Hebrews. The fact that the sentence opens with the conditional “if” means that a corresponding “then” is implied and required. So the logic of our author is clear: if the Levitical service in the Tabernacle and Temples had brought a complete fulfillment of God’s saving plan, then there would have been no need for a priest after the order of Melchizedek to be commissioned... This is the point: our author is not contrasting two covenants...but two priesthoods, the first (Levitical) and the second (Yeshua as the Melchizedek high priest).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ In Ezekiel 36:25, “the description mixes the metaphors of priestly cleansing rituals and blood springlike ceremonies” and therefore, intentionally connects the Mosaic commandments with the New Covenant. See: Block, *Ezekiel 25–48* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 354.

¹⁷⁷ Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Book of Hebrews—Volume 1: Chapters 1–8* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2016), 332.

This flawed nature of the Levitical priesthood is evidenced throughout Scripture (Mal. 2:8). Furthermore, is Hebrews 8:7 inferring that the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai was not “faultless” and rendered as obsolete, but instead is an “everlasting” covenant (Ezek. 44:4–14; cf. Lev. 26:44; Deut. 5:29; 12:28; Judg. 2:1; Pss. 89:34; 105:8–10; 111:7–9; 1 Chron. 16:15–17)? If this position is accepted, it could be argued that all of the Mosaic Covenant should be considered faulty, *including* the moral laws. Consistency is indeed an issue here. The proposed interpretation, however, favors Hebrews 8:7, 13 and 9:1 as continuing the discussion that previous chapters explored: the ministry of the priesthood in the Temple as represented by people.

Renewed, not “New”

While not the intention of this chapter, a brief discussion is warranted regarding the phrase “New Covenant.” The preference of “renewed” over “new” within this dissertation can be justified from Scripture. The Hebrew word חָדָשׁ *châdâsh* can mean that which is entirely new and that which has been refreshed or renewed. It all depends on context. For example, Exodus 1:8 speaks of a “new” king in Egypt. While in one sense there is a brand-new person in the role, the role itself is not at all new: the duties, nature, and power of the position remain the same. Leviticus 26:10 speaks of a “new” year. Years are the same, chronologically speaking. How they are used, as one passes and another starts, does not mean that each is a new conception in itself. While the book of Psalms often speaks of new songs (33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1), these are “new” in the sense of their composition and lyrics, yet their focus remains the same (on God) and their purpose does as well (collective worship). Isaiah 65:17 speaks of a “new heavens and earth.” These are not new conceptions

but rather renewed creations. Lamentations 3:23 speaks of mercies “new” every morning, whether the same as yesterday or different today. In all these instances, that which is “new” is not an entirely a new concept, creation, or construct; there are elements that are renewed and elements that are revealed. While not entirely pronomian in his thinking, Averbek notes that both continuity and discontinuity apply to the Mosaic covenant in relation to the New (Renewed) Covenant, yet admits “the Old Testament law, which is embedded in the Mosaic covenant, is *not* left behind in the new covenant.”¹⁷⁸

In the Greek, the word for new is “καίνος *kainós*.” When speaking of form, it can refer to both freshness and recent creation; speaking of substance, it can mean “uncommon” or “unprecedented.” For example, we again see a new heaven and earth, Jerusalem, name(s), song, etc., in Revelation 2:17, 3:12, 5:9, 14:3, and 21:1, yet all are both renewed and revelatory in their elements. In looking at the NT verses relating to the New (Renewed) Covenant in the Scriptures, there are clearly aspects that remain the same: bread and wine in the Passover are still used when remembering the life and death of Jesus Christ, the content described in the covenant is composed of both familiar and unfamiliar comments, and so on. Again, context is imperative to understand words and passages, as it shapes our conclusions about a doctrine. New, then, does not mean that the old has permanently ended.

There are examples of covenant renewal in Scripture, which strengthens the preferred phrasing of Jeremiah’s prophesied covenant. Baltzer contends that Exodus 34, 2 Chronicles 29:5–11, Ezra 9–10, Nehemiah 9–10, and Jeremiah 34:8–22 could be understood as covenant-renewal ceremonies.¹⁷⁹ Joshua 24 and 2 Kings 22–23 are helpful guides in understanding the process of renewing a pre-existing covenant, without contending that a

¹⁷⁸ Richard E. Averbek, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 61.

¹⁷⁹ Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings*, trans. D. E. Green (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 39–62.

present covenant can render obsolete a previous one. Joshua, in the wake of Moses' death and entering the Promised Land, sought to renew that which had been heralded to Israel at Mt. Sinai. He understood that they had changed as a people because of sin, but God's standard for holiness had not, and he called out the people on this (Josh. 24:14–15, 18, 23). Likewise, King Josiah and his reformations in light of reclaiming the book of the Law recognized this. The irony here is that Josiah's approach to national renewal acknowledged the need to preserve orthodoxy (e.g., 2 Kings 23:21–22), yet pursued a fresh orthopraxy (2 Kings 23:3). In renewing Israel's commitment to the Mosaic Covenant, Josiah reveals both consistency and variance of what has been practiced by the nation in the past (2 Kings 23:4–20).

Terblanche notes that

the renewed covenant cannot be reduced to a renewed Sinai covenant such as the one that was concluded on the plains of Moab (Deut. 5:2–3; 28:69; 29:1), at Shechem (Jos. 24), or at the climax of the Josainic reform (2 Kgs. 23). In Jeremiah 31:32, the new covenant is set against the covenant that YHWH had concluded with their fathers... [yet,] the content of the new covenant would, nonetheless, be similar to that of the old—the same *torah* and the same partners. The newness appears in the manner of establishing the relationship and in its consequences of unmediated knowledge of YHWH... The *torah* will be fully internalized.¹⁸⁰

Influenced by the writings of Meredith G. Kline, who states that the “historical relationship sustained by the new covenant to the old covenant and the place occupied by the New Testament as the divine documentation of the new covenant compel us to understand that New Testament as a resumption of that documentary mode of covenant administration represented by the Old Testament,”¹⁸¹ Berkowitz proposes “that neither the Book of

¹⁸⁰ M. D. Terblanche, “Jeremiah 31:31–34: A Prospect of True Transformation,” *Acta Theologica* 41, no. 32 (2021): 262.

¹⁸¹ As such, the “New Testament belongs to that pattern of renewing covenants by the issuance of new treaty documents which is already found in the inner history of old covenant administration.” Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1972), 68.

Hebrews [cf. 8:8–12] nor any other part of the Newer/Renewed Covenant Scriptures represents a covenant that annuls or abrogates the covenants that God previously made with His people... instead, the best way to view the contents of [these] is to see this covenant as a renewal of the covenants already ratified.”¹⁸² A more consistent understating of covenants in Scripture then, is one that does not see covenants as linear but coexisting together in complementary ways, a dynamic tension that does not have latter covenants implying superiority, and acknowledging the fulfilment of promises within the covenant (not the covenant itself).¹⁸³

In the past, the old covenant “killed” as it was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6). Yet, in the wake of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the old covenant that once led to death is now made alive because the consequences of breaking the laws of Torah have been paid for with the blood of Jesus. As the anonymous author of the epistle remarks, Jesus’ “death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant” (Heb. 9:15). The emphasis here is on the act of breaking, not on what was broken. Interpreting the New (Renewed) Covenant as the old covenant with “the Spirit... [which] gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6) deconstructs the perceived division between the two and potentially makes the titles of “Old and New” Testaments unnecessary. This raises an additional issue that can be dealt with easily from the Scriptures. In Jeremiah 31:27–34, the passage of origin in defining the New (Renewed) Covenant, there is no mention of Gentiles, yet all professing Christians affirm they are of the New (Renewed) Covenant. If, however, one understands “the house of Israel” here to be believing Israel, not ethnic Israel, composing both Jew and Gentile believers in the Trinitarian God, then as

¹⁸² Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered*, 51–52. Gal 3:16-19 then, speaks of adding not in the sense of replacing, but rather, enlarging.

¹⁸³ Andrew R. Davis, “A Biblical View of Covenants Old and New,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 3 (2020): 631–48.

Gentiles are “grafted in” the New (Renewed) Covenant incorporates them (Rom. 11:17–24; Eph. 2:11–13, 19; 3:6).

Dispelling False Dichotomy 3: Ceremonial, Civil, and Moral Laws

As explored in the previous chapter, the laws in the Torah have been embedded with a tripartite nature originating in Roman Catholicism, one that makes the assumption that there are three aspects of the Scriptures which all pertain to the Jew and only one to the Gentile: ceremonial, civil, and moral laws. The last of these is still operative and to be believed and practiced by those who believe in Jesus Christ, while the other two were never binding and only for the Jew (who, in coming to Jesus, will finally be free of those laws). As stated in Chapter 1, this divisive label did not occur before the Middle Ages, and the earliest account of it being an established train of thought was in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* (particularly questions 99–105) written between 1265–1274. Centuries later, it was preserved as the norm in creeds such as the *Belgic Confession* (1563; article 25) and *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563; article 7). The problem with this division, again, is that it has no basis in the Scriptures and fuels the dichotomies against the Law. It presupposes that a majority of the Law is no longer valid to the believer now that Jesus has come, and that when He said He came to fulfill the Law His actions essentially abolished it and rendered a large portion of the Old Testament redundant. Exegetically, this tripartite label is a landmine of contradictions and inconsistency. Not only are many ethics derived from the Law,¹⁸⁴ but trying to determine what is ceremonial, what is civil, and what is moral becomes a futile exercise, for “disobeying God, whether within the sphere of daily life [civil] or specifically on matters

¹⁸⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

relating to one's worship [ceremonial], always falls into the realm of moral [moral] or ethical behaviours."¹⁸⁵ Those that don't necessarily believe that all of the Law is intended for sanctification today are honest about the flaw of placing on it a three part nature. Hays notes three major weaknesses with this view: "it is arbitrary and without any textual support, it ignores the narrative context, and it fails to reflect the significant implications of the change from Old Covenant to New Covenant.... this approach, therefore, is inadequate as a hermeneutic method for interpreting and applying the Law."¹⁸⁶ Barrs also admits these "divisions are not hard and fast... many of the ceremonial laws included moral and civil aspects... many of the civil laws include moral aspects... a problematic consequence of this view, if it is held with systematic rigor, is that the beauties of the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law become lost to us during this present age."¹⁸⁷ Many in scholarship are abandoning these labels, yet there is little discussion of what this means for orthopraxy. Sadly, most denominations insist on maintaining the three-part legal framework.

Dispelling False Dichotomy 4: The Spirit of the Law versus the Letter of the Law

The "Spirit of the Law" versus the "Letter of the Law" is yet another false dichotomy. Nowhere in Scripture is a believer absolved from physically practicing a law in favor of a

¹⁸⁵ Tim Hegg, "Didn't God Abolish the Ceremonial and Civil Parts of the Law, Requiring of Us Only the Moral Law?" *Why We Keep Torah: Ten Persistent Questions* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2013), 135–36.

¹⁸⁶ J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (2001): 30. Even on the opposite spectrum, Dorsey fairly notes "the scheme of a tripartite division is unknown both in the Bible and in early rabbinic literature[,]... the categorizing of certain selected laws as 'moral' is methodologically questionable... and the attempt to formulate this special category in order to 'save' for NT Christians a handful of apparently universally-applicable laws—particularly the ones quoted in the NT—is an unnecessary effort." David Alden Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 3 (1991): 329–32. Granted, Hays is not contending for pronomianism and acknowledges a shift in change regarding covenants, but his specific commentary on dividing the Law aligns with pronomian thinking.

¹⁸⁷ Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord: God's Alternative to Legalism and Moralism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 314.

spiritual approach. Rather, one's spiritual and physical dispositions toward God must align. An example of this is Galatians 5:23 ("self-control") and Matthew 5:28 ("in his heart"). The physical harmonizes with the spiritual. 2 Corinthians 3:7–8 speaks of a complimentary glory between the previous covenants and the Spirit-indwelt New (Renewed) Covenant. A Spiritless Law kills, but a Spirit-filled Law "gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). As Miller rightly notes,

One of the props that is marshaled to support the concept known as "situationism" is the notion that a legitimate distinction may be made between the "letter of the law" and the "spirit of the law." It is argued that sometimes it is necessary, even mandatory, to violate the "letter of the law" in order to act in harmony with the "spirit of the law." According to this line of thinking, those who insist that obedience to God's law always is required—without exception—are "hung up on the letter of the law" instead of being led by the "spirit of the law." Of course, this kind of thinking naturally breeds and nurtures a relaxed attitude toward obedience. It militates against a desire to be precise and careful in conformity to Bible teaching.¹⁸⁸

In approaching 2 Corinthians 3:4–18, Miller further contends that the passage is antithetical in nature, contrasting the two covenants, and "[p]recisely the same meaning is conveyed by the same terminology in Paul's letter to the Romans (2:29; 7:6)... [for t]he Old Testament legal system, though an excellent system for what God had in mind (Romans 7:12), was unable to provide ultimate forgiveness for violations of law and, in that sense, "kills" [and i]t took Jesus dying on the cross to make "life" possible (i.e., actual cleansing from sin)."¹⁸⁹ Hence, the phrase of the "Spirit of the Law" versus "Letter of the Law" has created a tension not found in Scripture and actually results in the sin of disobedience. External factors, as opposed to those within, do not exclusively shape behaviour. Obedience is the result of a "new heart" (Ezek. 36:26).

¹⁸⁸ David Miller, "The Spirit and Letter of the Law," *Apologetics Press* (2002), <https://apologeticspress.org/the-spirit-and-letter-of-the-law-1225/>.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The false dichotomies listed, are a testament to how ingrained a traditional train of thought exists within mainstream Christianity, to the point it is no longer questioned.

Proposal 1: A New Definition

Convenient as the definition of pronomianism as being “pro-law” is, it is nevertheless too simplistic and needs a fuller treatment. *The First Pronomian Statement* is a great start, but if pronomianism is to have a genuine hope of being seriously considered within academic communities and Christian churches it needs a definition agreed upon by its proponents. What follows is a proposed foundational definition that takes into consideration all that has been written on this topic and harmonizes various concepts into a single coherent thought.

Pronomianism is a pro-Torah hermeneutic, a methodology of interpretation, that theologically approaches all sixty-six books of the Scripture as a unified canon (i.e., the completed Torah) and as authoritative, infallible, inspired, and inerrant in nature, while teaching that practical application of divinely commanded instructions are a means of sanctification in the life of the redeemed believer. As Scripture is its own interpreter, passages are interpreted according to context, culture, grammar, literature, and history, as affirmed by the authorship of the Holy Spirit, understanding that the immutability of Scripture extends to God’s breathed out words preserved for all redeemed generations. Pronomianism affirms that abidance in the commanded instructions of God given to the eternal ekklesia of God has no bearing on salvation nor contributes to justification, but is evidence of an individual’s salvation and the fruit of their walk with God. It is love in action and a sanctifying component of the work of the Holy Spirit in conforming the believer into the image of God the Son. The Law is operative in the life of believers since its codification at Sinai. Its commandments have never been tripartite in nature and are therefore unable to be

labeled as ceremonial, civil, or moral, for all are inherently moral in their nature.

Pronomianism insists that as God is immutable, so too is His Word, and His words were never to be abolished or interpreted so as to abrogate any part of His lawful commandments, all of which were intended for Jews and Gentiles and were never ethnocentric in nature.

While having a primary interpretation, these commandments can be applied literally or non-literally (principally and paradigmatically).

Pronomianism relates primarily to the doctrine of sanctification, yet it does acknowledge a direct impact on ecclesiology, maintaining that Jew and Gentile believers in the Messiah are neither sanctified independently nor are meant to be physically separate in their communal life of fellowship. Instead, they are one body of believers who congregate as a covenantal community, called out and chosen from the earthly nations, a royal priesthood and holy nation of God. Fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenantal community has had several different names throughout history, including “church” and “congregation,” but it is principally understood as the ekklesia of God, referred to as redeemed Israel (Gal. 6:16).¹⁹⁰

Proposal 2: The Thirteen Principles of Pronomian Faith

Pronomianism is, as has been stated, not a denomination. It is a theological interpretation, a hermeneutic centered on Scripture. It is a movement of individuals who maintain a theological interpretation that they believe can be practiced within a local

¹⁹⁰ On the argument of the ekklesia being “the Israel of God” there have been many convincing contentions advanced in scholarship. G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6:16b,” *Biblica* 80, no. 2 (1999): 204–23; Christopher W. Cowan, “Context Is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ In Galatians 6:16,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (2010): 78–85; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Identity of the ἸΣΡΑΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith and Mission* 19 (2001): 3–24. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, serious study is needed to see how pronomian thought impacts ecclesiology. Currently, it favors an interpretation that sees Israel in two ways: an unredeemed ethnic nation and a redeemed remnant nation, the latter being the body in which redeemed Gentiles have been grafted into, the ekklesia of YHWH.

congregation. Pronomianism contends that the instructed commandments of God are to be practiced today but not in a single denomination. While one could possibly be a “Pronomian Baptist” or a “Reformed Pronomian” (amending interpretations toward the Law according to historical creeds),¹⁹¹ pronomianism best succeeds in a non-denominational setting or Messianic Judaism (with revisions). There do, however, need to be principles that guide pronomian thinking and practice.

Principle 1: Pronomianism Affirms the Five Solae and Tota Scriptura

Pronomianism affirms the five solae (“five solas”) taught in the Reformation.¹⁹² While the list itself did not originate until the twentieth century,¹⁹³ each statement can be carefully extracted from select theologians during the era. All teachings associated with Reformed thinking uphold only the moral laws (theonomy being the exception), so, when a pronomian uses these terms, they do so with the understanding that they pertain to all the laws, not merely a third of them (i.e. the moral laws).

Sola Scriptura attests that Scripture alone is sufficient; every verse, each chapter, and each of the sixty-six books in the OT and NT canons. Scripture alone contains all that is necessary to know God and salvation, for it is authoritative, inerrant, and infallible in its conception, nature, and illumination. No tradition or writings by man contain truth and

¹⁹¹ It is naïve not to acknowledge that there will be tension between pronomian thinking and practice, and some confessions and statements of faith.

¹⁹² James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 65–149.

¹⁹³ “There’s no precise historical date that we can attribute to all these five.” Derek Thomas, “What Does ‘Sola Scriptura’ Mean?” *Ligonier Ministries* (2021), <https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/ask-ligonier/what-does-sola-scriptura-mean>. Furthermore, “the popular delineation of these five solas is not a Reformation idea but a modern one.” Chad B. van Dixhoorn, “Review: *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: the Solas of the Reformation* by Terry L. Johnson,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 23, no. 1 (2005): 119.

revelation from and of God apart from the Scriptures.¹⁹⁴ *Sola Fide* attests that by faith alone in God, not by the works of our hands or minds, believers are saved. Saving faith is a gift from God that cannot be bought, earned, lost, refined, revoked, or transferred, but it is gifted from God to those He has elected into salvation. It declares believers righteous by imputing Christ Jesus' righteousness to them, the act of justification. Believers are justified through faith. Other so-called faith apart from Scripture is not from God and does not save. *Sola Gratia* attests that God graciously saved believers because, in His lovingkindness, He blessed them despite them not deserving such a blessing. It is by grace believers have been saved, through faith and that not of themselves. It is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Believers did not have a hand in their own salvation; our reactions of confession are in response to God's actions in Christ Jesus. His salvific goodness is supreme because man is incapable of goodness and saving himself. *Solus Christus* attests that Christ Jesus alone is the savior and the only means of salvation; no other co-saves or salvifically intercedes for believers, for Christ Jesus' death was sufficient, and He alone is our mediator. No other person, persons, or works by person(s) are integral or necessary in either salvation or mediation, for the sinless life and substitutionary atonement of Christ Jesus alone was all that was necessary as preserved in the Scriptures, both prophetically and historically. Finally, *Soli Deo Gloria* attests that God created all things for His glory and man's purpose in life is to glorify God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is glorified through both general and special revelation, in creation, created Scripture, and His co-creating Son, Christ Jesus. By knowing God, making Him known, and living in accordance with His Scriptures, the believer glorifies God and manifests His purposes perfectly.

¹⁹⁴ Humbly, it could be contended that pronomianism is more consistent in this sola in that it affirms the entirety of the Law in practice, unlike the Reformed tradition.

Following on from the first principle is the affirmation of *tota Scriptura*, a helpful term that is no longer commonly used yet perfectly encapsulates pronomianism. Miller defines the word as the Protestant belief that “the Bible is a unified whole and all relevant material throughout the Bible should be brought to bear on one’s study of any topic or subject... [for] the Bible should serve as its own interpreter since its authorship has been unified through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹⁵ He later adds, that the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Chapter 1.9, essentially sets down the *tota* principle: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture . . . it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”¹⁹⁶ Sproul rightly comments that “[o]nce we remove ourselves from a view of *tota Scriptura*, we are free then to pick and choose what portions of Scripture are normative for Christian faith and life, just like picking cherries from a tree.”¹⁹⁷ Yet his tripartite view of the Law contradicts this statement. Pronomianism’s embrace of this term results in a true use of the theological concept, for it contends there is no ceremonial, civil, and moral division of the commanded instructions of God and that today they are still applicable, in accordance with context, both literally or non-literally.

Principle 2: Pronomianism Affirms the Unity of the Bible

Scripture is a unified library, one that should not be seen as two distinct libraries in which the latter canon is deemed superior to the former canon due to its content.¹⁹⁸ This is

¹⁹⁵ Nicholas Miller, *Reformation and the Remnant: The Reformers Speak to Today’s Church* (Nampa, ID: PacificPress, 2016), 26.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁹⁷ R. C. Sproul, “Tota Scriptura,” *Ligonier Ministries* (2008), <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/tota-scriptura>.

affirmed by Scripture itself (Ps. 19:7; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). Pronomianism approaches the Scriptures in their entirety in that it insists that all books be considered integral to the overall message that God has preserved throughout the closed canon. This, by extension, does not see the Law as pertaining to a single or specific dispensation but as woven throughout the narrative of Scripture as a whole.

Walter Kaiser has been instrumental in advocating this position within contemporary academia and has proposed six categories of unity: (1) structural, (2) historic, (3) prophetic, (4) doctrinal, (5) spiritual, and (6) kerygmatic.¹⁹⁹ In further studying the role of the Law in relation to the unity of Scripture, Kaiser perceptively declares the sobering truth to those who would seek to discredit the majority of Law on the false dichotomy of “Grace versus Law”:

Typical though it may be for all too many contemporary believers, such a presentation of the law’s relationship to the gospel of grace is all too absolute, antithetical, and one-sided to encompass a great number of Pauline passages, let alone the rest of the Bible. For example, Paul asks our question and answers it straightaway in Romans 3:31: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” Grace did not annul the law; instead, it “upheld” it. What did “fade away,” or “was rendered obsolete” (Gk., *katargoymenen*), however, was the “ministry” (Gk., *diakonia*) that Moses and Aaron introduced (2 Cor. 3:8, 11). What also needed to be “removed” (Gk., *anakaluptomenon*) was the “veil (Gk., *kalumma*) [that] covers [Israel’s] hearts” “when Moses [the old covenant] is read” (2 Cor. 3:14–15). “Only in Christ is [the veil] taken away” (Gk., *katargeitai*). Once more the apostle Paul asked the same question in Galatians 3:21: “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not!” Consequently, any solution to the question of unity of the law and the gospel that quickly does away with the law for the believer today cannot look to the Scriptures for support. One cannot say that believers have nothing to do with the law anymore, for in that case they will stand opposed to the plain teaching of the Scriptures. All too frequently people take an atomistic approach to this

¹⁹⁸ Ideally, the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament” would be abolished and either replaced with First Testament and Second Testament, Hebrew Scriptures and Greek Scriptures, or no designation be made at all.

¹⁹⁹ Walter Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 20–24; Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 21–28.

relationship and select an array of biblical phrases or verses from here and there in the Bible to prove their freedom from the law.²⁰⁰

Unity does not negate diversity, which Kaiser rightly highlights.²⁰¹ There is unity in diversity and such a perspective maintains a reverence towards the Scriptures that has eroded over the decades and resulted in full blown biblical illiteracy. Fuller notes several similarities between the law and the gospel:²⁰² that Paul denied that the Law was sin and never belittled the Law, that Scripture acknowledges that the New (Renewed) Covenant added only regeneration of the heart, that the OT faithful loved the Law, and that the Law at Mt. Sinai was a Law of Faith.²⁰³ The last point is worth considering:

The final evidence for the similarity of the law with the gospel comes from Hebrews 4:2, where the writer declares that “we also have had the gospel preached to us [in today’s church], just as they did [the Israelites who came out of Egypt]; but the message they heard was of no value to them because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.” The comparison of law and gospel implies that the law presented at Sinai was one of faith, with essentially the same content needed for salvation as the message people received in New Testament times. But people today, like Israelites in the wilderness, are just as liable to God’s wrath if they do not, in faith, turn the control of their lives over to the God who yearns to be benevolent to them.²⁰⁴

The unity of the Bible is spoken of *theoretically* within Christianity but is not consistently *practiced*, as evidenced by the disproportional sermons and studies on the NT over the former

²⁰⁰ Kaiser Jr., *Recovering Unity of the Bible*, 158.

²⁰¹ Kaiser Jr., *Recovering Unity of the Bible*, 26–28. He notes that there is diversity of language (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek), diversity of authorship (“at least forty” authors), diversity of qualifications (among the authors), diversity of place (both the location of the authors and the geographical locations they write about), diversity of forms (“a variety of genres”), diversity in subject matter, and diversity of the times covered and the times written in.

²⁰² Gregory S. MaGee, “Paul’s Gospel, the Law, and God’s Universal Reign in Romans 3:31,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 2 (2014): 341–50.

²⁰³ Fuller, *Unity of the Bible*, 345–50.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 350.

testament, the perpetually taught abrogation of the Law (in part or whole), and the dichotomies listed above. Pronomianism affirms that, rather than interpreting the majority of His laws ceasing with one people and with one testament, the unity of Scripture undergirds a consistent exegetical perspective that envisions a redeemed people abiding by holy instructions from Genesis to Revelation.

Principle 3: Pronomianism Correctly Identifies Three Definitions of Torah

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, in discussing pronomianism and the concept of the Law, believers must ensure that they are using correct definitions of the associated terms. It is irrelevant that a word has been used historically in a certain way; if it is incorrect, a linguistic shift is necessary. The Hebrew word “Torah” (תּוֹרָה *tôwrâh*), within Christian commentators and academic courses, is mistranslated as if synonymous with the word “Law.” This common view is unfortunate, for the connotation of the Law with Torah has the former negatively influence the latter, due to the universally perceived apprehension towards legal matters when discussing holy texts. There are, however, three distinct definitions of Torah according to the Scripture.

The first is instruction, which includes laws among other literary categories. As Goldberg writes,

The term *Torah* comes from the Hebrew word *yarah*, meaning *throw, cast, or shoot*. A noun, *moreh*, meaning *teacher*, is grammatically the *hiphil* of the same verb, while another noun derived from the *hiphil* is *torah*, defined as *instruction*. So a good teacher aptly “throws,” or “casts,” instruction at his or her disciples... As the divine Teacher, or *moreh*, God has imparted His “instruction” or Word to Israel... Torah is therefore to be regarded as “from heaven” (God-breathed) and it comes to man through the “unveiling of His presence” (revelation). This meaning of Torah, as it is understood in the

Scriptures, carries no taint of legalism, through what man *does to* Torah can at times become legalistic.²⁰⁵

The second definition is that the Torah refers to the first five books of the OT; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (cf. Acts 15:21).²⁰⁶ This definition is also known by the name Pentateuch, being a Greek word meaning “five books.” The OT is sometimes referred to as the Tanakh, being an acronym of the three divisions of Scriptures written in Hebrew, being Torah (“Law”), Nevi’im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings); TaNaKh. This threefold structure emerged sometime in the intertestamental period, as it is inferred in Luke 24:44 (cf. apocryphal Sirach 38:34–39:1 and its Prologue, in addition to Philo of Alexandria’s *On the Contemplative Life* 3:25). Sometimes only two divisions were mentioned, being the Law (or “Moses”) and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17; Luke 16:16, 29, 31; 24:27; John 1:45; Acts 26:22; cf. 2 Macc. 15:9; 4 Macc. 18:10).

The third, less common, definition encompasses the entire OT (cf. John 10:34–35; 1 Cor. 14:21) or is a shorthand for the OT and NT as a unified canon (evidenced in passages such as 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 5:18). When phrases such as “One Torah” and “Torah Observant” are used in pronomian circles, this third definition is often being employed.

It is important to add that the “613 Commandments” compiled by Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon) are not entirely scriptural; this is a man-made framework and one that was not monolithically embraced within rabbinical Judaism. It was cited briefly in the third century AD (Rabbi Simlai; b. Makkot 23b–24a) but not pioneered until the 12th century by Maimonides. Judaic scholar Hermen admits,

²⁰⁵ Goldberg, *God, Torah, Messiah*, 10.

²⁰⁶ “In time, the word Torah also came to have several narrower meanings, referring first of all to the Torah of Moses, or the Mosaic Covenant (Constitution), which is also divine revelation.” *Ibid.*, 10.

Taken as a whole, rabbinic literature hardly supports the claim that the Torah contains 613 commandments and the Babylonian Talmud never takes up the question of what constitutes a commandment for the purposes of this enumeration... there is perhaps no idea that is simultaneously as widely accepted, yet with so little basis in rabbinic literature, as the supposition that it is “unambiguous” that Jewish law consists of precisely 613 commandments.²⁰⁷

While Hermen explores the creation of Maimonides’ list and others who sought to compile a master list of commandments, it must be stressed that the number should not be considered as authoritative, representing the entirety of commanded instructions from God. Just as the tripartite structure imposed on the laws of God is problematic and without evidence in Scripture, so too are the “613 Commandments,” being a creation of man not intended to be a systematic rendering of the Law. Drazin further adds that

There is one serious problem with Maimonides’s list of biblical commands. Most of the laws in Maimonides’s list, if not all of them, have been modified and explained by the rabbis in ways that are not explicit in the Torah... It would be absurd to say that Maimonides did not realize that virtually all, if not all, of the commandments that he enumerated are rabbinic interpretations of the Bible, not explicit biblical commandments. Thus, although he does not say so, we should understand that he listed those commandments that the *rabbis said were biblical in origin*.²⁰⁸

The infamous “613 Commandments” are a list shaped by rabbinical thought and a theological framework that is not unanimously agreed upon within Judaism. Biblical commentators and scholars must be cautious in adopting this list as a means to contend that the Law is burdensome, overwhelming, and no longer applicable today. Deuteronomy 30:11–14 teaches

²⁰⁷ Marc Herman, “The Origins and Use of the 613 Mitzvot,” *TheTorah.com* (2016), <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-origins-and-use-of-the-613-mitzvot>; Marc Herman and Jeremy P. Brown, “The Commandments as a Discursive Nexus of Medieval Judaism,” in *Accounting for the Commandments in Medieval Judaism: Studies in Law, Philosophy, Pietism, and Kabbalah*, ed. Jeremy P. Brown and Marc Herman (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 3–24.

²⁰⁸ Israel Drazin, *Maimonides and the Biblical Prophets* (Jerusalem, Israel: Gefen Publishing House, 2009), 205.

the opposite. Careful analysis must be undertaken to identify commanded instructions from God and to refrain from mischaracterizing the Torah and its laws.

Principle 4: Pronomianism Acknowledges that Jesus and His Disciples never Broke the Laws in the Torah, only Its Rabbinical Interpretation

Jesus and His disciples were never accused of breaking the commanded instructions in the Torah. This point is regrettably ignored by most commentators. Jesus could have not broken them, for He was the perfect Lamb of God, without sinful blemish or spot (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 4:15). Likewise, His followers could also not be accused, for in their walk of faith they sought to abide in Him, memorize and practice His teachings, and raise up new disciples. Overman states, “Jesus and his disciples do not break the law[...] They break with the Pharisees over interpretation of the law, but not with regard to its validity or importance.”²⁰⁹ The distinction between the two was that Jesus practiced the Law perfectly, whereas the disciples (and those thereafter) do so imperfectly. Yet, they could never be accused of not practicing the commanded instructions taught to them.

Consider the case for Saturday Sabbath over Sunday. If the Sabbath had been changed to Sunday, it would have been one of the major charges laid against the apostle Paul, or James and John, in their ministry. Yet, the religious elites of Judaism that frequently accused Paul never once charged him for teaching the abrogation of the Sabbath because he never taught anything that contradicted the Law. Friedman notes that

if breaking the Torah or the mitzvot was a main reason for antagonism against the movement, we should expect to see this recorded in the New Testament...[however, Acts 4:1–4, 5–22; 5:17; 6:8; 8:3; 9:2, 23; 12:1, and

²⁰⁹ J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 81.

21:27–29] demonstrates that there was no valid charge of Torah-breaking in any of the above passages[;] if any type of Torah-breaking had been advocated, either in teaching or lifestyle, we should have read of protests against it... we do not see this (outside of one false charge that is not investigated any further according to the text)... [so,] whatever reasons are given for the prejudices against the first-century Messianic movement, Torah-breaking was *not* one of them.²¹⁰

Fortin adds, “Paul’s observance of the Sabbath was genuine, authentic, and not a subterfuge to *convert* Jews to Christianity... [he] was a Jew and intended to remain one, albeit as a member of a new sect,” adding that

what Luke is describing is not Paul inviting Jews and Gentiles to form a new religion; rather, he is proclaiming the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Messiah and this promise is for both Jews and Gentiles. Seen from this perspective, Paul’s visits to synagogues on Sabbath are not merely a strategy to win converts. Paul can be seen as a faithful Jew and observing the Sabbath: at this point in early Christian history, Paul and his colleagues are Jewish believers in Jesus the Messiah and keep the Sabbath.²¹¹

From Jesus, to His disciples, to contemporary times, the birthmark of a born-again believer should not be antinomianism. Law-breaking is not a characteristic taught or evidenced among first century believers nor should it be accepted today. Garrett uncompromisingly echoes this when he writes that the

conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was not about grace versus legalism. At no point did Jesus and the Pharisees argue over whether a person receives forgiveness by divine mercy or by acquiring merit through righteous acts. They certainly never argued over the value of the Law. Jesus never suggested that Torah was deficient because it teaches legalistic religion.²¹²

²¹⁰ David Friedman, *They Loved the Torah: What Yeshua’s Followers Really Thought About the Law* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2001), 99–100.

²¹¹ Denis Fortin, “Paul’s Observance of the Sabbath in Acts of the Apostles as a Marker of Continuity between Judaism and Early Christianity,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 2 (2015): 326, 329. It is important to stress here that ethnically, Paul was a Jew and taught against the idea that a Gentile could become a Jew through Torah-observance. He advocated an enlarged and Christ-centered faith intended for all ethnicities.

It would be inconceivable to the first century believer that Christianity abolished the majority of laws preserved in the Torah. Any interpretation that abrogates them under the guise of being fulfilled is not found in the scriptural record.

Principle 5: The Laws in the Torah Are Intended for Both the Redeemed Jew and Gentile

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, non-Jews who came to believe in the God of Israel became recipients of believing Israel's calling to be a light unto the nations.²¹³ These Gentiles were partakers integrated into the covenantal relationship they possessed. Scripture attests that *one* "law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you" (Exod. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15–16, 29; Isa. 56:6–8). This did not mean that all believers were to abide by the same laws (e.g., there are laws specifically for men or women) but that redeemed Gentiles in believing Israel were to be seen as co-heirs in the spiritual community. Scripture often attests to examples of when Gentiles who had become believers in the God of Israel were expected to fully engage with His instructions, both social and religious. The notion of "Jewish" festivals, laws, and practices is not consistent with the Scriptures. Such a quantifier is misleading. Kelly notes how Gentiles are permitted in the Temple to worship God:

On the one hand, Israel once lived as vulnerable dependents in a foreign land where they experienced abuse and oppression. By incorporating the נָגִי into the

²¹² Duane A. Garrett, *The Problem of the Old Testament: Hermeneutical, Schematic & Theological Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 232–34. He states the exact same about the ministry of the apostle Paul.

²¹³ Gane notes that God's covenant with Israel "would draw others to the divine source of wisdom and blessing... Israel was to be God's model nation, showing to all other peoples how well a society could function if it followed YHWH's unique value system... [the] society would reveal the values, which in turn would reveal the Lord." Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 54–55.

Passover ritual, they could reflect on the fact that the גר among them occupies a position similar to their own when they lived in Egypt. On the other hand, Yhwh himself delivered Israel from their oppressive situation because of the special relationship he shared with them. By incorporating the גר into the Passover ritual, Israel is able to demonstrate solidarity with their dependents and model the very character of their God, Yhwh.²¹⁴

Exodus 12:43–48 makes clear that believing Gentiles partook in the act of circumcision alongside their Jewish brethren. Earlier, in Exodus 12:38, we read of a “mixed multitude” leaving Egypt, comprising both Jew and Gentile. Sherwood’s conclusion to a survey of the theological significance of this event, clearly affirming that Gentiles were partakers in the laws of Torah, is worth quoting at length:

At their inception Israel is fulfilling the *Torah* ideal of attaining the reverence of the nations (Deut 28:1,9-10; cf. Exod 19:5). And if we can be permitted to use later language from the Prophets, then at the outset Israel is succeeding in their task of being a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Thus, the significance of the mixed multitude in Exodus 12:38 is that at the moment of their deliverance, God’s people comprises Israelites and non-Israelites (i.e., representatives of “the nations”), who are his spoils won from Egypt. The plague cycle concludes and exodus begins with the mixed multitude in 12:38, where Israel and the nations are unified in a context of worship in the first step to the institution of Israel as a nation upon Sinai. Leading into chapter 14, the formation of this people is God’s signature upon his new act of creation at the climax of the exodus narrative. As God’s single composite people, they are together the very expression of his new creation. Therefore, in 12:37–38, the narrator interprets Israel’s identity and the most formative event in their history as a creational formation of the new humanity of his people Israel, to whom the mixed multitude is intrinsic.²¹⁵

“Israel” then, was a community of those who both ethnically Jew and Gentile. This group was the same one that stood before Moses at Mt. Sinai and received the laws of God.

²¹⁴ Joseph R. Kelly, “The Ethics of Inclusion: The גר and the אֲזָרָה in the Passover to Yhwh,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 2 (2013): 455.

²¹⁵ Aaron Sherwood, “The Mixed Multitude in Exodus 12:38: Glorification, Creation, and Yhwh’s Plunder of Israel and the Nations,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34, no. 2 (2012): 153–54.

Principle 6: Pronomianism Affirms that the Laws in the Torah Are a Means of Sanctification for Redeemed Jews and Gentiles

The laws in the Torah, to an extent, condemn believers. It is by the Law (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21; cf. Gal. 3:24) that believers must be convicted of the gravity of their sin in order to fully comprehend the gravity of what Jesus did for them on the cross (Isa. 53:5–6; cf. Rom. 3:21–26; 5:8–9) and need for Him as Savior. Sin separates believers from God and is not their intended nature or purpose in life. The apostle Paul, a man who once greatly sinned against God but became a believer himself, stated “the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*” by faith (Gal. 3:24) and “we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19–20). The Law is needed to expose sin before God. It is a true statement that the Law condemns by exposing sin, but through its consequences being dealt with by Jesus on the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit, its original intention, sanctification, is now possible.²¹⁶

Sanctification, according to Scripture, is a godly process (which takes place after justification; Rom. 3:21–26; cf. Rom. 5:18–19) in which believers become mentally, physically, and spiritually *separated* from the world as they deepen in their understanding of truth as defined by God (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. John 17:16). Believers are to be a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9), striving for peace and holiness (Heb. 12:14) and to be holy in all conduct (1 Pet. 1:15). The apostle Paul describes this well when he writes “that, in reference to your former

²¹⁶ It is fascinating to note that during the times of Jesus most opposition was built upon political alliances and power struggles (as opposed to differences of Torah interpretation) and that, post-Jesus, of all the recorded opposition against the early believers there “is no internal evidence from the New Testament that any persecutions occurred because of Torah-breaking... [and this] tells us much about the type of Torah observance practiced by the early Messianic Jewish community.” Friedman, *They Loved the Torah*, 91, 100.

manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:22–24; cf. Col. 3:5–17). Through sanctification, believers are being transformed into the likeness of the Son (Rom. 8:28–29; cf. Heb. 10:10). Sanctification is a journey towards glorification (1 Cor. 15:53; 2 Cor. 3:18), refining and purifying the heart, soul, and mind until a believer’s offerings to God are righteous (Mal. 3:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:6–7). The practical means of sanctification empowered and led by the Holy Spirit are the Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, providence, and obedience²¹⁷ (through practicing the commanded instructions of God).²¹⁸ Sanctification is the same for the redeemed Jew and Gentile.²¹⁹

It is also possible to speak of righteousness in this context. There are *two* types of righteousness taught in Scripture. The first is internal in nature. Before believers are justified by God, unbelievers are at war with Him (Rom. 8:7; cf. Rom. 5:9–11) and angry with Him every day (Ps. 7:11; cf. Ps. 50:16–23). Once they believe and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are saved and first justified by God (Rom. 3:21–26); Christ’s righteousness is imputed once and for all. In being justified, one must not focus on the old self and its ways. After justification, the process of sanctification takes place in the believer. The second type of righteousness is external in nature as exemplified in Luke 1:6, Matthew 1:19, and Philippians 3:6. This is righteousness *coram mundo* (righteousness in the eyes of

²¹⁷ Michael Riccardi, *Sanctification: The Christian’s Pursuit of God-Given Holiness* (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Books, 2015), 21–27.

²¹⁸ In differing with Riccardi, pronomianism would stipulate obedience to *all* the laws of God, those before the life of Jesus Christ and those thereafter.

²¹⁹ Suggesting that the Law was to be practiced by Jewish Christians post-Jesus but not Gentile Christians causes much confusion. Consider this befuddling statement as an example: “Paul [said] salvation is the unification of uncircumcised, non-Torah abiding Gentiles with circumcised, Torah-abiding Jews under the one divine headship of Yahweh... Paul would say that observance of the law by Jewish Christianity was important for the salvation of the Gentile world and that non-observance of the law by Gentile Christians was important for the salvation of the Jewish world.” George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 81.

the world), as the Reformers would phrase it, that determine rewards (Matt. 5:19; Rev. 19:7–9). In Melancthon’s *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), Arrand summarizes,

[t]heologically, to be righteous is to be human as God envisioned in creation, and again in redemption... The distinction between two kinds of righteousness rests upon the observation that there are two dimensions to being a human creature. One dimension involves our life with God, especially in the matters of death and salvation. The other dimension involves our life with God's creatures and our activity in this world. In the former we receive righteousness before God through faith on account of Christ. In the latter, we achieve righteousness in the eyes of the world by works when we carry out our God-given responsibilities.²²⁰

As such, pronomianism acknowledges the practice of all laws in the Torah as a component of sanctification, a righteously visual act, that takes seriously the role of a holy nation among unholy nations; it is a theocratic worldview that insists on balancing orthodoxy and orthopraxy.²²¹ These laws guide, protect, and distinguish believers from the pagan nations and are not burdensome. That believers often fail to abide by them is due not to their overwhelming nature, but rather, the nature of sin itself which seeks to derail holiness.

²²⁰ Charles Arand, “Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 420–21. He adds, “Melancthon variously describes this as the righteousness of reason (*iustitia rationis*), the righteousness of the law (*iustitia legis*), civil righteousness (*iustitia civilis*), one's own righteousness (*iustitia propria*), carnal righteousness (*iustitia carnis*), righteousness of works (*iustitia operum*) and philosophical righteousness. The second is a Christian righteousness that we receive by faith's apprehension of the promise of Christ. Melancthon variously expresses this as spiritual righteousness (*iustitia spiritualis*), inner righteousness, eternal righteousness (*iustitia aeterna*), the righteousness of faith (*iustitia fidei*), the righteousness of the gospel (*iustitia evangelii*); Christian righteousness (*iustitia Christiana*); righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*), and the righteousness of the heart (*iustitia cordis*).” Arand cites directly from Melancthon’s document to highlight how the Reformer distinguished both types of righteousness.

²²¹ Arguments that many laws of the Torah are no longer relevant because Israel was a theocracy and the ekklesia is not, seem weak. The ekklesia is, while not identical to how Israel practiced its laws in a designated geographical location, still under theocratic rule. While distinguishing the two, Gane rightly highlights that the “church is not a civil theocracy, but it is a spiritual theocracy with authority to govern the boundaries of its community of faith in accordance with the divine will (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:220–23).” Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 333. 1 Corinthians 5 is a perfect example of this, for while Leviticus 20:11 could have been employed in this scenario, Paul adopted the choice of mercy on his life (yet still suffering consequences), as evidenced by God’s response to King David, his adultery, and the loss of his child.

Principle 7: Pronomianism Is Zealous for Good Works

Jesus Christ gave “Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). The use of the word “works” refers to practical evidence of abiding by the commandments of God. James, the half-brother of Jesus, states that “faith, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17). Such works are the commandments acted out and sourced from the “law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12), the entire Torah. Believers are to be doers of God’s will, not merely hearers (cf. James 1:22–25). The role of works in the Scriptures, defined as abiding in the commandments (ἐντολή *entolḗ*) of God, is a practical display of loving Jesus (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3) and evidence of fruit in the life of a believer (cf. Matt. 7:16). Abiding in the commandments of God is one of the greatest expressions of loving God (cf. Mark 12:30) and is demonstrated throughout the gospels not only in the ministry of Jesus but also of His disciples.²²²

Jesus instructs His disciples, past and present, to do works in accordance with the entire Torah. Such works are activated commands of God; the commandments of God are statements until they are practiced and become works. This is why love, particularly agape, is an action. It is sanctification being worked out. As Scaer notes, “in loving us by sending the Son and the spirit to do the works of God, the Father is not engaged in an arbitrary work... this is not alien to what he is [for] in loving us, God is doing what he is... [therefore] in our loving others, we replicate and extend God’s love in Christ into the world.”²²³ He adds later

²²² “In no sense... are good works meritorious. They are not the currency by which one earns salvation. No amount of good deeds removes the need for grace. The divine pronouncement of justification is by grace alone through faith alone. Nonetheless, in the God ordained order (or “way”) of salvation, good works are the instrument by which God’s people are transformed to love holiness and live righteously.” Thomas McCall, Caleb T. Friedeman, and Matt T. Friedeman, *Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 119.

²²³ David P. Scaer, “Sanctification,” *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 3 (2015): 239.

“Jesus is as much the doer of the good works as he is the recipient.”²²⁴ Furthering the Lutheran approach, Grobien notes that Johann Gerhard’s formidable *On Good Works* highlights a number of “passages in support of his claim that the law is the norm of good works (Deut 12:8, 32; Num 15:39–40; Ezek 20:19; Isa 29:13; Matt 15:9; Jer 7:31; Zech 7:5, 9; Amos 5:25–26; Eph 2:10; Rom 12–13; Mic 6:8)”²²⁵ and “drawing from Galatians 5 and 1 Peter 2, Gerhard demonstrates that Christian freedom is not freedom from good works, but the freedom of the conscience from condemnation, that is, freedom from the curse of the law.”²²⁶ Grobein adds,

when good works are taught in their fullness, as the holy works of God and including the internal faith and love of the one who does them, they reveal the hollowness and facade of the merely external good works of the old nature. The “good works” of the old nature are just a show. The full, comprehensive, and pure teaching of Christian good works, to include the new life, faith, and love that can only exist in the regenerate by the Holy Spirit...²²⁷

Furthermore, pronomianism insists on a clear contrast between works born of laws created by men and works born of God in the Torah. Consider the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees over ceremonial hand washing (Mark 7:1–13). The former reveals a loving disposition where the latter does not. The “traditions of the elders” (Mark 7:3) mentioned in the passage are those works “of the law” that are not sourced from the Torah, but from

the “oral tradition” although this does not seem to have been its original name. This body of legislation contains two types of rulings. First, those said to be handed down from Moses and not recorded in writing and which are no less binding than the “written tradition.” Second, rulings enacted over time by

²²⁴ Ibid., 245.

²²⁵ Gifford Andrew Grobien, “Good Works and the Law’s Exhortation and Accusation,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 3–4 (2020): 279.

²²⁶ Grobien, “Good Works and the Law’s Exhortation and Accusation,” 286.

²²⁷ Ibid., 288.

scribes and judges, not said to have been handed down by Moses, and practiced scrupulously by Pharisaic Jews but rejected by others. This second category of law (and perhaps the first also) appears to have been known in the first century (if not earlier) as the “Tradition of the Elders” or “Tradition of the Fathers” and then later as the “Repeated Law [over successive generations],” which is to say that these laws were passed down by teachers along with the written laws of Moses.²²⁸

Descriptive examples of oral law are seen in Luke 1:9, John 19:40, and Acts 26:3 and 28:17.

Importantly, Paul’s phrase “works of the law” (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16),²²⁹ particularly in light of MMT (4Q394-399) which was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus, assists in shaping one’s understanding of his commentary on the role of the Law as it relates to works, both godly and man-made.²³⁰ One of the key scholars on this piece of literature, Abegg, writes that “[t]he works of the law that the Qumran text refers to are obviously typified by the 20 or so religious precepts (halakhot) detailed in the body of the text... that the phrase *miqsat ma’ase ha-torah* (“pertinent works of the law”) appears nowhere in rabbinic literature suggests that the theology of the Qumran sect was not destined to become normative for Judaism... [as such,] it seems clear that Paul, using the same terminology, is rebutting the theology of documents such as MMT.”²³¹ Plainly stated, Paul’s use of the phrase is not pertaining to the Law itself but those who have a narrow interpretation of a particular component that is distinct to a religious community, not affirmed by others.²³²

²²⁸ Herbert W. Basser, “Confirming That ‘Tradition of the Elders’ (Paradosis) Refers to an Oral Body of Law (Masoret),” *Revue Des Études Juives* 171, no. 1–2 (2012): 174.

²²⁹ Oddly, ἐὰν μὴ in the Galatians verse is translated inconsistently from the rest of the NT canon. Dunn and Walker Jr. are closer to the Greek in rendering the verse “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law *except* (ἐὰν μὴ) through faith in Jesus Christ.” James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95–122; O. William Walker, “Translation and Interpretation of Ἐὰν Μὴ in Galatians 2:16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 3 (1997): 515–20.

²³⁰ The Essenes of the Dead Sea Scroll community also differentiated between “works of the law” and works sourced from God’s Law. Consider the “Damascus Document” (5.2–6).

²³¹ Martin Abegg, “Paul, ‘Works of the Law’ and MMT,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20, no. 6 (1994): 52–55.

²³² It “denote[s] the interpretations of the Torah which marked out the Qumran community as distinctive, the obligations which members took upon themselves as members and by which they maintained

Thus, every statement in the NT which appears to be against Law or works is actually being against sectarian misinterpretation of the Law. As Parker summarizes, Paul's use of this term makes clear that the "faithfulness of Christ suffices for both Jew and Gentile (pagan), who are equally condemned—in Galatians they are condemned for trying to supplement that faithfulness with a perverted version of the law, and in Romans they are condemned for perverting the law [of God] by their very efforts to fulfil it through a selective participation in it."²³³ Wright adds,

[t]he (sectarian) code of MMT is designed to say, 'Do these particular "works of Torah," and they will mark you out in the present as the true covenant people.' These 'works' in question in MMT were not sabbath, food laws and circumcision... Rather, the particular and very specific codes in MMT include various aspects of ritual performance (the calendar, regulations about water, marriage laws and so on), some of which were markers against Gentiles, but most of which were markers designed to demonstrate membership of the particular sect, the people that believed itself to be the inauguration of God's new covenant people.²³⁴

The man-made works based on the law are clearly to be distinguished from the Law itself, for they are devoid of the holiness and righteousness of God. The negative interpretation of adherence to the majority of God's commandments has divorced it from the understanding that such adherence is actually a demonstration of love, according to Jesus. As Taylor highlights, Paul, who had a tumultuous relationship with Mark (Acts 15:39) which ended peaceably (2 Tim. 4:11), stressed to the Thessalonian church that

their membership." James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 204.

²³³ Barry F. Parker, "'Works of the Law' and the Jewish Settlement in Asia Minor," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 9 (2013): 96.

²³⁴ N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 146.

work, labor, and endurance are the necessary outcome and demonstration of their faith, love, and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. In a letter filled with reminders of what the Thessalonian church experienced and learned since their conversion, it is of particular interest in interpreting later portions of the letter, that not only does Paul remind them of the work that derives from faith, and the endurance which derives from hope in the Lord Jesus, but also the labor and toil that derives from love.²³⁵

*Excursus: On the Clear Distinction between the Laws of God and Tradition*²³⁶

In Christianity, the word “tradition” results in a plethora of definitions, some more accurate than others. As such, it is important to ensure a scripturally accurate definition that is free of opinion. In the OT, the Hebrew word for tradition is

m'soret, (from *îñø*, “to hand on” or “pass on”) from which we derive the name “Masorete,” the scribes who passed down the “tradition” of the received, Hebrew text of the Tanach. This Hebrew term is found only one time in the Tanach, at Ezekiel 20:37, in the phrase *בְּמִסְרֵת הַבְּרִית*: translated “bonds of the covenant,” but could just as well be understood as “tradition of the covenant.” Since *masar* means to “hand on,” it stands to reason that the Hebrew for “receive” could likewise have the meaning “receive tradition.” The piel form *קִבֵּל* (*qibbel*) is used this way in later rabbinic Hebrew (*kabbalah* = to receive tradition). In the Hebrew Scriptures we find the term used only once in a context which would allow the meaning “receive tradition,” and this is at Prov 19:20, “Listen to counsel and accept instruction (*îññËø*), that you may be wise the rest of your days.” This “accepting instruction” is, as the Hebrew text indicates, “accepting the traditions which the father or mother teaches.”²³⁷

In the NT, the word tradition (*παράδοσις* *parádosis*) refers to two bodies of writings that are taught; one negative and the other positive. The first is by false teachers such as the Jewish religious elite (Matt. 15:2,3,6; Mark 7:3,5,8,9,13; Gal. 1:14; cf. the oral law) and false

²³⁵ John W. Taylor, “Labor of Love: The Theology of Work in First and Second Thessalonians,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 59, no. 2 (2017): 208.

²³⁶ This section is a revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. Benjamin Szumskyj, “The Role of Godly Works in the Markan Shema: A Pronomian Response” (class paper submitted in NBST815: Gospels (B01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

²³⁷ Tim Hegg, “Traditions: Some Thoughts on the Place of Tradition in Torah Communities,” *Torah Resource* (2001): 1, <http://www.henkrijstenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TORAH-TRADITION.pdf>.

believers (Col. 2:8), while the second pertains to the teachings referred to by the apostle Paul by way of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). As such, debate continues as to how one should use the word today. As Lane fairly notes, in surveying church history, “Scripture and tradition cannot be studied in isolation.”²³⁸ He thought-provokingly summarizes that in

the New Testament a twofold attitude to tradition can be discerned. The tradition of the (Jewish) elders, together with other human tradition, is rejected. At the same time there is good apostolic tradition which is simply the Christian faith as it was proclaimed and transmitted by the apostles and their associates. The New Testament writings sprang out of this latter tradition at different stages in its history. There is therefore an important sense in which (apostolic) tradition precedes Scripture, an aspect largely ignored by traditional Protestant theology. But although this has important implications for the origin of the New Testament it does not foreclose the question of the subsequent relation between Scripture and tradition. The New Testament may derive from the original apostolic tradition but once it was produced it became distinct from that tradition and the relation between the two became an open question.²³⁹

This quote stresses how important it is to clarify this meaning of “tradition,” for, having more than one definition, it has often been interpreted incorrectly so as to be negatively seen as shorthand for all of the commandments of God or as additional and oppressive teaching added by a religious elite. While there are elements of truth in these views, believers must distinguish in light of context. More specifically, references to the commandments of God must not be interpreted as synonymous with man-made tradition, for doing so perpetuates a myth that renders many—if not most—of His holy commands obsolete. There is often a charge within mainstream Christianity against practicing *all* the commandments of God in Christianity, yet those same voices uphold man-made traditions which have no scriptural

²³⁸ A. N. S. Lane, “Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey,” *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 37.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38. It must be stressed here that the authoritative apostolic traditions were inscripturated and there are no authoritative extra-biblical traditions.

precedent (e.g., infant baptism, Lent, etc.). Traditions may serve a purpose at times and compliment the Scriptures, but are never to be amalgamated with, compete with, or substitute the commanded instructions of God. To do so is to break the laws of Torah and sin.

*Principle 8: Pronomianism Teaches both a Literal and Non-Literal Application of the Laws in the Torah*²⁴⁰

Many of the laws instructed throughout the OT can be practiced in the modern world, regardless of one's geographical location, culture, and social-economic status. While originally understood to be solely literal in their application, today those same laws can be practiced both literally and laterally. Furthermore, when the laws were originally instructed by God to humanity, the recipients of them understood that all the commands were to be lived out as a reflection of their distinct and unchanging worldview. They were works evidencing a holy nation, a redeemed people.

Literalism is often misunderstood, for accusations of fundamentalism all the way to being works-based are attached to those who seek to apply God's Word in full. However, the commands of God were intended to be literally understood and practiced, for while some of the books in the biblical canon are written in genres that do not always abide by literal interpretation, Scripture is meant to be read literally unless it states otherwise (e.g., John 16:25; Rev. 12:9). Ramm rightly notes, "the program of the literal interpretation of Scripture does not overlook the figures of speech, the symbols, the types, the allegories that as a matter of fact are to be found in Holy Scripture... The belief in verbal inspiration does not mean, for example, that this belief makes the interpreter interpret the book of Revelation in a

²⁴⁰ This section is a revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. Benjamin Szumskyj, "The Role of Godly Works in the Markan Shema: A Pronomian Response" (class paper submitted in NBST815: Gospels (B01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

completely literalistic fashion... [v]erbal inspiration is a theory about the origin of Holy Scriptures but it settles nothing in and of itself about theory of hermeneutics.”²⁴¹ The Scriptures are to be read literally. Unpacking the laws documented throughout the Scripture, there is no indication that any of them were meant to be understood in any other way. Believing readers see that their spiritual ancestors sought to practice the laws even in the absence of the Temple itself (Neh. 8:14; Dan. 6:10).

While a notable portion of the laws can be literally fulfilled, not all of them can be. This is due to either the absence of a physical Temple in Jerusalem or due to the culture of ancient Israel in which the laws were attuned to the environment. In the wake of many scholars concluding that the tripartite division of the laws is neither biblical or helpful in assessing how to approach them as contemporary Christians, few have proposed alternatives as to how one is to approach the laws in the Torah. Pronomianism contends that there are two means of interpreting and applying Scripture when a literal method is not possible as proposed by scholars. The first is principlism, which seeks to establish one or more principles in a text as guided by theological interpretation. Hays introduces this approach as follows:

In accord with sound hermeneutical method, [Old Testament interpretation] should be an approach that (a) is consistent, treating all Old Testament Scripture as God's Word, (b) does not depend on arbitrary nontextual categories, (c) reflects the literary and historical context of the Law, placing it firmly into the narrative story of the Pentateuch, (d) reflects the theological context of the Law, and (e) corresponds to New Testament teaching. The approach that best incorporates these criteria is referred to as *principlism*. A number of evangelicals have employed this approach on a regular basis as the method of choice in interpreting the Old Testament. The advantage of this approach is that it enables Bible students to be consistent when interpreting Old Testament passages. There is no need to classify the laws arbitrarily into applicable and nonapplicable categories.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 126.

²⁴² J. Daniel Hays, “Applying the Old Testament Law Today,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 30.

Hays goes on to advance this application by providing five steps: 1) identify what the particular law meant to the initial audience, 2) determine the differences between the initial audience and the believers today, 3) develop universal principles from the text, 4) correlate the principle with NT teaching,²⁴³ and 5) apply the modified universal principle to life today.²⁴⁴ This approach is exceptional in that it does not disregard any law but maintains they are all applicable, albeit in a different form.²⁴⁵ Principlism is also seen several times throughout the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 5:2, 5, and 13 Paul extracts a principle from Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; and 24:7, in 1 Corinthians 6:9 he extracts a principle from Leviticus 20:13, in 1 Corinthians 9:9 he extracts a principle from Deuteronomy 25:4, and in 2 Corinthians 6:14, 13:1 he extracts a principle from Deuteronomy 22:10. Paul's use of the earlier text is not done in a literal manner. As can be deduced from all these passages, principlism draws a principle from a law, regardless of whether it can be literally practiced.²⁴⁶ Earlier examples are found in 2 Samuel 12:1–14, 14:1–20, and 1 Kings 20:35–43 in which stories are “legally realistic and... engage accepted legal principles, in order to deceive the king into exercising his judicial powers” as each relates directly to a commanded instruction from the laws of Moses.²⁴⁷ As such, this scriptural precedent can be

²⁴³ This is not always possible, nor is it entirely necessary. Many ethical positions, for example, are not repeated in the NT. Such an absence is not problematic if one maintains a unified view of Scripture.

²⁴⁴ Hays, “Applying the Old Testament Law Today,” 31–33. Hays goes on to demonstrate these steps by exploring Leviticus 5:2.

²⁴⁵ Berding laments that “principles are difficult to connect to the redemptive-historical storyline of the Bible, a story that centers on the person and work of Jesus” and its related “patterns and themes.” However, this is fixed when anchored to biblical theology, particularly one that centers on Christ. He is entirely correct that it could be a problematic approach but is only so in the absence of a sound hermeneutic (and by extension, biblical theology). Kenneth Berding, “The Problem with Principlizing: How Do We Move From Biblical Text to Application?” *Talbot School of Theology Faculty Blog* (2020), www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2020/the-problem-with-principlizing-how-do-we-move-from-biblical-text-to-application.

²⁴⁶ While Sprinkle differs in his understanding of the Law post-Christ, he admits “according to the principlizing approach, it is necessary to look at each law and ask what principle—moral or religious—underlies this regulation... Christians can and should continue to derive moral and religious principles from Mosaic laws.” He also cited the same examples of Paul's principlizing. Joe M. Sprinkle, “How Should the Old Testament Civil Laws Apply Today?” *Liberty University Law Review* 2, no. 3 (2008): 920–22.

utilized in a contemporary setting²⁴⁸ and is homogeneous to what Jesus Christ taught on the Sermon of the Mount.²⁴⁹

Kaiser Jr. also advocates for principlism, acknowledging that it states the author's "propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church... contemporary applications will often be suggested by analogous applications made by the original writer of the Biblical text."²⁵⁰ In order to maintain this, the

first step in principlizing a passage from the Bible is to determine what the subject of the focal point of that passage is... [and the second step is] the emphasis must be sought from any terms that are repeated or are a key or part of the important words used in developing that same subject... connecting words in that pericope that link the phrases, clauses, and sentences... [and] how each paragraph (in prose genres), scene (in narratives), or strophe (in poetical passages) can be expressed in propositional principles. It is always best to avoid using all proper names/nouns in stating the principle for each of these units of thought (e.g., the paragraph in the prose sections, the scene in narrative sections, or the strophe in poetical sections of the Bible) except divine names, for all such references to all other persons, places, or historic events will only lock the text into the past and handicap its application to the contemporary scene.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 14.

²⁴⁸ Interestingly, aspects of the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) are found in early Celtic Christianity. Hardinge, *Celtic Church*, 99–100.

²⁴⁹ He highlighted both the literal application of the law (e.g., Matt. 5:21) and principles that were also to be drawn from them (e.g., Matt. 5:22–26).

²⁵⁰ Walter C. Kaiser Jr, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), 152.

²⁵¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "A Principlizing Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors and Walter C. Kaiser (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 21–57; Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 92.

Additionally Gane,²⁵² in seeking to understand how to apply the OT laws to the Christian life, notes,

we may be able to learn from valuable concepts represented in the law, such as principles concerning liability and theft (Exod. 21–22 in farming contexts), divine holiness in contrast to human faultiness (Lev. 1–16 in sanctuary and related contexts), and the importance of provision for independent living (Lev. 25, Jubilee).²⁵³

While he does not contend all laws are applicable today, Gane does see wider application than the tripartite model employed by most Christian denominations. His contemporary application (which he phrases as “partly apply[ing]”) to believers today is exemplified in studying Exodus 21:12–14. He writes,

This expands on the sixth of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13). The idea that someone who intentionally, not accidentally, kills another person by striking him should be severely punished as a murderer is a logical extension of the Decalogue commandment and therefore constitutes a moral principle that remains in force today. However, the details “I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee” (cf. Num. 35; Deut. 19, cities of refuge) and “You shall take him from my altar” (cf. altar asylum in 1 Kings 1:50–53; 2:28–29) are obsolete, and a modern state may choose not to administer capital punishment.²⁵⁴

To a pronomian, this highlights the bridge from literal application, to principle or paradigm.

The second application is what is known as *paradigmatical*, referring to the concept of paradigm. Paradigm is similar to typology but differs in that the latter focuses purely on a type based on a previously established reality or truth, whereas a paradigm is an example,

²⁵² The author of this dissertation came to the identical conclusion as Gane regarding the employment of principle and paradigm prior to reading his exhaustive and important work. Gane expresses potential concerns with principlism in his book. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 180–81.

²⁵³ . Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 140.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 140–41.

model, or pattern. For example, Jesus was a “type” of Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), while the absence of a Temple is a paradigm for the local ekklesia: “[Y]ou also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). Vogt defines a paradigmatical approach as follows:

Israel was to be a paradigm for how people were to live. In the study of language, a paradigm is a useful tool that helps the student understand how the language works... seeing Israel as a paradigm helps us understand how to live life in a relationship with God... Israel is called to be a known quantity, the knowledge of which helps determine what is correct in unknown situations. This is part of what it means for Israel to be a nation of priests, for priests serve as mediators between God and human beings. A paradigmatic approach to law helps us avoid the problems of the more traditional approaches to the law... [it] seeks to understand how the law functioned for ancient Israel in its mission as a witness for the rest of humanity concerning human's proper relationship with God. Once that has been accomplished, we can look for ways in which the paradigm applies to our situation, even though we live in vastly different circumstances in terms of salvation history, worldview, culture, technology, etc... The question in a paradigmatic approach is not “Is the law applicable to the Christian?” but, rather, “*How* is the law applicable to the Christian?” In this way, the “usefulness” of all of Scripture is maintained, as is the integrity of the original author’s intention regarding the unity and relevance of the law.²⁵⁵

The insistence of maintaining a practical nature of the laws in the Torah is commendable and maintains a continuity in the scriptural record. Carrol R. echoes these sentiments:

[the] Law was in some measure an expression of the heart of God. Though legislation for an ancient theocracy, Deuteronomy 4:5–8 suggests that its wisdom was (and is) a testimony to Yahweh and its laws a paradigm for other contexts beyond that time and place. While to imitate those laws does not make sense in the twenty-first century, its moral principles continue to reverberate even now.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 45–46.

²⁵⁶ M Daniel Carroll R., “Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission: Contributions from the Old Testament,” *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 19.

Wright is another who sees value in this approach, defining the concepts as follows:

A paradigm is a model or pattern that enables you to explain or critique many different and varying situations by means of some single concept or set of governing principles. To use paradigm you work by analogy from a specific known reality (the paradigm) to a wider or different context in which there are problems to be solved, or answers to be found, or choices to be made. Or a paradigm may provide criteria by which you evaluate or critique some set of circumstances or proposals, positively or negatively. So a paradigm may function descriptively or prescriptively or critically.²⁵⁷

Various laws can be considered in a paradigmatical manner, particularly when they cannot be practised literally or are not suitable for extracting a principle. Another prominent example of paradigm in Scripture is that of the shepherd and how it relates to leadership in the ekklesia (Jer. 23:1–8; Ezek. 1 34; Zech. 10:2–12).²⁵⁸ Mott and Sider envision verses such as Exodus 23:3, Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 10:17–18 and others forming a “biblical paradigm on economic justice.”²⁵⁹ Levine sees “the rites of the *pesah* ‘paschal sacrifice,’ prescribed in Exodus, chapters 12–13, as a paradigm for investigating the social aspects of sacrifice in ancient Israel[,]” hence a paradigm of communality.²⁶⁰ Cezula sees 2 Chronicles 6:32 as a paradigm for political reconstructionism.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 63–64. In considering the relevancy of Exodus 19:4–6, he writes on p. 65 that “when we enquire about the ethical relevance of ancient Israel to our own contemporary context, when we try to see what light the scriptures of Israel shed on our own world, we are doing what God intended should happen. That’s what we have these scriptures for. They render to us a paradigm, in one single culture and slice of history, of the kinds of social values God looks for in human life generally.”

²⁵⁸ Roger Pascoe, “Biblical Models of Christian Leadership, Part 1—The Shepherd Model,” *Bible.org* (2019), <https://bible.org/seriespage/biblical-models-christian-leadership-part-1-shepherd-model>.

²⁵⁹ Stephen Mott and R. J. Sider, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” *Transformation* 17, no. 2 (2000): 51, 54.

²⁶⁰ Baruch A. Levine, “On the Social Aspects of Sacrifice: A Paradigm from the Hebrew Bible,” *Revue Biblique* 117, no. 3 (2010): 339.

²⁶¹ Ntozakhe Simon Cezula, “The Chronicler as a Biblical Paradigm for a Theology of Reconstruction in Africa: An Exploration of 2 Chronicles 6:32,” *Old Testament Essays* 29, no. 2 (2016): 277–96.

Another example is Exodus 22:27. In the cumulative passage of Exodus 34:5–7, God communicates specific attributes of His that are both distinct and holy. One of these is grace (verse 6). Channuwn (חַנּוּן; channûwn), the Hebrew word for “gracious” here, is born out of sincere pity. It is ripe with love and concern for those made in the image of God by their Creator. The word is interestingly used in Exodus 22:27. The passage in context is as follows:

If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.

This use of His gracious nature here is fascinating as it is so specific. Here, in one of His revealed laws, God demonstrates His grace in an everyday example from life. He remarks that when you loan money to the poor, there is an expectation of it being returned without interest. Likewise, in a pledge being offered as collateral by the one receiving the money (like a prized cloak that keeps them warm every night), it must be returned if it is clearly an essential item and necessary to life or security. That the neighbor receiving the money is willing to pledge something so important to their lender should be a testimony of their character. They are clearly trustworthy, clearly grateful, clearly intending to pay the finances back. If, however, the pledge is withheld by the neighbor loaning the money, then God, being gracious, will act, not against the poor neighbor but the one lending money. As Carpenter states,

In the biblical text the person could presumably return the next day and again take the garment in pledge for a loan or benefit he had granted to the poor person. But the compassionate, “humanitarian” concern of Yahweh is emphatic. Yahweh is חַנּוּן (cf. Exod 34:6), gracious, and רַחֻם, compassionate. When the poor person needs his garment, he has a right to it, according to Yahweh himself... Some think that laborers actually pledged their cloaks as

collateral until the end of the day, when they had given their employer a full day's labor. Yahweh's appeal on the basis of Israel's own experience of help and relief is based on their greater realization that Yahweh will treat the poor as he treated them when they cried to him. He will hear and show his compassion, but "I will hear" implies, as it does in vv.23–24, that he will act on the poor person's behalf. He has done so when he heard Israel's cry (Exod 2:24; 3:7).²⁶²

God who is gracious, gives of Himself to that neighbor who is undeserving. Surely, the neighbor loaning would perceivably be seen as the righteous individual in this scenario, but in the economy of God it is not they who needs His grace. It is the one who is poor in spirit, the one who does not deserve it, the one who cannot provide by their own volition. *This is a paradigm of grace.* It is not a gift to the one who deserves to be gifted because of their good deeds. It is a gift to the one who does not deserve it, the one who needs pity. Believers must distinguish it from mercy, for that speaks of judgement which one should receive but does not. Believers deserve judgement, but God is merciful. As such, grace is receiving that goodness which believers should not. That is the essence of a gift. Grace is not only that which is undeserved, it is something that cannot originate in the one receiving it. That is to say, one can give love, receive love, and love one's self, but one cannot truly give grace to one's self; it can only be given to another or received. Grace is both free and unexpected, as all true gifts are. A principle can be extracted from this verse as well, but it is an exceptional example, a model, of grace.

Other paradigms worthy of further discussion are those of agriculture (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22; 25:4–5, 11), preparedness (Gen. 6:21; 41:47–49; Neh. 4:16–18; Prov. 6:6–9; 21:20; 24:27; Eccles. 11:1–2), and the Levitical priesthood as a paradigm for the pastorate of the ekklesia until the commencement of literal Millennium (Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 1:50–53; 3:12–13; 18:2–11; Deut. 17:8–13; 33:10; 2 Chron. 34:12–13).

²⁶² Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 19–40*, vol. 2, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 112.

Approaching and applying the Law literally or principally or paradigmatically ensures that Scripture is not annulled (John 10:35) and maintains that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

To the pronomian, a theological hermeneutic shaped by a biblical theology exalting the promised Messiah ensures a correct understanding and application of the laws given to the Messiah's Bride, for as they love Him, they do as He commands. As the nation being made holy by being conformed into His image, they are to glorify the promised Messiah in thought, word, and deed, ensuring a right balance of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Principle 9: Pronomianism Teaches against Anti-Judaism

Pronomianism is not, as some falsely assume, a repackaged collection of thoughts extracted from “The New Perspective of Paul” movement,²⁶³ though there is occasional overlap with aspects of how there needs to be a recovery of the Jewish context that is foundational to the Christian faith. Anti-Judaism has deep roots within first century Christianity and the years thereafter.²⁶⁴ It is no secret that there are several misconceptions towards Jews and Judaism within Christian theology, the most common being that the Hebrews/Jews are “an exceptionally rebellious people” (more so than the ekklesia, past and present), “Jews do not believe the predictions of their own Scriptures,” and “the Old Testament is antiquated.”²⁶⁵ Pronomianism seeks to reverse this exegetically flawed thinking.

²⁶³ See chapters 3–5 of N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

²⁶⁴ Graham Keith, *Hated Without a Cause? A Survey of Anti-Semitism* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), 91–116; Peter Richardson, “Chapter 10: The Beginnings of Christian anti-Judaism, 70–C. 235,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press) 244–58.

²⁶⁵ Fredrick C. Holmgren, “Preaching the Gospel without Anti-Judaism,” in *Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowsky (New York, NY: Continuum, 1996), 68–73.

On the third point, Holmgren notes that “many view the Jewish Bible as ancient, out-of-date, second-level Scripture that the church does not really need... its basic value, it is thought, is that it points to the New Testament... [for as it] is the only canonical Scripture of Judaism... Judaism is [then] judged to be an inadequate religion [as well].”²⁶⁶ He later adds,

Jesus embraced the Torah of Moses; he came not to end it but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17)—to carry its teachings forward. Further, to those who came to him seeking eternal life, he held it up as the essential teaching to be observed (Luke 10:25–28). Despite Jesus’ conflict with some interpreters of his day, both Jewish and Christian scholars seem as one who honored and followed the Law. When Jesus proclaims the coming rule of God, he speaks nowhere in detail about the inner character of this rule. He does not need to because that has already been described in the Old Testament and spoken of in [biblical] Judaism. The realm of God follows the path of justice and kindness taught in Torah.²⁶⁷

Daly goes on to list several approaches to removing anti-Judaism from the pulpit, two of which align with pronomian thought: upholding historical context (for this “demonstrates how thoroughly Jewish ... Jesus and the first Christians [were]”)²⁶⁸ and “a tone or attitude that interprets and proclaims every biblical text in a way that reveals its positive Jewish presuppositions and content” and counteract “supersessionist mentality.”²⁶⁹ Again, it is to be stressed that pronomianism does not suggest that Christianity must be more Jewish, but it does ensure that Christianity understands its history, one that distinguishes biblical Judaism from rabbinical Judaism and does not believe that those texts and practices associated with

²⁶⁶ Holmgren, “Preaching the Gospel without Anti-Judaism,” 71.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁶⁸ Robert J. Daly, “Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit: Four Approaches,” *Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowsky (New York, NY: Continuum, 1996), 53.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

biblical Judaism, namely the OT and circumcision, kashrut, the appointed festivals, have been abrogated.²⁷⁰

Principle 10: Romans 10:4 Speaks of the Goal of the Law, not Its End

In Romans 10:4 it is written, “For Christ is the end [*or goal*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” This verse has often been used to justify an argument against the Law as a whole. Representing this position, Bruce clearly believes that Christ is the “end” of the law, stating that the “age of law, which was never designed to be other than a parenthesis in God’s dealing with mankind... had been superseded by the new age, which might be variously called “the age of Christ.” Yet soon after, he leans toward it meaning both “goal” and “end,” which is inconsistent. He then remarks various interpretations, ranging from views that flirt with Antinomianism (the total rejection of the Law, moral included) and the Lutheran view of the law being a means of preservation, a summons to repentance, and guidance for the church, to the Reformed view of the Law being the rule of life and existential end of religion itself.²⁷¹

If “telos” just meant end, then Jesus abolishing the Law as a whole would make sense. But in His own words, He came to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–20), which is why His being the goal makes more sense, not merely grammatically, but theologically.²⁷² As Kaiser rightly notes, the

²⁷⁰ It is important to note in passing that Gane has proposed another model he titles “Progressive Moral Wisdom” which “contains five main steps toward application of a given law: (1) analyze the law by itself, (2) analyze the law within the system of Old Testament laws, (3) further analyze the law within the context of its ancient life situation, (4) analyze the law within the process of redemption, and (5) relate findings regarding the function of the law to modern life.” Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 218.

²⁷¹ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of The Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eardmans Publishing Company, 1977): 190–93.

²⁷² “Within Romans 10:4, the Apostle Paul is by no means communicating that Yeshua the Messiah is the abolition of the Mosaic Torah; in being the *telos nomou*... Yeshua the Messiah is the Torah’s goal, its climax, its inevitable outcome, or even its dénouement... Arriving at saving faith in the Messiah of Israel is the *resultant end*, with Him being the consummation to whom the Torah points.” J. K. McKee, *The New Testament*

“term *telos* in Romans 10:4 means ‘goal’ or purposeful conclusion. The law cannot be properly understood unless it moves toward the grand goal of pointing the believer toward the Messiah, Christ. The law remains God’s law, not Moses’ law (Rom. 7:22; 8:7). It still is holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14) for the Israelite as well for the believing Gentile.”²⁷³ While he does not believe all the Law is to be adhered to today, Goldberg fairly notes that two goals of the Law were justification and sanctification.²⁷⁴ Jesus as the goal of the Law should be understood in the context of righteousness. The Law does not make one righteous but does define righteousness. Walter Kaiser includes himself with others that see Christ as the goal of the Law. He notes, “The debate here cannot, and should not, be settled by an appeal to a word study of the thirteen uses of *telos* in Paul [e.g. Rom. 10:4]. Much greater significance should be placed on the context with its affirmation that ‘Christ is the *telos* of the law for everyone who believes [*eis dikaiosynēn panti tō pisteuonti*].’ That phrase is extremely close to the ones in Romans 10:6, *dikaiosynēn de tēn ek pisteōs* (lit. ‘and the righteousness that is by faith’) and Romans 10:10, *pisteuetai eis dikaiosynēn* (‘you believe unto righteousness’). Clearly, the righteousness being talked about in these contexts is appealing to homemade righteousness and of using works to establish it!”²⁷⁵ Rhyne summarises this thinking by stating “[r]ooted in their ignorance of God’s righteousness and their endeavours to establish their own, the Jews undiscerning zeal had led them to reject His righteousness in their pursuit of the “law of righteousness”... this in turn was due to their failure to recognise that *in Christ the Law in its promise of righteousness reaches its goal so that (God’s) righteousness may be available to*

Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away with the Law? (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 123.

²⁷³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *Four Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 188.

²⁷⁴ Goldberg, *God, Torah, Messiah*, 105.

²⁷⁵ Kaiser Jr., “Law as God’s Gracious Guidance,” 186.

everyone who believes.”²⁷⁶ Paul saw Christ as the goal of the law, not the end of law. If Jesus came to abolish the laws of the Torah, that would be affirmed if Paul also meant that Jesus was the end of the Law. However, Jesus said He came to fulfill, which is consistent with Paul’s understanding that Jesus was the goal of the Law.

Principle 11: Pronomianism upholds Biblical Patriarchy

Scripture attests that the father is the spiritual head of the family (Eph. 5:21–27; 6:4).²⁷⁷ It was a man, Moses, that received the commanded instructions of God (Exod. 19–24). Men were appointed to the priesthood (Num. 3:3, 10). The twelve apostles of Jesus were all men (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13). Men are called to be elders (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet. 5:1–4) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:8–13).²⁷⁸ While predominately liberal scholars have argued against biblical patriarchy,²⁷⁹ this is problematic as such terms should not be defined according to secular thinking or the sins of individuals associated with the concept. Block rightly notes the centrality of the male in the biblical record. He writes,

²⁷⁶ C. Thomas Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law*, (Chico, CA: Scholars’ Press, 1981), 113.

²⁷⁷ “If you are a father, you carry the mantle of patriarchy. You rule your home. To make this a pretext for abuse is vile. Your rule is to be a sweet echo of the eternal love of God made known in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son. It is to be lived in daily prayer for the Spirit of God to pour more of the love of God into your heart in order that you might cheerfully exercise sacrificial leadership and care. Biblical fatherhood is strong, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy and forgiveness, and holy.” Peter Van Doodewaard, “In Defense of Patriarchy” *Reformation 21* (2024): <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/in-defense-of-patriarchy>.

²⁷⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995); Alexander Strauch, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 112–31.

²⁷⁹ Block prefers to the term “patricentrism” which is entirely reasonable to adopt, though it should not be done to avoid the negative association with the word “patriarchy.” If patriarchy is defined by Block’s parameters, then the word should remain. Daniel Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” ed. Ken M. Cambell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 41–44.

Biblical genealogies trace descent through the male line; a married couple resided within the household of the groom; in reference to a man and his wife or a man and his children, the man is generally named first (Gen 7:7); children were born to the father (Gen 21:1–7); fathers negotiated family disputes (Gen 13:1–13; 31:1–55); God generally addressed heads of the household; when families worshipped, the head of the household took the initiative; and when men died without descendants their “name” died. In short, the community was built around the father, in every respect it bore his stamp.²⁸⁰

Furthermore, patriarchy “rightly conceived, is not about the subjugation of women as much as it is about the subjugation of the male aggression and male irresponsibility that runs wild when women are forced to be in charge because the men are nowhere to be found... [so the] choice is not between patriarchy and enlightened democracy, but between patriarchy and anarchy.”²⁸¹ Pronomianism contends that the absence of laws has contributed to this. It not only acknowledges the God-given role and responsibility that redeemed men have been given in their homes and local church²⁸² while also supporting the female-led ministries (e.g., Titus 2:3–5), but that it is men who have been uniquely entrusted with teaching the laws in the Torah and practicing its truths before their family and community. Women are not to teach or lead (1 Tim. 2:12; cf. Isa. 3:12) but are to emulate their husband’s teaching or that of the elders of their church (if unmarried). This is further strengthened by the reality that many of the laws in the Torah are gender-specific for men (e.g., Lev. 15:13–14; 19:27) and women (e.g., Lev. 15:19, 28–29), supporting the patriarchalism and even commanding that the boundaries between the two genders are never to be crossed (e.g., Deut. 22:5). Furthermore,

²⁸⁰ Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” 42.

²⁸¹ Kevin DeYoung, “Death to the Patriarchy? Complementarity and the Scandal of ‘Father Rule,’” *Desiring God* (2022), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/death-to-the-patriarchy>.

²⁸² Baucham Jr. prefers the term “gospel patriarchy.” Interestingly, while Bauchman does not contend that all the laws are to be practiced, he makes the connection between the role of the father with the teaching of God’s Law and that the father is called to “uphold... the principles of God’s Law.” Voddie Baucham Jr., *What He Must Be... if he wants to marry my daughter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 59–60. By extension, in the Calvinistic view that like Jesus Christ, fathers are to emulate the roles of prophet, priest, and king in their households, the “priestly” function would demand the practice of the laws.

patriarchalism is intertwined with complementarianism, which Scripture also affirms,²⁸³ as opposed to egalitarianism.²⁸⁴

*Principle 12: Pronomianism does not Uphold Continuationism and Charismatic Practices*²⁸⁵

Continuationism is the belief that all the spiritual gifts are active today and have been practiced since their inception in the first century AD.²⁸⁶ The opposite, cessationism,

is the view that the miraculous gifts ceased with, or very soon after, the ministry of the apostles to whom—and to whom only—they were given. It understands that the miraculous and non-miraculous gifts appear in the same lists in Scripture because they all came from the same source—God’s grace and the Spirit’s power—yet it recognizes that different gifts are given by God for different purposes. The view rests on a careful, non-speculative exegetical study of the Scriptures. It minimizes the element of human experience by not allowing experience to influence decisions of biblical interpretation.²⁸⁷

Continuationism is not a recent position in church history, as attested by Busenitz who cites comments that John Chrysostom, Augustine, Theodoret of Cyrus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Owen, Thomas Watson, Matthew Henry, John Gill, and Jonathan Edwards were but a few that held to the position.²⁸⁸ The purpose of the *supernatural* spiritual gifts was to authenticate

²⁸³ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

²⁸⁴ A common argument is that Deborah contradicts complementarianism and upholds egalitarianism. A pronomian response can be found here: Jeff Young, “Deborah The Judge Doesn’t Justify Egalitarianism,” *Pronomian.com* (2022), <https://pronomian.com/deborah-the-judge-doesnt-justify-egalitarianism/>.

²⁸⁵ This is an extracted revision of a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, “Spiritual Gifts and Cessationism” (class paper submitted in CHHI 610: Historical Development of Christian Theology at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2020).

²⁸⁶ Andrew Wilson, “The Continuation of the Charismata,” *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (2019): 17, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-continuation-of-the-charismata/>.

²⁸⁷ James F. Stitzinger, “Spiritual Gifts: Definitions and Kinds,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 14, no. 2 (2013): 143–76, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj14f.pdf>.

the message and ministry of Jesus Christ, as the NT canon was not to be established until after the first century (though much of it was in circulation). By the end of the century the NT was completed, “once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3; cf. Heb. 1:1). As pronomianism affirms the ongoing application of the laws of the Torah, it wholly rejects the possibility of more laws being added to the canon. This does not mean that God no longer practices some of these supernatural acts. Disbelieving in *supernatural* spiritual gifts is not the same as disbelieving God’s ability to perform the miraculous. Christians are to have great confidence in the supernatural acts of God, who is more than able and willing to perform miracles such as healings.²⁸⁹ What cannot be supported is the belief in individuals being able to perform supernatural acts today at all times, in addition to the possibility that more laws may be added to what has been given in the Torah by a modern-day prophet.

The pronomian believer sees in the Scriptures that there is an important correlation between miracles and the Kingdom of God. In the kingdom, there is a harmony between the natural and supernatural, but it has not yet been established permanently according to the divine plan of God. It is forthcoming. The kingdom of God refers to the sovereign rule of God over the entire universe, from its conception to its eschatological future, and all that is created and operates therein. Vlach rightly notes that

Signs and wonders occur in rare and strategic times in history when the nearness of the kingdom of God on earth is being presented or addressed in close connection with Israel. These presentations are associated with unique representatives of God—Moses, Elijah, Jesus, the apostles, and the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. However, this present age we live in is not the Davidic/Messianic reign of Jesus or the Tribulation Period that immediately precedes the kingdom. Continual signs and wonders, therefore, are not a part of God’s plan for this age.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Nathan Busenitz, “What Cessationism Is Not,” *Cripplegate*, last modified August 2011, https://thecripplegate.com/what_cessationism_is_not/.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

This is crucial to a foundational understanding of the pronomian embrace of cessationism. The miraculous, of which spiritual gifts are, is not a natural part of our world. Their appearance in the Scriptures do not initiate a theological precedent, but rather, a purposeful and structured revealing of God’s person and power.²⁹¹ The result of these miraculous acts and events during the times of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus, the Apostles, and future witnesses during the Tribulation were “Israel established as a kingdom... Israel continues its downward spiral to captivity... Israel refuses to repent; kingdom to come in the future... Israel refuses to believe; kingdom to come in the future... [and] Kingdom and second coming of Jesus to appear very soon.” These historical miracles had historical purposes.²⁹² Furthermore, pronomianism rests on the premise that the commanded instructions of God, the laws in the Torah, are both unchanging and applicable today. Self-proclaimed prophets who add, change, or ignore what the Law already commands, in addition to charismatic practices that either contradict or are irreverent towards the Law, make it impossible to maintain that God continues to reveal His will today through spiritually gifted individuals who yet—as mainstream Christianity does—reject the majority of His will as preserved in His commands.²⁹³ One cannot uphold that the laws in the Torah remain and that more may be added to that holy list.

²⁹⁰ Michael J. Vlach, “God’s Kingdom and the Miraculous,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 25, no. 2 (2014): 30, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.tms.edu/m/msj25.2.pdf>.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 33, 39.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁹³ The contention of Continuationism that there is a distinction between prophets who represent the will of God and whose writings composed Scripture and prophets who proclaim future events (e.g., Agabus in Acts 11:27–30) is not as helpful as its proponents might contend. To accept the view that the second type of prophet was fallible and non-authoritative is highly problematic. Other than the prophets raised by God in the eschaton, Scripture warns us of prophets in the end times (Matt. 7:15) for those from God have ended (Eph. 4:11; Heb. 1:1).

Principle 13: Pronomianism Is Intentionally Scholarly and Seeks to Bridge the Gap between the Church Pulpit and the Seminarian Lectern

While to some degree scholarship has a presence that shapes the way pastors interpret and teach the Scriptures, there nevertheless is a chasm between what it is taught at seminary and the teachings of the local church. Much of this comes from a generally negative view of academia, which has not been helped by the progressive liberalism that has infected many of the once conservative institutions that were associated with biblical integrity. Observing the destructive and often embarrassing self-proclaimed “scholars” of the Hebrew Roots movement, who often have no formal training, pronomians intentionally seek out scholarly consensus on the positions they uphold and often reference such works in the articles they write and the sermons they preach. Furthermore, several pronomians have sought to undergo formal training in order to better understand doctrine and to establish credibility for the pronomian interpretation of Scripture, with some working towards the re-establishment of the “pastor-theologian” in the local church.²⁹⁴ Pronomianism is intentional in that it cites appropriate and relevant sources in the field of scholarship, in order to minimize both the chasm between the church and seminary and the damage the former has sometimes inflicted on the other from those institutions that have become liberalized.

Summary

Pronomianism, as a theological interpretation, faces a theological uphill battle, but it is a position that has academic credibility and scriptural precedent. This chapter began with a

²⁹⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

definition of the Law and tradition, followed by an exploration of “One Law/Torah Theology” as a precursor to pronomianism. The emergence of pronomian thinking was identified in lay and scholarly circles and a new definition was proposed to guide future studies. Thirteen principles of pronomian faith were proposed to guide the theological interpretation in the wide community of academia and congregations. The chapter also addressed dichotomies raised when discussing the laws in the Torah.

Believers are to love God. Christians, first and foremost, find their identity in Him. They desire to glorify God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. One is not so much a pronomian Christian but a Christian who upholds pronomianism. These understand practicing the Law as a loving act, for Jesus stated that those who love Him do His commandments. It is affection in action. His commandments have been progressively revealed since the time of Genesis. Believers are to abide in Him. They desire to emulate the lifestyle, experiences, the food and the festivals that their Lord and Savior did. They want to be conformed into His image. They obey Him and observe His unchanging, holy laws.

Chapter 3:

Observing Circumcision, the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Gospel²⁹⁵

In the Scriptures, the Abrahamic Covenant was established in Genesis 15, but the sign of circumcision was given in Genesis 17. The circumcised penis was to be a sign symbolizing the promise made to Abraham by God that “all the families of the earth will be blessed” through him (Gen. 12:1–3), and this ritual was to be practiced in his household and emulated by the nation(s) that would arise from his offspring. Historically, the Hebrew nation that has existed since the time of Abraham has performed this ritual. Scripture, however, attests to the practice being evidenced among Gentiles centuries after the narrative in Genesis.

The following chapter will argue that circumcision, being a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, what Paul refers to as the “gospel” (Gal. 3:8), is an act of sanctification by both Jewish *and Gentile* believers in Jesus Christ as they enter the covenantal community of God, the redeemed ekklesia. This premise is based on exploring how the word circumcision is scripturally used, revisiting the intended goal of the Abrahamic Covenant, identifying examples of circumcised Gentiles in Scripture, and considering rebuttals to key passages in the pronomian debate. The chapter will end with a discussion dispelling anticipated claims of Judaizing and contextual considerations of the ritualistic practice.

An Examination of “Circumcision” and Its Interpretations

It is important to scripturally define what circumcision is. Circumcision is when the prepuce (foreskin; the sensitive sleeve of tissue) which covers the glans (tip) of the male

²⁹⁵ This is a heavy revision of a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, “Circumcision for Gentiles according to Scripture” (class paper submitted in BIBL715: Hermeneutics at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2021).

penis is removed with the use of anesthesia and surgical materials. Even though the glans is exposed, the procedure is not to be publicly witnessed unlike most social markers. It was conducted on the eighth day of a male child's birth (Lev. 12:3; cf. Gen. 21:4), because post-biblical medicine determined that biologically this is when prothrombin and vitamin K is most present in the growing body and ensures the baby does not excessively bleed when cut. A child's name was given the day of the circumcision (Luke 1:59–60; 2:21). It is possible that this was conducted using a "flint" knife (Exod. 4:25; Josh. 5:2–3), though Scripture is generally silent on anaesthetic used.²⁹⁶ De Vaux summarizes that

[t]he operation was carried out by the father (Gn 21:4), in the exceptional case of Ex 4:25 by the mother, or, in later times, by a physician or a specialist (1 M[accabees] 1:61). There was no ruling about the place where it was to be performed, but it was never done in the sanctuary or by a priest. With adults, the wound healed only after several days of rest (Gn 34:25; Jos 5:8).²⁹⁷

Circumcision was also seen as a rite of passage into adulthood, particularly in relation to marriage (Gen. 34:13–17; Exod. 4:24–26; 1 Sam. 18:17–27). De Vaux adds "that the Hebrew word for bridegroom, son-in-law and father-in-law are all derived from the same root, *hatan*, which means in Arabic 'to circumcise.'"²⁹⁸ As most males are circumcised eight days after birth, it is difficult to ascertain whether this marital application was intended to be applied beyond the scriptural canon or was distinct to early Israel. The actual origins of circumcision are obscure and it is unclear whether the Israelites adopted the practice from a Gentile nation,

²⁹⁶ Rosner contends that sleep (cf. Gen. 2:21) and alcohol (Prov. 31:6) may have been forms of anaesthetic according to the Bible, the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *Sanhedrin* 43a) affirming the latter, while an "unknown anesthetic sleeping potion is also mentioned in... Tractate *Baba Metzia* 83b [and] 85a." Fred Rosner, "Anesthesia in the Bible and Talmud," *Anesthesia & Analgesia* 50, no. 2 (1971), 298–99.

²⁹⁷ Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1973), 46. Blanton IV's survey of ancient literature, biblical and extrabiblical, affirms that the ritual could be practiced by both men and women and contends that both 1 Maccabees 1:60–61 and Luke 1:57–66 evidences that it was common to take place at the household of the parents. Thomas R. Blanton IV, "Did Jewish Women Circumcise Male Infants in Antiquity? A Reassessment of the Evidence," *JMJS* 10 (2023): 53.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

for archaeology attests other nations and their cultures practiced the act prior to Israel.

Regardless, Hertz states that

to whatever origin and purpose it might be traced—whether as a measure of safeguarding cleanliness and health (Philo), or to counteract excessive lust (Maimonides), or as a sacrificial symbol—for Abraham and his descendants all these conceptions are supplanted, and the rite is the abiding symbol of a consecration of the Children of Abraham to the God of Abraham.²⁹⁹

Throughout the Scriptures, the word “circumcision” is used in multiple ways and these distinctions must be clearly understood.

The first is in reference to a specific people group (“Jews”; Rom. 4:12; Gal. 2:12–13; Titus 1:10). The word used is περιτομή (peritomē), which is not exclusively used for the Jewish people *pers se*, so it must be determined by the context of the verse where it appears. What can be safely stated is that it does not appear to inform us of their theology but rather their ethnicity alone.

A second use of the word “circumcision” is as a means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation (Acts 15:5).³⁰⁰ The word used here is περιτέμνω (peritémnō), which differs from the above word in that it is more specific about *how* the circumcision is performed and the purpose of it, particularly in being separated from a previous way of living.

A third use of the word “circumcision” is as a symbolic phrase of cutting sin from a believer’s life (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28–29; 4:11). The Hebrew word used here is מוּל (mûwl) which, while sometimes speaking of the act itself, more often extends to the act

²⁹⁹ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1972), 57.

³⁰⁰ This problematic interpretation will be explored later in this chapter, but this appears to be the primary interpretation of Paul in his letters when negatively using the word “circumcision.” Furthermore, though Hertz was not a believer in Christ, “Children of Abraham” can be extended to the Gentile believer (Gal. 3:29).

of being cut down, cut off, or even ending what has been destroyed. Context assists the word's intention in the Greek (περιτομή).

The final use of the word “circumcision” was symbolically referring to believers (Phil. 3:3). The word again used is περιτομή (peritomḗ), but context makes clear that it is speaking of the believing group, explicitly seen in this verse as it is rendered in a positive tone (“true” circumcision) when compared with the negative group in the prior verse.

An Examination of “Uncircumcised” and Its Interpretations

Negatively, the word “uncircumcised” was used in more than one way throughout the Scriptures. The first use is in referring to Gentiles (Col. 3:11). The Greek word here is ἀκροβυστία (akrobystía), refers to one who has remained uncircumcised, primarily Gentile, and infers the remaining presence of lawlessness. Historically the Philistines were referred to as uncircumcised (1 Sam. 17:26, 36; 18:25), as were the Sidonians (Ezek. 32:30). The Hebrew word is עָרֵל (‘ârêl), meaning to have foreskin or be uncircumcised.

A second use of the word “uncircumcised” was when referring to pagan practices (Lev. 19:23: “When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten”). The Hebrew word here, translated in the English as “forbidden,” is again עָרֵל (‘ârêl). While meaning to remain unharvested in an agricultural context, it more often speaks of intentionally remaining uncircumcised.

The third use of the word “uncircumcised” was referring to untrained qualities (Exod. 6:30; Jer. 6:10). The English word here is translated as “unskilled” and “closed.” While the same as the word above, context here infers a state of being exposed, raw, or not having yet undergone the means of being cut for a specific purpose.

The final use of the word “uncircumcised” was referring to a non-circumcised Jew (Josh. 5:6–7; cf. Acts 21:21). The Hebrew word used here is מוּל (mûwl) which can speak of uncircumcision itself or being cut down, cut off, or destroyed. This was a Jewish individual who, either by his own volition (as cited in the apocryphal 1 Maccabees 1:11–15) or by force (1 Maccabees 1:44, 48) was not circumcised like his fellow Jew.

The Mainstream Interpretation of Circumcision in Christianity

While there are exceptions,³⁰¹ almost all Christian denominations interpret that circumcision, if at all practiced, is distinct to religious communities, primarily Judaic and Islamic. While the medical practice of Gentile circumcision is still common in some Western countries, such as the United States of America, it has been abandoned by most. It is contended by Christians that a Jew who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior should abandon the role of the Law in their life (particularly commandments such as circumcision) and that the act was never intended for Gentiles. Du Toit summarizes the standard interpretation when he writes that there is “a definite *redefinition* of the criteria for identity or covenant membership in the new era... [t]he old marks of identity defined by the Law, including circumcision (cf. Gal 5:2–3; 6:12–13), dietary laws (cf. 2:12) and the keeping of special days (cf. 4:9–11), have become redundant and are no longer applicable to Judaeans or Gentile believers.”³⁰² Martyn echoes these sentiments when he writes,

³⁰¹ Ethiopian and Coptic Christians, in addition to many within Messianic Judaism, practice circumcision. It is also common in North American culture, but this is for medical, rather than theological, reasons. Michael J. Balboni and John R. Petet, *Spirituality and Religion Within the Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 97–101.

³⁰² Philip la Grange Du Toit, “Galatians 3 and the Redefinition of the Criteria of Covenant Membership in the New Faith-Era in Christ,” *Neotestamentica* 52, no. 1 (2018): 54.

God has brought about *one* mission to the Gentiles, and that mission is loosed from the Law. Paul can tolerate, and even recognize as God’s doing, a *parallel*, Law-observant mission to the Jews, so long as that mission is and remains truly parallel, that is to say, so long as it does not infect the Gentile mission with the demand for Law-observance. Nothing would have been further from Paul’s mind than to indicate that there was a Law-observant mission to Gentiles, considered by at least some members of the church to be authorized by God.³⁰³

Donaldson, agreeing with the above, goes one step further to address the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, as signified in circumcision, in relation to the Gentile nations when he states that Gentile adherence to “‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14; also Rom. 8–10) ... [is to] fulfill the “righteous requirement” of the law. Gentiles who do so without being circumcised nevertheless can be described as belonging to the “seed of Abraham.”³⁰⁴ Schwab contends that adult circumcision is no longer, due to “the danger of infection... [t]he Torah commands the superseding of God’s commandments in order to save lives.”³⁰⁵ When circumcision is discussed in Christian circles, it is often labeled as “Jewish” and its practice is framed with soteriological condemnation so as to infer works-based salvation.

Contention: The Abrahamic Covenant, and Its Sign, Is for Redeemed Jews and Gentiles

In Genesis 15:1–6, Abram (later Abraham), underwent a vision in which he encountered God. During this dream sequence, God affirmed the covenant promised to the patriarch earlier (Gen. 15:5; cf. Gen. 12:1–3) by promising Abram he would have a physical heir. When Abram initially accuses God of giving him no offspring (v.2–3) and proposes

³⁰³ J. Louis Martyn, “A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 3 (1985): 309.

³⁰⁴ Terence L. Donaldson, “Paul, Abraham’s Gentile ‘Offspring,’ and the Torah,” in *Torah Ethics and Early Christian Tradition*, ed. Susan J Wendel and David M. Miller (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 149–50.

³⁰⁵ Moshe Schwab, *A Hebraic Messianic Galatians: Yeshua’s (Jesus’) Message to Shaul (Paul)* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2020), 49.

human means of having a son (v.4), God reiterates to Abram His earlier promise (v.5).

Abram believed in this promise and was made right with God (v.6), being imputed with God's righteousness. It was not until Genesis 15:18 that the covenant was enacted. Genesis 17:1–8 goes on to state that

[T]he Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

In seeking to understand how covenants operated in the ancient Middle East, Kline states that the "historical relationship sustained by the new covenant to the old covenant and the place occupied by the New Testament as the divine documentation of the new covenant compel us to understand that New Testament as a resumption of that documentary mode of covenant administration represented by the Old Testament."³⁰⁶ Old covenants are not rendered inoperative and new covenants are either *entirely* new (with no connection to a former covenant) or renewals of former covenants; former covenants are never entirely superseded by latter covenants (though they could be renewed and enlarged with additional considerations and information).³⁰⁷ The Abrahamic Covenant is still in operation, including

³⁰⁶ As such, the "New Testament belongs to that pattern of renewing covenants by the issuance of new treaty documents which is already found in the inner history of old covenant administration." Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1972), 68.

³⁰⁷ Averbeck notes that "none of these covenants [from Scripture]... sets aside the previous ones as one succeeds the other; but they build together into a compilation of God's ongoing covenantal commitments and His expectations for those who commit to Him in those covenants." Richard E. Averbeck, *The Old Testament*

its distinct sign. The text here introduces readers to circumcision, which was established as a sign of the covenant made by God with Abraham. Genesis 17:9–14 states the following:

Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.

It is interesting that while God insists that Ishmael, born of a Gentile (Egyptian) mother, will not have the covenant established with his firstborn son (Gen. 17:21), Abraham is still required to circumcise Ishmael (Gen. 17:23, 25–26). Therefore, circumcision was *not* ethnocentric in its nature. It is the faith encapsulated in the covenant that determines who its beneficiary descendants are. *It is not by genetic disposition but by spiritual disposition.*

This is further clarified thousands of years later, after the death, resurrection, and ascension of the promised and prophesied Christ, when one of His most ardent disciples, Paul, reveals that the Abrahamic Covenant was in fact *the gospel*,³⁰⁸ which was first declared to Abraham. The apostle writes to the church in Galatia (Gal. 3:8),

Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 60.

³⁰⁸ Hegg is perceptive when he writes that “Paul’s commentary on the words of Christ [1 Corinthians 11:25–26] is interesting because he confirms that the Pesach seder functions as the sign of the New Covenant because it is the ritual of remembrance. It is itself a proclamation of the death of Christ, the very act which secures the New Covenant. Further, the words of Christ approximate the terminology of circumcision in Genesis 17. There, circumcision is given the status of being the covenant, since it denotes the essential aspect, namely, the promised Seed. Here, in the NT words of Christ, the cup is said ‘to be the covenant.’ It is fitting that both speak of death to self and faith in the Promised One. Both look to the promised blessing, relying not on the flesh but rather dying to self and trusting in God. And both, interestingly, have a messianic thrust, for even the sign of the New Covenant is ‘until He comes.’” He adds, “Theologically, then, circumcision has a greater parallel to the

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.”

This statement, “all nations will be blessed in you,” makes clear that the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant was the gospel. That Abram believed in God is without question. Genesis 15:6 begged the rhetorical question, *who was the object of saving faith* that Abram believed in that resulted in righteousness being imputed (which cannot be achieved by the works of a believing individual)? The answer is twofold. Paul believed in both the author of the covenant (God) and the object of the Abrahamic Covenant, the means by which the nations would be blessed, namely, the Christ. First prophesied in Genesis 3:15, the promised seed is Christ Jesus. Walter Kaiser Jr. refers to this as the “Promise-Plan,” which he defines as follows:

The promise-plan is God’s word of declaration, beginning with Eve and continuing on through history, especially in the patriarchs and the Davidic line, that God would continually *be* in his person and *do* in his deeds and works (in and through Israel, and later the church) his redemptive plan as his *means* of keeping that promised word alive for Israel, and thereby for all who subsequently believed. All in that promised seed were called to act as a light for all nations so that all the families of the earth might come to faith and to new life in the Messiah.³⁰⁹

Kaiser comments on Genesis 15:6 that “the object of faith...in the Abrahamic covenant... [is] the ‘seed,’ ‘the Anointed One,’ ‘the Man of Promise’ (i.e., Jesus).”³¹⁰ While he accepts that

Pesach seder than to baptism, since both circumcision and celebration of Pesach stand metonymically for the covenant (‘This is the covenant in your flesh’//‘This is the new covenant in My blood’).” Tim Hegg, “Circumcision as a Sign: The Theological Significance,” *Evangelical Theological Society Northwest Regional Meeting* (1990): 17–18, <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/circumcision-as-a-sign.pdf>.

³⁰⁹ Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, (2008), 19.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

the verse emphasizes God, not any of His divine persons or Jesus in particular, Kaiser contends that this “was more than a vague intellectual assent to a supreme deity... [for t]he object of his faith was to be found in the content of the total promise...the person or man of promise signified by the male descendant who was to come from the seed.”³¹¹ This thinking is not inconsistent with the Scripture, for August further contends that while it “is widely accepted that Galatians 3:8 combines Genesis 12:3 and 18:18 and that Galatians 3:16 is taken from Genesis 13:15 and 17:8.... [it is more likely that] Galatians 3:8 and 16 cite Genesis 22:18... [s]ince the Hebrew of Genesis 22:17b–18 refers to a single Offspring, [and] Paul’s interpretation in Galatians 3:16 reflects a contextual hermeneutic,”³¹² adding later that

the blessing to “the Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνος) of Galatians 3:14 connects back to Galatians 3:8 and reinforces the focus on universal blessing that was promised in Genesis 22:18... [but] more importantly, Paul’s entire argument rests on the singular nature of the term “offspring” (עֶרְוָה or LXX σπέρμα).. [for a]s Paul states, the Scripture is not “referring to many, but referring to one” (Gal 3:16)... [and t]his focus on the singular nature of the Offspring is consistent with Paul’s argument in 2:15-4:7[;] Paul focused throughout this section on the individual Jesus Christ (2:16, 20), who redeems and brings the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles (3:13, 14), providing the promise to those who believe (3:22, 26), and who was born of woman at the “fullness of time” (4:4–5).³¹³

This would imply that if the gospel is for all nations and the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant is the gospel, then the covenant and signs attributed to it are intended for the nations and those redeemed within them.

³¹¹ Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God*, 30.

³¹² Jared M. August, “Paul’s View of Abraham’s Faith: Genesis 22:18 in Galatians 3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176, no. 701 (2019): 51–52.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

Moorthy continues this train of thought and sees in Romans 4:11–12 a declaration by Paul that the circumcision—which Paul declared in Galatians as representing the Gospel-centric Abrahamic Covenant—is intended for redeemed Jew and Gentile alike. She writes,

Paul’s emphasis on the idea of circumcision as a sign is apparent in the Greek of Rom 4:11 since the term “sign” is placed syntactically prior to the word “circumcision.” In other words, although awkward in English, the phrase καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν περιτομῆς could be read: “and as a *sign*, he took circumcision.” On the other hand, however, Abraham’s circumcision may have served as a kind of authentication by God. With regard to this, it may be noted that, in 2 Thess 3:[1]7, the word “sign” (σημεῖον) refers to personal signature – an element intended to certify the authenticity of the epistle. As mentioned earlier, Paul describes those in 2 Cor 3:3 those in the community in Corinth as living epistles written with the Holy Spirit. That Paul understands σημεῖον in the sense of certification of approval or authenticity is amplified by his use of the term “seal” (σφραγίζω). Paul’s suggestion thus seems to be that circumcision served for Abraham just as would a seal or impression placed on a waxen stamp signifying the completion and approval of a written document. This would actually correspond with the idea of the written law being in the heart—that is, of man as a living law or legal document.³¹⁴

As such, believing in the Abrahamic Covenant saved Abraham because it was the gospel. It was the gospel of the promised Christ, the promised seed, i.e., the means of salvation. This dramatically shifts the long-held view that circumcision is solely intended for the Jew. While it was one of the means of culturally defining the Jewish nation as a people group, its practice enshrined a greater and spiritual meaning for those that believe in God as their Lord and Savior: *it attested to the Messiah*. While infant unbelievers undergo the practice, its symbolism resonates on a deeper level for consenting believers³¹⁵ who responds to the call of

³¹⁴ Asha K. Moorthy, “A Seal of Faith: Rereading Paul on Circumcision, Torah, and the Gentiles” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 159–60. She later adds on p. 182 that “what Paul seems to be precisely highlighting in Rom 4:11–12 is that physical circumcision is not of value for the sake of justification, as a mark specifically designating the Jew from Gentile or anything else but rather as a seal of the righteousness produced by faith for anyone walking in faith, whether Jew or Gentile. In other words, he would have understood physical circumcision as being of value for the entire household of Abraham in the sense of the entire household of faith.”

³¹⁵ This train of thought will be developed towards the end of this chapter.

the good news, the gospel. Circumcision attests to the Abrahamic Covenant, the “gospel beforehand,” and the one who would be the source of salvation: Jesus Christ.

How Circumcision Shifted from a Sanctifying to a Soteriological Sign

Circumcision was never meant to be understood as a means of salvation, that one had to become Jewish through a ritual proselyte conversion to be saved (i.e., ethnocentric soteriology). This blasphemous hermeneutic emerged outside of the scriptural canon during the intertestamental period. The events documented in the apocryphal book of 1 and 2 Maccabees were the catalyst, for there the reader begins to see circumcision become a matter of life and death. The violence shown towards Jewish believers by Gentile pagans during the Maccabean period (1 Maccabees 1:60–61; 2 Maccabees 6:10) and the willingness by some Jews to Hellenize solidified in the minds of religious and pious Jews that physical circumcision should not only identify God’s chosen people *physically* but *salvifically*. Compiled well after the closing of the scriptural canon in the fourth to fifth century, the Babylonian Talmud may contain evidence of this thinking, a school of thought that continued on for centuries in rabbinic Judaism. It is written that “[j]ust as your forefathers entered the covenant only with circumcision and immersion and sprinkling of blood through the sacrifices, so they will enter the covenant only through circumcision, immersion, and sprinkling of blood on the altar” (b.Keritot 9a).³¹⁶ Elsewhere it is written that “So great is the mitzva of circumcision that despite all the mitzvot that Abraham our Patriarch did, he was not called wholehearted until he circumcised himself” (m. Nedarim 3:11).³¹⁷ The first passage

³¹⁶ Babylonian Talmud [William Davidson Talmud trans. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz], “b.Keritot 9a,” Sefaria, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://www.sefaria.org/Keritot.9a?lang=bi>.

³¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud [William Davidson Talmud trans. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz], “(m. Nedarim 3:11,” Sefaria, accessed September 13, 2023, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Nedarim.3.11?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

documents the process of ritual proselyte conversion to become a “saved Jew,” while the second attests that it is necessary to be circumcised to be made truly righteous, justified, before God. As Donaldson conveniently summarizes in surveying other texts, such as 2 Baruch 30:4–5; 44:15; 51:6; 82:3–9 and 4 Ezra 7:37–38,72; 8:56–58, he admits,

most of the texts cited are post-70 C.E., and not all of them are positive towards proselytism. Nevertheless, on the basis of this evidence... we can make the following observations with confidence: (1) many within Judaism expected the exclusion and judgment of the Gentiles in the future; (2) most of Judaism was prepared to receive proselytes in the present; (3) these two opinions can be easily combined within the framework of covenantal nomism, as the Tannaitic evidence demonstrates; and (4) the likelihood of such a combination is in no way dependent on the events of 70 C.E. There is every reason, then, to suppose that for one strand of Judaism, at least, the Gentiles’ hope of salvation in the age to come depended on their becoming proselytes in the present age.³¹⁸

Hence, while acknowledging the Talmud’s appearance later in history, it seems reasonable to uphold the belief that it is the *interpretation* of circumcision that the apostle Paul condemns in the Scriptures, *not the act itself*. Circumcision being reinterpreted through man-made tradition as a means of salvation rather than a sign of the one who saves Jew and Gentile alike (“all the nations will be blessed”), is a theological travesty. Hence, any aggression towards Gentile circumcision by the Apostle Paul was only in the context of ritual proselyte conversion.³¹⁹ If the apostle Paul believed that circumcision was truly abolished and that its practice would be associated with salvation in any form or manner, he would have not circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). He also could not have defended the false accusation made against him that he taught Jewish believers should not circumcise their children (Acts 21:21)

³¹⁸ Terence Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 224–26.

³¹⁹ Tim Hegg, *Fellow Heirs: Jews & Gentiles Together in the Family of God* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2013), 81–82.

or boldly proclaimed his own circumcision when speaking of his credentials as a devout Jew (Phil. 3:5).³²⁰ To do so would be inconsistent, hypocritical, or worse yet, a lie.

Circumcision still possessed value to the apostle Paul. Uniquely, Sanfridson states that when “Gentiles joined the Jesus movement they altered aspects of their genealogy, language, cult, and/or customs,” (cf. Philo’s *Virtues* 102–103) and “Paul deliberately rewrites the gentile Christ followers’ genealogy... these gentiles are no longer whatever they were before they joined the Jesus movement and the Galtian *ekklesia* but have now become one in Christ, sons of Abraham, sons of God, children of the promise, and children of Sarah, the free woman.”³²¹ Likewise, after Gentile Abram believed, his genealogy also was rewritten when he became a Hebrew. Berkowitz writes that circumcision “serves as the sign of the covenant made with our father Abraham... pictures for us what it is like to be spiritually circumcised... [and the] service for our male infants can become an enduring testimony not only to the continuing covenant with Abraham, but also to the spiritual miracle God did in us who believe in the Messiah” (i.e., salvation).³²² The relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant with both redeemed Jew and Gentile cannot be overstated. Ethnicity is not eroded in saved people groups coming together; covenantal entry by Gentiles has them adopting the community’s sanctifying practices.³²³ Kaiser concludes his thought process, which is worth quoting at length. He writes,

³²⁰ To be clear, Philippians 3:7 does not erode those commanded instructions of the verses before it but the “gain” it established with man, rather than with Jesus Christ.

³²¹ Martin Sanfridson, “Circumcision in Galatia: Why Did Some Gentile Christ Followers Seek Circumcision in the Early Jesus Movement?” *JJMJS* 10 (2023): 71, 81.

³²² Ariel Berkowitz, *Genesis: Bereshit* (Hampton, VA: Shoreshim Publishing, 2001), 11.

³²³ While not agreeing with his view of capital punishment, McKee adds that “circumcision is still a memorial sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and a most worthwhile medical procedure for hygiene. *Circumcision should be practiced by God’s people*. Circumcision, unlike the bulk of capital penalties of the Torah (cf. Colossians 2:14), has not been nullified by Yeshua’s sacrificial work.” J. K. McKee, “Is Circumcision for Everyone?” in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II: The Set-Apart Life in Action—The Outward Expressions of Faith*, ed. J. K. McKee (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2015), 220.

Our contention is not that the new covenant only fulfilled the spiritual promises made to Abraham's seed. True, the middle wall of partition had been broken down between believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:13–18); but this again did not imply or explicitly teach that national identities or promises were likewise obviated any more than maleness and femaleness were dropped. Paul's claim that the Gentile believers have been "grafted into" the Jewish olive tree (Rom 11:17–25) and made "fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his *promise* in Christ by the gospel (Eph 3:6, emphasis mine. Since "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn 4:22), and since there is only one sheepfold, one Shepherd, and yet "other sheep that are not of this sheep pen" (Jn 10:16), it should not be too surprising to see the New Testament writers add to the merging thesis of the Old Testament that there is just one people of God and one program of God even though there are several aspects to that single people and single program. Paul made the Gentile believers part of the "household of God" (Eph 2:19) and part of "Abraham's seed" (Gal 3:16–19). Furthermore, he called them "heirs" according to the promise (Gal 3:19), which "inheritance" was part of "the hope of their calling" (Eph 1:18) and part of the "eternal inheritance" given to Abraham (Heb 9:15). Thus, Gentiles who were "excluded from the citizenship in Israel (Eph 2:12) and "foreigners and strangers" (v.19) to "the covenants of the promise" (v.12), have been made to share in part of the blessing of God to Israel. In the midst of this unity of the "people of God" and the "household of faith" there yet remains an expectation of a future inheritance which will also conclude God's promise with a revived nation of Israel, the kingdom of God, and the renewed heavens and earth. It is evident that Gentiles in this present time share already in some of the benefits of the age to come; yet the greater part of that same unified plan still awaits a future and everlasting fulfillment.³²⁴

As ingrafted covenant members, Gentiles adopt the practices that defined them from the other nations, bearing social markers that affirm both the source (God) and manifestation (Jesus) of salvation. Isaac was naturally conceived through Sarah; Jesus was miraculously conceived through Mary. While their nature and purpose were significantly different, both bore the mark of circumcision; the former prophetically initiated its intention of *ensuring* "all the nations will be blessed," while the latter prophetically fulfilled its intention by *being* the object of blessing to the nations. Hence, all those who bear circumcision today attest not only what the covenant promised but the One whom it promised and who saves alone.

³²⁴ Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 393–94.

Scriptural Examples of Gentile Circumcision

Contrary to mainstream understanding, Scripture evidences several examples of circumcised Gentiles, challenging the ethnocentricity of the ritual. These instances diminish insistence that the act is solely Jewish in nature and that God did not see its practice by those redeemed from within other nations as cultural appropriation.

The first of these is Abraham himself (Gen. 17:24; cf. 11:28–31). Abram was not born an ethnic Hebrew. He was from Ur, located in southern Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31). He was called and set apart (Gen. 12:1–8) to establish what would later be known as the Hebrew people. The one referred to as a spiritual father (Gen. 17:3–7; cf. Gal. 3:29) of the redeemed Jew and Gentile was himself originally a Gentile.

The second is Ishmael (Gen. 17:25). His mother was an Egyptian (Gen. 16:1). Today, the false religion of Islam still circumcises its boys at the age of thirteen, an ancient testament to the historical veracity of the Genesis narrative. Abraham circumcised his son although he was not of Hebrew descent.

The third example of circumcision is the Gentiles referred to in Exodus 12:43–47. The text states,

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; but every man’s slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.

Both the circumcised slave and the sojourning stranger were most likely those Gentiles who were a part of the exodus, the “mixed multitude” that left Egypt with the Hebrews into the Promised Land (Exod. 12:38). These were believers in God. They attested of Him as their Lord and Savior. They were one with Israel. They believed that one “law [Torah] shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Exod. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15–16, 29; Isa. 56:6–8).³²⁵ As the Temple was still standing, in order to worship alongside the believing Hebrew and partake in the festival of Passover, the foreign slave needed to be circumcised. Such a believing male was living proof of blessing through the Abrahamic Covenant. Speaking of both groups of circumcised Gentiles, Carpenter writes that “He has made a commitment to be to be part of Israel and their unique history and destiny... a recognized member of Israel, illustrating Yahweh’s desire to “bless all the nations” (Gen 12:1–3) through the descendants of Abraham... [they] could participate in Israel’s theological, religious, moral, and historical traditions and realities.”³²⁶ Circumcision was a sanctifying act and one that crossed ethnic boundaries.

The fourth are Gentile believers referred to in Ezekiel 44:6–9:

You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void—this in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge of My sanctuary.’ Thus says the Lord God, ‘No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.’”

³²⁵ A specific example is Caleb, who was a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6, 14).

³²⁶ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 1–18*, vol. 2, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 478–79.

God makes it clear here that no foreigner uncircumcised in heart and in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter His sanctuary. This implies that those that *have been* circumcised in heart and circumcised in flesh, can. Whether one interprets this verse as past or eschatological, Gentiles and circumcision are inferred in relation to the Temple (cf. Joshua 9:23, 27). If the issue was with Gentiles in general, there would be no need to distinguish them by the act of physical and spiritual circumcision. Equally important is *the correlation between physical and spiritual circumcision*; they are as one. The divine act of new birth, of being made spiritually alive, was to be acknowledged and celebrated with the human act of marking one's body as unique to the redeemed society which you had entered. This is seen even more clearly in Isaiah 56:1–8,³²⁷ which attests to a scene in which Gentiles (whom are circumcised in heart and in flesh) are welcomed into the Temple of God:

Thus says the Lord, "Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed. "How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from His people." Nor let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord, "To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered.

³²⁷ Isaiah 52:1 declares that "the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer come into the Holy City." Reading this in unison with Isaiah 56:1–8 implies that "foreigners" must be circumcised.

The final example of Gentile circumcision is the disciple Timothy (Acts 16:3; cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). Commentators have been divided on whether Timothy was to be understood as an ethnic Jew or a Gentile in the eyes of the Jewish authorities. Recent scholarship discredits the long-held belief that the traditional view of a Jewish birth mother as the determining factor of Jewish identity was a tradition established post-Scripture, not within the first century AD. Cohen concludes his exhaustive study by stating,

In the biblical period a mixed marriage between an Israelite and a non-Israelite produced offspring which was usually judged patrilineally. If an Israelite woman was married to a non-Israelite man, she would join his clan and bear children who were not Israelite. If he joined her clan through matrilocal marriage, the children apparently were considered Israelite. A matrilocal marriage could even legitimate the children of an Israelite mother and a slave father (1 Chron. 2:34–35). In the Mishnah, however, the children of an Israelite mother and a gentile father (either slave or free) are *mamzerim*, Jews of impaired status. The Talmudim declare these children to be not *mamzerim* but full and legitimate Jews. Both decisions, at least in cases of patrilocal marriage, contradict the Bible. In biblical times many Israelite men married foreign women, and there was never any doubt that the children were Israelite. The offspring of a slave mother and an Israelite father did, apparently, suffer from some disabilities, but no one questioned its Israelite status. The Mishnah, however, explicitly states that such off-spring follow the mother, and this ruling is not disputed in the Talmudim. As far as I have been able to determine, the transition from biblical patriliney to mishnaic matriliney cannot be dated before the period of the Mishnah itself. There is no evidence that Ezra attempted to introduce the matrilineal principle, and even if he did, there is abundant evidence that it was still unknown in the first century of our era.³²⁸

Hence, it cannot be unequivocally stated that Timothy was a Jew based on a post-biblical tradition. Sadly, many Bible commentaries continue to do so. His ethnic identity was that of a Gentile (Greek), attested by the fact that he was not circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). Paul circumcising³²⁹ Timothy is one of the strongest cases of Gentile

³²⁸ Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1985): 51–52.

³²⁹ Campbell suggests that based on Galatians 5:11, Paul did start circumcising Gentile believers and over time, rightly or wrongly, abandoned this practice. Douglas A. Campbell, “Galatians 5:11: Evidence of an Early Law-Observant Mission by Paul?” *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 3 (2011): 331.

circumcision and radically shifts the narrative on Gentile circumcision. As Hegg perceptively comments,

From a narrative standpoint, it is striking that the first action of Paul following the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 is to have Timothy circumcised, and this is so Timothy could accompany him as he distributed the edict of the council on the very subject of circumcision of Gentiles! We must presume that Paul was sufficiently confident of Timothy's understanding of salvation by faith, that to have him undergo circumcision would not in any way change his perspective. Having Timothy circumcised could thus be viewed as simple obedience to the Torah commandment without considering it a means of covenant status. In this way, Timothy's circumcision was in accordance with the original purpose of the Torah, but not an acquiescence to the teaching that Jewish status gained one entrance into the covenant.³³⁰

Outside of Scripture, there are brief references to Gentiles being circumcised in the apocrypha. Most notable is Achior who, when he "saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God... so he was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day" (Judith 14:10 NRSV). Another citation comes from Greek Esther 8:17, which reads that "in every city and province wherever the decree was published; wherever the proclamation was made, the Jews had joy and gladness, a banquet and a holiday... and many of the Gentiles were circumcised and became Jews out of fear of the Jews" (NRSV).³³¹

Summary

Abraham was saved because of his faith, prior to circumcision; he was made righteous and justified because of his belief in God as Lord and Savior (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4).

³³⁰ Tim Hegg, *Fellow Heirs: Jews & Gentiles Together in the Family of God* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2013), 83.

³³¹ To be fair, the Gentile circumcision of Izates king of Adiabene documented in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.34–48 is an example of a forced act, a decision made not by conscious guilt, and in its historical context may have been soteriological in nature rather than an act of sanctification.

Circumcision *is not necessary for salvation*; like all commands in Scripture, its practice as sanctification is dependent on the conscience of the believer. It is difficult to maintain the long-held belief that the act is solely intended for and practiced by “Jews” alone, for Scripture attests to Gentiles partaking in the ritual as a means to not only to identify with the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) *nationally* but also *salvifically*, as a testament to the saving work of the Lord Savior, the Christ, the One promised to Abraham through the Abrahamic Covenant and whom the apostle Paul acknowledged as the gospel. It is not incumbent on Gentiles to be circumcised for salvation and it does not alter their standing before God if they willingly choose not to be, but its practice is done as an example of submission, one that is intended to be a social marker of a redeemed people and is neither sinful nor an abolished practice intended for only one ethnicity.

Rebuttals to Key Passages in the Pronomian Debate

In proposing an alternative theological interpretation involves a need to identify both how certain passages have been historically understood by Christianity throughout the centuries and a pronomian rebuttal to each. While the weight of scholarship favors a position that does not advocate for the ongoing practice of certain commanded instructions from the Torah, this does not necessarily mean that a minority view is inherently wrong. Academia has several landmark scholars who proposed alternative views that have gone on to be adopted and shaped by others and their denominations.

Almost all Christian denominations interpret that circumcision, if at all practiced, is distinctly Jewish in nature and should be from cultural or traditional convictions, rather than theological. It is argued that a Jew who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior should abandon the role of the Law in their life, particularly practices such as circumcision, and that

the act was never intended for Gentiles. This section works through the passages that allege that circumcision is no longer to be practiced among believers.

Romans 2:25–29, 4:1–12

Romans 2:25–29 is interesting in how the Greek is structured. Paul begins the sentence in a positive manner only to transition to a seemingly negative one. Yet the change in words indicates that he is not speaking about the same thing. He says περιτομή μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ, noting the value of physical circumcision as one of many commandments, related to the νόμον πράσεως (“practice [of] the Torah”). He then states that if one transgresses the Torah, one’s περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν (“circumcision has become uncircumcision”). He does not say it is devalued. It appears that Paul is stating that the uncircumcised heart is on full display when one willingly transgresses the Law. Paul has no intention of contradicting himself later in 3:1, so, as Cranfield explains,

[I]t seems therefore better to understand Rom 2:25 to mean, not that the Jew’s circumcision has been annulled in God’s sight, but that he has become uncircumcised in heart (i.e., one whose heart is far from God and whose life is a contradiction of his membership of the Covenant people), and now, though still a member of God’s special people to whom God is still faithful, stands in his human existence in a negative, and no longer in a positive, relation to God’s purpose in history, and is outside that Israel within Israel, to which Paul refers in Rom 9:6ff.³³²

This is further affirmed in v.26, for Paul highlights through a rhetorical question that the redeemed Gentiles are capable of being more Torah observant than Jews. As Hegg notes, “Paul is not saying here that a Gentile believer becomes a Jew through his faith in Yeshua...

³³² C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1–8: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1975), 128.

[w]hat he is saying is simply that a doer of the Torah stands just before God, not the hearer (2:13)... [for i]f circumcision is the sign of the covenant, then circumcision ought to always be accompanied by righteous living[; i]n the same way, true righteous living (as defined by God, not man) assumes a status as a true covenant member (cf. 9:6), for true covenant members practice circumcision of heart.”³³³ Hence, Romans 2:28 is speaking directly to the ethnic Jew while 2:29 says that circumcision as a means of Gentile conversion is impossible, much like other means of being saved in the eyes of God (John 1:12–13). Physically, circumcision does not ensure the “circumcision of the heart.” Rather, the latter is evidenced by the former.³³⁴

In Romans 4:11, after detailing that Abraham was righteous before God because of his faith, not his works or by abidance in a prescribed commandment, Abraham “received the sign of circumcision, a seal of righteousness of the faith.” This phrase, connecting circumcision and a seal is notable, for the term “seal” (σφραγίς) is not only identified in extrabiblical literature with the practice of circumcision (Ferda highlights *The Testament of Levi*, *Epistle of Barnabas* 9:6, and *Targum Canticles* 3:8 as examples),³³⁵ but it is the same term used when speaking of believers being sealed by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30), language often employed by the apostle. This is no mere coincidence. While the reader is most likely meant to infer that Paul is speaking of the process that spiritually circumcises the heart (in accordance with Ezekiel 36:26), it is also possible to theologially conclude that Paul saw circumcision as evidence of obedience to the commandments of God, *post* salvation

³³³ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans—Volume 1* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2005), 56.

³³⁴ An alternative view is contended by Tucker. Tucker's view is that physical circumcision remains valid as a Jewish identity marker and is not encouraged for Gentiles. He argues that Rom 3:1ff makes no sense if Paul has just pronounced all believers to be true Jews and has dismissed Jewish ethnic identity. Brian Tucker, *Reading Romans after Supersessionism: The Continuity of Jewish Covenantal Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 51–56.

³³⁵ Tucker S. Ferda, “‘Sealed’ with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14) and Circumcision,” *Biblica* 93, no. 4 (2012): 569–71.

(Rom. 2:13; cf. James 2:17). While Paul writes that Abraham is the “father of all who believe without being circumcised” (Rom. 4:11), he stresses that the practice was not a precursor to saving faith and is not to be identified with the works-based “righteousness” being taught found in the proselyte ritual of conversion according to the Pharisees. Ferda, in contending Spirit-sealing as circumcision in the NT, makes the relevant point that

sociologists of religion have shown that religious groups often understand new situations and even model new rites and rituals on older prototypes or cultural assumptions. The relevance for Eph 1:13–14 is obvious: what better way to signal the “conversion-initiation” of Gentiles into the movement begun and sustained by Jews than the rite of circumcision which some Jews themselves used to signal the inclusion of Gentile proselytes into the fold? So too, as circumcision was a statement about the identity of Israel—e.g., that they are marked out as descendants of Abraham and members of an ancient covenant—so does Spirit-sealing make the statement that the *ekklesia* of Jews and lives “in the fullness of times” (v.10) and experiences the pouring of God’s Spirit (e.g., Ezek 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29).³³⁶

Hence, one can interpret that physical circumcision, an act of sanctification, represents spiritual circumcision, an act of salvation, and identifies a believer with the *ekklesia* of God.

Excursus: “Circumcision of the Heart”

Physical circumcision, as a commandment of God, does not contradict nor nullify the “circumcision of the heart” spoken of in Scripture (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). On the contrary, the former is an act of sanctification, the latter, of salvation. A believer cannot physically circumcise their heart, for the process is supernatural and initiated by God; it is a spiritual rebirth of a once spiritually dead individual. The heart is made anew in accordance

³³⁶ Ferda, “‘Sealed’ with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14) and Circumcision,” 578.

with the New (Renewed) Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27), of which both redeemed Jew and grafted Gentile (Rom. 11:17) are partakers. In Scripture,

[r]eferences to the heart as a physical organ are extremely rare in the OT (cf. 1 Sam. 25:37)... Heart was commonly used... of the center of something—whether humans or other objects, and from this usage the term was applied to the whole range of internal and central things in humans. The ancients did not use detailed psychological vocabulary to make the fine distinctions used in modern speech. The Hebrews thought of the whole human being and personality with all its physical, intellectual, and psychological attributes when they used “heart.” It was considered the governing center for all of these. It is the heart (the core) which makes and identifies the person (Prov. 4:23). Character, personality, will, and mind are modern terms which all reflect something of the meaning of the “heart” in its biblical usage.³³⁷

The “circumcision of the heart” is the replacing of the sinful, spiritually dead heart with one that has been redeemed and aligned with the will of God, that conforms itself to the heart of the Christ whose shed blood initiated the sanctification prophesied by the prophets in the New (Renewed) Covenant. Just as baptism of the Holy Spirit does not nullify physical baptism, nor does the circumcision of the heart nullify physical circumcision.

Galatians 2:1–3; 5:1–12; 6:12–15

In Galatians 2:1–3, Paul writes “not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” This affirms that as a Gentile, Titus had no desire to be physically circumcised.³³⁸ The quantifying statement “he was a Greek,” highlights that Paul and Titus understood that ethnicity was not what determined whether one would be

³³⁷ Larry L. Walker, “Heart,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019), 563.

³³⁸ The recent interpretation that Titus was in fact Timothy is not a helpful contribution to the discussion. Richard Fellows, “Paul, Timothy, Jerusalem and the Confusion in Galatia,” *Biblica* 99 (2018): 544–66.

circumcised: *it was faith*. Greeks were pagans. The word “compelled” (ἀναγκάζω), a word that denotes force, even threat (e.g., Act 26:11) is a phrase *never* used for Torah observance. The notion that a commandment of God which Paul attests is the gospel itself (Gal. 3:8) was “forced” upon Gentiles is foreign to Scripture. A more accurate understanding is that, as a Greek (Gentile), Titus was not compelled to undergo circumcision as means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation (cf. Acts 15:5; i.e., a proselyte ritual).³³⁹ This then leaves the possibility that Titus may still have been circumcised (despite his father’s inferred failure to do so) according to the written Torah, not the oral laws.³⁴⁰ Cha is helpful here when he notes that

Traditional Christian interpreters tend to understand καταδουλώσουσιν (“bondage”) in 2:4 and ζυγῶ δουλείας (“yoke of slavery”) in 5:1 as the OT law of Moses. Thus Paul seems to be urging the Galatians to leave the enslaving OT law behind and move on to “the liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” (2:4). In the proceeding context, however, the “bondage” and “yoke of slavery” probably refer to “my former manner of life in Judaism” (1:13) and “my ancestral traditions” (1:14)—the burdensome stipulations of the Jewish religious authorities in Paul’s time.”³⁴¹

Furthermore, that contention that Titus is not instructed to be circumcised in the letter addressed to him by Paul is *argumentum ad ignorantium*, a logical fallacy. The reference in Titus 1:10 is Paul’s shorthand for religious Jews, and no further comment on the topic is documented.

³³⁹ “This, in fact, leaves open the question of whether or not Titus was circumcised voluntarily.” P. B. Smit, “In Search of Real Circumcision: Ritual Failure and Circumcision in Paul,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40, no. 1 (2017): 80.

³⁴⁰ Frederic William Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1889), 233; William O. Walker, Jr., “The Timothy-Titus Problem Reconsidered,” *The Expository Times* 92, no. 8 (1981): 231–35.

³⁴¹ M. I. Cha, *Misunderstanding Galatians: An Exegetical, Originalist Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 51.

Later, when Paul writes “if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Gal. 5:2), he is not talking about the practice but rather the interpretive intention of the ritualistic act. Paul’s righteous anger was directed upon the thinking that a believer relied upon the flesh to enter the Kingdom of God. This is affirmed by the fact that he went on to circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:3). Circumcision as means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation is a false gospel that teaches Jesus plus works. Paul makes clear that such people must be accursed (Gal. 1:8). Commentators who wish to maintain their view that this is an example of the Law no longer being operative would have to maintain consistency if they replaced the phrase “have yourselves circumcised” with any other Mosaic law, including those that instruct against the sins prescribed in Galatians 5:19–21.

Furthermore, in understanding “circumcision” as a means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation, a verse such as “every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law” (Gal. 5:3) is made clearer on two fronts. First, “man” here is *ἄνθρωπος*, meaning that Paul is speaking more broadly here than gender. Hence, any man *or woman* who undergoes this proselyte ritual must keep the whole Law, which to the religious Jew in the first century AD was both the written *and oral* laws, the former of which Jesus affirmed in His ministry and the latter, condemned (e.g., Mark 7:8; cf. b. *Shabbat* 31a; b. *Yevamot* 47a–b).³⁴² Many of the encounters and charges against Jesus by the Pharisees (and by extension Paul and the so-called “Judaizers”) pertained to how He rejected their additional laws, never the Law itself. As McKee fairly notes,

Why would being regarded as a “debtor to do the Torah,” merit being cut from God’s grace in Yeshua? Because in Yeshua, born again Believers are no longer be regarded as such debtors. He has freed all redeemed men and women from the curse of the Torah declared upon Torah-breakers (3:13). To regard oneself as some kind of “debtor to do the Torah,” and if found breaking

³⁴² This was a problem that stretched back to the OT era. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, noted distinctions between His laws (Ezek. 20:11) and man’s (Ezek. 20:25; Amos 5:21).

the Torah incur its curse, would be tantamount to the Galatians saying that Yeshua had not really broken the curse of Torah-breaking via His salvation.³⁴³

Paul states that being circumcised or uncircumcised means “nothing,” for it is “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6) that determines one’s standing, one’s justification, before God.

When the practice is associated with soteriology, Paul is unflinching in his condemnation of such an interpretation. His rhetoric is so violent that he declares he “wish[es] that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves[!]” Jeremiah, who is quoted in the letter to the Galatians, stated the same thing when he wrote in Jeremiah 9:23–26:

Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord. “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised—Egypt and Judah, and Edom and the sons of Ammon, and Moab and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.”

Here, Jeremiah makes clear that the practice, the fulfillment of the commandment, will not determine the salvation of an individual. Interestingly, Jeremiah’s condemnation of the type of boasting that comes from those who believe themselves to be in right standing before God is the exact charge made against Paul by those who sought to do the same in his life (cf. Gal. 6:13), advocating for circumcision as a means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation.

The charge made against Paul in 5:11 also makes no sense if he is referring to physical circumcision. Paul was not preaching against circumcision but its interpretation. He never annulled the Torah (Acts 4:1–4, 5–22; 5:17; 6:8; 8:3; 9:2, 23; 12:1; 21:27–29). He was

³⁴³ J. K. McKee, *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 179.

clearly preaching against circumcision as a means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation; this is why he was persecuted. He was teaching salvation through Jesus alone, not by works.

In Galatians 6:12–15, this passage is speaking of ethnic status, not commandments, as identified in the statement “those who are circumcised [i.e., Jews] do not even keep the Law [i.e., written *and oral*] themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised [i.e., undergo a proselyte ritual] so that they may boast in your flesh” (Gal. 6:13). The boasting spoken of here regards the works-based ritual, for it cannot be a boast on adherence to any of the commandments of God which the Gentiles were already abiding in (cf. Acts 15:20). Furthermore, the claim that those wanting circumcision (ritual conversion) “do not even keep the Law” cannot be understood in the context of those who are physically circumcised not keeping physical circumcision themselves, for that would be a contradiction. Such a phrase further strengthens that circumcision is often used by Paul as a shorthand as a means of conversion to ethnocentric salvation.

1 Corinthians 7:17–20

In reading this letter to the assembly in Corinth, one cannot but think of epispasm (cf. 1 Cor. 7:18), strengthening the interpretation that these verses evoke a connection to the physical act, but not as a means to condemn the commandment. Paul is stating that when one is called (καλέω), it matters not if they were physically circumcised, reminiscent of Abraham’s journey to faith. Like Abraham, Paul and believers at Corinth were called (καλέω) to salvation (1 Cor. 1:9). In 1 Corinthians 7:19, Paul remarks, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” This statement would be a contradiction if one interprets that he is speaking *of the commandment of circumcision*. Circumcision is a commanded instruction of God. Paul is

clear that believers are to be “keeping” commandments, one of which *is* circumcision. Hence, this verse must be speaking of something else, namely, *its interpretation*; practice of the commandment itself is not wrong, rather, interpreting it as a means of salvation is “nothing.”

Philippians 3:1–5

Writing to the church at Philippi, Paul says to the assembly in 3:2, “Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν.” Unfortunately, the word κατατομή has been translated into the English as “false circumcision,” but it is more accurate to render it as “mutilation.”³⁴⁴ It has been interpretively contrasted with the word περιτομή (peritomé) in 3:3 to contrast the idea of one group labeled the “false circumcision” with another group labeled the “true circumcision.” κατατομή is never cited in any ancient Greek literature as being synonymous with the act of circumcision (e.g., Theophrastus’ *The Hippocratic Treatises* 4.8.10 and the *Inscriptiones Graecae* 12.372.134). Furthermore, Paul humbly acknowledges his own circumcision (περιτομή) soon after in v.5. This contrast between κατατομή and περιτομή, is most likely spiritual in nature; it highlights the false conversion (inaugurated by physical circumcision) against true conversion (supernatural circumcision of the heart). Violent rhetoric is used by Paul in discussing this group of false believers. This is consistent with his summary of them in v.18–19. As Bateman IV comments,

the depiction of these opponents as self-centered (“their god is their belly,” ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία), self-gratifying (“their glory is in their shame,” ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ), and worldly (“who set their minds on earthly things,” τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες) clearly contrasts the self-denying, self-giving, self-sacrificing attitude and life of Jesus (2:6–8) as well as the lifestyles of Timothy (2:20–23),

³⁴⁴ H. Koster “katatomé [cutting up, mutilation],” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1169.

Epaphroditus (2:25–29), and Paul (3:7–16). The description of the eternal destiny of these unregenerates (“enemies of the cross,” τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ) clearly contrasts with that of the saints in Philippi.³⁴⁵

This, like many of the Pauline passages on circumcision, does not denigrate the practice itself, but rather its interpretation. Paul is not throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater.

Colossians 2:8–12

In his epistle to the assembly at Colossae, Paul relates baptism to circumcision. The passage does not speak of physical circumcision or its abolishment but of Christ “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands” (i.e., supernaturally) removing “the body of the flesh [i.e., the “old man,” represented by the heart of stone] by the circumcision [i.e., baptism] of Christ.” Arnold notes, “Paul here emphasizes that this spiritual circumcision was performed by Christ... [t]he following participial clause (συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ) explains this circumcision as having taken place through identification with Christ in his death and represented through the rite of baptism.”³⁴⁶ This passage cannot affirm the ongoing practice of physical circumcision any more than it can discredit its practice after the time of Jesus Christ (and thereafter). Speculatively, such an unusual turn of phrase may imply that the Colossae assembly were being compelled to undergo circumcision as means of

³⁴⁵ Herbet W. Bateman IV, “Were the Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 59.

³⁴⁶ Cliton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 297.

conversion to ethnocentric salvation like the Galatians, for Paul never makes this connection between the two practices in any other epistles.³⁴⁷

Excursus: Contending Circumcision as an Act of Sanctification by a Consenting Believer

Historically, circumcision as a practice is often associated with infants. This conclusion, enforced by rabbinical Judaism and accepted within Christianity, originates in Genesis (17:9–14). Most notable are the examples of Isaac, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ (Gen. 21:4; Luke 1:59–60; Luke 2:21). Examples of adult circumcision abound throughout Scripture (Exod. 12:43–47; Ezek. 44:6–9; Acts 16:3), which gives one pause as to whether there is a preferred age in fulfilling the commandment. While the circumcision of Jewish youth distinguished Israel from other nations, it had no bearing on their justification before God. It was never taught as relating to salvation in Scripture; this was a man-made, intertestamental concept that plagued the first century AD, attested by Paul’s numerous commentaries on the topic. With the arrival of Jesus Christ, Himself circumcised, the Renewed Covenant He has established in which the Holy Spirit “seals” the believer in their salvation, a salvation that is publicly inaugurated with the confession of faith (Rom. 10:9). Furthermore, baptism is only inaugurated in the wake of confessing sin (Acts 2:38). This forms a picture in which, once saved by Christ and identifying with Him through the practice of baptism, a believer follows the example of Christ and is circumcised into the covenantal community representing His body. This connects the practice of circumcision relating to marriage (cf. Gen. 34:13–17; Exod. 4:24–26; 1 Sam. 18:17–27); Christologically, it is an act signifying marriage between Christ and His Bride. An infant is incapable of any of these

³⁴⁷ Neither is such a connection between baptism and circumcision made in first century literature (or the intertestamental period beforehand).

steps; *each depends on a consenting believer*, one who responds to the salvific call of God the Father who draws them to Him. The Renewed Covenant has not abolished circumcision but redirected its recipient. This is not an entirely new thought, for one reads in Genesis 17:13–14 that God instructed Moses that older individuals must be circumcised lest “that person shall be cut off from his people [for] he has broken My covenant.” Today, that the majority of Judaism, though circumcised, has rejected Jesus as Christ attests that circumcision bears no connection to the faith of the individual themselves. In light of the New (Renewed) Covenant, circumcision has become an act of sanctification by a consenting believer. As Hegg summarizes,

Circumcision first and foremost is a sign pointing to the promised Son, first in Isaac, and then in the Messiah. The cutting of the flesh, though a ceremony known in the ancient world as a rite of passage to marriage, was to be done on an infant male to stress the impossibility of bringing the promised Son by human efforts. No eight-day old son could ever father offspring. The act of circumcision on the infant reinforced the picture that the promised One would have to come by above-human means.³⁴⁸

*On Galatians 2:11–14, Acts 15:1–5, and the Charge of “Judaizing”*³⁴⁹

Biblical passages pertaining to “Judaizing” must be addressed as they relate to the role of the Law for a believer. Defining what a Judaizer is and what “judaizing” means is challenging as many of our definitions have been formed post-Scripture. Even among scholars, the definition varies. In studying the end of the first century AD and emerging post-scriptural commentary regarding those who were favourable towards Judaism, one scholar

³⁴⁸ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 88.

³⁴⁹ This section on judaizing is a revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, “The Background of the New Testament Essay: The Gospels and Acts Assignment—Acts 15:19–21” (class paper submitted in NBST800: New Testament Backgrounds (D01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

speculates that Judaizers were either “those who provided vocal support for the Jews ([Epistle of]Barnabas), through those who allied themselves opportunistically with the synagogue (Revelation [2:9, 3:9]) or adopted the customs of the Jews (Ignatius [Epistle to the Magnesians *and* Epistle to the Philadelphians] and Justin [Dialogue with Trypho]), to those who became full Jewish converts and abandoned the church altogether (Justin [Dialogue with Trypho]).³⁵⁰ It is apparent that defining the term even within the lifetime of the original disciples (and subsequently their disciples) is not easy to summarize. Adding nineteen centuries to this theological debate makes identification of the Judaizers and their practices more of a detective game than one of authority. The standard definition of Judaizers is as follows:

The most likely identification of the Galatian opponents of Paul [i.e., Judaizers] is that they are Jewish Christians who demanded that Gentile Christians practice circumcision and obedience to the law as a foundation for salvation. A related emphasis is that they insisted on obedience to the law as necessary for full acceptance as Christians. These Judaizers may have had a link with the Judean Christians who emphasized obedience to Jewish customs (see Acts 15:1–2). They may also have insisted on the supreme authority of Jerusalem leaders in identifying the true gospel. The Judaizers operated by discrediting Paul’s credentials (1:10–17) and charging Paul with personal inconsistency in both opposing and preaching circumcision (5:11). They must also have emphasized that obedience to the Jewish law was a means of hindering the spread of immorality and disobedience in the church.³⁵¹

The origins of the Judaizer and judaizing are hard to pinpoint. One scholar suggests that the terms emerged during the Maccabean era, much of which has been documented in the apocryphal 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees.³⁵² Though outside of the inspired canon of

³⁵⁰Stephen G. Wilson, “Gentile Judaizers,” *New Testament Studies* 38, no. 4 (1992): 605–16.

³⁵¹ Thomas D. Lea, “Unscrambling the Judaizers: Who Were Paul’s Opponents?” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 37, no. 1 (September 1994): 23–29.

³⁵² Steven Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38, no. 4–5 (2007): 465–68.

Scripture these books do give insights to the discussion in their depiction of preserving Judaism against Hellenism³⁵³ and the goal of Judas Maccabeus of judaizing Jews back to the faith. Yet even here, we see a process that seeks to return people to what they once believed in the wake of abandoning their faith for an entirely new religion.

The earliest reference to judaizing occurs in Esther 8:17: “In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.” Here, the phrase “became Jews,” יהָדַיְ yâhad, infers *a process of becoming a Jew*. Exactly what this means is vague. The apocryphal Greek Esther 8:17 might give some indication: “in every city and province wherever the decree was published; wherever the proclamation was made, the Jews had joy and gladness, a banquet and a holiday... and many of the Gentiles were circumcised and became Jews out of fear of the Jews” (NRSV). The English translation “became Jews” in the Greek is Ἰουδαΐζω (Ioudaízō) and is said to refer to judaizing, yet since this phrase is preceded by circumcision, it might imply ritual proselyte conversion. Circumcision in itself is not wrong and was practiced by Gentiles in Scripture (Gen. 17:24, 25; Exod. 12:43–47; Ezek. 44:6–9; Acts 16:3), but it had falsely been interpreted as a means of salvation, for it was believed that the Jew alone was saved and therefore, to be saved, one had to become an ethnic Jew through this ritual. However, this ritual proselyte conversion theory quickly falls apart when we note that this interpretation emerged in Judaism far after the events of the book of Esther, most likely during the intertestamental period, and the apocryphal Greek Esther was translated and preserved during the Hellenistic era. An editorial assumption

³⁵³ There are those who do not see Hellenism as a threat to the biblical faith, but rather believe that it should be embraced and is in fact normative to Christianity: “The challenge of Hellenism, therefore, need not be viewed so much as a clash between two cultures, but as a meeting of two traditions that would one day enhance one another, blending one with the other. Christianity throughout history has identified more with its Hellenic roots than with its Semitic ones.” Eric M. Meyers, “The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 55, no. 2 (1992): 91.

appears to have been made and exegetically inserted. The scriptural Esther 8:17 speaks of some type of conversion by Gentiles to Israel. It may have been sincere (as exemplified in the book of Ruth) or out of fear and thus disingenuous. One does not know if it involved circumcision or merely obeying the laws of God (i.e., a “God-fearer”; Acts 10:2, 13:16, 26).

The next verse on judaizing comes from Galatians 2:11–14. The text reads, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” Here, the Greek word Ἰουδαίζω (*Ioudaízō*),³⁵⁴ translated “live like the Jews” is said to refer to judaizing (cf. Greek Esther 8:17). It must be noted quickly, there is nothing implied here that speaks of abiding by the laws of God. It is a stretch to suggest otherwise, as Paul then would be criticizing the divinely inspired laws of God, something he is never accused of in the book of Acts. The context here strongly affirms the theory of ritual proselyte conversion (far more than the previously cited verse from Esther). Read alongside Acts 15:1, the connection becomes stronger. The groups in both passages are one in the same.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ This Greek word is also used in Josephus’ *The Jewish War* (2.454, 2.463). Of particular interest here is the first of these, for it was said that the Roman Metilius “will Judaize all the way to circumcision” to avoid execution. Notice how judaizing precedes the act of circumcision. Again, the brevity of the remark does not give us much to work from, though in fairness, it does evoke ritual proselyte conversion.

³⁵⁵ Not all commentators are convinced that this is definitive but do lean toward such an interpretation. See: Lea, “Unscrambling the Judaizers,” 21–29.

Turning to Acts 15:1, one reads that “[s]ome men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Here, one is introduced to a *second* group which contained “some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). These are not one in the same, though similar, for the latter group is stated as having emerged from the Pharisees, refers to the “Law” not the “custom” of Moses, and was not identified as attributing its beliefs with salvation in approaching the Gentiles. One needs to differentiate these two groups and acknowledge that the first group are Judiazers, not the second, even though both were unscriptural. As such, the first group acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, no doubt “from James” (Gal. 2:12), but “were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14) and perpetuated a long held false doctrine of salvation in ancient Israel.³⁵⁶ Also, they were not Pharisees. The second group also “had believed” in Jesus as Messiah (Acts 15:5) but had corrupted the gospel by teaching that it was “necessary” to practice the Law in its entirety, muddying the doctrine of soteriology. This was a hallmark of the Pharisees, who merged man’s will with God’s (Matt. 9:14; 15:1–9; 23:5; 23:16, 23; Mark 7:7). A better understanding of judaizing shows no relation to pronomianism.

Contextual Considerations

³⁵⁶ Vanhoff disagrees that the first group believed in Jesus (Yeshua). He contends that “the halakhah in verse 1 is essentially a non-“Yeshua-believing” Judean nationalist-oriented ruling (a Greek third-class conditional sentence, “Unless *x*, you cannot *y*”) clearly delimiting saved from unsaved, the halakhah in verse 5 seeks to build upon a faith demonstrated by the Gentiles who were now coming to Messiah in increasing numbers. This opinion is not conceived as a barrier to Gentile entry into the community. Rather, it is a requisite curriculum of rite and behavior, formulated by Pharisaic believers, for all who desire to walk with and worship the God of Israel in the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah.” Rob Vanhoff, “Circumcision in the Second Temple Period,” *TorahResource Institute* (2012), <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/circumcision-in-the-second-temple-period.pdf>.

It is important to explore briefly some of the natural challenges and conclusions that arise from the circumcision of redeemed believers in Christ.

Circumcision is not merely a physical act, it is an act performed as obedience, an example of sanctification. It is based in a belief that all covenants of the Scripture are still operative and not to be enacted under coercion. It has no bearing on justification and is unrelated to the ethnocentric salvation taught outside of Scripture (Acts 15:5). Sanctification is a divinely enacted process (taking place after justification; Rom. 3:21–26; cf. Rom. 5:18–19) in which “born again” believers are mentally, physically, and spiritually *separated* from the world and walk according to the Word (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. John 17:16). As a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9), believers strive for peace and holiness (Heb. 12:14) and to be holy in all conduct (1 Pet. 1:15). The apostle Paul writes “that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:22–24; cf. Col. 3:5–17). Sanctification is the process of being transformed into the likeness of the Son (Rom. 8:28–29; cf. Heb. 10:10), refining and purifying the heart, soul, and mind until the believer’s offerings to Him are righteous (Mal. 3:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:6–7). Riccardi notes that empowered and lead by the Holy Spirit, the practical means of sanctification are the Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, providence, and obedience³⁵⁷ (namely, to God’s teachings). While Riccardi would disagree, this should include obedience to all the laws of God, those before the life of Messiah Jesus and those after, including circumcision. As such, it can be an act of willing submission by a Gentile believer. McComiskey strengthens this thinking when he writes that

³⁵⁷ Michael Riccardi, *Sanctification: The Christian’s Pursuit of God-Given Holiness* (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Books, 2015), 21–27.

the function of circumcision was to prescribe obedience in one physical rite. It stipulated one aspect of obedience and that aspect had the distinct function of serving as a sign of Abraham's participation in the promise. In this way circumcision is like the law covenant under which it was later subsumed. Circumcision did not grant the inheritance, nor did the law, but both administered the obedience necessary for participation in it. Both specified the nature of obedience, and those stipulations were given for important reasons in redemptive history.³⁵⁸

Circumcision is not nullified by the statements emerging from the famed Jerusalem Council. While this has been the mainstream interpretation, an alternative view is more scripturally consistent. Rather than understanding the four laws summarized in the letter as the sole expectation of the Gentile believer's relationship to the Law (i.e., "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication," Acts 15:24–29), it is more likely that these are the minimum requirements (as expounded in Chapter 4). That is to say, these are the foundational beliefs a Gentile believer must hold to in their conversion to the faith, not all that is encouraged or expected of them, for to interpret otherwise would nullify the Ten Commandments and numerous other laws. Earlier, they are called to observe (Saturday) Sabbath and the divinely inspired writings of Moses (Acts 15:21), and soon after this event, Timothy is circumcised. As Jervell highlights,

According to Luke the church did not keep the law only until the Apostolic Council. After that meeting not only Paul but all other Jewish Christians observed the law, so that Paul immediately after the council circumcised one of his fellow workers (16:3; 21:15–26). For Luke it is impossible that the law should be arbitrated, replaced, or conceived as an epoch. This is apparent from the previously mentioned Jewish charges that the Christian Jews in the diaspora are taught by Paul to abandon circumcision and the law. If Luke had championed the idea that the law was but provisionally valid, an epoch, he would have proved that the Jewish accusations were valid. But that is precisely what he tries to disprove.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 149.

³⁵⁹ Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 145. Thiessen adds, "Luke intentionally depicts Paul as a law-observant Jewish follower of Jesus until the very end, one who *did not* teach Jewish Messiah followers to abandon the law of

Hence, abiding by more than these four commands will naturally flow from the obedient heart of the grafted-in Gentiles. J. K. McKee comments that the “actual statements that the Jerusalem Council met to address involved the absurd claim that circumcision as proselytes, and Torah-keeping, were to be ordered... upon the non-Jewish Believers *for salvation* [and if] the non-Jewish believers did not do these things, they could not be considered redeemed by the hyper-conservative Pharisees.”³⁶⁰ The point here is not a theological concern with circumcision and Torah-keeping in general (for the disciples had partaken and continued in both)³⁶¹ but with their association with soteriology;³⁶² the former act granting entry into the community of the saved (by being Jews) and the latter being the means of ensuring that was secured (by performing works). This was assuredly a false gospel.³⁶³ McKee reiterates later, the Jerusalem Council’s ruling was against how to understand Torah observance, not as salvific but “as a

Moses and one who did not oppose the Jewish law.” Matthew Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul: The Messiah’s Herald to the Gentiles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 27.

³⁶⁰ J. K. McKee, *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 94.

³⁶¹ Friedman notes that “if breaking the Torah or the mitzvot was a main reason for antagonism against the movement, we should expect to see this recorded in the New Testament... [however, Acts 4:1–4, 5–22; 5:17; 6:8; 8:3; 9:2, 23; 12:1; 21:27–29] demonstrates that there was no valid charge of Torah-breaking in any of the above passages[;] if any type of Torah-breaking had been advocated, either in teaching or lifestyle, we should have read of protests against it... we do not see this (outside of one false charge that is not investigated any further according to the text)... [so,] whatever reasons are given for the prejudices against the first-century Messianic movement, Torah-breaking was *not* one of them.” Friedman, *They Loved the Torah*, 99–100.

³⁶² This interpretation emerged with the incorrectly integrated phrase “*You must* be circumcised and keep the law” (Acts 15:24 NKJV) that is present in the Textus Receptus but absent from the preferred Critical Text. This appears to have been added to the original text at some point during scribal transmission. McKee cites Bruce M. Metzger as the source of this theory, referred to as a “form of interpolation.” McKee, *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*, 92.

³⁶³ Vanhoff writes that “Whereas the halakhah in verse 1 is essentially a non-“Yeshua-believing” Judean nationalist-oriented ruling (a Greek third-class conditional sentence, “Unless *x*, you cannot *y*”) clearly delimiting saved from unsaved, the halakhah in verse 5 seeks to build upon a faith demonstrated by the Gentiles who were now coming to Messiah in increasing numbers. This opinion is not conceived as a barrier to Gentile entry into the community. Rather, it is a requisite curriculum of rite and behavior, formulated by Pharisaic believers, for all who desire to walk with and worship the God of Israel in the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah.” Rob Vanhoff, “Circumcision in the Second Temple Period,” *TorahResource Institute* (2012), accessed September 13, 2023, <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/circumcision-in-the-second-temple-period.pdf>

matter of sanctification... [t]he promise of the Holy Spirit being given, and wiring the Torah's commandments onto the heart (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:25–27) would certainly involve much *more than just* the requirements to love God and neighbor,” adding that v.29 makes clear that the “*non-Jewish Believers will do well because as they progress in holiness, they will improve in obedience.*”³⁶⁴ Hence, circumcision was permitted among Jew *and* Gentile; its intent, however, was as a means of sanctification *not* salvation.³⁶⁵

Circumcision is not exclusive to the Jewish nation as first established by Abraham and the Hebrews. Other people groups practice the act, namely the “West Semitic peoples, including the Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Phoenicians[,]Arameans... [and] Egyptians.”³⁶⁶ While speculative, it is not unreasonable that those who became believers from these nations did not reverse their circumcision in coming to their newfound faith, for epispasm was condemned in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 7:18). However, it is possible, as exemplified by those who had left Egypt, that the means of circumcision was not the same between other cultures and the nation of Israel and thus joining Israel required a “second” circumcision (Josh. 5:2). Jeremiah 9:25 clearly acknowledges the existence of nations that also circumcised males.

Circumcision is not to be understood as being replaced with infant baptism, that is to say, that what circumcision was to Jewish children in the OT has now been substituted with

³⁶⁴ McKee, *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*, 97, 99. Italics his.

³⁶⁵ It is worth noting here that there are some who conclude that Paul did in fact begin a “Torah-observant” missionary approach early in his apostolic career but that it shifted over time until he no longer held to this view. Campbell writes, “Paul did spend part of his apostolic career proclaiming a gospel that included a commitment to circumcision, which is to say that he did not always relax this expectation for male converts to his movement from paganism. At some auspicious moment a significant transition in Paul's missionary praxis seems to have taken place from a gospel merely for the uncircumcised to one that allowed them to remain so following their conversion. But we must leave it to other studies to establish exactly when and where this transition took place, and to reconstruct its rationale. It suffices for now to conclude that Gal 5.11, suitably interpreted, points toward the fact that such a transition did take place. At an early point in his missionary career, and by his own admission, Paul the apostle preached a law-observant gospel, and his modern interpreters must learn to interpret him in a way that comprehends this intriguing transition, rather than ignores it.” While not advocating for the belief that Gentiles can circumcise today, his contention reveals that the reading of Scripture on this matter is not necessarily cut and dry. Douglas A. Campbell, “Galatians 5.11: Evidence of an Early Law-Observant Mission by Paul?” *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 3 (2011): 337.

³⁶⁶ Philip J. King, “Circumcision,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32, no. 4 (2006): 50.

infant baptism in the NT. Proponent Berkhof writes that “[t]he covenant made with Abraham was a primarily a *spiritual* covenant... [that] is still in force and is essentially identical with the “new covenant” of this present dispensation... [and b]y the appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the covenant, and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal [and as such i]n the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace.”³⁶⁷ Though beyond the scope of this paper, infant baptism is inconsistent with the Scriptures, for it relies on church history, eisegesis, and spiritualizing. By Berkhof’s own admission, there is “no explicit command in the Bible to baptize children... [and] there is not a single instance in which we are plainly told that children were baptized.”³⁶⁸

Finally, *circumcision is a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Gospel*. In highlighting that Paul understood the covenant made between God and Abraham as the same as the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to bear such a mark on the body of a believer is a testament to the salvific promise of God. Caleb Hegg perceptively notes that

Isaiah tells us that the Messianic figure that had been prophesied would also come through miraculous means [Isa. 7:14]. The seed that would crush the head of the serpent would come through the seed of Abraham, would fulfill the Gospel message that “in your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed,” and would come through a miraculous birth. A virgin, a woman that had never been with a man, would conceive and give birth to the living God. The male organ of procreation would be taken out of the equation so that the Almighty could walk among His people and save them from their sins. Yes, circumcision is a sign that Isaac would come through miraculous means, but it is also a sign that the goal of the Abrahamic covenant, the coming of the Messiah, would be through the same type of miracle. The cutting away of the foreskin is a declaration that a virgin would give birth. It is the proclamation that the living God would come in the flesh, and it is the decree that God would deal with the sins of His elect. The male organ of procreation was not needed. God would be the Father!³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1958), 632–33.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 632.

Summary

In the epistles of Paul, it appears that the primary use of the term “circumcision” is either a convenient cultural reference to Gentiles or a short-hand referring to the man-conversion of ethnocentric salvation established by rabbinical Judaism in the intertestamental period. Paul never condemned the commandments of God, including circumcision. He acknowledged the practice in his life and conducted it on an ethnic Gentile during his ministry after the resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus. Other Scripture, pending on one’s eschatological interpretation, indicates a distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised individuals, an irrelevant point if the practice itself is no longer relevant. Circumcision is not the abolished or condemned practice cast by so many NT commentators today, but rather an ongoing gospel-centered marker on the life of a believer that sanctifies and points to the supernatural circumcision of the heart by the Savior of those Jews and Gentiles elected by Him. Circumcision is a sign not only of the Abrahamic Covenant but of the gospel itself. It is not in itself a marker of a saved individual but a testament that God does save and He will bless all the nations through Jesus Christ. If baptism acknowledges the enactor of salvation, the person of Jesus Christ, circumcision acknowledges the action of salvation, the works of Jesus Christ. It has no bearing on justification, on salvation, but is one of many means of sanctification.

The signs attributed to the covenants of God remain intact. For the Noahic Covenant, it is the sign of the rainbow (Gen. 9:13–17). For the Mosaic Covenant, it is the Sabbath (Exod. 31:12–18). For the Land Covenant, it is re-established Israel (Gen. 15:18; Josh. 1:4). For the Davidic Covenant, it is the resurrected Christ enthroned (Acts 2:30–33). For the New

³⁶⁹ Caleb Hegg, “The Significance of Circumcision,” in *Celebrate the Feast: Collected Articles on the Spring Festivals* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2019), 46. Nappier adds, “Circumcision... can be viewed as a sign of the covenant of Yahweh but also a sign of encouragement to Abram, as it is something he will be reminded of each time he and Sarai work to do their part in bringing forth the covenant seed of promise”. Matt Nappier, “Lech Lecha,” in *How I Love Your Law*, ed. Joshua Ensley (Clover, SC: Pronomian Publishing LCC, 2022), 10.

(Renewed) Covenant, it is the Passover meal (Luke 21:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Finally, for the Abrahamic Covenant, it is circumcision (Gen. 17:11). It is a sign not of the ethnic Jew but the redeemed Jew and Gentile, saved in the same manner through redemptive history, and it points to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the blessing of the nations.

Chapter 4

Observing Kashrut, the Dietary Laws of God

Kashrut are those dietary laws stating which animals God has determined are permissible for consumption and which are deemed unsuitable, demonstrating His holy nature (Lev. 11:44, 20:22–26), a holiness to be emulated by His redeemed nation. Those believers whom He has saved and is sanctifying are to be distinct from the nations (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9), so much so that even the foods they consume separate them from the nations of the world, foods that are often identified in the worship of false gods (e.g., Gen. 43:32; Dan. 1:8, 12).³⁷⁰ The laws “served as constant reminders of God’s electing grace.”³⁷¹ Hertz writes,

[t]he supreme motive... of the Dietary Laws remains Holiness, not as an abstract idea, but as a regulating principle in the everyday lives of men, women, and children... Israel is bidden to be holy. This demand has two aspects—one positive and the other negative. The positive aspect may be called the Imitation of God... [t]he negative aspect means the withdrawal from things impure and abominable. Even as nothing that suggested the least taint could be associated with God, so it was the duty of the Israelites to strive, so far as it was attainable by man, to avoid whatever would defile them, whether physically or spiritually. Wherever men and women honestly strive after holy living, such striving carries its own fulfillment with it.³⁷²

Skyler adds that Leviticus 11 had two primary functions: to “tell the Israelites of the different ways they could contract ritual impurity from animal carcasses, and explains how they could purify themselves from it [and] provides an official list of which animals were ritually pure... and which were ritually impure... [to achieve three goals:] set the Israelites apart as his

³⁷⁰ One explanation advanced for how the animals were divided by God is the “cultic explanation[which] holds that the unclean animals are either those used in pagan worship or those associated with particular non-Israelites deities.” This is theorized by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 4:93. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 166.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183. Wenham is inconsistent in how he commends and condemns the role of these laws today.

³⁷² J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1972), 449, 453.

people... they underscored the Lord's holiness... [and] served as a reminder to seek purity in life."³⁷³ This connection with holiness is imperative in understanding the contention that kashrut is still practiced today, for it is difficult to contend that the standard of God's holiness changes throughout history. God's divine attribute cannot be perfect if that which He once identified as abominable and unholy is now acceptable to practice and previous commandments are abrogated. As Schultz freely admits,

Since holiness was God's essential characteristic, it was crucial that the Israelites, in their relationship with God who lived among them, be able to distinguish between clean and unclean. By observing the Levitical instructions, holiness was an attainable goal in everyday life as they maintain proper reverence for God.³⁷⁴

The word *kashrut* is to be distinguished from the word *kosher*, for the former specifically relates to dietary laws deemed "proper" and "suitable" (Esther 8:5; Eccles. 10:10; 11:6) rendered from כָּשֵׁר (kâshêr), whereas the latter speaks more broadly to include matters pertaining to foods and other laws that are legal within rabbinical Judaism. Hence, kashrut refers to foods that have been identified as clean or pure in accordance with the Scriptures (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), not because they are genetically different or supernaturally embedded with such traits.³⁷⁵ The word *kosher*, to illustrate some examples, can be used to speak of the means by which an animal is killed and prepared (i.e., "kosher" slaughter), the items used in conjunction with such food (i.e., "kosher" utensils), and acceptable items made with "kosher" animal parts. However, interpretation varies between denominations and rabbis within

³⁷³ Jay Skylar, *Leviticus: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 172–73.

³⁷⁴ Samuel J. Schultz, *Leviticus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 71.

³⁷⁵ The biblical (as opposed to rabbinical) kosher method of slaughter is called *shechitah* and attested in several scriptural passages: Genesis 32:32; Leviticus 3:9–10; 7:23–25; Deuteronomy 12:15–18; Acts 15:20, 29. Distinguishing meat from fat is also scriptural (Gen. 4:4).

rabbinical Judaism. Sadly, as humanity has a tendency to do with the laws of God, kashrut was merged with man-made traditions that were both cumbersome and difficult to understand, more commonly known as “rabbinical,” and whose justification are primarily found outside of the Scriptures. There is a need to distinguish the difference between biblically kosher and rabbinically kosher foods and their preparation, for each set of prohibitions has different origins.³⁷⁶ The former only is of interest to the student of Scripture who seeks to live out God’s commanded instructions. Kashrut is generally not seen as an issue of contention or concern among believers of almost all denominations, for it is generally relegated as a Jewish practice and of no concern to a believer in Jesus Christ, most of whom are Gentile in their ethnicity. It can be contended from Scripture, however, that a different theological conclusion than that of Church History can be reached.³⁷⁷

Laying the Foundation for Kashrut

The earliest distinction between animals that were permissible to eat and those that were never to be considered for consumption as food occurs in Genesis 9:1–4. Here, in the wake of the global flood, God instructs Noah: “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant” (Gen. 9:3–4). In noting that God had Noah take great care in distinguishing clean and unclean animals as they entered the ark (Gen. 7:2; cf. long before a Hebrew/Jewish nation), it would be nothing short of contradictory of God to say to Noah that both types of animals could now be eaten as he and his family

³⁷⁶ McKee notes that these differentiating titles can be divisive, as how one defines each can differ between local assemblies (let alone between Judaism and those denominations or movements in Christianity that abide by kashrut). The tension lies not so much in what Scripture designates as edible animals but the notion that clean animals are being prepared alongside (and with the same tableware, e.g., cooking dishes and utensils) as unclean animals. J. K. McKee, *Kashrut: Kosher for Messianic Believers* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2015), 71–91.

³⁷⁷ Aaron Eby, *Biblical Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: FirstFruits of Zion, 2012), 142–55.

emerged from Mt. Ararat. This, coupled with the teaching that places restrictions on the food by stating “only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Gen. 9:4), implies that “every moving thing” must be understood to be specifically speaking of clean animals, i.e., those animals designated for consumption in accordance with the holy will of God. Walton notes that

The noun (*remeś*) and the associated verb (*rmś*) each occur seventeen times in the Old Testament, ten times each in Genesis 1–9. This word group is distinct from both the wild (predatory) beasts and domesticated flocks and herds. Neither verb nor noun is ever used to refer to larger wild animals or to domesticated animals. In no place is *remeś* a catch-all category for all creatures. It is one category of creature only. The division of the Hebrew terms used up to this point in Genesis reflects the nature of the animal (not the locomotion, genre, species, or the morphology). If this is true, we are mistaken to translate *remeś* as if it describes a type of locomotion (e.g., “creeping things”). An alternative is suggested by the Akkadian cognate *nammašu/nammaštu*, which typically refers to wild animals that travel in herds; they are distinct from wild animals that hunt or scavenge, from the domesticated cattle, and from the docile beasts that do not tend to be found in herds. It is most familiar as the group that Enkidu watched over in his pre-civilized days in the Gilgamesh Epic. These animals were typically characterized as being the prey of hunters and predatory beasts.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, not to do so would contradict the requests of Genesis 7:2 and 9:4. This aligns with the point that only clean animals were to be sacrificed (Gen. 8:20). Thus, clean and unclean food consumption took place before Mount Sinai.³⁷⁹ As Wenham astutely notes,

It is characteristic of Gen 1–11 to trace back the fundamental religious institutions to primeval times: Sabbath (2:1–3); the Garden of Eden, the ideal sanctuary (2–3); sacrifice (4:1–8); and here the difference between clean and unclean. As a righteous and blameless man, Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean and the necessity of sacrifice. Furthermore, the

³⁷⁸ John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 341–42.

³⁷⁹ It is likely that Noah ate clean food before the flood. Genesis 6:20–21 attests that he was to temporarily suspend such consumption in order to preserve animal species, and he ate the same food as birds.

timetable of the flood with its seven-day periods of waiting may indicate that he observed the Sabbath.³⁸⁰

Ross echoes these sentiments when he writes, “into this ark Noah was to take all kinds of animals to preserve life on earth... a distinction was made very early between clean and unclean animals... [so,] to preserve life Noah had to take on board two of every kind of animals, but for food and for sacrificing he had to bring seven pairs of each kind of clean animal.”³⁸¹ The existence of the Law before it was physically documented at Mt. Sinai is an understudied consideration in Scripture.³⁸² Understanding that “everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4), since sin manifested itself through Adam in the events recalled in Genesis 3, aspects of the Law were known cognitively or spiritually but were not etched onto stone until the events of Exodus 19–20. Hence, the Law has partially existed since sin existed, for sin is the breaking of the Law. If sin is defined as breaking the Law, and sin has existed since Eden, then the Law must have existed as well. Christian theology need a new definition of sin prior to Mt. Sinai.

Soon after the codification of the Torah at Mount Sinai, it was made clear exactly which animals were to be considered a food source and which were not (and by extension which were permitted for sacrifice). The entirety of Leviticus 11 lists which animals can be consumed by humans. The list is exhaustive, making clear to the reader that God wanted His followers to understand without excuse what was clean and unclean, what was food and what was detestable, never to be considered a viable food source. The list is reiterated in Deuteronomy 14 and established with full divine knowledge that Gentiles were going to be

³⁸⁰ Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 176–77. Later, on p. 193, he writes, “[Genesis 9:4]’s keen concern with other food rules, e.g., no consumption of blood or cadavers, suggests that the unclean / clean distinction may be taken for granted.”

³⁸¹ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 38.

³⁸² For more on this, read Appendix 2: “A Brief Consideration of the Law before Mt. Sinai in the life of Job.”

grafted into the ekklesia of God, partakers of “His holiness” (Heb. 12:10) and “spiritual things” (Rom. 15:27). The reasons for such a distinction go beyond economics or health.³⁸³

As stated earlier, the reason for such a separation is as follows:

For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44–45).

God desires His followers to be consecrated, separated from the ways of the nations and distinct in all their practices, even in something as common as eating. God clearly designed specific foods for His creations (Ps. 104). Even among plants, some are permitted to be eaten and some are not (Gen. 1:29). This relates to the doctrine of sanctification, of being made holy. Separated from sin, believers now live a life of holiness and the lordship of God extends over all aspects of life, including what they eat. The standard for holiness, according to God, does not change. It cannot, for doing so would undermine the attribute and question all doctrines associated with the holiness of God. Scriptural evidence that kashrut is still in effect is based on a corrected understanding of key passages discussed below which do not challenge Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 and affirm the distinctions between clean and unclean animals in eschatology.³⁸⁴ As Douglas concludes,

³⁸³ Gordon D. Fee and Douglass Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 177–78.

³⁸⁴ According to a futurist eschatologically, the Millennium, a forthcoming and literal one thousand year “millennial” kingdom in Israel (Zech. 14:4–11; Luke 1:32–33; Rev. 19:11–16; 20:1–6), takes place directly after the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11–16). A passage in Isaiah speaks of God’s displeasure toward those “‘who eat swine’s flesh, detestable things and mice... [for they] will come to an end altogether,’ declares the Lord” (Isa. 65:17; cf. 65:4; 66:3). Even if this verse is to be interpreted as being during the Tribulation (directly before the Millennium), the point remains: kashrut is still in effect according to God. Additionally, unclean animals are mentioned in the Tribulation (Rev. 18:2; cf. 21:27), an odd reference if such distinctions had been abrogated in the NT era.

the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple.³⁸⁵

Rebuttals to Key Passages on Kashrut in the Pronomian Debate

While the weight of scholarship favors an alternative theological interpretation that does not advocate for the ongoing practice of certain laws from the Torah, this does not necessarily mean that a minority view is inherently wrong. Scholars have proposed alternative views that have gone on to be adopted and shaped by others and their denominations. In discussing the concept of kashrut, the majority of Christians appeal to selected texts of Scripture to disprove the notion that what a believer eats is of any spiritual significance or that it is sinful to eat certain animals as it had been before the ministry of Jesus Christ. There are, however, exegetical problems and inconsistencies that render this interpretation doubtful.

On Kashrut: Mark 7:19

Majority Interpretation

Mark 7:19, to many commentators, is the definitive passage regarding the matter of kashrut, and this interaction between Jesus, His disciples, and the Pharisees reinforces the contention that the distinction between clean and unclean animals has ended (as has most, if not all, of the Law). A standard explanation is provided by MacArthur, who writes, “Mark’s

³⁸⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 202. While there is no Temple today, futurist eschatology contends there will be in the literal Millennium.

parenthetical note explains that in making this statement [in Mark 7:18] Jesus in a moment obliterated the dietary laws of Judaism... [t]he issue is not a person's culinary choices but the spiritual condition of his inner person."³⁸⁶ Hiebert adds that the end of v.19

is to be closely connected with the statement on the expulsion of the excrement, thus purifying the food eaten by the removal of the useless portion of it from the body. This connection would call for the participle to be neuter gender, but it is textually certain that it is masculine. The masculine participle is best regarded as grammatically going back to the subject of the verb [λέγω]... This makes the appended phrase a comment by Mark himself and indicates that the words were not actually spoken by Jesus at the time.. [however,] it was the logical implication of His words [in v.18]. Christ's abolition of these ceremonial distinctions was part of His purpose to fulfill the Law.³⁸⁷

Pronomian Alternative

The passage comes in the wake of a confrontation Jesus had with some "Pharisees and some of the scribes" (Mark 7:1) about perceived laws pertaining to "eating their bread with impure hands" (Mark 7:2). There are problems with seeing this as having anything to do with kashrut for this passage is condemning those that alter the Torah, is about ritual impurity, mis-contextualizes the commentary on "food," translates the Greek into English questionably, and is inconsistent with Scripture that discusses matters pertaining to food.

First, the entire chapter of Mark 7 is not documenting Jesus' concern with the Torah but rather upholding it in its entirety due to His concerns with man-made tradition. The alternative is a faulty theological presupposition. His problem is with "the traditions of the elders" (Mark 7:3; cf. Josephus' *Antiquities* 1.192; 4.114 and *Jewish Wars* 7.110.; Philo's *Moses* 1.278), for the Pharisees and Scribes were "[n]eglecting the commandment of God,

³⁸⁶ John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 357.

³⁸⁷ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 202.

[to] hold to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8). Jesus clearly expresses disdain for those who alter the Torah, who “reject the commandment of God” (Mark 7:9) and who, by their actions, are “invalidating the word of God” (Mark 7:13). For Jesus to condemn those nullifying the Torah but then in the same breath invalidate laws pertaining to clean and unclean meat is incomprehensible.³⁸⁸ The extra-scriptural Pharisaic traditions were the point of contention, not the Torah. This is strengthened by Jesus citing Isaiah 29:13 and interpreting that passage as demonstrating the hypocrisy they exhibited, by abandoning what God has instructed in favor of their own man-made laws. Thiessen makes this strikingly clear when he observes,

To demonstrate the veracity of his claims, Jesus provides a specific instance in which the Pharisees supposedly prefer human tradition to the commandments of God: allowing a man to declare his possessions devoted to God upon his death (*korban*)... [As such,] disapproval of the Pharisees’ purported preference for human tradition at the cost of divine commands raises a real quandary for those who see in Mark 7 a rejection of the Jewish dietary laws. In a story that, according to traditional interpretations, depicts Jesus’s rejection of the Jewish dietary laws, Mark portrays Jesus’s condemnation of others who follow human rulings and in so doing disobey God’s commandments. How likely is it that Mark would stress obeying God’s commandments in a story in which Jesus rejects God’s commandments as they pertain to the consumption of impure animals? How rhetorically convincing would this story be if it were advocating the rejection of laws that most, if not all, Jews in the first century CE thought were divinely ordained? After all, Leviticus stresses that the dietary laws have their basis in the commandment of Israel’s God (Lev. 11:1, 44–45).³⁸⁹

Crossley echoes those sentiments when he writes,

If Mark wanted to reject the biblical food laws, as is generally assumed, he would have to be a lot more explicit than the editorial comment in 7.19 and he

³⁸⁸ “It is peculiar for Yeshua to charge the Pharisees with being lawless and hypocritical (Matt. 23[:]28), as well as abandoning the Commandment of God (Mar. 7[:]9) and making void the Word of God (v.13) when He is, apparently, about to do the exact same thing. This would make Yeshua, quite literally, a hypocrite and lawless. Instead of this impossible idea, He is following a thematic attack, both going after the weightier matters and focusing on the inner man of the Pharisees.” Rick Bailey, *What God Hath Created: Does the New Testament Do Away with the Dietary Laws?* (Engrafted Word Ministry, 2023), 46.

³⁸⁹ Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels’ Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 189.

would not have given us the detailed and accurate halakic information in 7.1–4. There is no mention of pork, shellfish and the like but in contrast there is plenty of halakic information in Mk 7.1–13 such as handwashing before foods, immersing kettles, pitchers, and dining beds. Likewise the corban tradition is attacked along with ‘many things like this’ and illustrated by the edited quote from Isa. 29.13. The ‘tradition of the elders’ (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) and the ‘human tradition’ (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων) are referred to six times (tradition of the elders 2 times; tradition 4 times). Mark has thus firmly established the context in which Jesus is debating, yet scholars continue to assert that the editorial comment of Mk 7.19 concerns the biblical food laws at a time when they were rejected by Christianity.³⁹⁰

One would expect that the Pharisees and, by extension, many in the crowd would want to lay charges against Jesus, even call for His execution in that moment, if He was indeed stating such an antinomian position. Yet, it “hardly stresses the gap between Jesus and the religious authorities... [p]ut differently, nothing in 7.1–23 explains why the antagonists wanted to get rid of him.”³⁹¹ If it were Jesus or Mark’s intention to announce that kashrut (and by extension the ceremonial laws) were abrogated, then no one in the crowd heard or interpreted Mark 7:19 in such a way. Such an interpretation is eisegetical. Jesus “refuses to subordinate one written commandment to the oral tradition pertaining to another... Torah serves as its own interpretative fence.”³⁹²

Second, the passage is focusing on the topic of ritual impurity, not clean or unclean foods. According to the Torah, priests washed their hands and feet as they came before the altar (Exod. 30:17–21), not every member of society, particularly before a meal.³⁹³ Jesus “contended that these laws, concerned as they were with eating only in a state of ritual purity,

³⁹⁰ James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark’s Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 191.

³⁹¹ Jesper Svartvik, “The Markan Interpretation of the Pentateuchal Food Laws,” *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels, Vol. 1: The Gospel of Mark* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 175.

³⁹² Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 6.

³⁹³ Kazen explores examples within Judaism pertaining to hand-washing and eating at the time of Jesus. Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010): 65–67.

were not biblical in origin, but rather were a Pharisaic innovation which reflected a new understanding of ritual contamination, one which changed the focus and significance of ritual purity.”³⁹⁴ Rather than being a proof-text used to justify the discontinuation of distinguishing clean from unclean animals, a fact underscored by its omission from the parallel texts in Matthew 15:1–20 and Luke 11:37–41, this text suggests that “not enough attention has been given to the unique aspects of the polemic over hand washing: the nature and origin of this particular purity law, and Jesus’ precise justification for his rejection of it.”³⁹⁵ Ritual purity remains a part of the believer’s walk of faith. Paul’s admonishment in 1 Corinthians 7:5 for a married couple not to deprive one another of sexual intimacy “except by agreement for a time” likely implies a reference to Leviticus 15:19, 24 and 20:18, which discuss a woman’s menstruation period. Thiessen again is helpful when he writes,

the story simply does not intend to deal with the question of whether one should eat pork or shellfish; rather, it intends to address the question of whether one can defile kosher food with one’s ritually impure hands and then introduce that ritual impurity into one’s body by the consumption of that defiled food... In answering this question, Mark’s Jesus focuses on the fact that deeds such as sexual immorality, theft, and murder move from inside the body to outside the body. He describes here various sins that defile people, since they are moral impurities. Such moral impurity, though, begins in the heart (Mark 7:21–23; cf. Matt. 15:18–20) and moves outside the body and into actions.³⁹⁶

Hence, to disregard kashrut, the law of God, would be to break it (1 John 3:4); kosher laws are about sanctification and by extension, morality (cf. Lev. 11:45–47). As van Maaren rightly notes, “Mark’s Jesus is not disclosing a ‘higher’ or ‘deeper’ meaning to his inner circle of disciples but is concerned that his closest followers correctly grasp principles of

³⁹⁴ Yair Furstenberg, “Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15,” *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 2 (2008): 178.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁹⁶ Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 192.

contamination that undergird all processes of defilement (whether ritual, moral, or otherwise)... [t]he strong conceptual correspondence between Mark's Jesus, the Torah, and other Second Temple developments shows that Mark's Jesus does not uphold morality over and against purity concerns, but rather assumes that morality is an important component of purity."³⁹⁷ It is unfortunate that the tripartite labelling of the Law, which distinguishes moral laws from ceremonial laws, has rendered centuries of believers unaware of the morality connected to the commanded instructions of God. As such laws are directly connected to the holy standard of God, they should not have been understood in any other way.

Third, the prevailing translation Mark 7:19 does not allude to *all* animals but *all animals deemed clean as food* by Him. God the Son did not consider unclean animals as food. If there had been a change, then the word food (βρῶμα) would have been replaced with animal (τετράπους, ἐρπετόν, or most likely ζῶον), yet it was not. Such a notion is foreign to the mind of God and to the ones who follow Him in living out Leviticus 11. Thiessen notes,

impure animals are only *latently* impure when they are alive. Israelites were permitted to own and ride donkeys, horses, and camels (e.g., Deut. 5:14; 17:16; 1 Sam. 27:9; Zech. 9:9), and no rites are prescribed for purifying one's body after touching such an animal, demonstrating that people did not become impure through mere contact with impure animals. Thus, in contrast to ritual impurity, impure animals did not transmit impurity to others through simple physical contact. Only when impure animals died did the impurity lurking within their bodies become a dynamic force; Israelites could not eat the flesh of impure animals or touch the carcass of such animals without becoming impure (Lev. 11:8).³⁹⁸

If Jesus Christ "declared all foods clean," He was affirming *that which was designated as food*, not animals. Jesus is teaching that evil is internally born, not externally, hence those commandments that are broken result in sin. Eating unclean food is not the source of sin; it is

³⁹⁷ John van Maaren, "Does Mark's Jesus Abrogate Torah? Jesus' Purity Logion and Its Illustration in Mark 7:15–23," *JJMJS*, no. 4 (2017): 22, 36.

³⁹⁸ Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 188.

a sinful act initiated by the heart of an individual from which “evil things proceed.” Furthermore, if indeed “all foods are clean” means all animals are clean to eat (or even more assertively, any creature considered edible by another culture), that would mean Christians are permitted to eat *anything* found dead or torn apart by other animals (Lev. 22:8), blood (Lev. 19:26), meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:20, 29–30), animals cooked using human excrement as fuel (Ezek. 4:12; cf. 2 Kings 18:27), and even other humans (Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53–57; Jer. 19:9; Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Ezek. 5:10). This is not a caricature of approaching the passage; one must be consistent if one believes that all foods, regardless of culture, are permissible for consumption. However, Scripture condemns the above practices, for God has clearly designated what animals he has deemed clean and edible; *all animals he has declared edible are clean*. If the prevailing translation of Mark 7:19 is to remain, that is what Jesus is affirming. Hence, “it is hardly conceivable that the disciples were eating *non-kosher* meats and therefore, in the Marcan narrative, 7:19c must also refer to *kosher* food... [t]he narrator does not mean to clarify that now all food is permitted but that permitted food does not convey impurity.”³⁹⁹

Fourth, the Greek in the original manuscripts is not entirely smooth and so the translations often make editorial assumptions, which are not grammatical conclusions. ἐκπορεύεται appears four times in Mark 7:19–23, qualifying the topic of focus in the passage. In reading καθαρίζων, its antecedent is more likely to be ἀφεδρών (and by extension the very contents of the latrine). Grammatically, the word needs a subject, but there is no need for that to be Jesus (v.18). Another example of understanding how an antecedent can work like this is in Luke 24:47. Hence, it is “linguistically possible” to “take ἀφεδρών as equivalent to

³⁹⁹ van Maaren, “Does Mark’s Jesus Abrogate Torah?,” 38–39.

ἀφεδρῶνα, referring to ἀφεδρών⁴⁰⁰ and to read the “circumstantial participle in the nominative instead of an oblique case.”⁴⁰¹ As Hegg notes,

The difficulty in the syntax stems from the fact that the word “purging” (καθαρίζων) is a present active participle, masculine singular nominative and thus seeks a subject. Most take the subject to be the leading subject of the verse as noted at the beginning of v. 18, “He said to them...” The subject of the participle is thus taken to be Yeshua, since this is the only implied nominative subject. But Turner (*Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3 vols. [T&T Clark, 1963], 3.316) notes that the nominative participle may not always follow a strict construction (i.e., a solecism), and he lists the participle of Mark 7:19 as an example of this. There is therefore no need to seek a subject in the nominative case to match the participle “purging,” and the most natural way to take the phrase is to connect the participle as indicating the action of the “man” who has eaten and is purging the food at the latrine.⁴⁰²

This contradicts many of the English translations that lean towards a construction that is more interpretive than linguistic. The NKJV, however, is closer to rendering the Greek accurately: “So [Jesus] said to them, ‘Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?’” (Mark 7:18–19).⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Maximilian Zerwick S. J., *Biblical Greek* (Roma RM, Italy: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 6.

⁴⁰¹ F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1961), 76, §137(3).

⁴⁰² Tim Hegg, “An Investigation into Mark 7:19: Understanding Mark 7:19 and Acts 10 (Peter’s Vision) from an Historical, Grammatical Interpretation,” *TorahResource* (2002), <https://torahresource.com/did-god-change-his-mind-about-food/>. Disagreeing with Hegg, Decker comes to a different conclusion. “καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα. This phrase (“cleansing all foods”) describes λέγει (v. 18), not εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται (“goes into the latrine”). For καθαρίζων to modify ἐκπορεύεται, it would have to be neuter (the unexpressed subject of ἐκπορεύεται is πᾶν τὸ ἔξωθεν from v. 18c). Since the participle καθαρίζων is masculine, it can only agree with the subject of λέγει (18a), the subject of which is Jesus. Having interrupted his record of the dialogue with this parenthetical statement, Mark must resume it with another verb of speaking (ἔλεγεν, v. 20) so the reader knows that this is not his editorial comment continuing, but Jesus’ words resuming. For a similar parenthetical statement, see 3:30.” Rodney J. Decker, *Mark: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, vol. 1, ed. Martin M. Culy, *Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 192.

⁴⁰³ βρῶμα “in the LXX, Josephus, and Philo shows that it is not normally understood to include unclean animals or meat improperly slaughtered... ‘foods’ likely mean in the Markan context, a better translation of 7.19c would be, ‘Thus he declared ritually pure all (permissible) foods.’” Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 79.

Finally, to consider Mark 7 as a discussion pertaining to food is inconsistent with other Scriptures that do speak about food's place in the life of a believer. If this chapter was indeed the clear and final word on the topic and "Jesus, even implicitly, had abrogated the food laws during his ministry, [then] apparently neither his own disciples nor Paul himself knew... [for n]o one invoked such a teaching to settle the argument."⁴⁰⁴ There would be no reason to distinguish food at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:28–29), nor any reason for Jesus to condemn food sacrificed to idols later in His ministry (Rev. 2:14, 20). If Jesus declared all foods clean, why did Peter distinguish clean from unclean at Joppa (Acts 10:4)?⁴⁰⁵ Peter knew his vision did not relate to food consumption (Acts 10:25–29). If indeed all foods are clean, they are clean. However, as the pronomian contends, this is not a correct understanding of Scripture.

*Excursus: A Case Study of the Role of Godly Works in the Markan Shema*⁴⁰⁶

Though not often studied for its relationship to the Torah, the Gospel of Mark preserves countless examples of works demonstrated through practicing the Law as an expression of love for God (through Jesus). Every time a work is practiced by Jesus or His disciples that is a direct response to a commandment (e.g., fasting, praying, Sabbath observance), what had been instructed in the Torah is physically evidenced. This dispels the argument that John 14:15 was only referencing those commandments instructed by Jesus during His earthly ministry. Rather, it refers to the entire Law as given and progressively

⁴⁰⁴ Paula Fredriksen, "Did Jesus Oppose Purity Laws?" *Bible Review* 11, no. 3 (1995): 41.

⁴⁰⁵ This is even more difficult to comprehend in light of church tradition attesting that Mark's Gospel was based on Peter's input and life experience.

⁴⁰⁶ This is an extracted revision of a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, "The Role of Godly Works in the Markan Shema: A Pronomian Response" (class paper submitted in NBST815: Gospels (B01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

enlarged since its codification at Mount Sinai. This is why Jesus utilized Deuteronomy in His spiritual duel with Satan (Mark 1:12–13; cf. Matt. 4:1–11). Using the Gospel of Mark, an uncommon work used to explore the role and impact of the Torah, one sees that Jesus' declaration in John 14:15 can be demonstrated through all Gospel accounts. John stressed the importance of abiding in the commandments of God through several of his writings (John 14:21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; 2 John 1:6), yet this truth encompasses all biographical works of Jesus and, by extension, His disciples. The truth of Jesus' declaration, reiterated by John, must be monolithic and evidenced throughout all the NT writings (cf. James 2:14–26).

A powerful portion of Scripture on the direct correlation of practicing the commandments of YHWH and loving works is from Mark's citation of the "Great Commandment" (Mark 12:28–33). The passage reads,

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

This is a unique phrasing of the "Great Commandment" when compared to the other gospel versions (Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 10:25–28) in that it includes another descriptor of loving God ("strength") and a direct connection to the Shema (Deut. 6:4), a culminative disposition of lovingly worshipping God. MaGee also notes the connection between the Shema and the heart of the gospel when studying Paul's epistle to the Romans. He writes "that the Shema, the heart of the Mosaic Law, vindicates [Paul's] gospel, [and] is able to reject the charge (μή

γένοιτο) that his gospel of faith undermines God’s law.”⁴⁰⁷ The Shema, once heard, is intended to be acted out. MaGee’s presupposition is that there is no tension between the Law of Moses (i.e., the Torah) and the gospel of God of which Paul speaks; while different, they do not conflict and contradict, but rather harmonize and are in unity with one another. His focus on Paul’s reinforcement of the Shema’s teaching in Romans 3:30 is quite profound, for the proclamatory verse that proceeds it establishes the flawless conclusion: because God is One, as taught in the Shema, which is representative of the entire Law (being the OT as a whole), then the Law is not nullified but established. In other words, because Romans 3:30 is true, being a text that represents the Law, then the Law is still active, practiced, and valuable. Likewise, the Gospel of Mark is highlighting that upholding the Shema, which represents YHWH’s relationship with His people through His commandments, is the supreme evidence of loving Him (exemplified in His Son, the “Word became flesh”; John 1:14). Le Peau infers this when he comments on Mark 12:33:

To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Some of the most stirring and well-known passages from Scripture surround this theme [Micah 6:6–8].. in addition, we read that obeying God (1 Sa 15:22; Jer 7:21–24; Hos 6:6–7), listening to God (Ps 40:6), repenting (Ps 51:16–17), stopping violence (Jeremiah 6:7, 20), not taxing the poor (Amos 5:11, 21–22, acting justly (Pr 21:3; Isa 1:11–17; Mic 6:6–8)—all these supersede acts of worship. Not coincidentally, they are also all urgent, concrete ways of loving our neighbors (Mk 12:31).⁴⁰⁸

This is not to dismiss the place of offerings and sacrifices but rather make clear the order of priority. Worship still matters and, in reality, work is a form of worship (Gen. 2:15). The point stressed here is that the works listed are all sourced from the Torah and were

⁴⁰⁷ Gregory S. MaGee, “Paul’s gospel, the Law, and God’s Universal Reign in Romans 3:31,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 2 (2014): 345.

⁴⁰⁸ Andrew T. Le Peau, *Mark Through Old Testament Eyes: A Background and Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 225.

interwoven with the notion of love for both God and those created in His image. Mark never attested the abolishment of the Law but in fact saw it as integral to the love a believer has for God and fellow humans. Van Maaren notes, “throughout the narrative of Mark, law observance is an assumed part of righteousness...[and] correct understanding and practice of the law are both closely tied with membership in the kingdom of God... [Evidence of] the important role of correct understanding of the law is most clear when a scribe questions Jesus about the greatest commandment (ἐντολὴ πρώτη) in the law (12:28–34).⁴⁰⁹ McFarlane echoes these sentiments in seeing the “Markan narration is an exercise in seeking interpretive supremacy, both of the life and death of Jesus and of the Torah.”⁴¹⁰ Hence the intertwined nature of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Loving His commandments is loving Him, for He “θεόπνευστος” them. Hiebert carefully notes that

Love to God must possess the whole heart, the seat of personality, the whole soul, the self-conscious life, the whole mind, the rational faculties, and the whole strength, the entire active powers of man... If God is worthy of man’s love, He must be loved with all of man’s being... [and the second] command demands that he must exercise a love equal to that which he has for himself toward his neighbor.⁴¹¹

One should not read into these statements that Jesus was making a distinction between imposed moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects of the Torah (which do not exist) or discarding two-thirds of them as is continually attested,⁴¹² for in affirming the oneness of God, he is

⁴⁰⁹ John R. Van Maaren, *The Gospel of Mark within Judaism: Reading the Gospel in its Ethnic Landscape* (2019), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/24581/2/Van_Maaren_John_R_finalsubmission2019June_PhD.pdf.

⁴¹⁰ Robert McFarlane, “The Gospel of Mark and Judaism,” *Jewish-Christian Relations*, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/the-gospel-of-mark-and-judaism.html>

⁴¹¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 352–53.

⁴¹² For a prime example, see: William R. G. Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude Towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 129–37.

affirming the oneness of the Torah. Love practiced toward a human “is much more” (Mark 12:33) than a practice that does not involve another human (i.e., sacrifices), but that is a differentiation of order, not equality. God’s holiness has neither changed nor regressed with the progressive revelation of God’s commandments before the closing of the scriptural canon.

This love in action is entirely consistent with the Hebrew worldview. It is essential to reframing the discussion of how one understands the direct correlation between works and love, to understand the differences between Greek and Hebrew worldviews. Though they wrote in Greek, the Gospel writers thought as Hebrews. They did not perceive the commandments of God as theoretical, but rather they were to be actioned and worked out. In his pioneering study on the subject matter, Bowman writes that Hebrew “verbs especially, whose basic meaning always expresses a movement or an activity, reveal the dynamic variety of the Hebrews’ thinking ... [w]hen a verb is to express a position like sitting or lying, it is done by a verb which can also designate a movement.”⁴¹³ Hence, “motionless and fixed being is for the Hebrews a nonentity; it does not exist for them... [o]nly ‘being’ which stands in inner relation with something active and moving is a reality to them.”⁴¹⁴ In exploring the active nature of the Shema, Bowman further reveals that the Hebrew word “to be,”

hayah contains a unity of ‘being,’ ‘becoming,’ and ‘effecting,’ that it dovetails neatly into the group of internally active (stative) verbs, and that it is best understood by us in the ‘being’ of an active person. If the essence of *hayah* best achieves expression in the being of a person, the next question involves this being’s intrinsic value since this is determined by the subject. It is natural, then, to concentrate the inquiry upon the most important ‘being’ that the Israelite thought knows: the ‘being’ of its god, the universal author. It is to be recalled first of all that analytic judgements about God, as well as about other objects, that is judgements where for the Israelite that predicate inheres in the subject, are not expressed by *hayah* but by noun clauses.... ‘Hear , O Israel Jahveh (is) our God, Jahveh (is) one’ (Deut. 6.4)... It is characteristic of God’s *hayah* that it seems to refer directly to the people’s *hayah*: ‘Obey my

⁴¹³ Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 28.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

command; thus I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Jer. 7.23; cf. 11.4).⁴¹⁵

In citing the Shema, Mark was clearly aware of the physicality to one's relationship to God. It was not merely a cognitive reaction to His commandments, but rather, an immediate response to work that affirmed one's love of God. Schnittjer further adds that the "Torah freely interchanges 'you' singular and plural in its legal standards [and its] alternation of second person singular and plural pronouns affirms the interrelated collective and individual identity of God's people and spells out their associated collective and individual responsibilities."⁴¹⁶ Their works are the commandments of God being lived out, both individually and collectively as an organic community of believers. In answering the rhetorical question as to why one performs godly works and how that cultivates a loving relationship with God, he answers through demonstrating the direct relationship of one of His main commands:

You collectively shall love the residing foreigner, because you collectively were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:19). The context of Deuteronomy 10 emphasizes that Yahweh protects the vulnerable classes and loves residing foreigners and provides for their needs (v. 18). If Israel is called upon to collectively love the residing foreigner, they imitate Yahweh and become instruments of Yahweh's love by providing for the hardships faced by the outsider. The responsibilities of Israel collectively to love the residing foreigner do not get satisfied by individual citizens caring for individual residing foreigners that they know personally (Lev 19:33a, 34b). Israel collectively needs to act as Yahweh does toward residing foreigners by proactively helping them with necessities (Deut 10:18–19). For all of this it would be a mistake to think that Deuteronomy is skewed toward collective social responsibilities.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 47.

⁴¹⁶ Gary Edward Schnittjer, "Say You, Say Ye: Individual and Collective Identity and Responsibility in Torah," *Center for Hebraic Thought* (March 9, 2022), <https://hebraicthought.org/individual-collective-identity-responsibility-torah/>.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Here one sees love in action. It is working out the commanded instructions of God. It is not an extrabiblical tradition, a man-made social gospel, but a triangular love between God, the believer, and others. Hebraic worldview was one of action, not inaction, so faith is practical in its nature. This is attested throughout the gospels in which we see many works being the fulfillment of commands given throughout the Torah. Knowing God and His Word comes with a charge to make Him and His Word known.

On Kashrut: Acts 10:9–16

Majority Interpretation

A standard explanation is provided by MacArthur, who writes,

that the sheet contained both clean and unclean animals reflects the Old Testament instruction in which God laid down certain dietary restrictions for Israel (cf. Lev. 11) ... Since the coming of the New Covenant and the calling of a new people (the church), the day of those restrictions was over, as Peter soon discovered... [the vision's] meaning was two-fold... [o]n the negative side, it signified the abolishing of the Old Testament dietary restrictions (cf. Mark 7:14–23; Rom. 14:1–3; Col. 2:16–17; 1 Tim. 4:1–5)... [and o]n the positive side, the vision pictured the inclusion of both the Gentiles, symbolized by the unclean animals, and the Jews, symbolized by the clean ones, into one body.⁴¹⁸

Pronomian Alternative

It is perplexing to the pronomian that these verses have been utilized by some Christians to conclude that any animal can now be eaten, rendering Leviticus 11 redundant

⁴¹⁸ John MacArthur, *Acts 1–12* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994), 295–96. This interpretation sees the passages as achieving two theological goals rather than the vision relating to *only* the latter explanation.

because it is somehow burdensome to the walk of faith (and by extension, fellowship with unbelievers). Three points of concern arise from such interpretation.

First is Peter's response in v.13. Peter knew that to eat animals not declared clean by God would be sin (Acts 10:14; cf. Ezekiel 4:14). After all, God would not break His own commandment, for that is the very definition of sin and He does not change (Num. 23:19; Ps. 102:26–27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:7). His standard for holiness does not change. If God breaks His commandments, it sets a dangerous precedent for all commandments before *and after* the ministry of Jesus Christ. If He changed His mind on one commandment, what of others He declares throughout the Scriptures?

Second, it never says explicitly that what “God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” is referring to the animals themselves in the vision. That is a false assumption based on reading these verses in isolation. Some of the animals referred to in the vision were never considered food by the Israelites to begin with, so it makes no contextual sense to see them as understood sources of food for consumption. So, for the purpose of example, a vulture was never considered something one could eat nor is it so today. The crux of this moment is that God was *testing* Peter and he passed the test. This was not the first time such an encounter, such a test, took place in Scripture (cf. Ezek. 4:9–15; Jer. 20:12 for identical situations to this event).

The third point is what God *actually said* about how one is to interpret Acts 10:9–16.

The answer comes a few verses later:

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am just a man.” As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. And he said to them, “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. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me (Acts 10:25–29).

The interpretation is clearly explained by Scripture itself. The “great sheet... of animals” Peter had seen earlier was not symbolizing actual animals and granting believers permission to eat all animals from that point on, rather, the “great sheet... of animals” symbolized the nations of the world (i.e., “foreigner[s]”) and now granted believers fellowship with all peoples of the earth (“I should not call any man unholy or unclean”). It is not food that is no longer holy or unholy but the nations of the world. In revisiting Acts 10, it is worth quoting Staples in full:

In light of the connection between food/purity regulations and restrictions on fellowship with Gentiles, the payoff may have to do with the matter of full community membership and table fellowship for Gentile believers... Peter is not instructed to violate Torah restrictions and eat (= incorporate) *unclean* animals, as is often assumed... Instead, the sheet contains a mixed group of all kinds (πάντα) of animals, and Peter’s protest in Acts 10.15 implies two categories, the ‘common’ (κοινόν) and ‘unclean’ or ‘impure’ (ἀκάθαρτον), though he treats them as equally inappropriate for consumption. Most scholars have followed Peter’s judgment in conflating these two categories... but these two terms tend to refer to separate domains defined by the opposing categories of pure/impure (or clean/unclean) on the one hand and holy/common on the other... Sacrificial food is both clean and holy, but an ordinary, non-sacred meal for Jewish laypersons by definition falls into the clean/common category, though the Pharisees and some other groups seem to have extended the purity expectations required for sacrificial (clean/holy) food to ordinary (clean/common) food (cf. *m. Hag.* 2.5; *t. Dem.* 2.2, 20–22[]), effectively treating that food as though it were holy... Indeed, Peter’s rejection of the common as equivalent to unclean is precisely what the heavenly voice rebukes, declaring, ‘What God has purified (ἐκαθάρισεν), do not call *common*’ (Acts 10.15). This is quite different from an admonition against reckoning what has been cleansed as unclean, which would be an outright contradiction and as such would seem less likely to occur. Modern scholarly conflation of the two categories in this passage is especially ironic in this light, as interpreters have straightforwardly shared Peter’s assumptions rather than heeding the heavenly voice. By the end of the narrative, Peter—having been thrice admonished by the heavenly voice—no longer lumps the two concepts together as in 10.14 (‘common and unclean’) but rather distinguishes them as two disparate categories: ‘common *or* unclean’ (10.28; 11.8).⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁹ Jason A. Staples, “‘Rise, Kill, and Eat’: Animals as Nations in Early Jewish Visionary Literature and Acts 10,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42, no. 1 (2019): 12–14.

Clearly stated, Gentiles have been made pure through sanctification and no longer common (Acts 10:15); they are clean and holy, having been justified by God. Now, having been grafted into His ekklesia, they are able to fellowship with their redeemed Jewish brethren. Kashrut is not the focus of this chapter or the intention of Peter's conversation with God on holiness.

Blidstein notes that in light of Gentiles being integrated into the faith of God, "most Christians upheld the validity of the Old Testament, [but] the prohibitions of Leviticus had to be explained in a way that neutralized their practical significance."⁴²⁰ This was sadly because of the antinomian spirit that emerged after the first century. He continues to comment that "[t]hree main types of explanations were proposed: allegorical, ascetic, and historical... [the first of these] *interpreted the pure and impure animals of Leviticus as symbolizing various kinds of good or evil people* [italics mine]. Such interpretations were found already in Jewish Hellenistic authors and were developed by Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Novatian, Augustine, and many other Latin and Greek authors. They were later dominant in the exegesis of medieval Latin writers."⁴²¹ He goes on to cite several examples: "*Let. Aris.* 150; Philo, *Spec.* 4.106–7; *Barn.* 10; Clement, *Paed.* 3.11; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.8.3; Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 7.6-7; and Augustine, *Faust.* 16.30."⁴²² The *Animal Apocalypse* of *1 Enoch* also depicts Gentile nations as unclean animals. In early Jewish (and Gentile) literature, ethnicity was sometimes understood through animal imagery.⁴²³ According to Peter's vision, Jew and

⁴²⁰ Moshe Blidstein, "How Many Pigs Were on Noah's Ark? An Exegetical Encounter on the Nature of Impurity," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 3 (2015): 452.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Matthew Thiessen, "Gentiles as Impure Animals in the Writings of Early Christ Followers," in *Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Wolfgang Grünstäudl, and Matthew Thiessen (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr, 2017): 19–32.

Gentile believers were now to be unified as one in Jesus Christ. This is the heartbeat of the *ekklesia*; a spiritual nation composed from *ethnic* nations.⁴²⁴

On Kashrut: Acts 15:28–29 cf. 15:20

Majority Interpretation

This appeal to Acts 15:28–29 (cf. 15:20) is excerpted from the Jerusalem Council’s letter to new Gentile believers who were seeking to understand their relation to the Torah. The text reads, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well.” This passage is interpreted to be the summation of a Gentile believers’ commitment to the Torah’s commands pertaining to food or OT passages relating to the Gentile. Bruce, for example, understands the first three to be about food and fornication was to be interpreted as “generally... an ethical prohibition.”⁴²⁵ Furthermore, like many scholars,⁴²⁶ he insists that the prohibitions are directly connected to the so-called “Noahide” laws of ancient Judaism. Holladay suggests that the “only specific obligations that should be

⁴²⁴ Two additional points are worth noting in passing. First, Scripture often recounted dreams and visions that were not interpreted literally (e.g., Gen. 41:15–30) and therefore Peter’s vision should not suddenly be interpreted in such a manner. The passage has nothing to do with animals and their consumption. Second, if Mark 7:19 was so clearly about absolution from kashrut why would there be a need for the topic to be repeated in Acts?

⁴²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 299.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 296; Douglas Hanrik, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 223; Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hendrickson, 1997), 74–75.

imposed on gentile Christians are those explicitly required of gentiles in the OT.”⁴²⁷ Talbert states that the Jerusalem Council ensures that “Gentiles are free from the law in the sense of ethnic identity markers.”⁴²⁸

Pronomian Alternative

Pronomianism contends that this passage *should not be read as the minimal requirements* expected of a Gentile believer by Torah regarding the matter of food and table fellowship but rather *the foundational starting point* of their spiritual journey in living out God’s Law as empowered by the Holy Spirit (cf. Jer. 31:31–34). Furthermore, the topic is not to be understood as food, debating whether kashrut has ceased or not; rather, it is chiefly about the place of idols in the life of a new convert and practices associated with idolatry. Plainly stated, these four laws are the “essentials” (implying the beginning of sanctification to distinguish new believers from their previous pagan beliefs). It was a clear theological transition from Christians’ former lives and identities with paganism. Abidance in and application of Torah, not rabbinical laws, would still take place. This is affirmed prior to the final version of James’ letter (cf. 15:29) when he states that “it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who

⁴²⁷ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 302. This is problematic as it ignores countless “one law” passages, which involved Gentiles and their acceptance into biblical festivals (see Chapter 5). It is important to note that not all passages that use the term “one law” imply that Jew and Gentile, man and woman, priest and non-priest were to abide by all laws of God equally (e.g., Lev. 7:7). Many, however, were intended to be practiced as such.

⁴²⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2018), 133.

preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19–21).⁴²⁹ James affirms that gathering regularly to hear the Torah and its instructions, including the cited commitment to Sabbath, was expected of Gentile believers. Departing from idols and abstaining from the associated practices of sacrifice, strangling animals, partaking in their blood, and fornication (Acts 15:28–29), would be *the foundational starting point*. This would affirm their repentance and born-again status. To consider, as some commentators do, that this passage goes so far as to absolve any commitment to the Torah, foods or otherwise, contradicts later examples in the NT canon. The letters of Paul are full of commandments from the Torah that are expected of believers (e.g., Col. 3:5–11).⁴³⁰

In deciphering the intent of Acts 15:21, Marshall proposes two interpretations, the second of which starts to align with the pronomian:

James’s concluding statement is puzzling. It may be regarded as saying that since there are Jews everywhere who regularly hear the law of Moses being read in the synagogues, Christian Gentiles ought to respect their scruples, and so avoid bringing the church into disrepute with them. 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.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Regarding the issue of textual variance, Talbert helpfully summarizes: “Verse 20 appears in two different forms in the Western and Alexandrian families of manuscripts. Here, and also in 15:29 and 21:25, codex D of the Western family omits ‘strangled’ (pniktou), and here, and also in 15:29, inserts instead the negative form of the Golden Rule (‘and not to do to others whatever they do not wish to be done to themselves’). These changes have the effect of making the list an ethical one: ‘Abstain from idolatry, from sexual immorality, from bloodshed, and do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.’ The uncials B and aleph include ‘things strangled’ and omit the Golden Rule. This leaves a list with a different slant: ‘Abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from eating blood.’ Of the two textual traditions, the latter has the better claim to be what Luke wrote. This text must be interpreted in the context of Acts.” Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2018), 132.

⁴³⁰ Furthermore, the so-called tripartite model comes crashing down when at least two of these commandments would be ceremonial according to its parameters.

⁴³¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 68.

The pronomian contends that it is not so much a case of “want[ing] to find out any more about the... Law” but a *call* to do so. The Torah is “not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach” (Deut. 30:11). The yoke of Acts 15:10 is the ungodly marriage of written *and oral* laws (e.g., Mark 7:8; cf. b. *Shabbat* 31a; b. *Yevamot* 47a–b). The early pronomian Christians, the Nazarenes, attested to this (Jerome *Commentary on Isaiah* 9:1–4). As Pervo notes, the word yoke “is an ambiguous metaphor [which] can be used for political or other oppression (e.g., Sib. Or. 3:448), but also for a guide to life, notably Wisdom (Sir 6:24–30; 51:23–27), Torah (identified with Wisdom, as in m.'Abot 3.6), and Christ (identified with Wisdom, as in Matt 11:29–30) ... early Judaism did not view Torah as a burden, let alone an intolerable weight.”⁴³² A new believer can only learn about God, His will, His Messiah, and His way through His Torah. As Jervell highlights,

Commentators speak of the Gentiles’ liberation from the law. This is not the whole truth. Luke knows of no Gentile mission that is free from the law. He knows about a Gentile mission without circumcision [as a means of salvation], not without the law. The apostolic decree enjoins Gentiles to keep the law, and they keep that part of the law required for them to live together with Jews. It is not lawful to impose upon Gentiles more than Moses himself demanded. It is false to speak of Gentiles as free from the law. The church, on the contrary, delivers the law to the Gentiles as Gentiles. Thus Luke succeeds in showing complete adherence to the law as well as the salvation of Gentiles as Gentiles. Luke does not champion any justification by law.⁴³³

Janicki echoes these sentiments when he summarizes, “at first glance, it appears that the Gentiles have very few commandments to deal with, but upon closer examination each of these four prohibitions becomes, in a sense, an overarching category which contains many sub-category commandments... this may be one of the reasons that... James adds the phrase

⁴³² Richard I. Pervo and Harold W. Attridge, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MO: Fortress Press, 2009), 374.

⁴³³ Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 144

about Moses being read in the synagogue every Sabbath.”⁴³⁴ The Gentiles calling to engage with the local ekklesia after these four commands implies the beginning of their journey in Torah. These four would be the minimum requirements that would make a clear separation from their pagan history, but they were commanded to fellowship and observe Sabbath in addition to the four prescribed. Later, Paul goes on to list countless more commandments that believers, Gentile included, were expected to abide by (Rom. 13:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21). As Janicki further clarifies, commands “break down into further commandments... for example, the prohibition on murder includes not accepting a ransom for a murderer (Numbers 35:31), not standing by idly while someone’s life is in danger (Leviticus 19:16), and the commandments surrounding the cities of refuge (e.g., Numbers 35:25).”⁴³⁵ It is imperative to stress that Acts 15:28–29 (cf. 15:20) focuses not on kashrut, nor on adherence to the Torah in its entirety, but on separation from the pagan sacrificial system Gentiles were once a part of and abstaining from the associated practices of sacrifice. Acts 15:28 speaks of them as ἐπιβάναγκες meaning essentials, being “of necessity” or requirements.⁴³⁶

In studying the structure of the passage, one notices several factors that lead to this conclusion. Bock is helpful in making a connection between idolatry and associated practices:

⁴³⁴ Toby Janicki, *God-Fearers: Gentiles & the God of Israel* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 50.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴³⁶ “The four prohibitions are given so that the new Gentile converts will be allowed in the believing Jewish communities, i.e., the synagogues. Verse 21 begins with a[n] explanatory conjunction, ‘for.’ What is about to be said in verse 21 is because of what was said in verse 20. The four laws given to the Gentiles are directly connected to verse 21 with the opening word ‘for.’ These laws are given to the Gentiles but that is not where it ends, ‘for’ Moses is read every Sabbath in the synagogues. The Gentiles should keep these four laws so that they are accepted into the synagogues so they can learn how to walk out their faith.... Instead of a conversion process, the council has decided on these requirements [ἐπιβάναγκες]. This is the only place in the Apostolic Scriptures that this Greek word is used.” Caleb Hegg, *Acts: Igniting the Abrahamic Promise* (Tacoma, WA: Caleb Hegg, 2022), 294, 296.

The word ἀλίσημα (aligēma, pollution) appears only in this verse and is not repeated in the NT, not even in 15:29 or 21:25, where the limitations reappear. Nor does the term appear in the LXX. The verb form appears in Dan. 1:8; Mal. 1:7, 12; and Sir. 40:29, where it concerns the eating of food and suggests a kind of desecration (see 4 Macc. 5:1–2 for a conceptual parallel using terminology that appears in 15:29; also Lev. 17:7; Exod. 20:4). It seems that pollution associated with idols and their rituals is in view.⁴³⁷

Acts 15:20 makes clear that the contamination of idols affects “everything connected with idol worship.”⁴³⁸ Kellum rightly notes that the

four items that are prohibited are each a part of common pagan temple worship... [and] these terms should be considered as four separate pagan activities in the venue of their temples... The point is not only those things that are particularly offensive to Jews but renouncing idolatry both ritually and culturally (see 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Pet 4:3). The suggestion is that they needed to make it clear that while they agree Gentiles can enter the kingdom as Gentiles, there must be a clean break with idolatry. There is no space for syncretism of any sort.⁴³⁹

Thinking of these prohibitions as a three-cornered diagram in which one corner focuses on (polluting) sacrifice, the other one fornication, and the third on the partaking of blood of animals (and strangulation of them) strengthens this interpretation. This triangle of idolatrous activity is all too common in Scripture. Historically, regarding the idolatrous worship of Moloch, one can see the prohibition to “abstain from things sacrificed to idols” (Lev. 20:2–4), “from blood” (Ezek. 23:37), and “from fornication” (Lev. 20:5). It could be contended that Ezekiel 33:25 also includes the prohibitions. Eschatologically, they are reiterated in the revival of idolatry in the eschaton: the prohibition to “abstain from things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:14, 20), “from blood” (Rev. 16:6; 17:6; cf. Rev. 14:20), and “from fornication” (Rev.

⁴³⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 505

⁴³⁸ Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2012), 268.

⁴³⁹ L. Scott Kellum, *Acts: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 3x of 172.

2:21; 9:21). With this model, an interpretation which connects all prohibitions to idolatry can be formulated. The order at the Jerusalem Council suggests that the spiritual contamination of idolatry (v.20) pollutes the act of sacrifice, the blood of the animal(s) themselves, the manner the life of the animal was ended (i.e., strangulation), and the pornographic acts associated with the ritual.⁴⁴⁰

“Sacrificed” to Idols

The act of sacrifice was common to ancient Israel, for there were several sacrifices instituted for a variety of reasons, ranging from burnt offerings (Lev. 1:1–17; 6:8–13) to sin offerings (Lev. 4:1–35). These sacrifices though, were never before an idola. Scripture is not silent on depicting God in any form of art; on the contrary, it loudly condemns it (Exodus 32:1-6) and archaeology attests they were an aniconic culture. However, sacrifices associated with foreign idols directly opposed the commandments of Torah and blasphemed God. They were a spiritual pollution that infected every component of religion. Schnabel states the “term ‘the polluted things’ (τὰ ἀλισγήματα) is rare; the verb (ἀλισγέω) means in the LXX ‘to make ceremonially impure’ [and i]n v. 29 the term ‘food sacrificed to idols’ (τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα) is used, denoting anything sacrificed to the cult image of a pagan deity (usually food; see on v.29)[; t]he genitive ‘by idols’ (τῶν εἰδώλων) indicates the source of the pollution: contact with pagan deities defile God’s people.”⁴⁴¹ A believer was not capable of acknowledging two deities, let alone sacrificing anything to both of them.

⁴⁴⁰ Young’s Literal Translation of Acts 15:29 reads “abstain from things offered to idols, and blood, and a strangled thing, and whoredom; from which keeping yourselves, ye shall do well; be strong,” while the MJLT reads “to abstain from things offered to idols, and blood, and strangled things, and sexual immorality—keeping yourselves from which, you will do well. Be strong!” These translations better guide the reader to understand that all four prohibitions are related to idolatry, rather than kashrut or the Torah in its entirety.

⁴⁴¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 642.

“Blood” and Idols

Scripture is clear that believers are not to partake in eating blood (Lev. 17:14, 19:26; Deut. 12:23; cf. Exod. 22:31). Again, in Ezekiel 33:25, God rhetorically asks Israel whether those who “eat *meat* with the blood *in it* [and] lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood should inherit the land?” The passage from Acts implies that the consumption of blood was connected to pagan worship.

That *haima* [blood] refers to the bloody rites of pagan sacrifices, one of their most prominent features, is certainly feasible.... It was also the custom in some cults to drink the blood of the victim.... It is not difficult, therefore, to see how blood could have been associated in a variety of ways with pagan cults, especially if that association had already been established by other terms of the decree.⁴⁴²

The consumption of blood as a practice within pagan worship is implied but there are few ancient sources to verify this. The blood of gladiators was drunk by some for medicinal purposes according to Celsus *De medicina* (3.23.7–8; cf. Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 28.4–5), but there do not appear to have been religious connotations. Herodotus mentions a Scythian ceremony in which “some of their blood [was dropped] into the wine” (*Histories* 4.4). Florus’ *Epitome Rerum Romanorum* 1.39 speaks of Thracian’s drinking blood from human skulls. Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* 22 speaks of blood being mixed with wine to seal a pact in which two parties are guilty of a crime. Lennon adds that in Cicero’s *Pro Roscio Amerino* 63–68, “his focus on blood as a substance that may stain physically and morally is striking... [and t]he passage also combines images of physical staining with acts of impiety and *scelus* [crime].”⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² Stephen G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1983), 97–98.

⁴⁴³ Jack J. Lennon, *Pollution and Religion in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 95.

“Things Strangled” and Idols

Animal strangulation was a practice associated with sacrifice to idols in pagan worship. Whether utilized as a beast of burden or for sacrificial purposes, within Israel, animals were to be treated respectfully and killed in a humane manner (Prov. 12:10; 27:23). This was not the case in the Greco-Roman world and, while never intentional, was of great concern even within rabbinical Judaism. As Instone-Brewer states,

Philo [*Spec. Leg.* 4.122; *Mut.* 62; *Aet.* 20] and *Joseph and Asenath* [8:5] also speak of “strangling” (ἀγγόνη) as a despised Gentile method of sacrificing animals, and some early and later Christian authors criticize pagans for strangling animals (though they may have based this on the Apostolic Decree). Targum Malachi refers to wrongful sacrifices which “you have strangled,” [1.13] and in Mishnah, certain methods of slitting the throat are banned because they tear the throat instead of cutting the arteries, so that the animal chokes to death (*m. Hul.* 1.2). It appears that some people may have choked sacrificial animals, either deliberately or by cutting their throat wrongly; or, at least, it appears that Jews believed that they did so.⁴⁴⁴

Regarding Philo’s commentary on the strangulation of animals in sacrifices, Petropoulou notes that “[t]he fact that a Jewish writer uses a Greek root [θῶ-], which most often designates sacrificial killing, in order to denote a secular slaughter, suggests that the everyday Jewish practice of killing an animal had a degree of sanctity.”⁴⁴⁵ Hence, the context here is not primarily the concern of eating animals that have been strangled to death but abstaining from sacrificing animals that had been. Since the Temple in Jerusalem had not yet fallen at that time Acts was written, this would have been particularly important to those who still sacrificed there, such as the disciples (Acts 3:1; cf. Exod. 29:39; Lev. 6:20; Josephus’

⁴⁴⁴ David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 2 (2009): 307. Consider also the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM XII. 14–95).

⁴⁴⁵ M. Z. Petropoulou, *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), 164.

Antiquities of the Jews 14.4.3), including Paul (Acts 21:24). As Gentiles were permitted to partake in Passover (Exod. 12:49; Num. 9:14; cf. Exod. 12:43–47), this would also apply to them.

“Fornication” and Idols

Recent scholarship challenges the assumption that cult prostitution was as prominent in the Greco-Roman world as once believed.⁴⁴⁶ Biblical scholar Baugh boldly declares that

Despite the received opinion to the contrary... cult prostitution was practiced in Greek (and Roman) regions of the NT era. The evidence thought to support this institution in the cities of Corinth and Ephesus was found wanting in our brief survey of Strabo and a few other authors... Hopefully Ephesian cult prostitutes will soon disappear from our literature and from our pulpits, for these chimera exist only in the minds of people today, not in the past.⁴⁴⁷

Fornication (πορνεία) in general, both inside and outside of Israel, was well attested, but its association with religious affairs is more challenging to verify. While the “non-food item (πορνεία) is difficult to link to meal-time activities, though perhaps it refers to the prostitutes which an attentive Roman host would provide for his guests after a meal [Philo, *De vita contemplative* 54–55] ... [o]r perhaps it refers to potential impurity of guests or the host due to menstrual uncleanness.”⁴⁴⁸ While aware of the challenges that come with relying on the accounts of ancient Greek historians and acknowledging that cultic prostitution is a myth, van

⁴⁴⁶ Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴⁴⁷ S. M. Baugh, “Cult Prostitution in New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 3 (1999): 459–60.

⁴⁴⁸ David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 2 (2009): 306.

der Toorn comments that the income of prostitutes was entering Temple finances.⁴⁴⁹ It seems reasonable to state that new believers would be made aware of the countless instructions pertaining to sexual matters and marital status in to the Torah, but the acceptance of the pornographic in the context of religious activities needed to be addressed to avoid separating private affairs from religious. Contextually, at the Jerusalem Council, this prohibition did not refer to all forms of illicit sexual intercourse but rather solely to idolatry. Nor should *πορνεία* be understood as a synonym for idolatry. All instructions pertaining to immoral sexual activity would be taught and explored in the synagogue, as James states (Acts 15:21). Here, the Council is addressing their concerns regarding the sexualization of the sacred, a natural phenomenon in Greece and Rome.

It is also important to dispel that this passage has anything to do with the Noahide laws of ancient Judaism. These laws originated during the second to fifth century, also known as the Amoriac period (Tosefta Avodah Zarah 8:4; Sanhedrin 56a; Genesis Rabbah 34:8), and therefore are a post-canon concept that should not be eisegetically integrated a century or more in the past. Even Jubilees 7:20–25, which affirms similar teaching, is dated a century after any scriptural books considered an influence.⁴⁵⁰ All such works, though speculative, may be an emotional reaction to the fall of Jerusalem and evolving rabbinical Judaism in the absence of the Temple. They seek to religiously restrict the Gentile who sought to befriend Judaism but not become an adherent; it was, essentially, another partition wall, one that enshrines work-based salvation (Olam Ha-Ba). While it might be contended that Acts 15 preserves an early form of the Noahide laws, it is too speculative, even convenient, to

⁴⁴⁹ “It must be stressed that sacred prostitution understood in this sense never existed in ancient Israel... Prostitutes operating, as it were, in the shadow of the Temple, then, existed in ancient Israel. However, any links between the latter and a hypothetical fertility cult, it need hardly be said, belong to the domain of speculation. Prostitution as a source of profit for the Temple? Yes. Prostitution as a feature of fertility rituals? No.” Karel van der Toorn, *God in Context: Selected Essays on Society and Religion in the Early Middle East* (Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 94–96.

⁴⁵⁰ Of passing note, Jubilees 22:16, Tobit 1:10–12, and Judith 12:1–14 all attest that Jews were not permitted to eat the food of the Gentiles (i.e., unclean food).

maintain this position and is more exegetically safe to understand the passage in relation to the Greco-Roman world at large.

In summary, the Jerusalem Council understood that unity would not come from the absence of the Torah but rather its presence, to distinguish it from pagan and pharisaical commandments. Their high bibliology maintained that the Scriptures that had attested the coming Messiah and had guided the path of the remnant were the same they were preaching from and would instruct them in the ways of the Messiah who had now arrived. While not a pronomian, Bauer rightly notes that the

implied reader would recognize that these are demands that Moses placed upon strangers, or aliens, who lived among the Hebrews in the land (Lev. 17–18). Hence, James finds this provision in the Mosaic legislation that corresponds to the situation of gentiles being joined with Jews in the eschatological experience of the Church, and accordingly he applies it to the present setting. Since James accepts the arguments of Peter, who insisted on salvation by faith in Jesus alone, without reference to any works of the Mosaic law, he is suggesting not that these provisions for abstention are necessary for salvation but rather that they offer a divinely revealed framework for the coexistence and intimate fellowship of Jewish and gentile Christians within the people of God.⁴⁵¹

Pronomianism contends that the “divinely revealed framework” is itself the Law of God. It is not the Law that married the written *with the oral* laws (cf. Mark 7:8; cf. b. *Shabbat* 31a; b. *Yevamot* 47a–b) but the “law of liberty” (James 1:25, 2:12), a liberty that prophesied of the Christ (Isa. 61:1), whose law enlarged the Mosaic Law to become the so-called “Law of Christ,” better rendered as the Torah as Christ taught it (cf. Matt. 5–7; Gal. 6:2).⁴⁵² Hence, the

⁴⁵¹ David R. Bauer, *The Book of Acts As Story: A Narrative-Critical Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 189–90.

⁴⁵² As Wilson states, there is “growing scholarly consensus that the ‘law of Christ’ does in fact refer to the law of Moses.” Todd A. Wilson, “Law of Christ,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 624. Wilber highlights that “the enduring authority and relevance of the Mosaic law in Christian ethics... the textual parallels with Galatians 5:13–14, which explicitly refer to the law of Moses, strongly suggest that the law of Christ mentioned in Galatians 6:2 points back to the earlier reference to the law of Moses in Galatians 5:13–14[, and] Paul’s description of himself as “under/in the law of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 9:21” all affirm this broadening view in scholarship. David Wilber, “The Law of Moses vs. the Law

prohibitions of Acts 15:28–29 (cf. 15:20) pertain to idolatry and practices associated with it; it is neither an abrogation of the Torah nor a fortification against kashrut.

On Kashrut: Romans 14:1–23

Majority Interpretation

Romans 14:1–23 is interpreted as affirming Mark 7:19 and Acts 10:9–16 in that “Jewish distinctions of meats do not exist in this dispensation, which knowledge, one having, could eat any food with thankfulness, and with no scruples... ‘all things are clean’ must be allowed to cover all things, whether of food or drink... [t]he only restricting thought is of the ‘weak’ brother who does not see this.”⁴⁵³

Pronomian Alternative

This passage has nothing to do with the Scriptures and its teachings on clean or unclean animals; it is speaking of strict eating methods by some in the local assembly (i.e., an omnivorous diet versus vegetarianism). It is a discussion regarding man-made fasting, surrounding what can and cannot be eaten during its practice.⁴⁵⁴ It is not kashrut. Clearly stated, the chapter is about man’s “opinions” (Rom. 14:1; διαλογισμός *dialogismós*) regarding foods consumed during fasts. When “there are not two persons represented, but the

of Christ? (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21),” accessed November 12, 2023, <https://davidwilber.com/articles/the-law-of-moses-vs-the-law-of-christ>.

⁴⁵³ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994), 502–3.

⁴⁵⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 798–99.

objecting and answering is done by the one speaker, the figure is called LOGISMUS, and what is stated is said to be in dialogismo, or in logismo.”⁴⁵⁵ The word is never used in the NT, explicitly or implicitly, to refer to commands of Scripture. Paul is not contradicting himself in this passage (cf. Acts 28:17). The passage is discussing days of tradition or of personal creation, pertaining to fasting or of a similar nature, as exemplified several times throughout Scripture: Judges 11:39–40 (“a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year”), Joel 2:15–16 (“Consecrate a fast [and] proclaim a solemn assembly”), and Zechariah 8:18–19 (“[t]he fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah”). These examples align with Romans 14:5–6. It is what theologians term *adiaphora* (literally, “indifferent” things). As Longenecker stresses,

Paul is urging his Christian addressees at Rome to accept and welcome all other professing believers in Jesus, particularly in situations where there are differences of understanding or practice about matters having to do primarily with social background, personal opinion, or personal preference—that is, with the so-called *adiaphora*, or matters that are neither required [i.e., commanded] of nor prohibited to believers in Jesus.⁴⁵⁶

Contextually (and with the same issues faced by Jesus in Mark 7:19 where man-made laws merged with the Torah pertaining to food consumption), Paul is condemning that some “opinions” regarding food were causing division, so much so that “your brother is hurt” and “a good thing [is being] spoken of as evil” (v.15–16). Drinking and eating food, as designated by God, should be done to the glory of Him (1 Cor. 10:31). The phrase “everything is clean” pertains only to that which God has previously permitted, for as Cranfield states, “as with

⁴⁵⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in The Bible* (UK, Eyre & Spottiswoode 1898), 957.

⁴⁵⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 923.

οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ of v.14, we have to understand this statement as intended in a restricted sense, the reference being not to such things as men's thoughts, desires and actions, but only to the resources of the created world which are available and appropriate for human consumption."⁴⁵⁷ Furthermore, the “weak” believer is designated so in their “faith” (πίστις; as explored in Romans 12–13), for they are still seeking to understand their identity in Christ and what it means to abide in Him. Hence, “it is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles” (v.21), that is to say, temporarily refrain from such activities (as opposed to “it is good to eat meat,” the opposite, which those who contend kashrut is no longer binding are actually advocating). Those weaker believers, still growing in their understanding of the Christian faith, need to be supported and work toward the fullness of what the Torah teaches.

On Kashrut: 1 Corinthians 10:25–33; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:4

Majority Interpretation

In an attempt to further support the abrogation of kashrut, these verses are cited to imply that Paul is teaching that food sacrificed to idols is permissible to eat as the idols are not real (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4). Later, in 10:23–33, Paul appears to teach that one can eat anything they desire, but their conscience should not be grieved by another believer if they choose not to eat food that some might consider sinful.⁴⁵⁸ For the sake of the gospel, a believer should eat anything in order to secure fellowship that might result in the conversion of an unbeliever.

⁴⁵⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9–16: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1979), 723.

⁴⁵⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 202–3; F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Oliphants, 1971), 98; Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 227.

Pronomian Alternative

The problem with declaring such a passage the end of the discussion on kashrut is it ignores not only the many passages that affirm kashrut (including those which have been contextually addressed thus far) but also that the notion of unclean animals being a source of food was spiritually foreign to the mind of a first century believer in Christ. Hence, when speaking of “anything that is sold in the meat market,” Paul is exclusively speaking of clean animals, not those that are unclean and unfit for consumption. He is aware that, for the sake of the gospel, there are times when one’s conscience may not be privy to the pagan sacrifice attached to the meat being bought at a marketplace (1 Cor. 10:25–26) or offered at a table of fellowship (1 Cor. 10:27–30). This, however, is not a precedent to eat all types of meat, clean and unclean, regardless of whether that meat has been sacrificed to an idol or not. Nor does it allow for ignorance of sin, for “if a person sins and does any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment” (Lev. 5:17). It is also fair to assume that “the unbeliever [who] invites” a believer would be aware of their adherence to kashrut and would be respectful of this, while the believer hosting a meal would only purchase and prepare food that affirmed kashrut.

Bruce reiterates that

Food of various kinds might be offered to idols, but the flesh of animal sacrifices is in view here: “an animal would constitute the only offering of sufficient size that a saleable portion would be left over following the sacrifice.” Such flesh (which would be of prime quality) was freely exposed for sale on the butchers’ stalls of pagan cities, since the temples received more than they could use; the question of eating it (whether its origin was known or unknown) was a matter of conscience for some Gentile Christians, as Paul’s Corinthian correspondence shows. The Jerusalem decree forbids it outright. It also forbids eating the meat of strangled animals, or the eating of blood in any form.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁹ F.F. Bruce, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 299.

Therefore, what seems to be stated here by Paul is that if a believer is served clean meat (as stipulated by God in Leviticus 11) and is not made aware of whether it was used in an act of pagan sacrifice (as can be the case in other instances according to v.28), then pronouncing a blessing over the meat (e.g., Ps. 24:1) will absolve their conscience. McKee helpfully cites traditional Jewish blessings in the Tosefta and Talmud that attest to this interpretation (t. *Berachot* 4:1; b. *Berachot* 35a; b. *Shabbat* 119a).⁴⁶⁰ Paul is making clear that in order to share the gospel with an unbeliever, one may partake in clean meat formerly associated with pagan sacrifice (accompanied by a blessing), but if it is found out to have been sacrificed to an idol, then a believer is within their right to decline that portion of the meal. Nothing in the passage implies that a believer is allowed to eat unclean meat for the sake of the gospel; had Paul taught this, he would be contradicting all previous commentary that he made on never being accused of teaching that the Torah had been abrogated (Acts 4:1–22; 5:17; 6:8; 8:3; 9:2, 23; 12:1; 21:27–29).

It is worth adding a discussion on Revelation 2:14, 20 in relation to Paul's passage. In the book of Revelation, one comes across admonishments from Jesus Christ that relate to kashrut. Well after His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus tells the ekklesia in Pergamum "you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam... to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality." Later, Jesus remarks to the ekklesia at Thyatira, "I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." Echoes of Acts 15:28–29 are heard in both statements. More importantly, if Jesus indeed taught that there are no longer any unclean animals, as

⁴⁶⁰ J. K. McKee, *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2015), 223.

those who interpret Mark 7:19 contend, then why does He state one should not partake in consuming animals that have been sacrificed to idols? If idols are indeed nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4), then consuming animals sacrificed to them would be acceptable. Yet two letters to two prominent assemblies in late first century Asia Minor include the condemnation of food sacrificed to pagan idols.⁴⁶¹ Thomas notes that in “Pergamum, personal involvement in idolatrous feasts was the major issue... to participate in the feast was tantamount to the actual offerings of sacrifices to these idols as the children of Israel had done with under Balaam’s influence (cf. Num 25:1–2)... some in Pergamum who professed to be Christians have yielded to cultural pressure.”⁴⁶² Hence, well after the affairs of Corinth, the ekklesia of the ancient world had to continually draw a line of sanctification between the sin of past pagan association, maintaining their commitment to the commandments of God and His standard for holiness.

On Kashrut: 1 Timothy 4:1–5

Majority Interpretation

The fifth argument comes from 1 Timothy 4:1–5. Some have suggested that v.3 relates to the issue of kashrut and that abstaining from any foods is no longer necessary if Jesus’ fulfillment of the Torah has abrogated any laws pertaining to food (i.e., Matt.

⁴⁶¹ “In Pergamum, the focus was on idolatry because of the prominence of the imperial cult... [while in Thyatira,] joining a [trade-]guild secured one’s livelihood, but it also included immoral religious rituals and meals involving idol sacrifice... the pressure on Christians was enormous, for they were faced with financial ruin if they rejected the guilds.” David E. Graves, *Jesus Speaks to the Seven Churches: A Historical and Exegetical Commentary on the Messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation* (Toronto, Canada: Electronic Christian Media, 2017), 257, 310.

⁴⁶² Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1992), 192.

15:11).⁴⁶³ Refraining from once-unclean foods is depicted as not only erroneous but possibly demonic in nature.

Pronomian Alternative

It is problematic to suggest that the “abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” spoken of here relates to Leviticus 11, for the apostle Paul precedes his statement with the assertion that such abstinence is the “doctrine of demons.” It would be blasphemous to refer to the Torah of God as the “doctrine of demons,” and thus the context of this passage does not absolve the list of clean and unclean animals from Leviticus 11. It must mean something else.⁴⁶⁴ Stern comments that v.3 “does not mean observing *kashrut*, although the false teachers probably did incorporate elements of the Jewish dietary laws into their ascetic practices.”⁴⁶⁵ Towner is even more direct when he writes,

The combination here, enforcement of celibacy and abstention from certain foods, is perhaps unusual, and may have required some unmentioned catalyst to bring them together. There is evidence of a Jewish-Christian element in the opposition, but circumcision and laws of purity are not a focal point of the opposition.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ H. A. Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 61.

⁴⁶⁴ When 1 Timothy 4:5 refers to food being “sanctified by means of the word,” one cannot help but make a connection to the holiness God appeals to when listing clean and unclean animals in the same chapter (Lev. 11:44).

⁴⁶⁵ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, ML: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 496.

⁴⁶⁶ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 294.

What Paul is speaking of must relate to pagan worship practices in which food was abstained from, a syncretism of the sacred and the demonic.⁴⁶⁷ It is likely that these false teachings are connected by the denial of flesh: human flesh (i.e., the body; cf. Gen. 2:23–24) and animal flesh (as food; cf. Gen. 9:3–4). The Essenes at Qumran qualified as such a group, for some were known to “neglect wedlock” and were “not at liberty to partake of that food that he meets with elsewhere” (Josephus’ *Wars of the Jews* 2.120, 2.143). It is also possible that this referred to an early form of Gnosticism (e.g., *Auth. Teach* 30; “the adversary... [places] many foods before our eyes, (things) which belong to this world... foods with which the devil lies in wait for us”),⁴⁶⁸ whose followers interpreted the material and physical as being evil and sought spiritual aestheticism.⁴⁶⁹ As such, the passage has nothing to do with kashrut.

Summary

In surveying the biblical passages often associated with the discussion of kashrut and the alleged abrogation of those laws prescribed by God in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, it is difficult to establish a clear position in the NT era that affirms this long-held interpretation. Mark 7:19 speaks directly to the issue of man-made laws, “tradition of the elders,” that contradicted the Torah’s teaching on matters pertaining to the consumption of

⁴⁶⁷ In a contemporary setting, this might look different, but possible examples would be those who teach the paleolithic diet based on evolutionary thinking that humans who lived millions of years ago in the Palaeolithic era had the ideal approach to eating food. There are strict vegetarians (and vegans) by choice, who insist that eating meat or any by-products from animals is wrong. Roman Catholic abstinence from certain foods is also possible.

⁴⁶⁸ “Authoritative Teaching, VI, 3”, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed., ed. James M. Robinson (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 308.

⁴⁶⁹ In 1 Timothy 4:1–8, “Paul is condemning a particularly harsh form of asceticism regarding food and the body. Paul’s condemnation of this form of dualistic asceticism in 1 Timothy 4 follows closely the same pattern used in Colossians 2 and 3: It juxtaposes severe bodily mortification and false humility with true inner holiness and love. This is also one of the reasons why Paul at the end of the letter talks about “God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6:17), in contrast to the proto-Gnostics and their depreciation of the physical world.” Marcello Newall, “Biblical Veganism: An Examination of 1 Timothy 4:1–8,” *Journal of Animal Ethics* 11, no. 1 (2021): 29.

food. A better translation of the verse clarifies Jesus' meaning. Acts 10:9–16 was a vision given to Peter which, according to his clarification with God, was not about food but rather nations ripe for the gospel (10:25–29). It had nothing to do with kashrut. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:28–29 (cf. 15:20) made clear that idolatry—and its related practices—were not to be tolerated by those grafted into the ekklesia of God. Romans 14:1–23 focuses on matters of opinion and ensuring man-made laws do not recreate a wall of partition between redeemed Jewish and Gentile believers. 1 Corinthians 10:25–33 (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4) clarified for believers that their sanctifying conscience mattered and they were to reject clean meat offered to them at table fellowship if they knew it had been associated with pagan sacrifice. Otherwise, they were to pray for a blessing of protection over its unknown source of procurement. 1 Timothy 4:1–5 speaks of being careful and discerning those religious communities that seek to entwine believers with their demonic doctrines regarding food.

It is difficult to draw from Scripture a position that maintains that those commandments distinguishing unclean from clean foods have been abrogated. If a thrice holy God (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8) can alter or cease one of His divine attributes, all such attributes are subject to revision. If His holy standard on one day is absent the day after, how can a believer maintain the holiness of Scripture that preserves His words or, more unsettling, trust that God's other attributes will not likewise change? If what was once unholy is no longer sinful by nature, then why would any doctrine beyond kashrut be secure?

Chapter 5 Observing Moedim, the Appointed Festivals of God

Since first introduced in the book of Leviticus, the appointed festivals are understood as both celebrations and reflections of pivotal theological events in the ekklesia of God, to be remembered annually as witnesses of God’s compassion, grace, and loving-kindness before the nations.⁴⁷⁰ Scripture attests that the remnant within national Israel (and later those redeemed Gentiles grafted into it)⁴⁷¹ were defined by their unwavering orthodoxy and orthopraxy to the revealed will of God. When the majority of national Israel failed to practice the festivals, the redeemed remnant joyfully preserved them even in the absence of a physical Temple (cf. Neh. 8:14). Today, the majority of Christian denominations no longer adhere to the scriptural festivals, either replacing them with traditional days of festivities created post-Scripture or referring to them in a historical sense (with no ongoing relevance).⁴⁷² Most believers contend that they are ceremonial in nature (harkening to the tripartite model of law that emerged in Church History) and were intended for ethnic Jews alone. Scripture, however, tells a different story.⁴⁷³

Pronomians who practice the festivals often begin with the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3), the first appointed time of God. That this is to be practiced once a week on Saturday is attested throughout Scripture, from before the rise of nations (Gen. 2:2–3) to the eschatological and

⁴⁷⁰ The often-cited Colossians 2:16–17 is not referring to the Messiah’s first coming but the end of time, understanding that μέλλω (méllō) is constantly used in NT passages pertaining to Christ’s return, the coming age, or the world to come. Travis M. Snow, *The Biblical Feast and the Return of Jesus: How the Spring and Fall Feasts of Israel will be Fulfilled in the Kingdom of God* (Dallas, TX: Shiloh Media, 2023), 12–13. The verses cited are Romans 3:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 2:5; 6:5, 13:14; 1 Peter 5:1; Revelation 1:19.

⁴⁷¹ Tim Hegg, *I Will Build My Ekklesia: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2009).

⁴⁷² Examples being Lent, Easter, and Christmas.

⁴⁷³ Though few in number, there are books written that contend this position. Tim Hegg, *Introduction to Torah Living: Living the Torah as Disciples of Yeshua* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002); J. K. McKee, *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2013).

literal “Millennium” (Isa. 56:1–8; 58:13–14). One of the main passages from Scripture that discusses the appointed festivals comes from the book of Leviticus (23:1–44). There, God states to Moses, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times’” (23:2). While the festivals were first instituted within the ethnic nation of Israel, who were at the time primarily the people of God, redeemed Gentiles are partakers since the sacrificial ministry of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:6), having been grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:17). They are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the father of Israel (Gal. 3:7, 16, 29), the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).⁴⁷⁴

The Seven Appointed Festivals of God

The first appointed festival is Passover (Pesach), a festival that celebrates the story of the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 12–14), which took place after God judged the oppressive Egyptian nation with ten plagues through His servant Moses. It was before the tenth plague, in which all the firstborn of Egypt were killed by God, that the Israelites sacrificed a sheep and placed its blood on the doorframes of their houses. When the judgement of God came upon Egypt, it *passed over* the Israelites and struck down the Egyptians (Exod. 12:23). The festival is of great significance and is recalled many times throughout the Scriptures as a whole (Exod. 12:1–13, 23–28, 42–51; Lev. 23:4–5; Num. 9:1–14; 28:16–25; 33:2–4; Deut. 16:1–7; Josh. 5:10–11; 2 Kings 23:21–23; 2 Chron. 30:1–5, 13–19; 35:1–19; Ezra 6:19–21; Ezek. 45:21; Matt. 26:17–35; Mark 14:1–2, 12–31; Luke 2:41;

⁴⁷⁴ G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b,” *Biblica* 80, no. 2 (1999): 204–23; Christopher W. Cowan, “Context Is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ In Galatians 6:16,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (2010): 78–85; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Identity of the ἸΣΡΑΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith and Mission* 19 (2001): 3–24.

22:1, 7–23; John 2:13, 23; 6:4, 12:1; 13:1–5; 18:28, 39; 19:14; Acts 12:4; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:28). Passover was the first day of the week of the festival of Unleavened Bread (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). During this festival, which commences at “twilight” (literally, “between the two evenings”; Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3) it is commanded to eat unleavened bread and herbs with lamb (Exod. 12:3, 8–10; Num. 9:11–12) or goat (Exod. 12:5), which is to be consumed in its entirety on the same day. When partaking in the meal, one must be clothed appropriately and should not eat with leisure (Exod. 12:11). One is to recount the story of the Exodus to children (Exod. 12:26–27), gather “in great numbers” (2 Chron. 30:5; i.e., as a congregation, cf. Exod. 12:3), remember the sacrifice of Christ Jesus and His fulfillment of the New (Renewed) Covenant by breaking bread and drinking wine symbolical of his body and blood (Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor. 5:7), and sing Psalms 113–118 (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). Notably, one cannot willfully ignore practicing the Passover festival (Num. 9:13).⁴⁷⁵

The second appointed festival is Unleavened Bread (Chag HaMatzot), a festival which emphasizes the hasty departure of Israel from Egypt before their exodus, so much so that their prepared bread was made without leaven (Exod. 12:14–22, 39; 13:6–7; 23:15; 34:18; Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17–25; Deut. 16:3–8, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13; 30:21–23; 35:17; Ezra 6:22; Ezek. 45:21; Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:1–2, 12; Luke 22:1–2, 7; Acts 12:3; 20:6; 1 Cor. 5:8). By recreating this meal, God’s people remember their enslavement and departure from the oppressive kingdom. Bitter herbs were also eaten with the unleavened bread to further remind believers of the bitter cycle of slavery and death (cf. paralleling believers previously being in the kingdom of Satan and enslaved to sin). During this week-long festival, it is commanded that “unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days” (Num. 28:17), to eat

⁴⁷⁵ There is discussion as to whether a Gentile believer must be circumcised to partake in the Passover (Exod. 12:43–49; cf. Num. 9:14). This would be true if there were a physical Temple. However, as one is not able to celebrate the meal of the Passover lamb in the Temple’s absence, a principle must be drawn.

“some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and roasted grain” (Josh. 5:11), and to possibly eat cattle (2 Chron. 35:7 cf. 1 Chron. 29:21; Deut. 16:4). For “seven days there shall be no dough with yeast found in your house” (Exod. 12:19–20; it must be temporarily placed outside “your borders” (Exod. 13:7; cf. Deut. 16:4), “on the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except for what must be eaten by every person” (Exod. 12:16; Num. 28:18), “no one is to appear before [God] empty-handed” (Exod. 23:15; cf. Deut. 16:16) and everyone, in relation to thanksgiving, must provide an offering (Num. 28:19–24; practically, in the absence of a Temple, this may be an equivalent resource: e.g., donating food, financial assistance, or services to brethren), and “on the first day you shall remove dough with yeast from your houses; for whoever eats anything with yeast from the first day until the seventh day” (Exod. 12:15). During the festival one is to express joy (2 Chron. 30:21; Ezra 6:22), and on “the seventh day you shall have a holy assembly; you shall do no laborious work” (Num. 28:25). Believers were to remove any idolatrous items from their houses at the beginning of the week as well (2 Chron. 30:14).⁴⁷⁶

The third appointed festival is First Fruits (Yom HaBikkurim), a festival which symbolizes the consecration of the whole harvest to God at the beginning of the grain harvest. It took place the day after the Sabbath, which ended the week of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Lev. 2:12; 23:9–14; Num. 18:12–13; 28:26; Deut. 18:4; 26:1–19; Prov. 3:9–10; Neh. 10:35; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:12–28; James 1:18; cf. Matt. 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–20; Luke 24:1–53; John 20:1–21:25). Israelites would “bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest,” in addition to a burnt grain and drink offering, because this not only recalled to the mind of Israel that extraordinary Exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land, one full of

⁴⁷⁶ Though the Levitical priesthood has been temporarily suspended, those that are pastor-teachers can principally emulate how they taught “good insight *in the things* of the Lord” (2 Chron. 30:22). While pastor-teachers do not replace Levitical priests, there are notable similarities.

agricultural abundance, but also prioritized the Blessor, God, before His blessings. During this festival, it is commanded to “bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God” (Exod. 23:19; 34:26) in a basket (Deut. 26:2). As there is no Temple, this could be applied as bringing seasonal fruit from your garden or community as an act of thanksgiving to be eaten, not burnt, to the glory of God (Exod. 23:16; Num. 18:13; cf. Lev. 2:12). The “best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain” (Num. 18:12) can also be eaten and “the first fleece of your sheep” enjoyed (Deut. 18:4). One is to provide an offering (Lev. 23:9–14; Num. 28:27). Believers “shall have a holy assembly; you shall do no laborious work” (Num. 28:26). One is to give a voluntary tithe “to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan, and to the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied” and to pray a prayer of exaltation (Deut. 26:12–15).⁴⁷⁷

The fourth appointed festival is Pentecost (a.k.a. Shavuot and Feast of Weeks; Exod. 34:21–23; Num. 28:26–27; Deut. 16:9–12, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13; Acts 2:1–47; 1 Cor. 16:8), which takes place fifty days after Passover and celebrates the end of the grain harvest. The food that was made from the harvest and the creatures of the field are sacrificed to God to commemorate His providential hand that brought food and life to the land. During this festival, it is commanded to celebrate “with a voluntary offering of your hand in a proportional amount, which you shall give just as the Lord your God blesses you; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you, your son and your daughter, and your male and female slaves, and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger, the orphan, and the widow who are in your midst, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His

⁴⁷⁷ It is worth noting here the “festival” of Omer (Lev. 23:15–16). It is essentially the biblical response to the unbiblical teaching of Lent, yet rather than taking place before the death and resurrection of the Messiah, it happens after. It is the counting down to Pentecost (Shavuot) over a period of fifty days (seven weeks). The teaching of the “festival” is that each day the “omer” is counted (being a unit of measurement; i.e., around three and a half litres) the believer is *acknowledging* the blessings of God in the *world* (as represented by the growing harvest) and *anticipating* the blessing of God’s *Word* (as represented by the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai at Shavout according to Exodus 19:1 and also by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the author of the Scriptures). During the forty days in which “omer” were counted, Jesus interacted with His disciples after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

name” (Deut. 16:9–11). One is to “remember that you were a slave” to sin (Deut. 16:12). No “one is to appear before [God] empty-handed” (Deut. 16:16) in relation to thanksgiving. As the response was in the book of Acts, it is befitting of the believer to be “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

The fifth appointed festival, the Day of Trumpets (a.k.a. Yom Teruah; Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 10:10; 29:1–6), marked the end of the agricultural year. No work was conducted and the people of God assembled before the blowing of a trumpet (shofar). As the day is a memorial, it is traditionally believed that the day memorializes the appearance of God on Mount Sinai, an event marked by the presence of a trumpet (Exod. 19:18–25; cf. Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19). During this festival, it is commanded to “have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation... [y]ou shall not do any laborious work” (Lev. 23:24–25; Num. 29:1; cf. note that sacrifice on this day is not seen as laborious, hence there is a distinction of such work). One is to provide an offering (Lev. 23:25; Num. 10:10; 29:2–6).⁴⁷⁸

The sixth appointed festival, the Day of Covering (a.k.a. Yom Kippur; Lev. 16:29; 23:26–32; 25:9; Acts 27:9), is the festival in which the high priest entered the “Holy of Holies,” the inner sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, to make reconciliatory sacrifice with God and Israel for their sins as a nation. It was the only fast ever commanded in Scripture, a response by the people to meditate upon their sin and the mercy of God in His forgiveness of them. It is often referred to as the “Day of Atonement.” This, however, is problematic as the word kippur (כִּפּוּר) does not primarily mean atonement but rather to cover, covered over, or covering.⁴⁷⁹ During this festival, it is commanded to “humble yourselves and not do any

⁴⁷⁸ It is often referred to as “Rosh Hashanah.” This, however, is a post-scriptural term that perpetuates the teaching that this is the Jewish New Year, which is false as the festival occurs in Nissan 1 (Exod. 12:1–2).

⁴⁷⁹ The Hebrew word כִּפּוּר (kâphar) does not directly translate to “atonement” but “covering.” While this interpretative translation by all Bible translations is not inherently wrong, it does detract that the word conveys

work” (Lev. 16:29), provide an offering (Lev. 23:27), “sound a horn all through your land” (Lev. 25:9) and fast (Acts 27:9) not merely from food but from everything.

The seventh appointed festival, Tabernacles (a.k.a. Sukkot and Feast of Ingathering; Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:33–43; Num. 29:12; Deut. 16:13–16; 31:10; 2 Chron. 8:13; Ezra 3:4; Neh. 8:13–17; Zech. 14:16–19; John 1:14; 7:2), is the festival in which the Israelites would refrain from living in their houses and embark on building and temporarily living in self-made tabernacles (or “booths”) as remembrance of their travails in the wilderness. During that time, they had been homeless but believed in the promises that God would lead them to a land of their own (Canaan). During this festival, one is to “gather in the fruit of your labors from the field” (Exod. 23:16), “not do any laborious work” on the first and last days (Lev. 23:35–36, 39), provide an offering each day of the week (Num. 29:12–38; cf. Lev. 23:36–38), “on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and branches of trees with thick branches and willows of the brook” (Lev. 23:40) and with them construct and “live in booths for seven days” (Lev. 23:42; Neh. 8:15–16). One is to “rejoice in your feast, you, your son and your daughter, and your male and female slaves, and the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow who are in your towns” (Deut. 16:14–15; cf. Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:17), “no one is to appear before [God] empty-handed” (Deut. 16:16) in relation to thanksgiving, and in sabbatical years, the Law is to be publicly read out (Deut. 31:10–13).

In assessing the role of the appointed festivals among the ekklesia of God today, there are several reasons to consider, each drawn from Scripture. It is difficult to contend that their ongoing practise is absent from the NT, for most arguments emerge post-canon.

how the offering fulfills all conditional expectations of God. Hence, the intended focus is not what is achieved so much as how it is achieved.

Reason 1: The Appointed Festivals of God Were Practiced post-Resurrection

It has been hastily declared that after the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the festivals were never practiced as they were obsolete. Any commanded instructions associated with the Temple or “ceremonial” in nature were abrogated in Christ fulfilling them. Scripture does not attest to this. The NT evidences that after the ascension of Christ, believers gathered and observed Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8),⁴⁸⁰ Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42–44; 16:13), Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6) and Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9).⁴⁸¹ The disciples did not absolve themselves from any practice pertaining to the physical Temple before it fell (Acts 2:46) nor the Torah as a whole (Acts 15:20–21). It can be contended that the apostle Paul was referring to Passover, not the Communion, in his discussion from 1 Corinthians 5:8 (see excursus below). The biblical record reveals that the disciples did not see the festivals as a burdensome yoke, let alone abrogated, and that they did not interpret their practice as inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus Christ. Discussion of these appointed festivals are not commented upon in a negative way, framed as a distraction to living out the commanded instructions of God, or in sharing the gospel. Their presence contradicts the mainstream narrative that they have no place in the Christian’s walk of faith.

⁴⁸⁰ “Paul writes around A.D. 55 from Ephesus in Asia Minor, a city with whose synagogue he had an extended relationship (Acts 19:8). Writing, possibly, from around the time of Passover, he tells the Corinthians that he intends to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). His references to Passover and Pentecost show that these times were significant for him, and he seems to assume that they have a definite meaning for the Corinthians to whom he writes.” The Corinthian church was composed of both redeemed Jew and Gentile believers. Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 4.

⁴⁸¹ “Commentators are unanimous in understanding ‘the Fast’ to be a reference to Yom Kippur. Scholars, assuming a close relationship between the author of Luke-Acts and Paul, such as R.P.C. Hanson and J. D. G. Dunn, deduce that Paul observed Yom Kippur... I cannot but draw the conclusion that Luke himself and his implied readers observed Yom Kippur. Why else would Luke use a ‘Jewish calendrical reference for a secular problem’? He clearly presumes that his readers will understand what he is referring to.... [W]e can assume a positive attitude of Luke and his implied audience to the fast of the Day of Atonement. In other words, Luke and his community observed Yom Kippur.” Daniel Stokl Ben Ezra, “Christians’ observing ‘Jewish’ festivals of Autumn,” in *The Image of the Judeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 61–62.

Reason 2: The Appointed Festivals of God Were for Redeemed Jews and Gentiles

As Christ is intended for all, so too are His commandments. Just as the Sabbath was intended for humanity as established prior to their being any Hebrew ethnicity or nation called Israel, so too were the appointed festivals of God. During the Exodus from Egypt, it is written that a “mixed multitude” (Exod. 12:38) left for the promised land, meaning both Jews *and Gentiles*. As Sherwood concludes,

At their inception Israel is fulfilling the *Torah* ideal of attaining the reverence of the nations (Deut 28:1, 9–10; cf. Exod 19:5). And if we can be permitted to use later language from the Prophets, then at the outset Israel is succeeding in their task of being a light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6). Thus, the significance of the mixed multitude in Exodus 12:38 is that at the moment of their deliverance, God’s people comprises Israelites and non-Israelites (*i.e.* representatives of “the nations”), who are his spoils won from Egypt. The plague cycle concludes and exodus begins with the mixed multitude in 12:38, where Israel and the nations are unified in a context of worship in the first step to the institution of Israel as a nation upon Sinai. Leading into chapter 14, the formation of this people is God’s signature upon his new act of creation at the climax of the exodus narrative. As God’s single composite people, they are together the very expression of his new creation. Therefore, in 12:37–38, the narrator interprets Israel’s identity and the most formative event in their history as a creational formation of the new humanity of his people Israel, to whom the mixed multitude is intrinsic.⁴⁸²

This is later strengthened by forthcoming commandments in the Exodus narrative that made it abundantly clear that redeemed Gentiles were to partake in the festivals now they had been grafted into the covenantal community. They were commanded to observe and practice Passover (Exod. 12:49; Num. 9:14; cf. Exod. 12:43–47), Pentecost (Deut. 16:11), Sabbath (Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14; cf. Acts 13:42–44), Tabernacles (Deut. 16:14), Unleavened

⁴⁸² Aaron Sherwood, “The Mixed Multitude in Exodus 12:38: Glorification, Creation, and Yhwh’s Plunder of Israel and the Nations,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34, no. 2 (2012): 153–54.

Bread (Exod. 12:19) and the Day of Covering (Lev. 16:29). The notion of the festivals as Jewish is wholly manufactured and foreign to Scripture, despite its constant mislabeling.⁴⁸³

Reason 3: The Appointed Festivals of God Can Be Practiced in the Absence of a Temple

It is often argued that since there is no physical Temple in Jerusalem since it was destroyed by Rome in AD70, ceremonial laws like the appointed festivals cannot be practiced. While it is true that many laws pertaining to the Temple cannot be practiced literally until its eschatological restoration (e.g., animal sacrifice), the majority of requirements for festival observance can be. In Nehemiah 8:14, believers practiced the appointed festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot) in the absence of the Temple; they were not wholly able to abide by the commandments pertaining to Tabernacles and the Temple, yet *they did so in such a way as to expect they would be able to do so in the future*. As Hegg perceptively notes,

celebration of Sukkot as recorded in Nehemiah 8 appears to have been carried out *apart from the sacrifices and ceremonies which the Torah prescribes for the Temple*. They celebrated the Festival by building sukkot, bringing in the four species, and rejoicing—the same way they would have celebrated even if the Temple had not been rebuilt. This pattern, given to us by the returning exiles, gives us an example in our day, when we celebrate the festival apart from the Temple. We may celebrate the feast by sitting or dwelling (שב) in a sukkah, bringing the four species within it, and rejoicing in the presence of HaShem. Like the exiles, we *anticipate* the full functioning of the Temple in connection with the Festivals.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ It is also encouraged that both Jew and Gentile believers in God are to celebrate the days of Purim (“the Jews established and made a custom for themselves, their descendants, and for all those who allied themselves with them” i.e., Gentiles; Esther 9:27 cf. 8:17). That there were conversions to the faith of believing Israel by Gentiles because of the events (Esther 8:17) is a stunning teaching that attests to its practice today and across ethnicities.

⁴⁸⁴ Tim Hegg, “Sukkot”, *TorahResource* (2006), <https://trfolder.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/PDFs/Article+PDFs/sukkot.pdf>. Even earlier, the Gentile Melchizedek was a priest of YHWH in the absence of the Temple and its distinct priestly system (Genesis 14:18).

Another example is from Daniel 6:10 in which the prophet prays in accordance with the command pertaining to the Temple in its absence, *anticipating* the day he could do so in person. Thus, a believer can practice many commandments in the absence of the Temple. It has been remarked that as believers must physically travel to Jerusalem three times a year to practice the pilgrimage festivals (Deut. 16:16; cf. Luke 2:41–43), it is impossible to abide by commandments associated with it. This, however, was true of those who lived *within* the boundaries of Israel but not explicit for those who lived in the diaspora. Extrabiblical literature strengthens this contention:

It is likely that many, if not most, diaspora Jews never went to Jerusalem during one of the festivals... In his account of the festival legislation in Deuteronomy, Josephus qualifies the command by stating that only those living within the “land which the Hebrews shall conquer” are expected to assemble in Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals (Ant. 4.203; cf. Philo, Moses, 2.232). Such an interpretation of the Mosaic Law quite clearly excuses diaspora Jews from participating annually in these three festivals. There is also evidence that those living within the land of Israel did not fulfill the festival legislation during the Second Temple period. For example, Tobit characterizes his own piety specifically through contrasting his meticulous observance of this command with his neighbors [Tobit 1:6]... It may have been more common for those living within [Israel] to go up to Jerusalem for one festival each year, which is how the author of the gospel of Luke portrays the practice of the family and community of Jesus (Luke 2:41). Such a limited fulfillment of the biblical legislation is not condemned but is presented as a normal expression of piety. So, if those living within the land traveled to Jerusalem only once each year to celebrate one of the festivals, then it seems likely that diaspora Jews would have felt even less inclined to do so based on their distance from the temple.⁴⁸⁵

Furthermore, Scripture attests that even within Israel, there have been extended seasons in which the festivals were not practiced within Israel due to disobedience (2 Kings 23:22; 2 Chron. 35:18). Jesus and his family lived in Egypt for at least a year, if not more, and they

⁴⁸⁵ Jonathan R. Trotter, *The Jerusalem Temple in Diaspora Jewish Practice and Thought during the Second Temple Period*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 78–80. To be fair, Trotter also cites examples that attest to references in extrabiblical literature that insist many pilgrims outside of Israel did make the journey (Philo *Spec.* 1.66–78; Josephus *Ant.* 18.310–313; Acts 2:5, 9–11).

did not travel back to Israel during the pilgrimage festivals (cf. Matt. 2:15). In Acts 20:16, Paul was determined to be in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost, implying he was not present for Passover, a pilgrimage festival. It appears that, if possible, a believer *could* make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from a location outside of Israel, but if it were not possible, they were able to celebrate in their local redeemed community.

Reason 4: The Appointed Festivals of God Are Bound to His Holiness

God does not change (Num. 23:19; Ps. 102:26–27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:7). Progressive revelation reveals more of the will of God and enlarges previous understanding, but God does not change His commandments, more so, His standard for holiness. The appointed festivals are referred to as “holy convocations” (Lev. 23:2), glorifying God through clean foods designated by Him based on His holiness (Lev. 11:44–45). They preserve a holy catechism.⁴⁸⁶ The term “convocation,” מִקְרָא in the Hebrew, denotes a formal gathering of worship for a specific time and purpose. While the physical place in which the appointed festival itself was not holy, the meaning and reason for convoking was; the presence of God made the place of gathering “holy ground” (Exod. 3:5; Josh. 5:15). The appointed festivals were holy encounters, and practicing them is a means of being sanctified, of becoming holy (cf. Heb. 12:14).⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ “The catechism of the Jew consists of his calendar. On the pinions of time which bear us through life, God has inscribed the eternal words of His soul-inspiring doctrine, making days and weeks, months and years the heralds to proclaim His truths. Nothing would seem more fleeting than these elements of time, but to them God entrusted the care of his holy things, thereby rendering them more imperishable and more accessible than any mouth of priest, any monument, temple, and altars could have done. Priests die, monuments decay, temples and altars fall to pieces, but time remains forever, and every newborn day emerges fresh and vigorous from its bosom.” Samuel Raphael, *Judaism Eternal—Volume 1* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 1996), 3.

⁴⁸⁷ It is just as likely that Hebrews 10:25 may refer to the appointed festivals *and local assemblies*, when paralleled with passages such as Numbers 9:13 and 2 Chronicles 30:6–9.

Reason 5: The Appointed Festivals Align with Created Order

In the beginning, at the creation of the universe, God established a blueprint for the festivals as attested in Genesis 1:14: “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and they shall serve as signs and for seasons, and for days and years.’” While this does not explicitly speak of festivals, the word for “seasons” here is מועד (môw‘êd), the same word used for “festivals.” This is no coincidence, for God is instructing His believers that just as there is a fixed order and time to the seasons within the natural world, so too is there a fixed order and time to the festivals within the physical world. The appointed festivals are as permanent as the seasons, and until the former passes away (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11–13), the latter will not either. For God “designed the universe itself (the sun and moon and the whole planetary structure) in order to point to and regulate the Festivals... [t]hus, the Moedim are first and foremost a part of the creative order, not merely a part of the covenant made with Israel at Sinai.”⁴⁸⁸ That the Torah (Matt. 5:17–18) and those who practice the festivals, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), also align with the created order (Jer. 31:35–37; “If this fixed order departs from before Me... Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever”) emphasizes that what God has established is unchanging and with continual purpose. Just as the narrative of creation in Genesis is functional, ontological, and literal, so to are the appointed festivals for their purpose only ends when God recreates everything (Revelation 21:5; cf. Isaiah 65:17) and there is no longer a need for the sun or moon (Revelation 21:23).

⁴⁸⁸ Tim Hegg, “Are the Festivals (Moedim) for Today?” *Torah Resource*, 2001. <https://torahresource.com/are-the-festivals-moedim-for-today/>.

Reason 6: The Appointed Festivals of God Were Practiced by Jesus, and We Are to Abide in Him

In the early 1990's, a popular phrase in American Christian circles was "WWJD," an abbreviation for "what would Jesus do" based on Galatians 2:20. The irony of this cultural phenomenon was that few using it to solve problems faced by believers considered that the theological answer should have been "what His Torah instructs." As a teacher, Jesus modeled what His disciples were to imitate and emulate in their walk of faith. This means that believers are to do His commandments, as this is what a loving disciple does (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Such obedient love includes practicing the festivals. To not do so is to be accursed (Deut. 27:26). As Chennattu reveals,

Keeping the commandments is an indispensable condition for abiding in Jesus' love (v.10) and for being friends of Jesus (v.14). The command to abide in Jesus' love is preceded by a conditional clause, "if you keep (τηρήσητε) my commandments (τὰς ἐντολάς μου)," and the call to be Jesus' friends is followed by a similar clause... According to the Johannine Jesus, if the disciples want to abide in his love and if they want to remain his friends, then they must keep the commandments. By using these conditional clauses and the commandments to keep the commandments, the evangelist parallels the abiding relationship between Jesus and the disciples with the OT covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel [LXX Deut 27:26; Isa 30:18]. One needs to obey God's voice and keep God's covenant commandments in order to be God's vine (cf. Jer 2:21; 3:13) and God's treasured possession (Exod 19:5; see also Josh 7:11; 24:25).⁴⁸⁹

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 11:1 and Ephesians 5:1, it is written that believers are to μιμητής (mimētēs) Christ/God. As He practiced the appointed festivals, so should believers; to love Him is to live out His commanded instructions. To μιμητής is to emulate a model, to reproduce actions and behavior. In the *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus remarks that

⁴⁸⁹ Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 117.

Jehoshaphat “received a magnificent burial in Jerusalem for he was an imitator [μιμητής] of the deeds of David” (9.44). There is no distinction made as to what period of David’s life was imitated; it is intentionally holistic. Aristotle stated it as akin to the “representation of life” (*Poetics* 1447a). Likewise, disciples of Jesus are to imitate the life of Jesus, His humanity, from His formative years to His last weeks before ascending. Imitation is discipleship.⁴⁹⁰ As Le Roux summarizes,

Jesus was not only born into the Jewish faith and genealogy (cf. Mt 1:1), but according to the New Testament he obeyed God’s commandments, celebrated each Jewish feast, and regarded all of the festivals as ordained by God to be remembered, observed and celebrated... He said, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come—it isn’t to cancel the laws of Moses and the warnings of the prophets.” “I am to fulfill them, and to make them all come true.” “Those who teach God’s laws and obey them shall be great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:17, 19). Jesus did not abolish the Torah, but he taught it in a way very different from other teachers.⁴⁹¹

One cannot imitate Jesus’ commitment to morality but reject His commitment to ceremony.

Reason 7: The Appointed Festivals of God Are Perpetual

According to the biblical record, Sabbath is a “perpetual” covenant (Exod. 31:16). The Passover and week of Unleavened Bread are “permanent” (Exod. 12:14, 17, 42). Pentecost is “perpetual” (Lev. 23:21), as is the Day of Covering (Lev. 23:31) and Tabernacles (Lev. 23:41). However, believers often interpret these words as either within a period of time

⁴⁹⁰ Michaelis understands *mathētēs* and *mimētēs* as one and the same, for the “NT as a whole does not teach imitation in the primary sense of imitating an example but rather in the predominate sense of discipleship i.e., of obedience to the word and will of the Lord directly or by way of the apostles.” W. Michaelis “mimeomai [to imitate],” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wiliam B. Eerdmans, 1985), 596.

⁴⁹¹ Magdel Le Roux, “Celebrating the Feasts of the Old Testament in Christian Contexts,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2009): 1002.

(ending with the arrival of Christ) or only applicable to the Jewish believer in Christ. The word permanent and perpetual, עֹלָם ('ôwlâm) in Hebrew, means “duration of time, which is concealed, as being of an unknown or great length, with respect to time either past, present, or to come.”⁴⁹² Since the appointed festivals are referred to in the Millennium and align with the created order, their context cannot be regulated to the past; they are ongoing until the time in which YHWH will restore the “new heavens and new earth” (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1–5).

Reason 8: The Appointed Festivals of God Are in the Millennium

Ezekiel 45:17 refers to Sabbaths (weekly and annual; Ezek. 46:1), while 45:21 refers to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Ezekiel 45:25 refers to Tabernacles, while 46:9–11 refers to the appointed festivals in their entirety. Later, in Zechariah 14:16–19, Tabernacles is again referenced. The Millennium is a literal period of a thousand years in which Jesus Christ will reign from a geographically restored Israel, fulfilling the Davidic Covenant once and for all. The promonian attests that, since the appointed festivals are practiced in the future and were practiced by the disciples before the crucifixion and after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, then they apply today until that eschatological period of time.⁴⁹³

Furthermore, that practices associated with the appointed festivals were also commanded of the redeemed Gentile, such as sacrifices (Lev. 17:8; 22:18; Num. 15:14–16), offerings, and rituals (Num. 15:16–31; 19:10) attests that these will be acceptable in the Millennium.

⁴⁹² William Wilson, “Perpetual,” *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 308.

⁴⁹³ This is discussed more in Appendix 4.

Reason 9: The Appointed Festivals of God Are Christological

Christologically, Passover (Pesach) has become the remembrance of that moment in history when Jesus Christ was sacrificially slain on the cross and atoned for the sins of all humanity. He prophetically fulfilled the festival in being the sacrificial Lamb of God (Isa. 53:7-8; John 1:29; Rev. 13:8).⁴⁹⁴

Christologically, in the festival of Unleavened Bread, leaven becomes synonymous with sin. The apostle Paul made the connection between the festival and Jesus in the following manner: “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6–8). In similar manner, Christians, whose identity was once in sin but now is in their salvation, have departed from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God, into Christ, and into sincerity and truth. Christ has already fulfilled the festival in being the *sinless* sacrifice needed for atonement, but the fullness of this glory has not yet been eschatologically realized.

Christologically, First Fruits is the day on which the Messiah was resurrected from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, God, through the apostle Paul, identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of the festival.⁴⁹⁵ It is not the sheaf of barley that is to be remembered today but

⁴⁹⁴ During the ministry of Jesus Christ, a tradition was birthed from the festival called “Communion,” in which the bread and wine used in the Passover meal (the third of four cups of wine drunk throughout) would become a regular remembrance of the body of Christ that was slain and the blood He shed. This, however, was not intended to replace the Passover Meal but enlarge its purpose in Jesus. It is the contention of some that Communion is a post-biblical tradition and that the partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice was intended to remain part of the Passover meal. For further discussion, see excursus below.

⁴⁹⁵ Jesus Christ partook the Passover meal on the night of Nissan 14 (which happened to be Thursday and when the sheep or goat were being killed Exod. 12:1-3, 5-8). He was trialled and crucified on Nissan 15 (Friday; “παρασκευή” in Matt 27:62, Mark. 15:42, Luke 23:54, John 19:14, 31, 42; cf. *Ant.* 16.163). This means

the sacrificed Christ. Jesus' death, both physically and symbolically, was the consecration of the whole harvest to God (that is to say, those who died in faith before His life and death) and of the whole harvest to come, that is, all the saints in ecclesial history up until today and those who will confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15:20, in which the euphemism "of those who are asleep" refers to Christians who died in the faith prior to Jesus' resurrection and, three verses later, "those who are Christ's at His coming." Christ has already fulfilled the festival by being resurrected and in being the first fruits of the righteous, but the fullness of this glory has not yet been eschatologically realized. It is the day of His resurrection, the day in which He was raised and walked out from the tomb. Additionally, believers have "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23), having been promised and filled with the Holy Spirit (i.e., the fruits of the Holy Spirit from Galatians 5:22–23), being a testament of their salvation and future glorification.

Christologically, because of the events during Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11), now indwells redeemed Jewish and Gentile believers and forms the universal assembly of God, the bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7). Celebrating the festival not only focuses on the Holy Spirit who seals salvation and blesses a believer with spiritual gifts for service and spiritual fruit for character, but it has believers focusing on the one of whom the Holy Spirit prophetically spoke through the authors of Scripture (Luke 24:44; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) and whom the Spirit is conforming believers (Rom. 8:29) into the image of: Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul continued to celebrate it as a believer in Christ (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8). Jesus already fulfilled the festival by His Spirit being indwelt in all believers and conforming us into the image of Him, but the fullness of this glory has not yet been eschatologically realized. The Pentecost in the book of Acts

that "the day after the sabbath" (Lev 23:11) was First Fruits, which started Saturday night and ended Sunday night. Christ was resurrected Sunday morning (Mark 16:1-2).

was particularly unique in that there were three outpourings: Acts 2; Samaritans: Acts 8; Gentiles: Acts 10. It will be fully fulfilled by the revivals, particularly of the Jews, during the Tribulation period.

Christologically, Trumpets refers not to the Second Coming of Christ but rather the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:52). This is interpreted as such because there will be the blowing of a trumpet (i.e., shofar) and Jesus will “catch up” those who believe in Him, both living and dead, all of whom will receive glorified bodies. As such, in the future, Christ will fulfill the festival at the Rapture of His Bride.⁴⁹⁶

Christologically, the intent of the Day of Covering has greater meaning. As Christ was substitutionally sacrificed for our sins, believers no longer need to perform animal sacrifices nor is there a physical Temple standing in Israel anymore (due to its destruction in 70 AD). The day now emphasizes Jesus as High Priest (Hebrews 8:6; 9:7, 11–26; 13:11–12). The apostle Paul alludes to the festival in 2 Corinthians 5:21 in discussing how God “made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He also acknowledged the festival as a believer in Christ (Acts 27:9). It is a time for Christians to pray for ethnic Israel that has yet to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, for that day will take place in the future (Zech. 12:10). Jesus will fulfil the festival in its entirety at the Second Coming (Zech. 14:4; Matt. 24:29–31; Rev. 19:11–16).

Last but not least, Sukkot is Christological in that it was the festival when Jesus was born (John 1:14; the Greek word for dwelt is “tabernacled”), as opposed to “Christmas” (a Roman Catholic term merging the word “Christ” and “mass”).⁴⁹⁷ Additionally, Jesus Christ

⁴⁹⁶ One can affirm this doctrine and not be a Pre-Tribulation Dispensational, as attested by the pre-wrath position of eschatology. Alan E. Kurschner, *Prewrath: A Very Short Introduction to the Great Tribulation, Rapture, and Day of the Lord* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2014).

⁴⁹⁷ Benjamin Szumskyj, “Do the Scriptures date the birth of Jesus Christ during the Feast of Tabernacles / Sukkoth?” (class paper submitted in THEO 530: Systematic Theology II at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2019). Unpublished. Christmas is also known as Chag Molad Same’ach in Israel.

will also “tabernacle” among us in the Millennium (Micah 4:1–7) as He rules from the land of Israel (Zech. 8:3). Jesus had already fulfilled this festival at His birth, but the fullness of this glory has not yet been eschatologically realized (e.g., in the Millennium). The ultimate tabernacling of God will be in eternity (Rev. 21:3).

Reason 10: The Appointed Festivals of God Have Yet to Be Fulfilled in Full

In studying the ongoing validity of the festivals, Bacchiocchi makes the following confession:

I was wrong in assuming that the annual Feasts came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ, simply because they were connected with the sacrificial system of the Temple. I came to realize that the continuity or discontinuity of the Feasts is determined not by their connection with the sacrificial system, but by the scope of their typology. If the Feasts had typified *only* the redemptive accomplishments of Christ’s first Advent, then obviously their function would have terminated at the Cross. But, if the Feasts foreshadow *also* the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ at His second Advent, then their function continues in the Christian church, though with a new meaning and manner of observance. It came as a pleasant surprise to discover that the typology and function of the Feasts reach beyond the Cross to the ultimate consummation of redemption.⁴⁹⁸

The seven appointed festivals have a Christ-centered and prophetic nature because of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ who came to fulfill the Torah (Matt. 5:17–18), *not* abolish it. These festival days not only anticipate His first advent but anticipate His second advent. Almost all who understand the idea of Jesus fulfilling the festivals teach that Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost have been fulfilled in their entirety, with the remainder to be fulfilled at His Second coming. Snow

⁴⁹⁸ Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals—Spring*, 9–10. His view is distinct as it is not a tenet upheld by Seventh Day Adventism as a whole.

details that Jesus fulfilled all the festivals in part, but they will not be fulfilled in their entirety until the eschatological end. He believes that “the Bible teaches that every feast has three layers of meaning or fulfillment: a historical meaning in ancient Israel, a first-century fulfillment through the work of Messiah, [and] a future fulfillment tied to end-time events and the Messiah’s Second Coming”⁴⁹⁹ and that Colossians 2:16–17 is not referring to the first century but the end of time, understanding that μέλλω (méllō) is constantly used in NT passages pertaining to Christ’s return, the coming age, or the world to come.⁵⁰⁰ Employing his threefold approach, Snow examples the Day of Covering (Atonement):

The Day of Atonement was when Israel’s annual rite of purification took place in the Tabernacle or Temple (historical meaning). We also know the Messiah made atonement for our sins, a point that the book of Hebrews establishes by drawing heavily from the Day of Atonement sections of Leviticus (first-century fulfillment). However, it is also widely accepted in many prophecy circles that the Day of Atonement foreshadows what the Messiah will do in and for Israel, and by extension for all the nations of the earth, after His Second Coming (future fulfillment).⁵⁰¹

There is just as much exegetical weight for all the festivals being fulfilled in part as there is for the contention that they will be fulfilled in the future.

Sabbath—Observing Saturday Rest and Worship

The Sabbath, as a topic of theological discussion among believers, reveals a plethora of different interpretations that reveals to contemporary students of Scripture that well-read

⁴⁹⁹ Travis M. Snow, *The Biblical Feast and the Return of Jesus: How the Spring and Fall Feasts of Israel Will Be Fulfilled in the Kingdom of God* (Dallas, TX: Shiloh Media, 2023), 10.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11. He cites Luke 22:15–16 as scriptural evidence that the Passover has not yet been fulfilled, Isaiah 66:18–21 for Pentecost, and several other passages for each of the festivals in his landmark work.

and informed believers from different periods of Church History and across denominations have not been uniform in their understanding.⁵⁰² The Sabbath has been understood from no longer being relevant or active in a general and spiritual sense all the way to being restructured or transferred to Sunday or strictly a Jewish holy day that Jewish people, even those who are Christians, are free to abide by according to their conscience and cultural convictions. Mainstream Protestant Christianity holds a view that practicing a Saturday Sabbath is no longer a scriptural command and that Sunday is the new Sabbath (i.e., “Christian Sabbath”) or, at the very least, a replacement. Generally, Sabbatarians are often of the denomination of Messianic Judaism, fringes of a mainstream denomination (for example, Seventh Day Baptists), or a part of cultic groups such as Worldwide Church of God, much of the erroneous Hebrew Roots movement, and (until significant soteriological changes are made), the problematic Seventh Day Adventists.

In the beginning, at the end of six days creating the entire universe, including earth and its first inhabitant, the triune God nominated one of their creations the final day of the week, a day of “rest” (שַׁבָּת or *šābat*). This was later referred to as the “sabbath” (שַׁבְּתוֹן or *šabātōn*). Before there was any sin, any need for salvation, before any law had been given or any ethnicity determined or nation born, a day on which God rested, not because He was tired but because He was establishing a commandment to be emulated, was established. This day, which would later be named “Saturday” in the language of foreign nations, was intended to be a holy day to be observed, one separated from a week that was to be worked through. Tonstad identifies seven meanings of the Sabbath in the creation account: it was a deliberate act (“the seventh day stands apart, charged with the holiness of the Creator in a solemn,

⁵⁰² There are numerous resources that explore this and uphold a Saturday Sabbath from Scripture and history. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1977); David Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath: What the New Testament Says about Sabbath Observance for Christians* (Clover, SC: Pronomian Publishing, 2022).

deliberate act and a signature statement of God’s purpose”), a distinctive prerogative (“Creation is God’s trademark, a statement of copyright that need not fear any competition because there cannot be any”), a sign of personhood (“[t]he cessation and completion are markers of personhood and of a definite process... exemplified especially in the creation of human beings”), a relational marker (“[t]he seventh day has an interactive character and intent... incarnating God in the ongoing experience of human beings”), an expression of love (“God ceases from working in order to enjoy the company of the person God created, suggesting that the seventh day speaks as much about the value of human beings to God as of God’s valuation of human life”), an affirmation of presence (“[t]he God of the seventh day is a near and present God, a Person who is committed to Creation and One who is involved in Creation up close and personal”), a day of blessing (“the seventh day—bringing the full measure of God’s presence, love, and blessing—marks the beginning of human existence in Genesis”), and a sign of revelation (“God’s enduring intention is in view, but it is not fully known”).⁵⁰³

The Sabbath is to be set apart, distinct, and, above all, unchanging as long as the current universe exists. On the sixth day, Friday, “the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts... [so by Saturday] the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done[;] God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:2–3). The beginning and ending of Sabbath are determined by dusk, for darkness existed before light when God was establishing days (Gen. 1:4–5), an understanding affirmed later when the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:18–19) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Covering) are established: “It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to

⁵⁰³ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 27–38.

you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, *from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath*” (Lev. 23:32; italics mine). Later, in the ministry of Jesus Christ, it is taught that day commences at dusk (Mark 14:30; John 19:31). As to when evening starts, Scripture is not specific, but traditions range from the complete disappearance of the sun to the appearance of the first star in the night sky (Neh. 13:19; cf. Josephus’ *Jewish Wars* 4.9.12).

A believer was to “[r]emember the sabbath day, to keep it holy[;] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exod. 20:8–11; cf. 23:12; Deut. 5:12–15; Luke 23:56). It was understood as one of the “LORD’S appointed times which [one] shall proclaim as holy convocations... For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:1–4). Convocations, in the Scriptures, were the assembling of believers for the purpose of teaching and worshiping God and fellowshiping with brethren. The “people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons” (Ezek. 46:3). God expected His believers to “walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them[... to] Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God” (Ezek. 20:19–20). The Sabbath was both a day of rest and worship. Stuart states that the Sabbath

is portrayed rather as a stoppage good for everyone, for the purpose of refocusing on holiness (all concerns that stem from belonging to God, which is

what holiness is) in order to enjoy God's blessings of that day and its potential ("Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy"). The Sabbath, in other words, is designed to help people become spiritually stronger and closer to God; whatever it does by way of helping people recuperate from being physically tired (and it certainly can do this), is incidental, rather than a primary benefit... To love God is not to have a lazy day one day a week; rather it is to focus on doing his will specially on one day a week—to worship, learn, study, care, and strengthen the spirit.⁵⁰⁴

Gane echoes these sentiments when he remarks that "another connection between love for God and love for humans is the fact that the Sabbath commandment includes a primary principle... to honor God as the creator (Exod. 20:11) or redeemer (Deut. 5:15), [and] a secondary principle is to allow others in one's household to enjoy the God-given benefit of Sabbath rest (Exod. 20:10), as emphasized in Moses's retelling of the commandment [Deut. 5:14]."⁵⁰⁵ This balance between resting physically from the world and resting spiritually in the Word is clear.

After Israel was established as a nation and the Hebrews designated as a distinct ethnicity, God declared to them,

You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. (Exod. 31:13–16)

Sadly, from this point on, Sabbath became ethnocentric and relevant only to the Hebrew, often referred to in latter history as a Jewish religious day. This is incorrect for various

⁵⁰⁴ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 460–61.

⁵⁰⁵ Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 127.

reasons. The day was established after ethnicity entered the world and observed from Adam onwards,⁵⁰⁶ and “God instituted the Sabbath for all human beings on planet Earth because he instituted it in the beginning, long before Israel existed, along with basic elements of human life such as marriage and labor.”⁵⁰⁷ As Murphy notes, “partly moral and partly positive... [the Sabbath] is especially binding on man, being founded on the six day’s work and the seventh day’s rest in that creation of which he formed the crowning part... it is therefore to him of perpetual significance and obligation.”⁵⁰⁸ Furthermore, the *ger* (גר, Hebrew for “stranger” or “sojourner”); i.e., a Gentile) was to abide by the teaching and rest on the Sabbath as well (Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14).⁵⁰⁹ One must be clear in defining “Israel” and its relation to the Law, in this case, the Sabbath. Israel was not solely to be understood as ethnic Hebrews (later Jews) but also included Gentile believers, however few.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Sabbath “is an example for all people, not just those who are ethnically descended from Abraham.” See: Craig Keener, “Which day is the Sabbath?” *Bible Background Research and Commentary from Dr. Craig Keener* (2015), <https://craigkeener.com/which-day-is-the-sabbath/>.

⁵⁰⁷ Roy E. Gane, “Sabbath and the New Covenant,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, no. 1–2 (1999): 316.

⁵⁰⁸ James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Minneapolis, MN; James Publications, 1976).

⁵⁰⁹ For an exhaustive treatment on foreigners, immigrants, natives, strangers, and other Gentile related roles, see: Tim Hegg, *Fellow Heirs: Jews & Gentiles Together in the Family of God* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2013).

⁵¹⁰ In passing, one must note what is not permitted to do on Sabbath according to the Scriptures, not the rabbinical writings post-canon. There is to be no human physical labor on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10; Lev. 23:3; Num. 15:32–36; Deut. 5:13–15; Jer. 17:21–22). This would include cooking (Exod. 16:23–30; 35:3; Num. 15:32–36; food must be prepared in advance), cleaning, and general work. This also extends to not causing another to work on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10). This does not, however, include labor that preserves human life (Matt. 12:1–13). There is to be no physical labor involving animals on the Sabbath (Deut. 5:14). That is to say, one should not be utilizing livestock or conducting any form of animal husbandry in which an animal is working for its owner. There is to be no buying or selling in any form or manner (Neh. 10:31; 13:15–19; Amos 8:5). All purchases are to be made prior to the day and throughout the week beforehand. There is to be no traveling far on the Sabbath (Exod. 16:29). One should avoid selfish pleasures on the Sabbath (Isa. 58:13). Above all, one should always exercise grace when events arise on Sabbath beyond our control (Matt. 12:10–11; Luke 14:1–5). Preserving life supersedes keeping the Sabbath, whether one is starving or on the brink of death. Likewise, there are times that, beyond our control, one cannot keep the Sabbath and, in those instances, grace must always be exercised. We are imperfect creatures, despite our holy intentions as believers.

In the intertestamental period between the reconstruction of the Temple arose the establishment of the synagogue and, like the Temple, teaching, worship, and fellowship took place on the Sabbath (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31; 13:10; Acts 13:14, 27, 42–44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2–3; 18:4). The early followers of Jesus Christ first assembled there (James 2:2). In the wake of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, believers are taught that they have entered into God’s rest because of His work of redemption (Heb. 4:1–13). This eternal rest (being of a spiritual nature) is experienced in part now through the partaking of the Sabbath (being physical in nature). As such, “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience” (Heb. 4:9–11). Prior to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the one who did not obey in practicing the Sabbath was executed (Exod. 31:15; Num. 15:32–35). Through His sacrificial and substitutionary death, Jesus has freed us from the consequences of breaking His commandments (Rom. 3:21–26; Eph. 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Gal. 3:13). This, however, does not mean that since the consequences have been rendered ineffectual, the command itself has as well.⁵¹¹

That the terms “Saturday” and “Sunday” do not appear in Scripture does cause an initial challenge for those upholding a Saturday Sabbath. The answer is post-scriptural in nature and, while that in itself can cause frustration with some believers, the reasons are consistent with the scriptural record as opposed to the tradition appealed to in order to maintain a Sunday Sabbath. There are three post-scriptural arguments for Sabbath: *anthropological, etymological, and historical*. In speaking of Saturday Sabbath, one is not

⁵¹¹ If a believer holds to a futurist eschatology, during the Tribulation, Jesus Christ forewarns those being pregnant during the second part of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:19), referring to the Sabbath as a day that remains acknowledged. In the Millennium, a future and literal one thousand year “millennial” kingdom in Israel (Zech. 14:4–11; Luke 1:32–33; Rev. 19:11–16; 20:1–6) that takes place directly after the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11–16), there will be several of the appointed times (i.e., festivals) that will be practiced, of which the Sabbath is one (Isa. 56:1–8; 58:13–14).

talking about all twenty-four hours, for it officially starts at dusk on Friday, but it does encompass the majority of the day.

The *anthropological* argument attests that numerous cultures throughout history hold to a seven-day week. This is unique, as it is the teaching in almost all cultures of a global flood. Both concepts emerge from Genesis and make clear that the description of creation in Genesis 1–2 is accurate and that of the seven days, six were for creating and one was for rest. While this does not reveal the given day (i.e., Saturday as Sabbath), in Hebrew, the days of the week are numerical, so Sunday is called “Yom rishon” (“first day”) while Saturday is called “Yom ha-shabbat” (“day of Sabbath”).

The *etymological* argument attests that the word for Saturday in numerous cultures throughout the world is derived from the word “Sabbath” (Arabic: Sabet Armenian: Shabat Bosnian: Subota Bulgarian: Sabota Corsican: Sàbatu Croatian: Subota Czech: Sobota Georgian: Sabati Greek: Savvato Indonesian: Sabtu Italian: Sabato Latin: Sabbatum Maltese: is-Sibt Polish: Sobota Portuguese: Sábado Romanian: Sambata Russian: Subbota Serbian: Subota Slovak: Sobota Slovene: Sobota Somali: Sabti Spanish: Sabado Sudanese: Saptu Ukrainian: Subota).⁵¹² Notably, σάββατον (sábbaton) in ancient Greek is derived from שַׁבְּתוֹן (šabātôn) in ancient Hebrew. Furthermore, the koine Greek word παρασκευή (paraskeue) referenced in Matt 27:62, Mark 15:42, Lk 23:54, John 19:14, 31, 42, refers to the preparation day *before* the weekly Sabbath i.e. Friday. This is further attested by Josephus’ use of the word (*Ant.* 16.163) and that the modern Greek work for Friday is *paraskeue*.

The *historical* argument attests that Sabbath has always been Saturday, as evidenced in several commentaries in the ancient world. A few examples will suffice. The first of these

⁵¹² United Church of God, “Names for Saturday in Many Languages Prove Which Day Is the True Sabbath,” *United Church of God* (2011), <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/sunset-to-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest/names-for-saturday-in-many-languages-prove-which-day-is-the-true-sabbath>; cf. Boris Rosenfeld, “Religions and the Seven-Day Week,” *Llull: Revista de la Sociedad Espanola de la Historia de las Ciencias y de las Tecnicas* 17, no. 32 (1994): 141-156.

was Frontinus (30–103 AD) who wrote that “Vespasian Augustus attacked the Jews on the day of Saturn, a day on which it is sinful for them to do any business, and so defeated them” (*Strategems*, Book II).⁵¹³ Dio Cassius (150–235 AD), the Roman senator and historian, wrote, “Jerusalem destroyed on the very day of Saturn, which now the Jews reverence most” (*Roman History*, Book 65)⁵¹⁴ and elsewhere when commenting on the Jews,

As it was, they made an excavation of what are called the days of Saturn and by doing no work at all on those days afforded the Romans an opportunity in this interval to batter down the wall...They build to him a temple that was extremely large and beautiful, except in so far as it was open and roofless, and likewise dedicated to him the day called the day of Saturn, on which, among many other most peculiar observances, they undertake no serious occupation (*Roman History*, 37.16.2; 37.16.3).⁵¹⁵

It is clear here, writing of events less than a century after their writings, that the day of Saturn (Saturday) was synonymous with Judaism’s day of rest, the Saturday Sabbath. Furthermore, Socrates Scholasticus, the Greek historian, wrote in 391 AD,

For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the mysteries (The Lord’s Supper) on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, refuse to do this. The Egyptians in the neighborhood of Alexandria and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious meetings on the Sabbath.⁵¹⁶

As with many other examples (e.g., the sixth Paschal letter of Cyril of Alexandria, 418 AD), this highlights that the tradition of Sunday being Sabbath among the Alexandrian and Roman

⁵¹³ Frontinus, “Stratagems—Book II,” *University of Chicago*, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/frontinus/strategemata/2*.html

⁵¹⁴ Cassius Dio, “Roman History—Epitome of Book 65,” *University of Chicago*, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/cassius_dio/65*.html.

⁵¹⁵ Cassius Dio, “Roman History—Epitome of Book 37,” *University of Chicago*, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/cassius_dio/37*.html.

⁵¹⁶ Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 196–97.

Christians was just that, *a tradition*. God, who does not change (Num. 23:19, Ps. 102:26–27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:7), has not changed His mind on the Sabbath. Furthermore, all reference to a Sunday Sabbath or the abrogation of Sabbath in favor of a Sunday observance of rest and worship is drawn purely from late second to third century extrabiblical literature.⁵¹⁷

Rebuttals to Key Passages in the Pronomian Debate

An alternative theological interpretation must identify how certain passages have been historically understood by Christianity throughout the centuries and a pronomian rebuttal to each one. While the weight of scholarship favors a position that does not advocate for the ongoing practice of certain laws from the Torah, this does not necessarily mean that a minority view is inherently wrong. Academia has several landmarks of scholars who proposed alternative views that have gone on to be adopted and shaped by others and their denominations. The following section will explore those passages used to discard Saturday Sabbath (replaced with Sunday Sabbath) and the appointed festivals of God.

On the Sabbath —Hebrews 4:9–11

Majority Interpretation

Hebrews 4:9–11 is often used as a passage to affirm that Jesus Christ is now a believer's Sabbath and that a physical day is no longer necessary. It is taught that as Jesus is a believer's "rest," one needs not delegate a time in the week to rest from the travails of daily

⁵¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. Don Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 223.

life and work: “[T]his rest does not involve keeping the Sabbath, as practiced in Judaism... neither is it acquired by works.”⁵¹⁸ Fruchtenbaum confusingly advocates that “the Jewish believer is free from the Law of Moses and from mandatory Sabbath-keeping... he is still free to observe Sabbath if he chooses and in whatever manner he may choose... any believers, Jewish or Gentile, are free to observe the Sabbath, whether it is a day of rest or as a day of corporate worship or both... [t]he day of choice is purely optional.”⁵¹⁹ In mainstream Christianity, then, Sabbath can be practiced, ignored, or, as taught in Reformed circles, observed on Sunday (a.k.a “Christian Sabbath”).⁵²⁰

Pronomian Alternative

Earlier, during the ministry of Jesus, He remarked the “Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). His grievance was the interpretation of the Sabbath and the countless oral laws attached to what the Torah clearly taught on the weekly festival. He never once condemned or renounced the Sabbath itself. While it is true that Christ is our rest according to the passage in Hebrews, the fullness of this truth is *a future reality*. In commenting on Hebrews 4:8–9 in particular, Hegg notes,

The rest which was promised to Israel and which they experienced once having entered the [Promised] Land, was not the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise. It was, rather, a foreshadow and illustration of eternal rest which the redeemed people of God would have in the world to come—the world that will be fully restored through God’s redeeming power. Moreover, this promised rest is both spiritual and physical (for the two cannot be separated)...

⁵¹⁸ David M. Levy, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2015), 44.

⁵¹⁹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Sabbath* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2012), 101.

⁵²⁰ This is due to the belief Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. However, none of the gospels stated that Jesus Christ was resurrected on Sunday but rather at the beginning of the week (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). The tomb was empty, granted, but Christ’s actual resurrection could have taken place any time from dusk on Saturday. While Sunday morning is most likely, one cannot be dogmatic.

Thus, “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,” envisions what we now enjoy in part and what we will experience fully when we enter into eternal Sabbath... the weekly Shabbat is the continuing revelation of God to His people of that eternal rest which He promises to those who, by faith, lay hold of the salvation which Yeshua has procured for His people.⁵²¹

Saved sinners remain in the flesh until glorification and therefore, while believers are entering it now, it will not be fulfilled till the establishment of the Heavens and Earth (cf. Isa. 56:1–8). Thus, the teaching that Sabbath was relevant up until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and then suspended until the initiation of the literal Millennium is exegetically inconsistent. It is *then* that the intention of the Sabbath will be all encompassing, for days will no longer exist, as believers will be in an eternal rest no longer bound by chronology. That “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9) in the future does not nullify the past (Josh. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1) and ongoing reality of rest today (Gen. 2:2). The Greek word σαββατισμός comes from “*sabbatizō*: to observe the Sabbath, which is from *sabbaton*: Sabbath.”⁵²² This anchors the “Sabbath rest,” a future reality, with weekly Sabbath, a present reality. Hebrews 4:8–9 does not cease the Sabbath, for such an interpretation would contradict the high view of bibliology espoused in Hebrews 4:12 (the very “word of God” that established the literal and weekly Sabbath) and render the title “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8) superfluous. One cannot be the Lord of that which is redundant. The “Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). Robertson summarizes beautifully:

When Scripture records that God “blessed” the Sabbath day in conjunction with his creational activity, it obviously cannot mean that God spoke meaninglessly into a vacuum. His blessing of this day had a significant effect on the world. Furthermore, the reference to God’s blessing the day should not be interpreted as meaning that God blessed the day with respect to himself. It was with respect to his creation, and with respect to man in particular that God

⁵²¹ Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Book of Hebrews: Volume 1—Chapters 1–8* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2016), 165–67.

⁵²² E. Richard Pigeon, *AMG’s Comprehensive Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2014), 906.

blessed the Sabbath day. As Jesus indicated pointedly, “the Sabbath came into being (ἐγένετο) for the sake of man (διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον) (Mark 2:27). Because it was for the good of man and the whole of creation, God instituted the Sabbath. Neither antinomianism nor dispensationalism may remove the obligation of the Christian today to observe the creation ordinance of the Sabbath.⁵²³

As such, the weekly Sabbath of rest today is a window into the Christ-centered arena of rest that awaits all believers in eternity. The Sabbath is a “perpetual covenant” and “forever” (Exod. 31:16–17), both for redeemed Jews and Gentiles (Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14).

On the Sabbath and Festivals —Romans 14:5–6

Majority Interpretation

Romans 14:5–6 are often interpreted as referring to “the weak Jewish Christian [who] remained strongly attached to the special days of Judaism and felt compelled to serve them... [and t]he weak Gentile... [who] wanted to separate himself as far as possible from the special days of his former paganism because of their idolatrous and immoral character.”⁵²⁴ Others believe that Paul is discussing the nature of the Sabbath:

“The weak brother, still influenced in his conscience by legal considerations, held the first day of the week as peculiar and sacred *in itself*. He invested it with the restrictions of a Jewish *sabbath*, instead of hailing it with fresh joy

⁵²³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 69. Oddly though, Patterson insists on Sunday Sabbath.

⁵²⁴ John MacArthur, *Romans 9–16* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994), 281.

each week as an opportunity for remembering... his Lord; and our place in the new creation with Him.”⁵²⁵

Pronomian Alternative

As already addressed in the previous chapter on kashrut, Romans 14:5–6 is a chapter about man’s “opinions” (Rom. 14:1; διαλογισμός dialogismós), discussing days of tradition or of personal creation pertaining to fasting or of a similar nature, as exemplified several times throughout Scripture: Judges 11:39–40 (“a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year”), Joel 2:15–16 (“Consecrate a fast [and] proclaim a solemn assembly”), and Zechariah 8:18–19 (“[t]he fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah”). Hence, the “one day” cited in Romans 14:5–6 is not speaking of Sabbath but rather in a general sense of days considered *παρ’ ἡμέραν* (“above another”) by some but not by others.

The Greek that is used by Paul is also important. Bailey notes,

The lack of any clear language over what is being discussed causes some ambiguity to the text—no typical language used for Feasts, Sabbath, or dietary commandments is shown. Even the word for observe for the day, *φρονων phronon*, is never used in the sense of festal observance elsewhere, where words such as *φυλαξουσιν / φυλαξαι* (LXX; Exo. 31.16, Deu. 16.1 & NT), *ποιειν / ποιησεις* (LXX; Exo. 31.16, Deu. 16.3 & NT), *τηρει* (NT), etc. would be used, instead. Neither *φρονων* nor *κρινει, krinei* (the word for “esteem” a verse earlier) are used in any setting regarding keeping, honoring, respecting, or observing a Feast or Sabbath in the NT, LXX, or extra-biblical literature.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994), 505.

⁵²⁶ Rick Bailey, *What God Hath Created: Does the New Testament Do Away with the Dietary Laws?* (Engrafted Word Ministry, 2023), 57.

This grammatically makes sense in light of this passage not being about the appointed festivals of God but rather those created by men that are not expected of the ekklesia as a whole.

Excursus: Purim and Hannukah

Scripture preserves information regarding two holy days, which are not instructed by God or considered official festivals of His, yet are neither condemned by Him nor referred to in negative terms: *Purim* and *Hannukah*. These days of celebration and observance are likely the type of ἡμέραν παρ' ἡμέραν spoken of in Romans 14:5–6 and are permitted by believers to practice or reject. They are not, however, to be discredited or vilified by fellow believers.

Purim (a.k.a. “Mordecai’s Day”; 2 Maccabees 15:36) is referred to in Esther 9:26–32. After the events of the book in which Esther and Mordechai, providentially guided by God, saved the Jewish race from being annihilated by Haman’s manipulation of Persian government (through its King Xerxes), one reads the following:

Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants. Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth, to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations. The command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.

The successive days are marked by six commands: “feasting and rejoicing... sending portions of food to one another... gifts to the poor” (9:22) as well as “fasting and... mourning” (9:31).

Hannukah (a.k.a. the Feast of Dedication) is referred to in John 10:22–23: “At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.” The events of the Feast of Dedication, more widely known as Hanukkah, took place during the “intertestamental” period between the final events of the OT and opening events of the Messiah’s earthly ministry. The geo-political events that formed its background are in the OT (Dan. 8:21–25; Zech. 9:13–15) and alluded to in the “tortured” saints of Hebrews 11:35. It is a festival that celebrates the victory of the Maccabean revolt against the occupying Greeks who sought to have the nation of Israel abolish the Law and render obsolete all teachings pertaining to their sanctification and adopt their culture (i.e., Hellenism). A description of the festival (and commands) is best explained outside of the Scripture, in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees 4:52–59:

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev [December], in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven [i.e., God], who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas [Maccabeus] and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

Jesus, who was known to evidence righteous anger towards the desecration of the Temple (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–18), exhibited no such demeanour when observing the Feast of

the Dedication festivities. His demeanour was one of respectful observation. That Scripture refers to both these festivals implies that all families in Israel, including Jesus', would have observed these festivals in their proper place.

On the Sabbath and Festivals—Colossians 2:16

Majority Interpretation

Colossians 2:16 is often interpreted that “the Colossian Christians were not to tolerate... Jewish differentiation between clean and unclean foods...impose Judaistic requirements upon them regarding drinking... religious feasts of the Jews, such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles...[any] monthly Jewish celebration that was held in connection with their lunar calendar... [and] the Jewish Sabbath day... Christians were not to let themselves be coerced into practicing these things because such rituals were just a shadow of what was coming.”⁵²⁷ As such, anything connected to the appointed festivals is not only abrogated from the believer’s walk of faith but condemned as a practice.

Pronomian Alternative

Read in isolation, Colossians 2:16–17⁵²⁸ would appear to declare that the scriptural festivals are no longer in effect. However, those who read and study the Scriptures know that isolating verses is the quickest way to erode context and when reading Scripture, context

⁵²⁷ Homer A. Kent Jr., *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians and Philemon rev. ed.* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2006), 98–100.

⁵²⁸ For a deeper study on this chapter from a pronomian position, see: R. L. Watson, *Let No One Judge You: A Pronomian Pocket Guide to Colossians 2* (Chatsworth, GA: Pronomian Publishing, 2022).

means everything. Colossians is a book in which the apostle Paul condemns the syncretic philosophical traditions of humanity, not of God and His Law. O'Brien writes,

for Israel[,] the keeping of these holy days was evidence of obedience to God's law and a sign of her election among the nations. At Colossae, however, the sacred days were to be kept for the sake of the "elemental spirits of the universe," those astral powers who directed the course of the stars and relegated the order of the calendar. So Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days or seasons as such; it is the wrong motive involved when the observance of these days is bound up with the recognition of the elemental spirits.⁵²⁹

Paul calls out the syncretic aberration three times in his epistle: firstly, regarding "philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world" (Col. 2:8), secondly, regarding the traditions *added* to the Law by humans, for "no one [man not God!] is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" (Col. 2:16), and thirdly, again, "the elementary principles of the world... [do not] submit yourself to decrees... in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men" (Col. 2:20–22). It is clear from these verses that the criticism of the law by the apostle Paul is of those laws made by man, not the Law of God. If Colossians 2:16 were referring to God's Law, not only would it contradict Paul's condemnation of man's laws before and after the verse (as mentioned above), but contextually it would make no sense. God has established laws concerning food, drink, festivals, moons, and Sabbaths;⁵³⁰ *man has not*. However, man *did* add philosophical

⁵²⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 139.

⁵³⁰ "The preceding grammatical and syntactical investigation of the clause in Col 2:17 suggests that the practices mentioned in 2:16 are those of the Colossian Christians and not the opponents... Early Christians observe both feasts and Sabbaths." Troy Martin, "But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:17)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 2 (1995): 255.

traditions to God’s Law that were never instituted by Him, and it is this that the apostle Paul is condemning.⁵³¹ Wilber notes that this

false teaching is according to “the elemental spirits of the world,” which likely refers to spiritual beings that were believed to have control over nature and the cosmos. Philo writes about nations that made divinities out of the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire (*Decalogue* 53). The Wisdom of Solomon [13:1–2]... speaks similarly about ignorant people who believe that the elements... were gods who ruled the world... [and other] pseudigraphia and Dead Sea Scrolls give some evidence of these type of ideas floating around broader Judaism of the Second Temple era [e.g., 1 Enoch 82:10–20; Jubilees 2:2; 1 QM 10.11–12].⁵³²

While Paul is correct that food, drinks and festivals “are a mere shadow of what is to come... the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:17), these are not what is being condemned, but the traditions added to them. Additionally, noting these are shadows does not abolish them. It merely has believers focus on what they point to and represent (as will those festivals in the Millennium).⁵³³

Furthermore, Colossians 2:16–17 is sometimes cited to argue that the Sabbath is to be disregarded, but as discussed above, Paul’s contention is with appointed festivals that have been syncretically merged with false interpretations and pagan philosophies.

It is still argued by some that Jesus Christ, through His sacrificial death, “nailed” the festivals to the cross, for He rendered the Law obsolete (in part or in its entirety). This comes from a handful of verses, most notably Colossians 2:14, where the apostle Paul writes that Christ’s death “canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us.” The problem

⁵³¹ Consider the identical example from Church History of the heretic Elchasai. Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); Jarl E. Fossum, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37, no. 3 (1983): 260–87.

⁵³² David Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath: What the New Testament Says about Sabbath Observance for Christians* (Clover, SC: Pronomian Publishing, 2022), 52.

⁵³³ Abaffy contends that “Paul means for us to not let our unbelieving neighbors in Colossae (800 miles from Jerusalem) who aren’t keeping God’s laws, judge us for keeping God’s food laws, Sabbath days, new moon observance, and feast days.” Luke Abaffy, *The Truth: Reformation 2.0* (ATS Press, 2022), 6.

with this interpretation is that Christ's death atoned for the sins of sinners because they had broken the Law (cf. 1 John 3:4). The consequences of death for breaking the commanded instructions were no longer; Christ had paid the penalty for them, in full. This did not mean though, that He had abolished the Torah in its entirety. To come to such a conclusion is eisegetical.

On Sabbath—Revelation 1:10

Majority Interpretation

There are interpretive differences as to what Revelation 1:10 is referring to. The three most prominent views⁵³⁴ are that it is referring to Sunday (the day that the ekklesia of God was beginning to meet on in the centuries after the resurrection of Christ), the Day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10–12) (an eschatological term regarding the end of days), or the Sabbath.

Pronomian Alternative

The pronomian understands that this passage is referring to Saturday Sabbath. There are a few notable reasons why this interpretation is more favorable than the others.

First, Isaiah 58:13–14 uses the same language, and this passage is referring to the Sabbath. It is written, "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking

⁵³⁴ Ranko Stefanovic, "'The Lord's Day' of Revelation 1:10 in The Current Debate," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49, no. 2 (2011): 261–84. Stefanovic's article is excellent in its survey of all known interpretations of this passage in Church History.

your own word, then you will take delight in the Lord.” Sabbath is *בְּיְוֹם קְדְשׁוֹ*, the Lord’s. The *ἡμέρα* referred to in Revelation is also the Lord’s. While God created all days in creation, there are only two specific days referred to in Scripture as His: the Sabbath and the eschatological period of time that speaks of future judgement. Keil and Delitzsch contend that

the Sabbath, above all other institutions appointed by the law, was the true means of uniting and sustaining Israel as a religious community... but whilst it was a Mosaic institution so far as its legal appointments were concerned, it rested, in a way which reached even beyond the rite of circumcision, upon a basis much older than that of the law, being a ceremonial copy of the Sabbath of creation, which was the divine rest established by God as the true object of all motion; for God entered into Himself again after He had created the world out of Himself, that all created things might enter into Him. In order that this, the great end set before all creation, and especially before mankind, viz., entrance into the rest of God, might be secured, the keeping of the Sabbath prescribed by the law was a divine method of education, which put an end every week to the ordinary avocations of the people, with their secular influence and their tendency to fix the mind on outward things, and was designed by the strict prohibition of all work to force them to enter into themselves and occupy their minds with God and His word.⁵³⁵

Additionally, the Greek behind the phrase *τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα* (*tē kyriakē hēmera* [“the Lord’s day”]) appears only twice in the NT, the other time regarding the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20). It is debatable whether this is in fact Communion (despite there being another Greek word used for that ordinance) or is referring to the Passover, which would mean that “Kyriakos” is used to denote two appointed days, namely, Passover and Sabbath.⁵³⁶

Second, the Sabbath was set apart for the Lord; it was His day, a day intended for Him to be worshiped (Lev. 23:3; Ezek. 46:3; Luke 4:16). It was a day He created for rest and

⁵³⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 393–94. They add, “The prophet does not hedge round this commandment to keep the Sabbath with any new precepts, but merely demands for its observance full truth answering to the spirit of the letter. “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath” is equivalent to, if thou do not tread upon its holy ground with a foot occupied with its everyday work.”

⁵³⁶ Being that Jesus Christ is referred to as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8), the only holy day integrated into a title of God, it is not so inconceivable. It is the contention of some that Communion is a post-biblical tradition and that the partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice was intended to remain a part of the Passover meal. For further discussion, see excursus below.

worship, not because God needed to do either but to be emulated by His greatest of creations, humanity. This would be consistent with the purpose of the “Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10.

Stefanovic is helpful in summarizing this view:

The phrase κυριακῆ ἡμέρα (“the Lord’s day”) is not used in the LXX or elsewhere in the NT. Yet the day is reported in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue to be ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἑβδόμη σάββατα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου (“the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God,” Exod 20:10, LXX). It is also called τὸ σάββατόν σου (“your Sabbath,” Neh 9:14). The expression τὸ σάββατόν σου (“my Sabbath”) is used sixteen times in the LXX.⁷⁰ While the LXX reads ἅγια τῷ θεῷ (“holy [day] to God”) in Isa 58:13, the Hebrew text has “the holy [day] of the Lord.” In addition, this passage in Hebrew also has “my holy day.” All three Synoptics quote Jesus as saying: “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (κύριος γάρ ἐστιν τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Matt 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5). Thus it is possible that the Christians in Asia could have easily understood the expression κυριακῆ ἡμέρα as John receiving his vision on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week.⁵³⁷

Finally, the designation of this title with Sunday appears to have originated in NT apocryphal works such as the Acts of Paul (7:3), Acts of Peter (29–30), and the Gospel of Peter (9:50), in addition to mostly late second century post-canon pastoral letters (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 14).⁵³⁸ Hence, it was in the latter part of the second century when Sunday over Saturday ekklesia observation gained traction, *not* the first century AD. To make the assumption that such a train of thought was evidence at the time of Jesus’ disciples, is disingenuous. Scholarship also attests that Saturday Sabbath observance was practiced for centuries, *alongside* Sunday ekklesia services,⁵³⁹ indicating that there were many who did not concede that the post-biblical shift was justified. This tension was seemingly resolved when NT priority was given over the OT. In the wake of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, the

⁵³⁷ Stefanovic, “The Lord’s Day,” 275.

⁵³⁸ Richard Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. Don Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 223.

⁵³⁹ C. W. Dugmore, “Lord’s Day and Easter,” *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1962), 279.

book of Acts records “a genuine continuity between early Christianity and first-century Judaism... [and] early Christian believers worshiped on the Sabbath, in the context of the Diaspora synagogue, and that this was according to their custom and reverence for the Law.”⁵⁴⁰

On the Sabbath—Acts 20:7

Majority Interpretation

This verse is often used to teach that weekly assembly of believers on Sunday: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.”

This is considered the evidence that the assembling for Saturday is now on Sunday:

“This passage is the earliest recorded description of a Christian worship service, and several features are noteworthy... the believers gathered together for worship not on the Sabbath (Saturday) but on the first day of the week (Sunday)... [they] break bread—to celebrate the Agape (love feast, or a common meal[]) and communion... [in addition to] preaching [as] there was discussion and he answered their questions.”⁵⁴¹

Though the elements of a church service do not appear in the text, their presence is assumed.

⁵⁴⁰ Robert McIver, “When, Where, and Why Did the Change from Sabbath to Sunday Worship Take Place in the Early Church?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 334.

⁵⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Acts 13–28* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1996), 202–3.

Pronomian Alternative

The problem with the majority view is that the “first day of the week” commenced Saturday *evening*, when the Sabbath ended. This was the Jewish reckoning of a day. Keener rightly notes that

Paul may [have met] at this time, however, because he follows his frequent practice of meeting in a synagogue on the Sabbath (the day preceding the first day), and because he was planning to leave on the following day (the motive explicit, in fact, in 20:7)... It is, indeed, quite unlikely that Luke would have viewed the timing of the Sabbath as changed, since he employs the term about thirty times, always for the traditional Sabbath. Many of these occurrences relate to synagogue activity; but Jesus may presuppose the goodness of the Sabbath in Luke 13:16, and his followers observe it in 23:54. Jesus challenges not the timing of the Sabbath but restrictions against benevolent activity then (6:5, 9; 13:15–16; 14:3–5); his followers continue to describe the day as the “Sabbath” (Acts 13:27; 15:21).⁵⁴²

Paul’s “message until midnight” was Saturday night into Sunday morning. Furthermore, the phrase “breaking bread” in the OT was used in the context of a meal (Jer. 16:7), while in the NT, the phrase is used as evidenced in Luke 24:30,35; Acts 2:42; 20:1, 7, 11; 27:33–35; 1 Corinthians 11:20–21. None of these meals are accompanied by wine and are not conducted in a sense as Passover would be and, as such, may even be a reference to the “love feasts” in Jude 1:10, 12 (cf. 2 Pet. 2:13). This passage does not indicate that this was an ekklesia service, particularly as no other activities accompany the meal, and it is most likely a farewell meal for Paul and his companions. There is nothing in this passage that gives believers a window into a prescribed or standard ekklesia service (for the closest to that is 1 Corinthians 14:26).

⁵⁴² Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2964–65.

On the Sabbath—1 Corinthians 16:2

Majority Interpretation

1 Corinthians 16:2 states that “on the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.” This has been interpreted the same way as Acts 20:7:

[T]hose who wrote shortly after the New Testament was completed [record] the custom of believers to gather together on the first day of the week for worship, for ministry of the Word, and above all for participation in what they called the Eucharist. . . . There have been those who tell us that we are all wrong in recognizing the first day of the week as a special day for worship and praise, that we should Judaize and go back to the law of Moses for our special day. But all that has been set aside in the old economy, for in the new dispensation we find God gives special honor to a new day, the first day of the week. On this day the disciples came together to break bread. The Holy Spirit descended on this day. On this day, Christ arose from the dead, and on this day the early Christians gave their offerings for the work of the Lord.⁵⁴³

Pronomian Alternative

As has been noted, this began *Saturday evening*. This may relate to the “service” of 2 Corinthians 9:12, which, even if it were on a Sunday, was not connected to any other acts associated with worship. Such an omission causes one to pause and consider that this act was more consistent with the financial support of churches as a whole⁵⁴⁴ than congregation services. Gathering such funds would be seen as a work on Sabbath, hence it took place immediately after it had ended (i.e., sunset on Saturday). McIver succinctly states,

⁵⁴³ H. A. Ironside, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 301.

⁵⁴⁴ Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 77.

It is more likely that 1 Cor 16:1–2 should be considered evidence against any particular religious significance being attached to Sunday. After all, in 1 Cor 16:1–12 Paul is urging his readers to consider their financial situation from the previous week. This makes sense if, in fact, the Christians at Corinth were observing Sabbath as a day free of work and financial considerations (i.e., were Sabbath-observant). In that case, the first day of the week would be the natural time for them to review their finances from the previous week, a type of business activity that was totally unsuited to a day of worship. Furthermore, there is nothing in the text that suggests that Paul has in mind a meeting of the community.⁵⁴⁵

Ironically, the only group that accused such Christians of Sabbath-breaking was those who insisted the day transition to Sunday. 1 Corinthians 16:2 speaks directly to fundraising by the ekklesia at Corinth to raise funds for the Jerusalem ekklesia, which occurred every week. It is possible that it occurred after an ekklesia service on Saturday Sabbath, but it appears to have been a temporary practice rather than a standard rule imposed on all assemblies.

On the Festivals—Galatians 4:9–11

Majority Interpretation

In his epistle to the ekklesia at Galatia, Paul writes, “now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”

Interpretations vary as to what is addressed here. A common view is as follows:

⁵⁴⁵ McIver, “When, Where, and Why?” 20. Consider other passages in which Paul spoke about financial support for the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15:14–32; 2 Cor. 8:1–9:15).

It is not certain whether the ‘elemental spirits’ of verse 9 (or ‘elements’) are actually identified by Paul with these months and seasons, now being observed in Galatia, or whether such customs are only an example of slavery to these elements by ‘returning to the infants’ class’ in the religious world, which seems preferable. The days and months and years could refer to the liturgical calendar of orthodox Judaism, with its sabbaths, ‘new moons’ and ‘sabbatical years,’ and in view of the situation in Galatia, this would suit best. They could equally well of course refer to the quasi-magical observances that we know to have been rife in Ephesus and, presumably, in other parts of Asia Minor too (Acts 19:19). Heterodox Jews as well as pagans certainly practiced these arts, as we see from Acts 19:13.⁵⁴⁶

It is then inferred that Paul was making a sweeping statement that equated weakness of faith with observance of the appointed festivals.

Pronomian Alternative

The Torah, being the preserved will of God and considered by Paul as “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17), cannot be considered ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ (“weak and worthless”). Paul’s language of “turning back” (ἐπιστρέφω) is a reversal of repentance (μετάνοια); it is rejecting that which was taught at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:28–29; cf. 15:20).

The concern here is that of idolatry, of paganism, not of adherence to teachings of the Torah. The elements (στοιχεῖον), the heavenly bodies, were primarily worshiped by Gentiles, and at times, unregenerate Israel. Several “gods” are mentioned in the OT and NT canons, some of which were associated with the elements: Laban’s “household gods” (Gen. 31:19), “all the gods of Egypt” (Exod. 12:12), Molech (Lev. 18:21; Jer. 32:35), “the Baals” (Num. 25:3; Judg. 2:11–13; 3:7; 1 Kings 18:25; 19:18; 1 Sam. 7:4; Jer. 2:8; Hosea 2:16; Rom. 11:4),

⁵⁴⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians*, vol. 9, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 164–65.

Astarte (1 Kings 11:5; Judg. 2:13; and whom Easter is named after), Milcom (1 Kings 11:5), Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7), Succoth-benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Nibhaz, Tartak, Adrammelech, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings 17:30), Dagon (1 Chr. 10:10), Asherah (2 Chr. 15:16), Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14), Sakuth and Kaiwan (Amos 5:26), Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:12), Rephan (Acts 7:43), and Artemis (Acts 19:27). Furthermore, evidence of pagan teaching is a far more consistent reading of the passage, which has little reference to Torah-based teaching:

Whereas Col 2.10 is exclusively Jewish, the list in Gal 4.10 describes either a pagan or a Jewish temporal scheme. This list is completely compatible with pagan time-keeping systems. In pagan chronography, the smallest unit larger than a single day is a group of nine or ten days. In the majority of systems, these are the ten days respectively of the waxing moon, full moon, and waning moon. These three groups of ten days comprise a month of thirty days. Three months make one of the four seasons, and four seasons make a year. The years are then grouped into Olympiads of four years or eras of varying lengths. When Paul refers to days, months, seasons, and years in Gal 4.10, he lists categories most characteristic of a pagan time-keeping system... The immediate context of Gal 4.10 argues for the pagan character of this list. In 4.8, Paul mentions the former pagan life of the Galatian Christians. In 4.9, he asks them how they can desire their former life again. He then proposes their observance of the time-keeping scheme in 4.10 as a demonstrative proof of their reversion to their old life. Considering only the immediate context of Gal 4.10, the list must be understood as a pagan temporal scheme.⁵⁴⁷

Again, Paul is not distancing himself from the Torah or considering it abrogated; his concern is solely focused on the pagan teachings of the world, outside of Torah. The are seen as a theological danger both outside of the ekklesia and inside the ekklesia. Just as idols were held onto by Rachel in her new life (Genesis 31:32), a connection to her pagan past, so to were there those among Paul who turned back to their old ways and kept alive the practises associated with the false gods (alongside their belief in God). Paul would have none of it for such a syncretism was blasphemous.

⁵⁴⁷ Troy Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4.10 and Col 2.16," *New Testament Studies* 42, no. 1 (1996): 111–13.

Case Study: Contending for Passover over Communion in 1 Corinthians

While much of what has been written about the structure of the Passover meal appears post-Scripture,⁵⁴⁸ most scholars agree that there were four cups consumed throughout.⁵⁴⁹ The fourth to fifth century Jerusalem Talmud explains the nature of each cup:

Why do we have four cups of wine? R. Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Benayah, this refers to four stages in the redemption... “I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt.” Even if He had left us in Egypt to be slaves, He would have ceased the burdensome yoke. For this alone we would have been grateful to Him and therefore we drink the first cup. “I will deliver you from their slavery.” We drink the cup of salvation for he delivered us completely from serving them. “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm....” Because he confused them and crushed them on our behalf so that they could no longer afflict us, we drink the third cup. “I will take you....” The greatest aspect of the redemption is that He brought us near to Him and granted us also spiritual redemption. For this we raise the fourth cup.⁵⁵⁰

Centuries later, the prophecy of Jeremiah (31:31) would begin its fulfillment, during the Passover meal and through Jesus Christ, who renewed its meaning in the Gospel of Luke (22:14–23). While one cannot be dogmatic about this interpretation of the cups and whether this understanding was present during the first century, it does appear to align with the events documented in the gospels, in particular when Jesus redemptively attributes His forthcoming sacrifice to the third cup (cf. Luke 22:20). The Passover and its meal were one of the most important of “LORD’S appointed times which [one] shall proclaim as holy convocations— [His] appointed times” (Lev. 23:2) and one of the three major pilgrimage festivals that all

⁵⁴⁸ Space does not permit further study, but there are some scholars that question the overlapping nature and purpose of the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread and whether they are separate or the same. To read a preliminary study, see: Tamara Prosic, “Origin of Passover,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1999): 78–94.

⁵⁴⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper & Lord’s Supper* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1980), 21–23, 179.

⁵⁵⁰ Quoted from Eliyahu Kitov’s *The Book of Our Heritage* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 1988), 2.269. One appreciates Tim Hegg sourcing this.

Israel-born believers were expected to attend and practice (Exod. 23:14–17), which even included Gentiles (Exod. 12:43–47; cf. the “mixed multitude” of Exodus 12:38).

This event was indeed a Passover meal.⁵⁵¹ There are scholars who contend that it was not. Throntveit helpfully summarizes the cases favoring Passover:

[1] The explicit statements in the synoptic Gospels that this was the case... [2] The meal took place at night as commanded for the Passover... [3] The participants reclined instead of the normal mealtime posture of sitting... [4] A dish preceded the breaking of bread... [5] Red wine was drunk, as prescribed for Passover... [6] The meal ended with a hymn, which points to the Hallel at the end of the Passover meal... [7] After the meal Jesus went to Gethsemane, not to Bethany. Bethany was outside the area to which one might go on Passover night, but Gethsemane was not... [8] The words of institution remind us that the presider at the seder explained its significance... [9] The words, “to give something to the poor” (John 13:29) may point to a giving of alms... [and 10] The arguments against it may all be fairly disputed.”⁵⁵²

This frames the contention that the Passover meal was front and center in the mind of Jesus and that His actions were within that context, not that of establishing a new festival.

An Alternative Interpretation: The Annual “Passover Supper” Remains

In Christendom, this Jesus’ last Passover meal (Matt. 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–30) became known as the “Lord’s Supper” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23–26) and on very rare occasions, the “breaking of bread” (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:16–17).⁵⁵³ It is taught that it was instituted

⁵⁵¹ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 55–75.

⁵⁵² Mark A. Throntveit, “The Lord’s Supper as New Testament, Not New Passover,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1997): 276–77. Throntveit does list the arguments against, but few are strong in their contention. Additionally, he appears frustrated in the perceived inability to harmonize the “synoptic” gospels with John’s gospel, particularly this meal (and forthcoming crucifixion), but this is not as difficult as scholarship contends. The “Passover Hypothesis” answers this. Tim Hegg, “The Chronology of the Crucifixion: A Comparison of the Gospel Accounts,” *TorahResource*, accessed July 24, 2022, <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/chronology-of-the-crucifixion.pdf>; Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015).

⁵⁵³ Interestingly, Hyperdispensationalists, Quakers, and the Salvation Army do not practice it.

by Jesus and *replaced* Passover, being an act of remembrance in which believers are to interpret the bread and wine as symbolically representing Jesus' body and blood being sacrificed in order to pay for their sins, commemorating their liberation from the slavery of sin. Allison summarizes the standard definition of the ordinance as

the Lord's Supper, also referred to as (Holy) Communion (1 Cor 10:16–17), the Eucharist (Greek *eucharistia* = thanksgiving), the breaking of bread (Matt 26:26; 1 Cor 11:24), and other names. Scripture addresses this rite in only two places: Jesus's institution at his last supper (Matt 26:26–29 and parallels) and Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians (10:14–22; 11:17–34). In the early church, only baptized believers in proper relationship to Christ could participate in this ordinance, which was celebrated weekly.⁵⁵⁴

In studying the background to this passage, one sees a radical substitution of the Passover festival (and its meal) with the “Lord's Supper.” It is contended by most scholars, theologians, and pastors that the ceremonial laws are no longer operative in the life of a believer and that Paul *adopted the language* of the Passover meal and applied it to newly instituted practice (cf. 1 Cor. 5:8), connecting it with the New (Renewed) Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31.⁵⁵⁵ Christendom interpretatively believes that most of the OT laws and practices are no longer necessary in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection and that in “fulfilling” the Law, He abrogated most (if not all) of it. Senn's comment summarizes the predominant view:

The annual reactualization of the Exodus is not the same for Christians as it is for Jews. The passover of Christ from death to life fulfills all the types of redemption. Christians experience the Exodus and the crossing of the sea by conversion from the old life to the new in the waters of baptism. The Christian Passover is not a night spent in eating and drinking, but in fasting and meditation on the mighty acts of God in salvation history, culminating in the announcement of the resurrection and the celebration of baptism. The message

⁵⁵⁴ Gregg A. Allison, “The Ordinances of the Church,” *The Gospel Coalition* (n.d.), accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-ordinances-of-the-church/>.

⁵⁵⁵ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 76–80, 147.

of Easter morning is not just that Christ is risen from the dead but “If ye then be risen *with* Christ, seek those things which are above” (Col 3:1). The feast which breaks the fast is celebrated on the morning of an anticipated new creation. The fullness of the paschal mystery is not experienced in an ersatz Seder meal, no matter how sincerely celebrated; it is experienced by entering into the eschatological passage rehearsed by the Easter Vigil and actualized in the celebration of holy baptism and the eucharistic meal.⁵⁵⁶

While pronomian thinking has yet to formulate an official position, its adherence to the festivals favors a continuity of the Passover meal rather than understanding it as a newly created ordinance in the first century AD.⁵⁵⁷

The first argument *surrounds the description of the meal in 1 Corinthians 5:8*. While Paul was known to use the language of the Temple when describing believers (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:19),⁵⁵⁸ he would always speak plainly regarding the festivals. He spoke about the festival of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6) and Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9) as literal and still practiced by himself.⁵⁵⁹ Patterson rightly notes that “Paul’s reference appears to be not a text, but his own actual experiences of celebrating the Passover.”⁵⁶⁰ Any notion of

⁵⁵⁶ Frank C. Senn, “The Lord’s Supper, Not the Passover Seder,” *Worship* 60, no. 4 (1986): 368.

⁵⁵⁷ The term ordinance itself, while universally used, is difficult to define. Ryrie notes the difficulty in defining ordinances *scripturally*, saying many “restrict the ordinances to those ordered by Christ to be administered in the church [... By] this kind of definition baptism and the Lord’s Supper are clearly ordinances, though foot-washing might also be... [If] an ordinance may be more broadly conceived (yet within the parameters of being God-ordained and related to the church) then marriage and the rite of praying for the sick... might also be considered ordinances... [as marriage] was God-ordained and symbolizes the important relationship between Christ and the church, and praying for the sick involves the church through its elders.” See: Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Faith* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999), 487. Allison defines their natures as “infus[ing] grace *ex opere operato* (by their administration) into the people of God[,] are means of grace by which God confers the benefits of salvation to his people[, and] symbolize the faith and obedience of the people of God.” See: Gregg A. Allison, “The Ordinances of the Church,” *The Gospel Coalition* (n.d.), accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-ordinances-of-the-church/>. While seemingly helpful, this cannot be so succinctly extracted from the Scriptures.

⁵⁵⁸ Believers are likened to the Temple, they do not replace it. Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul*, 121–22.

⁵⁵⁹ Dumm tries his hardest to see both continuity and discontinuity in the Passover and “Eucharist.” He writes: “On its deepest symbolic level, the Passover ritual has been for Israel an annual opportunity to renew the decision of faith by which they originally put behind them the illusion of safety in a familiar past and moved resolutely into the unknown future of God’s mystery and promise. The Christian eucharist certainly has retained and reaffirmed this primordial meaning. Jesus did not flee from Gethsemane but embraced his destiny and freely entered the “wilderness” of the Calvary experience beyond which he discovered the wondrous promised land of resurrection life.” See: Demetrius R. Dumm, “Passover and Eucharist,” *Worship* 61, no. 3 (1987): 207.

supersessionism is foreign to his mindset and choice of words. Patterson states earlier that “[t]he strength of Passover imagery occurs not merely in its explicit use, but in its resonance with all of the cultic metaphors and with language related to some of their entailments, such as eating, freedom and slavery, covenant, cleanness, belonging, holiness, and community.”⁵⁶¹ Shifting the language of a perpetual festival to that of a newly created meal would be as inconsistent logic as shifting the language of circumcision to that of a newly created practice such as “infant baptism”.

The second argument is that 1 Corinthians 11:24–26 speaks not of an insinuation of repetition but in accordance with the annual nature of the Passover meal. While many early post-Scripture writings detail the practice of the “Lord’s Supper” with great frequency, there are exceptions. The phrase “[t]his cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:25) can be read so as to denote that, as often as you drink the Passover wine, do so in remembrance of the Messiah. This was not a licence to practice the Passover meal multiple times a year (though there was scriptural concession to celebrate a second Passover under a particular circumstance; Num. 9:9–12).⁵⁶² Likewise, remembrance was an expected part of the Passover meal (Exod. 12:26–27; cf. 12:14). That Jesus attributes remembrance of Himself and what He has done, enlarging the festival’s purpose, does not change the frequency of its practice by the people of God. Remembrance is

⁵⁶⁰ Jane Lancaster Patterson, *Keeping the Feast: Metaphors of Sacrifice in 1 Corinthians and Philippians* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 131.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁶² While not advocating for the Passover meal to remain instead of the “Lord’s Supper,” DeHann argues “by separating the sacrament of communion from a meal diminishes its true meaning and turns a celebration into a ritual[;] If we are to enjoy communion the way God intended, we need to make it part of a meal, not as a separate ceremony.” He adds that “If you want to disassociate the phrase ‘as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup’ from the annual practice of Passover, then the only interpretation indicates every time you have a meal. That means we should practice communion each time we sit down to eat. That’s three times a day. And if we practice communion that often, we run the risk of it becoming a meaningless ritual much like the obligatory prayers we say before we eat. However, since the setting was Passover and Passover is an annual event, it’s likely that Jesus intended for us to celebrate communion once a year, [as] an annual holiday.” See: Peter DeHaan, “Why We Shouldn’t Celebrate Communion at Church,” *PeterDeHaan.com*, last modified September 13, 2023, <https://www.peterdehaan.com/christianity/celebrate-communion-the-right-way/>.

understood as loyalty, not chronology. Patterson echoes similar sentiments: “Appropriate proclamation of the death of this Christ occurs precisely in *how* the community eats and drinks together (11:26), and whether or not all of their actions are “for” (ὕπερ) one another... the capstone is set on this argument when Paul says, within his “hymn” to love in chapter 13, that “Love is *not* puffed up” (οὐ φυσιοῦται, 13:4)[;] Love, spelled out in all of its actions, perfectly characterizes the unleavened community.” The speculation of 1 Corinthians 13 being hymnal in nature connects the Corinthian passage with the Hallel psalms sung at Passover (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).⁵⁶³ Furthermore, Luke 22 refers to Passover (πάσχα pascha) six times. No other festival is established or substituted with another in this passage. Jesus desired to celebrate “this” (Luke 22:15) Passover with His disciples, and it is this festival, with its elements of wine (22:17) and bread (22:19), that Jesus states believers are to do “this in remembrance of Me.” It is “this” (οὗτος hoytos) meal, this festival, that believers are to remember, for Jesus enlarged its meaning and purpose. No part of it is to be extracted to create a replacement festival, a superseding of the sacred. It is no surprise that one reads parallels with this chapter and Exodus 12 in the Septuagint translation, in which one reads of the origins of Passover. Here one finds the word “this” (οὗτος hoytos) relating to Passover referenced several times (12:14, 17, 24, 25, 26, 42, 43, 47). What Jesus is calling believers to remember is the meaning integrated into this festival which is to remain as an annual practice.⁵⁶⁴ Conybeare and Howson echo these sentiments when they write that

if we take “as ye are unleavened” in a metaphorical sense, it is scarcely consistent with the previous “cast out the old leaven”; for the passage would then amount to saying “Be free from leaven (metaphorically)”; whereas, on the other view, St. Paul says, “Be free from leaven (metaphorically) as you are free from leaven (literally).” There seems no difficulty in supposing the

⁵⁶³ Jane Lancaster Patterson, *Keeping the Feast: Metaphors of Sacrifice in 1 Corinthians and Philippians* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 154.

⁵⁶⁴ It is interesting that the Aramaic Bible in Plain English translation renders 1 Corinthians 11:25 as “So after they had dined, he also gave the cup, and he said, “This cup is The New Covenant in my blood. You shall be so doing every time that you drink for my Memorial.”

Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven in the love-feasts... and we see that St. Paul still observed the “days of unleavened bread” at this period of his life, from Acts [20:]6.⁵⁶⁵

The third argument is that *the judgement of 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 aligns with Numbers 9:13*. Paul notes that the believer who “eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord... [and] eats and drinks judgment to himself.” This language is similar to the judgement that befalls the believers who do not take the Passover seriously. Moses writes, “the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the Lord at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin” (Num. 9:13). Both individuals are approaching the appointed time in an unworthy manner, in a state in which they have not examined themselves, and to do so is considered sinful. Likewise, the introspection of 1 Corinthians 11:28 is echoed by Philo of Alexandria, who notes that in practicing the Passover, “the whole life of a good person is the equivalent of a feast (ἑορτή) held by one who has expelled grief and fear and desire and the other passions and maladies of the soul” (Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.157).⁵⁶⁶

The fourth argument is that the Passover was not replaced by the “Last Supper,” rather, *Jesus enlarged the purpose and meaning of the festival*.⁵⁶⁷ The symbolic meanings attributed to the bread and wine were to be embedded in the annual meal. Sichel perfectly states this view:

Christ takes each one of these Old Covenant sacraments, and provides them with their final and completed meaning. Instead of abolishing them, he takes

⁵⁶⁵ William Conybeare and John Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Company, 1978), 389–90.

⁵⁶⁶ Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 135.

⁵⁶⁷ Alex Jacob, *The Case for Enlargement Theology* (Croydon, UK: Glory to Glory Publications, 2010).

each *Jewish* rite and provides it with the fullness that God had always intended it to have. This corresponds to the argument of the writer of Hebrews. “Hebrews claims for itself the image of a *liturgy*, a symbolic action in the sacred sphere: more particularly, a *covenant-renewal rite*, of which the book’s words comprise a long prophetic exhortation . . . a reinterpretation of the symbolism of the old covenant, through a *reapplication* of its symbols in the light of Christ.” . . . The early Jewish believers did not understand the Old Covenant abolished, and they did not see the sacraments instituted by Christ as *replacements* of the sacraments so long celebrated. In Paul’s discussion of the Eucharist, he references a *specific* bread and cup, “For whenever you eat *this* bread and drink *this* cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV). The implication is that the early believers continued to understand the Eucharist in the framework of Passover.⁵⁶⁸

Jesus (and His disciples) did not form a new religion but rather renewed the foundations of what the OT taught and enlarged the believer’s understanding of it in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as prophesied in Jeremiah 31.

The fifth and final argument is that *there is a distinction between meals and festival meals (i.e., banquets)*. 1 Cor. 11:20–22 and 33–34 make clear that there is a distinction between a meal in a general sense and the meal attached to the Passover. Paul is not stating in these verses that food is not a part of the practice of remembering Jesus in the partaking of bread and wine, but that its presence in the Passover meal as a whole enshrines the entire meal as holy and thus, set apart from other, normal meals. There are meals as a family, meals connected to festivals, and meals as a part of fellowship according to Scripture. The latter are referred to as “love feasts” (Jude 1:10, 12; ἀγάπη agápē) and sometimes referred to as “breaking bread” (Acts 2:42, 46; cf. Jer. 16:7).⁵⁶⁹

In noting the word “supper” in the passage (1 Cor. 11:20–21, 25), one is to understand that Jesus’ enlarged meaning to the bread and wine taken in the third stage of the evening

⁵⁶⁸ Matthew S. Sichel, “Sacraments Reimagined: Fulfillment, Continuity and the New Israel,” *Evangelical Journal* 34, no. 1 (2016): 13.

⁵⁶⁹ See further comments: Tim Hegg, “Investigation of the Lord’s Table—Passover or Communion?” 10–14, *TorahResource*, accessed July 24, 2022, <https://tr-pdf.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/investigation-into-the-lords-supper.pdf>.

indicate that it was a part of a larger meal, namely, a banquet. It was not a brief gathering in which bread and wine were only taken and labeled a “supper”; it was part of a larger consumption of food and wine, the Passover meal. While not advocating for the continuance of the Passover meal over the Lord’s Supper, McGowan notes that *deipnon* (“banquet” in Greek), “was an evening meal with certain expected formalities and tradition of proper conduct... [they were] purposeful events, held often and but nonetheless distinguished from merely incidental eating... [t]hey were also an integral part of Greco-Roman (including Jewish) sacrifices, since the flesh of animal victims were often consumed straight after ritual slaughter in a festive atmosphere.”⁵⁷⁰ This speaks directly to the Passover and by extension, other “appointed times” (Lev. 23:2). That they were at evening (Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3) and insisted on the consumption of the entire eaten meal (Exod. 12:11), further connects 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 with Passover.⁵⁷¹

Summary

The appointed festivals of God are perpetual convocations that are to be practiced by His redeemed nation, Jew and Gentile. They not only strengthen communal life within the ekklesia of God, separating believers from the pagan nations of the world that seek to stunt sanctification, but they also enshrine a standard of holiness that does not change with time. To celebrate and worship God, remembering His works among His redeemed, the contemporary Christian’s spiritual ancestors, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be

⁵⁷⁰ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 201), 20.

⁵⁷¹ McGowan makes a profound statement when he writes that the Lord’s Supper is not used “as a way of talking about the Eucharist itself until the fourth century and the term can be used with a certain holy irony; even then, it is not a name so much as an epithet for the liturgical Eucharist... the tendency of modern scholars to imagine that Paul reflects some wider usage—for which there is no evidence at all—reminds us how influential our own liturgical experience can be in imagining that of the past.” *Ibid.*, 34.

considered a sinful yoke. The practice of godly festivals, a command clearly given to both redeemed Jews and Gentiles in the Scriptures, was intended for each and every generation. It is exegetically difficult to contend that God initiated, abolished, and then intended to reinitiate the appointed festivals; they either were never intended to be permanent in reflecting the holy standard of God or are to be one of many ongoing means of sanctification for His redeemed people that make them distinct and separate from the world and its nations. The appointed festivals are divine appointments on a cosmic calendar that are not to be changed or substituted by the hand of those created by the God who established their practice for His ekklesia before the foundation of the world.

Conclusion: The Law of YHWH Restores the Soul

Pronomianism is an accurate and credible methodology that contends redeemed Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ are to abide by the commanded instructions of God as taught throughout the entirety of Scripture and intended for both ongoing and universal application as a means of sanctification. The Law is not to be interpreted as fulfilled so as to be rendered no longer necessary but rather one of the primary means of sanctification in which believers are made holy. Holiness is an unchanging attribute; God does not change, for He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This is an essential understanding of His character and how he distinguishes the differences between that which is holy and unholy. Likewise, His standard for holiness cannot change, for if it does, it leaves ajar a theological door, and there is no basis to contend for the unchanging nature of any doctrinal position an individual, church, or denomination stands upon.

As mentioned in the introduction, the theological conclusions pertaining to the Law are varied and as fragmented as the answers given by pastor and scholar alike as to *how* and *why* commanded instructions of God have changed. It is so deeply ingrained in believers today that grace has rendered the Law obsolete, that reconsidering the Law's place in the life of a believer is too great a thought to consider. The spectrum of mainstream Christianity approaches the Law as an antinomian or with nomophobia. Yet, believers are called to read and study *all* Scripture. According to the Scriptures themselves, they are to be meditated on daily (Josh. 1:8), to be treasured more than food (Job 23:12), to be applied, celebrated, and loved (Ps. 119), and to be studied, personally and with brethren (Acts 2:42). Reading and studying the Scriptures, *including the Law*, ensures we come to know God and His doctrinal will. It ensures knowing how to live *for* God. It ensures one avoids biblical illiteracy. It ensures memorization and audibleness. It ensures expository listening. It ensures biblical

discernment. It ensures qualified leadership in the ekklesia. It ensures one does not waste time reading and studying irrelevant literature. Finally, it ensures one learns about the world scripturally. There is no such thing as a “New Testament Christian” or a “Red Letter Christian”; a Christian is to read, study, believe, and practice the Scriptures, from Genesis all the way to the book of Revelation.

This dissertation is an introduction; its topic warrants further discussion and study. It is not a definitive defence. It is not an exhaustive survey of Scripture and extrabiblical literature, nor has it cited the growing body of scholarship that contends that the Law is no longer relevant to the contemporary believer. Furthermore, pronomianism directly impacts one’s understanding of the doctrines of holiness and works in addition to ecclesiology and the New (Renewed) Covenant. Each of these were not fully covered in the dissertation but must be explored in their relation to pronomianism, for their understanding will evolve in light of affirming that the Law remains active in the life of a believer today.

As stated in chapter two, Pronomianism is a pro-Torah hermeneutic that theologically approaches all sixty-six books of the Scripture as a unified canon (i.e., the completed Torah) and as authoritative, infallible, inspired, and inerrant in nature, while teaching that practical application of its divinely commanded instructions are a means of sanctification in the life of a redeemed believer. As Scripture is its own interpreter, passages are interpreted according to context, culture, grammar, literature, and history, as affirmed by the authorship of the Holy Spirit, while understanding the immutability of Scripture extends to God’s breathed out words that have been preserved for all redeemed generations. Pronomianism affirms that abiding in the commanded instructions of God that were given to the eternal ekklesia of God has no bearing on salvation nor contributes to justification, but is evidence of a saved individual and the fruit of their walk with God. It is love in action and a sanctifying component of the work of the Holy Spirit in conforming the believer into the image of God

the Son, and it is operative in the life of believers since its codification at Sinai. These commandments have never been tripartite in nature and therefore are unable to be labeled as ceremonial, civil, or moral, for all are inherently moral in their nature. Pronomianism insists that as God is immutable, so too is His Word, and His words were never to be abolished or interpreted so as to abrogate any part of His lawful commandments, all of which were intended for Jew and Gentile, were never ethnocentric in nature and, while having a primary interpretation, can be applied literally or non-literally (principally and paradigmatically).

The breath of God does not change, nor does His God-breathed Scripture. No command of God saves His people, but all commandments of God sanctify His people.

**Appendix 1:
A Pronomian Interpretation of Matthew 5:17–20**

In anticipation of the prophesied Messiah, Israel consulted the Scriptures. It was the source of divine knowledge, the preserved will of God. In cultivating their path of sanctification and deepening their understanding of their Lord and Saviour, the redeemed spent time reading, mediating, and applying what they heard and read in the Scriptures. Messiah was coming, and they depended on the Scriptures being true and unchanging. With the arrival of Jesus, the Word made flesh, the prophecies of Scripture were coming true before the eyes of Israel. In his first spiritual battle with the forces of darkness during His earthly ministry, Jesus appealed to the Torah against Satan (Matt. 4:1–11). His adversary tried to misinterpret it, but Jesus corrected Satan’s degrading view. Each day and with each encounter, Jesus the Messiah was living life in accordance with the laws preserved in the Torah. Then, prior to His world-changing sermon on a small mount north of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, one that exegetically expounded on the Torah itself, Jesus made the following statement:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 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. 5:17–20).

Here, Jesus clearly states He has not come to abolish (καταλύω) the Torah but fulfill (πληρώω) it. How this is defined and understood, historically, has a significant impact on how believers approach and read the OT canon, in particular, the laws of God.⁵⁷²

It is important in establishing pronomianism as an interpretation worthy of contention and one that attests of the ongoing nature of all Torah to explore this key passage regarding Jesus and Torah that shapes much of the debate discussing its nature and purpose.

Majority Interpretation

Most of Church history, as evidenced in Chapter 1, has interpreted Matthew 5:17–20 as meaning that Jesus did not come to abolish the Torah once He arrived on earth and started His ministry but rather He sought to fulfill the Torah, abiding by each and every instruction of God, rendering its place and purpose in the life of believers as no longer necessary. Dispensationalist Arnold Fruchtenbaum advocates that “[t]he Mosaic Covenant was the basis for the Dispensation of Law[; i]t was the one Jewish covenant that was conditional and ultimately came to an end with the death of the Messiah... Hence, the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect.”⁵⁷³ He later adds, “[t]he clear-cut teaching of the New Testament is that the Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative with the death of the Messiah; in other words, the law in its entirety no longer has authority over any individual.”⁵⁷⁴ This view sees that none of the OT laws found in the Torah are applicable today and serve only as a teaching lesson to believers of subsequent generations. Some may use them as moral guides, but the believer is to focus exclusively on those laws taught in the NT. Covenantalists hold to the

⁵⁷² By extension, this is shaped also by one’s understanding of “Israel” and ecclesiology as a whole.

⁵⁷³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Word of God: Its Nature and Content* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2014), 91.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

position that Jesus fulfilled the law by His perfect obedience, “by performing the saving acts that the law’s sacrifices foreshadow and require [in addition to] teaching the law in a way that brings out its true sense.”⁵⁷⁵ Practically, this results in only the moral laws being ongoing in nature; all that is ceremonial and civil has ended. The tension is resolved in that Jesus fulfilled the Torah in the sense that He completed it so that it would no longer be practiced by His followers.

Pronomian Alternative

Pronomianism does not interpret the Torah coming to end (in part or in its entirety) like a contract being fulfilled but understands it as a manual that has been written and evidenced in the life of its instructor who then expects it to be emulated and taught by their students, from one redeemed generation to the next. One that will result in good works, i.e., fruit (Matt. 7:15–20; cf. James 2:14–26). Turner is helpful in setting the stage for how one must approach the passage:

if Jesus has come simply to carry out what Moses said, his finality is compromised, continuity is overemphasized, and the six contrasts of 5:21–48 are rendered superfluous. On the other hand, the notion that Jesus completes the law overstates discontinuity and is tantamount to saying he has come to abolish the law. It seems clear that there is an essential continuity of the teaching and mission of Jesus with the redemptive ethical intent of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁷⁶

Part of the challenge lies in the mainstream teaching that starts with the predisposition that the Torah is no longer relevant or was primarily for Israel, not the Church. Only the moral aspect of the law is to remain in the life of the believer today. Jesus fulfilled the Torah so that

⁵⁷⁵ *ESV Expository Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, vol. 8 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 120.

⁵⁷⁶ David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 157.

believers do not have to, rendering it inoperative. This faulty premise rests solely on the man-made tradition that the Torah is to be understood in a tripartite manner (ceremonial, civil, and moral laws). As explored in Chapter 1, this model is not only foreign to Scripture but was integrated after the events of the first century AD. No such division exists in Scripture. The belief that only the OT laws that appear in the NT are to be acknowledged is self-defeating. For, “this understanding does not take seriously enough the words of Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount about the abiding nature of all God’s law... [n]or does this understanding reckon with the easy manner in which the New Testament quotes and alludes to many aspects of the Old Testament law.”⁵⁷⁷ There are many laws and ethical principles from the OT that are not repeated in the NT. The laws of God, which are anchored in His holiness, do not change from generation to generation or simply cease. The sequence of the structure is precise:

1. Prohibition: Do not think that Jesus has come to abolish the law (5:17a).
2. Antithetical clarification: Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfill (5:17b).
3. Explanation 1: Even the smallest parts of the law are permanently valid (5:18).
4. Implication: Spiritual status is measured by conformity to the law (5:19).⁵⁷⁸

The literary history of the word and concept “abolish” in Jewish literature guides one’s understanding of its intended use and how it was expositively heard by its original audience. The word abolish (καταλύω) comes “from *kata*: intens., and *argeō*: to be inactive, which is from *a*: neg. and *ergon*: work [meaning, t]o abrogate, to make disappear, to destroy; also transl.: to annul.”⁵⁷⁹ In its basic sense it can mean to destroy (e.g., Mark 14:58), frustrate

⁵⁷⁷ Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord: God’s Alternative to Legalism and Moralism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 313.

⁵⁷⁸ Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 162.

⁵⁷⁹ E. Richard Pigeon, *AMG’s Comprehensive Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2014), 6.

(e.g., Acts 5:38–39), invalidate (e.g., Matt. 5:17), and lodge or rest (e.g., Luke 2:7, 9:12).⁵⁸⁰

To contextualize it as discussion of the Torah itself is to disavow the consideration that such descriptors are used; an inactive state of being and annulment is the opposite of what the Scripture states of itself (Heb. 4:14; John 10:35). There is no indication in the Greek that to πληρώω something, any part thereafter would be rendered καταλύω.⁵⁸¹

Historically, the word was associated with the Maccabean War. The audience of Jesus and His disciples were well aware of the events and their long-lasting effect as preserved in Maccabean literature. In 2 Maccabees, Jason, subservient to Antiochus IV Epiphanes in his quest for the priesthood filled by his brother Onias, found opposition from those loyal to God and His Torah, who “reestablished the laws that were about to be abolished” (2 Maccabees 2:22; cf. 4:9–11). In 4 Maccabees 4:24, Antiochus IV Epiphanes “had not been able in any way to put an end [καταλύω] to the people’s observance of the law” and in 4 Maccabees 5:33, believers refuse to “overthrow [καταλύω] the ancestral law” in accordance with Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ decrees, the “tyrant who wished to destroy [καταλύω] the way of life of the Hebrews” (4 Maccabees 17:9). This memory, of one entering Jerusalem who sought to change the nation’s way of life by attacking the Torah itself, would have resulted in many subsequent generations being hostile to any others who would seek to undermine the laws of God. That Jesus would amend or change the Torah, rendering any part of it καταλύω, would be repeating a dark chapter in the history of Israel.⁵⁸² Thiessen rightly comments that the Maccabean writers

⁵⁸⁰ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 544.

⁵⁸¹ The word is found in other ancient Greek literature, denoting being demolished or being thrown down: Euripides, *The Trojan Women* 819, Herodian *Roman History* 8.4.4, Isocrates *Panegyricus* 55, and possibly Old Oligarch’s *Respublica Atheniensium* 1.13. Variations of καταλύω are also found in Isocrates *De bigis* 40.8–9 (καταλύσαι; destroy) and *In Lochitem* 10.2–4 (καταλυθεῖσαν; abolish), and in Plutarchus *Timoleon* 39.5 (καταλύσας; deprive).

view this attack on circumcision, Sabbath, Temple cult, and food laws as an attack on the Jewish or Hebrew πολιτεία, and upon Jewish ancestral customs. It is important to note that, according to each of these three authors, it was a Jewish group that was closely involved in the abolishment of the Jewish law in an attempt at Hellenization (2 Macc 4,7–15; 4 Macc 4,15–21; *A.J.* 12.240–256; 12.362–66 [cf. also 1 Macc 1,11–15]) 14. Divine wrath, in the form of the persecution, was the consequence of this law abolishment.⁵⁸³

The literary history of the word and concept “fulfill” in Jewish literature further guides our understanding of its intended use and how it was expositoryly heard by its original audience. The word fulfill (πληρόω) means “[t]o make full, to accomplish, to realize; also transl., to complete, to end, to finish, to be full, to make full, to come full, to come fully, to pass.”⁵⁸⁴ Mark 1:15, Luke 24:44, John 3:39, and Acts 13:52 all use the word to indicate an initial act with ongoing application or future completion. However, further clarity is necessary as some of these phrases equate with the goal of abolish (καταλύω). Jesus cannot have intended to make a contradictory statement. Hegg provides a helpful answer to the tension found in the passage:

Perhaps the best clue to the meaning of “fulfill” in this saying of Messiah is the parallelism that goes on in verse 19.20 In the first clause the verbs λύω (luo, “loose, destroy”) and διδάσκω (“teach, instruct”) are paralleled in the second clause by the verbs ποιέω (“do”) and διδάσκω (“teach, instruct”). What seems apparent in this parallel structure is the simple definition (in terms of opposites) of “annul” as “not doing.” Conversely, to “do” the commandments (and thus to teach others to do them too) would be the opposite of “annulling” them and would thus be to “fulfill” them. It would seem probable from this analogy that what Yeshua is indicating in His words of verse 17 is simply that He did not come to destroy the commandments but rather to do them. This fits with the active aspect of the verb as over against the more prevalent passive

⁵⁸² Josephus recounts the events of the Maccabean War using the exact same Greek word for “abolish” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.364, 15.41; *Wars of the Jews* 1.34), in addition to his commentary on the Jewish Revolt.

⁵⁸³ Matthew Thiessen, “Abolishers of the Law in Early Judaism and Matthew 5,17–20,” *Biblica* 93, no. 4 (2012): 548. This article is exceptional in its survey of καταλύω in ancient Jewish literature and its challenge of the majority interpretation.

⁵⁸⁴ Pigeon, *AMG’s Comprehensive Dictionary*, 435.

usage. Theologically, this would answer to the “first Adam / last Adam” motif found in Paul. To put it simply, the structure of the paragraph, especially verse 19, suggests that what Yeshua meant by “fulfilling” in verse 17 was “doing.”⁵⁸⁵

Keener echoes this thinking, for in the Gospel of Matthew, “*Jesus’ language clearly affirms his commitment to the law of Moses... [t]o ‘fulfill’ God’s law was to ‘confirm’ it by obedience and demonstrating that one’s teaching accorded with it... [Matthew’s] Jesus illustrates the eternity of God’s law... [and] declares that nothing will pass from the law ‘until all is accomplished’ (5:18), meaning until the consummation of the kingdom, when heaven and earth pass away (24:34–45; cf. Jer. 31:35–37; Ps–Philo 11:5; Sib. Or. 3:570–72).*”⁵⁸⁶ As explored in Appendix 3, Scripture is immutable and not subject to a change that would in any way abolish its living nature. Fulfilling, then, cannot be considered a once and for all action; it is active and ongoing.

Taking this all into consideration, Luz is helpful in summarizing various approaches to this passage, noting that both terms (abolish and fulfill) can relate to either Jesus’ teaching or life. He writes,

If we relate καταλύω and πληρώω to Jesus’ teaching, we can go further and ask whether Jesus’ teaching does or does not change something in the law. If Jesus makes no changes in the law, πληρώω may mean [1] “to emphasize it in its true meaning,” “to express it completely.” ...if, however, Jesus’ fulfilling changes the law itself, we could understand πληρώω either quantitatively in the sense of [2] “to add,” “to complement” (something that is missing) or qualitatively in the sense of [3] “to finish,” “to make perfect.”⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Tim Hegg, “Matthew 5:17–20 Yeshua’s View of the Law Some Preliminary Questions & Answers,” *TorahResource*, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/Matthew%205.17-20.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁶ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Augsburg Press, 1999), 177–78.

⁵⁸⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), 214.

This challenges a fulfillment of the Torah that renders it inoperative, being the mainstream position of Christianity. The first approach is consistent with Jesus' "you have heard that it was said" statements that come directly after this world-changing passage. If one prefers the second approach, Jesus' "change" is in reality an enlargement of what has been stated and, rather than being inoperative, "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). A fulfillment that renders the Torah inoperative is antithetical to the declaration of Jesus. It is a contradiction created by man, not God. Furthermore, as Luz convincingly adds,

If we relate καταλύω and πληρώω to Jesus' activity, πληρώω can mean either that Jesus [4] "fulfills" the requirements of the law and prophets in his life with his obedience, that is, that he keeps the law... or we can also [5] think of Jesus' death and resurrection: with his death and resurrection Jesus has "fulfilled" the law and thus brought it to its goal and end.⁵⁸⁸

Hence, of five possible interpretations, only *one* renders the Law inoperative and has become the position of mainstream Christianity. In choosing the fourth option, Luz does not follow the logical conclusion of pronomian practice, for he remarks "the temporal limitation of the Torah would not fit at all well in the context, where the subject is its *unlimited* validity [for] if the Matthean Jesus had temporally limited the validity of the Torah, that would have been a completely surprising message for the Jewish Christian readers of the Gospel... it would not at all have been in keeping with the one who wants to keep the same Torah down to its last iota."⁵⁸⁹ It is inconceivable that Jesus intended His readers to interpret His fulfillment of the Torah as absolving them of any commitment to it. Plainly stated, if one's definition of "fulfill" results in abolishment, then Jesus' statement is an oxymoron, one that makes no sense in light of His speech thereafter when He teaches the *correct* understanding of the

⁵⁸⁸ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 215.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

Torah, as opposed to the rabbinical one, in which the Pharisees added to, changed, and subtracted from the laws of Torah.⁵⁹⁰ Jesus, however, maintains a high bibliology, one that He intends to be emulated by His disciples.

This continuity is clearly evident. Hagner writes that

As the Messiah, Jesus has come to bring both the law and the prophets to their intended fulfillment. Jesus' view of the law as valid until the end of time means that the fulfillment he brings is in true continuity with the past, a fulfillment toward which the law and prophets pointed... Jesus' commitment to the whole law is no less serious than [the Pharisees], but he alone is in a position to penetrate to the intended meaning of the Torah. In this connection, it is absolutely important to note that the understanding of the Torah and the attainment of the righteousness of the law are thus vitally linked with the presence of the kingdom... [believers] needed to know— especially in the light of repeated counter-claims— that the pattern for righteousness taught by Jesus reflects the true meaning of the Torah, and thus that the Torah in its entirety is preserved in and through the ethical teaching of the [ekklesia].⁵⁹¹

The teachings on the Sermon on the Mount affirm a consistency in how a believer is to understand and practice the Torah. Jesus corrects interpretation, not orthodoxy. His interpretation is chief, for as Hartin argues, “Jesus does not take issue with the Torah as such, for the Torah is God’s expressed will... Matthew’s Jesus takes issue with the way the rabbis of the synagogue interpret the Torah through their oral law... Jesus is in effect stating that his interpretation of the Torah is easy and light [i.e., 11:29–30] in contrast to the other rabbis who place a heavy burden on their followers through their interpretations.”⁵⁹² There is no

⁵⁹⁰ “Matthew’s Jesus is the ultimate goal of the law and the prophets, the one to whom they point. His mission of kingdom word and deed fulfills the ethical standards and eschatological promises of the law and the prophets. Thus he becomes the sole authoritative teacher of the law, and his interpretations take on the character of new law for his disciples. His teachings are not brand new in the sense of having no root in the Hebrew Bible but new in the sense of transcending the traditional understanding of the law promulgated by the religious leaders.” Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 158.

⁵⁹¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 110.

⁵⁹² P.J. Hartin, “Ethics in the Letter of James, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Didache: Their Place in Early Christian Literature,” *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, ed. Hubertus Waltherus Maria van de Sandt and Jürgen Zangenberg (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 294.

sense of discontinuity then, but rather consistency, for fulfillment demands adherence to what has been previously established and is described as is perfect, full of wisdom, right, pure, enduring, and truly righteous (Ps. 19:7–10). As Charles notes, “[w]hat is striking in Matthew is the degree to which Jesus stands in continuity with the OT,” while clarifying that

Oral tradition, that is, the ‘fence around the law,’ . . . had the effect of obscuring the true meaning of the commandments (see Mark 7:8–13). In a day when halakhic interpretation was en route to being absolutized, it was the ‘abrogators of the law’ who were to meet the force of Jesus’ fury (hence, the material in Matt 23:1ff.). Stringent Pharisaical interpretation of the law (not to mention “lawlessness”) was to be rejected, and it is the distortions in these traditions that must be addressed—*Ekousate hoti errethë . . . egö de lego hymin . . .*—and purged (5:21–48). The stress on continuity in 5:17–18 is important for interpreting the ‘antitheses’ in 5:21–48; it is not the Torah itself that Jesus rejects, rather the halakah, the oral tradition and interpretation, that have come to surround the law.⁵⁹³

If indeed anything is to be abolished or end regarding the law, it is the oral law. Regarding the Torah, Jesus saw continuity, so much so that the very fabric of the universe would be a testament to its ongoing nature; as long as humanity would behold the cosmos, the Torah would remain in effect. To suggest that this was only true of one aspect, one portion of Scripture (i.e., moral law), but not of all its contents is to undermine and underscore the standard of God Himself.⁵⁹⁴ As Turner perceptively states,

far from abolishing the law, Jesus brings it to its desired goal because not even its slightest detail will go unaccomplished. The two phrases “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all things are accomplished” (cf. 24:34–35) are essentially synonymous references to the end of the present world and the

⁵⁹³ Charles J Daryl, “Garnishing with the ‘Greater Righteousness’: The Disciple’s Relationship to the Law (Matthew 5:17–20),” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (2002): 2, 8.

⁵⁹⁴ This is a major contradiction for those futurists, many being Dispensational in their eschatology, that believe that there will be a literal Millennium in which the festivals will be practiced again (see: Appendix 4). If indeed the ceremonial laws have ended, abolished since the first century AD, why do they return for a thousand years? A continuity of festivals, as taught in pronomian thought, is scripturally consistent. Consider: Travis M. Snow, *The Biblical Feast and the Return of Jesus: How the Spring and Fall Feasts of Israel will be Fulfilled in the Kingdom of God* (Dallas, TX: Shiloh Media, 2023).

beginning of the eschaton (cf. 12:32; 13:30, 39, 40, 49; 19:28; 24:3, 14; 28:20). Until that time the law is valid.⁵⁹⁵

In “Matthew [5:13–16, Jesus] calls his readers... to let their light shine so that others see their good works (i.e., their law observance) and praise God.”⁵⁹⁶ That the laws of God were never divided in such a way as to designate them as ceremonial, civil, and moral (being a post-canon framework) and that believers who knew the Torah delighted in it, meditated upon it day and night (Ps. 1:2) and let it be it a lamp to the feet, a light unto their path (Ps. 119:105), attests that indeed, Jesus came to fulfill the Torah, not to abolish it intentionally or as a result of fulfilling it, but to shepherd the believer in their sanctification until the day they would be united in Heaven forevermore. One “*cannot pick and choose among the commandments but must obey them all...* God will punish teachers who undermine students’ obedience to any portion of the Bible [Matt.] 5:19.”⁵⁹⁷ The burden of proof is on the majority view to reconcile Scripture with the teaching that fulfilling the Torah renders most, if not all, its laws abrogated, abolished. Jesus did not abolish the Torah; He fulfilled it so that in no longer bearing the consequences of death for commandment-breaking, believers may emulate Him and disciple others (Matt. 28:16–20). It is living and active (Heb. 4:12).

⁵⁹⁵ Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 163.

⁵⁹⁶ Thiessen, “Abolishers of the Law,” 552.

⁵⁹⁷ Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 179.

**Appendix 2:
A Brief Consideration of the Law before Mt. Sinai in Job⁵⁹⁸**

The Law, in part or in full, must have been imparted consciously or spiritually (rather than physically) to those who believed in God prior to its physical codification to Moses. When sin entered the world through the lawlessness of Adam and resulted in the subsequent fall (cf. Gen. 3:1–24; 4:7), “everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Romans 5:12–14 implies that the Law existed before Mt. Sinai because of death. Sin was not fully defined or understood as a concept, yet death affirmed its presence, and this would come to be known as a result of transgressing the commandments of God. The law must have existed from the time of Adam for him and, by default, all those thereafter to be guilty of practicing lawlessness (i.e., “breaking the law”).⁵⁹⁹ As Griffiths notes, “in pre-Mosaic times, although the law of God was not explicitly revealed, it was nevertheless a reality, people know the difference between right and wrong, demonstrating that the ‘work of the law is written on their hearts’ (Rom. 2:15).”⁶⁰⁰ To suggest the absence of the Law’s intention prior to Mt. Sinai is inconsistent with the evidence of the biblical record. When Cain’s murder of Abel was declared as being against the will of God (Gen. 4:8–16), centuries before the command not to murder had physically been codified and imparted to Moses (Exod. 20:13), it could have only been understood as lawlessness—the act of sin—if it were a known law. Watson notes further that Noah’s designation of clean and unclean animals in Genesis 7:2 before Leviticus 11, the standard of sacrifice by Cain and Abel before the

⁵⁹⁸ This section revises a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, “Torah Obedience as Evidence of a ‘Righteous’ Life in Job 29” (class paper submitted in OBST860: Writings (B01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Summer 2022).

⁵⁹⁹ Disagreeing, Abernathy believes that sin, prior to the Mosaic Law, was not a result of breaking commandments but rather the shared nature of Adam. David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 379.

⁶⁰⁰ Phillip Griffiths, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 39.

Levitical systems, and that “[w]e read in Genesis 15 that Abram’s descendants would be the instrument by which God would remove the inhabitants of Canaan for their *abominations*... is not [revealed] until Leviticus 18:21–27 that these abominations are formally defined as sexual idolatry[,]” which is also the basis of judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, despite such laws not being taught, all attest to the Law before Mt. Sinai.⁶⁰¹ Kaiser Jr. acknowledges this theological logic when he writes that

in spite of its marvellous succinctness, economy of words, and comprehensive vision, it must not be thought that the Decalogue was inaugurated and promulgated at Sinai for the first time[;] all Ten Commandments had been part of the law of God previously written on the hearts instead of stone, for all ten appear, in one way or another, in Genesis. They are: The first [commandment is seen in] Genesis 35:2... The second [commandment is seen in] Genesis 31:39... The third [commandment is seen in] Genesis 24:3... The fourth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 2:3... The fifth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 27:41... The sixth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 4:9... The seventh [commandment is seen in] Genesis 39:9... The eighth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 44:4–7... The ninth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 39:17... [and] the tenth [commandment is seen in] Genesis 12:18; 20:3.⁶⁰²

While Kaiser Jr.’s comments pertain solely to the Ten Commandments,⁶⁰³ it is not inconceivable to extend this to the laws given to Moses after these ten⁶⁰⁴ as some scholars do.⁶⁰⁵ Kaiser Jr. helpfully cites Sarna, who makes another insightful comment about the role of the Law prior to Sinai. He writes,

⁶⁰¹ R. L. Watson, *Why then the Law?* (Chatsworth, GA: Pronomian Publishing, 2020), 8.

⁶⁰² Walter Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 81–82.

⁶⁰³ Other examples abound: the third commandment can be found in Leviticus 18:21, 27, the fifth commandment in Genesis 28:7, the ninth commandment in Genesis 3:13–14, and the tenth commandment in Genesis 3:6.

⁶⁰⁴ Walker respectfully admits that “the eternal law, evident in the natural law, comes to be expressed in divine law... while the Decalogue is, I believe, a timeless representation of natural law, its contents existed before they were formally codified.” Andrew T. Walker, “American Culture Is Broken. Is Theonomy the Answer?” *The Gospel Coalition* (2021), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/theonomy/>.

⁶⁰⁵ Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 41–42, 121–22.

As with the Flood, the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative is predicated upon the existence of a moral law of universal application for the infraction of which God holds all men answerable. *The idea that there is an intimate, in fact, inextricable, connection between the social-moral condition of a people and its ultimate fate is one of the main pillars upon which stands the entire biblical interpretation of history.*⁶⁰⁶

God's expectation of humanity, in conformity with His commands, is clearly evidenced throughout the book of Genesis. References to judgement in light of sin, the consequence of disobeying Him, imply an understanding placed upon believers of instructions for a holy life.

The character of Job and his "righteousness," according to Job 29, reveals much about the believing individual prior to the codification of the Law. Job is referred to as a "man [who] was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1). Job believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness (like Abraham, cf. Gen. 15:6). God acknowledges Job's righteousness on more than one occasion (Job 1:8; 2:3), his wife infers it as she counsels him to curse God (Job 2:9–10), and his friends question whether it is even possible for a man to be as righteous as he claims to be (Job 4:7), as does Satan (Job 2:4–5). It was by grace that Job had been saved through faith and not of himself; it was the gift of God, not a result of works, so that Job could not boast. Job was known by his fruit, the works of the Lord. What these works were and the evidence of them in the book construct an understanding that once Job had been declared righteous by God, this would have been seen in his adherence to those laws commanded by Him. As Job lived in the patriarchal period, prior to the events at Mt. Sinai, he was aware of commandments. Job himself states this clearly when he declares "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured

⁶⁰⁶ Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in Light of History* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1970), 145–46.

the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Job, like Abraham (Gen. 26:5), knew and practiced the commands of God in the wake of his salvation.

Newsom notes that “Job names the key words of virtue in 29:14 as “righteousness” (ṣedeq) and “just judgement” (mišpāt)... [s]o closely is his identity bound up with them that he describes them as his garments of honor.”⁶⁰⁷ Saved by the will of God, in whom now his identity is found, he seeks to live it out. In seeking an appropriate understanding of “righteousness” and the use of the Hebrew word צְדָקָה tsedeq in the OT, Irons says,

the words צְדָקָה and יְשׁוּעָה are commonly used in the secular sense with a human subject... whereas “salvation” is almost exclusively attributed to God. God alone saves, but when he does so, he saves in a manner that has analogies with human judicial activity... the judicial and the salvific are intertwined and mutually illuminating aspects of the same event. God’s salvific activity is more precisely judicial activity. When God saves, his “righteousness” is manifested, not merely as a timeless attribute or quality, but as the divine action of issuing judgements in particular situations, judgements that are experienced by Israel’s enemies as punishment and by Israel herself as deliverance and salvation.⁶⁰⁸

What is so striking about Job 29 is that it speaks of his formative years of sanctification, revealing that “the elite life that Job envisions is one marked by... significant religious sanctions for proper and improper behavior”⁶⁰⁹ in which, in his world, “sits the deity, who keeps Job... remains with him... and who provides him knowledge for right conduct... the noble leader enjoys unusual access to divine protection and knowledge of the realm of metajustice, and this allows him to use his power in appropriate ways.”⁶¹⁰ Hamilton

⁶⁰⁷ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford University Press, UK, 2003), 189.

⁶⁰⁸ Charles Lee Irons, *The Righteousness of God: A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 150–51.

⁶⁰⁹ Mark W. Hamilton, “Elite Lives: Job 29–31 and Traditional Authority,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 1 (2007): 71.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

goes further to state that the book's use of the Hebrew word אֹרֶךְ יָמַי, "a favorite term of the author... often metaphorically... denote[s] a condition of knowledge (3.16, 20; 12.22, 25; 17.12; 18.18; 24.16; 28.11; 38.15, 19, 24)... a precondition of morality (18.5–6...; 24.14, 16), and a point of access to divine revelation (22.28; 25.3 36.30, 32; 37.3, 15, 21).⁶¹¹ This analysis highlights that what defines Job's righteous character is access to divine knowledge, which, chronologically speaking, must have been possible prior to the events at Mt. Sinai. In being made "right" with God, his righteousness is on full display to all who encounter him, for he lives out the divinely revealed commands of his God. As Musa summarizes,

[Job's] 'good life' in his past raised his expectation of receiving great reward of goodness and blessings from God throughout his life and led him to a blissful end (29–18–20)... Good people are seen and known in what they choose to do to help and be a blessing to the people around them. Job as a person exemplifies ethics of responsibility as a person towards other persons, and as a leader towards the people he led. He was a human being who could see, understand, and conduct himself towards helping and guiding those under him. He is a good example of a religious, social, and political leader.⁶¹²

Despite the objection of some scholars, Job lived during the time period documented in the book of Genesis.⁶¹³ As Zuck carefully contends,

The length of Job's life corresponds roughly to the length of the patriarchs... Job's wealth was reckoned in livestock (1:3; 42:12), which was also true of Abraham (Gen 12:16; 13:2), and Jacob (Gen 30:43; 32:5)... The Sabeans and Chaldeans (1:15, 17) were nomads, but they were not nomads in later years... That Job was the priest of his family (1:5) would suggest that an official national priesthood was not yet in existence in Job's area... The Hebrew word translated "piece of money" (42:11) is used elsewhere only twice (Gen 33:19; Josh 24:32), both times in reference to Jacob... The musical instruments referred to (21:12;

⁶¹¹ Hamilton, "Elite Lives: Job 29–31 and Traditional Authority," 75.

⁶¹² Hassan Musa, "Job's Lament: Towards the Theological-Ethical Significance of Job 29–31," *Journal of Biblical Theology* 3, no. 2 (2020): 209–10.

⁶¹³ In studying the style and language, the literary structure, the significance of numbers, mythology, and role of Job's daughters, Sarna concludes "the detailed and consistent patriarchal setting must be regarded as genuine and as belonging to the original saga." Nahum M. Sarna, "Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, no. 1 (1957): 25.

30:31), the timbrel, harp (or lyre), and flute (or pipe), are also mentioned in Genesis (4:21; 31:27)... Literary works similar in some ways to the book of Job were written in Mesopotamia about the same time... The book of Job includes no references to the Mosaic institutions (priesthood, laws, tabernacle, special religious days and events, etc.)... The name Shaddai is used of God thirty-one times in Job (compared with only seventeen elsewhere in the Old Testament) and is a name familiar to the patriarchs (Gen 17:1, marg.; Exod 6:3, marg.)... A number of personal and place names in the book were also associated with the patriarchal period. Examples include Sheba (a grandson of Abraham), and the Sabeans from Sheba (Gen 25:3; Job 1:15; 6:19); Tema (another grandson of Abraham), and Tema (a location in Arabia) 15 (Gen 25:15; Job 6:19); Eliphaz (son of Esau), and Eliphaz (one of Job's companions) (Gen 36:4; Job 2:11); Uz (a nephew of Abraham), and Uz (where Job lived) (Gen 22:21; Job 1:1)... [and there are] stylistic parallels to Ugaritic.⁶¹⁴

It is difficult for liberal interpretation of a later dating to contend these nuanced points.

In exploring the life of Job, one is able to identify several acts and characteristics that align with the commands drawn from the Torah as delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Particularly interesting is Job's self-depiction in Job 29, where he writes of his righteous standing before God prior to his satanic calamities. The text reads as follows:

And Job again took up his discourse and said,
²“Oh that I were as in months gone by,
 As in the days when God watched over me;
³When His lamp shone over my head,
 And by His light I walked through darkness;
⁴As I was in the prime of my days,
 When the friendship of God *was* over my tent;
⁵When the Almighty was yet with me,
 And my children were around me;
⁶When my steps were bathed in butter,
 And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
⁷“When I went out to the gate of the city,
 When I took my seat in the square,
⁸The young men saw me and hid themselves,
 And the old men arose *and* stood.
⁹“The princes stopped talking
 And put *their* hands on their mouths;
¹⁰The voice of the nobles was hushed,
 And their tongue stuck to their palate.
¹¹“For when the ear heard, it called me blessed,

⁶¹⁴ Roy Zuck, *Job* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1978), 7–9.

And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,
¹² Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
 And the orphan who had no helper.
¹³ “The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,
 And I made the widow’s heart sing for joy.
¹⁴ “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
 My justice was like a robe and a turban.
¹⁵ “I was eyes to the blind
 And feet to the lame.
¹⁶ “I was a father to the needy,
 And I investigated the case which I did not know.
¹⁷ “I broke the jaws of the wicked
 And snatched the prey from his teeth.
¹⁸ “Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest,
 And I shall multiply *my* days as the sand.
¹⁹ ‘My root is spread out to the waters,
 And dew lies all night on my branch.
²⁰ ‘My glory is *ever* new with me,
 And my bow is renewed in my hand.’
²¹ “To me they listened and waited,
 And kept silent for my counsel.
²² “After my words they did not speak again,
 And my speech dropped on them.
²³ “They waited for me as for the rain,
 And opened their mouth as for the spring rain.
²⁴ “I smiled on them when they did not believe,
 And the light of my face they did not cast down.
²⁵ “I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
 And dwelt as a king among the troops,
 As one who comforted the mourners.”

In reading this passage, several commands directly from the Law can be identified.⁶¹⁵

In verse four one reads, “the friendship of God *was* over my tent.” This can be paralleled with Exodus 33:11, which states, “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.” While not a command, its familiar language indicates not only an early dating of events in Job but conveys that the reason both men were considered friends to God (cf. Exod. 3:12) was their obedience to His commands.

⁶¹⁵ Job’s knowledge of biblical wisdom beyond the Law might be possible. In Job 29:3 one reads, “[God’s] lamp shone over my head, *and* by His light I walked through darkness.” This can be paralleled with Proverbs 13:9, which states, “The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out.” While not a law *per se*, it is a teaching from the word of God that appears well before its appearance in Proverbs. While the argument is that Job was written after these works and depends upon them, this is not exegetically or unanimously conclusive.

In verse six, one reads not a direct reference to a command from the Law but rather the employment of language familiar to it. Smick comments that it “sums up the blessing in figurative language that reminds us of the words used to describe Israel’s blessing in the land of promise—there it was “milk and honey,” here “cream[/butter]” and “olive oil”... [in] Deuteronomy 32:12, Israel was blessed with oil and honey from the rock.”⁶¹⁶

In verses seven and eight one reads, “I went out to the gate of the city... I took my seat in the square... [and] young men saw me and hid themselves, and the old men arose *and* stood.” This can be paralleled with the command from Deuteronomy 21:18–21 which states,

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. They shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

In verse eleven one reads, “when the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it gave witness of me.” This can be paralleled with the command from Deuteronomy 28:1–3, which states,

Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God: “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

⁶¹⁶ Elmer B. Smick, “Job,” *1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 981.

While this might seem an initial theological stretch, one need only read back to verses five and six to see of the financial and familial blessings bestowed upon Job.

In verses twelve to fourteen, Job relays that he “delivered the poor who cried for help, and the orphan who had no helper... I made the widow’s heart sing for joy... [and] My justice was like a robe.” This aligns with the commands from Exodus 22:22 and Deuteronomy 24:17 in particular, which read, “You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow’s garment in pledge.” The parallel here is striking, for the mention of orphans, widows, justice, and clothing is too coincidental, even if some of the Hebrew words used differ. Additionally, Job is emulating God Himself (cf. Deut. 10:18).

In verse eighteen, one reads Job declaring that “I shall multiply *my* days as the sand.” This aligns with the fruit of Torah observance, which is stated in Deuteronomy 5:33: “You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess.”⁶¹⁷

In verse twenty-four, Smick hints that Job’s “terminology... is not unlike the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–25.”⁶¹⁸ Job declares: “I smiled on them when they did not believe, and the light of my face they did not cast down.” Moses declares, “The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you.” Again, the language is too coincidental to dismiss, especially as the translated words for light and shine both come from the Hebrew word אור ’ôr.

Verses outside of this studied passage continue to highlight Job’s parallel with the commandments in the Law as a whole. One can see the Ten Commandments being evidenced

⁶¹⁷ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman, 1988), 393.

⁶¹⁸ Smick, “Job,” 982–83.

in the life of Job. The table below helps visualize that there is more than one example found in Job of the commandments being acknowledged or practiced:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>[Exodus 21] First Commandment— ³“You shall have no other gods before Me.</p> | <p>“Job... [was known for] fearing God” (Job 1:2) “Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21) Cf. Job 31:28</p> |
| <p>Second Commandment— “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p> | <p>“If I have looked at the sun when it shone or the moon going in splendor, and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity <i>calling for</i> judgment, for I would have denied God above (Job 31:26–28)</p> |
| <p>Third Commandment— “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.</p> | <p>When asked to curse God by his wife, Job “did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:9-10; cf. 1:21)</p> |
| <p>Fourth Commandment— Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; <i>in it</i> you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.</p> | <p>While not explicitly evidenced in the book, it can be inferred that he was a man that revered religious days: “When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:5)</p> |
| <p>Fifth Commandment— “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.</p> | <p>“Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were years older than he” (Job 12:12) “Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding” (Job 32:4)</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Cf. Job 31:18; 42:17 LXX |
| Sixth Commandment— “You shall not murder. | <p>“The murderer arises at dawn; He kills the poor and the needy” (Job 24:14)</p> <p>“If I have... caused its owners to lose their lives, let briars grow instead of wheat, and stinkweed instead of barley” (Job 31:39–40)</p> |
| Seventh Commandment— “You shall not commit adultery. | <p>“The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, ‘No eye will see me,’ and he disguises his face” (Job 24:15)</p> <p>“I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1)</p> <p>“If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or I have lurked at my neighbor’s doorway, May my wife grind for another, and let others kneel down over her. For that would be a lustful crime; Moreover, it would be an iniquity punishable by judges” (Job 31:9–11)</p> |
| Eighth Commandment— “You shall not steal. | <p>“The murderer... at night he is as a thief” (Job 24:14)</p> <p>“If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together; If I have eaten its fruit without money... let briars grow instead of wheat, and stinkweed instead of barley” (31:38–40)</p> <p>Cf. Job 1:14-17.</p> |
| Ninth Commandment— “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. | <p>“Now if it is not so, who can prove me a liar, and make my speech worthless?” (Job 24:25)</p> <p>“My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, nor will my tongue mutter deceit” (Job 27:4)</p> <p>“If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened after deceit, Let Him weigh me with accurate scales, and let God know my integrity” (Job 31:5–6)</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | “For truly my words are not false; One who is perfect in knowledge is with you” (Job 36:4) |
| <p>Tenth Commandment— “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”</p> | <p>“If my step has turned from the way, or my heart followed my eyes, or if any spot has stuck to my hands, Let me sow and another eat, and let my crops be uprooted” (Job 31:7–8)</p> <p>“If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust, If I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much...that too would have been an iniquity <i>calling for judgment</i>, for I would have denied God above” (Job 31:24–25, 28)</p> |

Job refers to God as “Redeemer” (Job 19:25). Hartley notes that the “term kinsman-redeemer (*go'el*) also functions as one of Yahweh’s titles [and] is rooted in the interpretation of Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage (e.g., Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:16...)... [t]he theology of this title is that since Yahweh brought Israel into existence as a nation, he recognizes his obligation to deliver them from all hostile foes.”⁶¹⁹ Job’s phraseology reveals an understanding of how the Torah commands followers of God to understand Him and his forthcoming role in redemption. Also, Job’s restoration of family and fortune (42:10–17) aligns with the promises associated with covenantal obedience. One reads in Deuteronomy 28:11, “the Lord will give you more than enough prosperity, in the children of your womb, in the offspring of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.” Commitment to God and His commandments bears great fruit.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁹ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman, 1988), 292.

⁶²⁰ There is a possible challenge that comes with this contention of the Law being practiced before Moses. In Job 42:15 one reads, “In all the land no women were found so fair as Job’s daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers.” This causes a possible conundrum, for in Numbers 27:1–11; 36:1–13 one reads that a father passed on his inheritance only to his sons (the exception being if his wife bore no sons). Forming a rebuttal, this passage could be understood as a) evidence that the Law, while known prior to

In summary, the Law existed before its codification at Mt. Sinai if one maintains that the book of Job was written before the books attributed to Moses. The life of Job evidences this reality, exponentially so if one aligns with an early composition, and believers are able to shape a godly life from its teachings in accordance with their journey of sanctification.

the events at Mt. Sinai, had yet been revealed *in full*, or b) that as Israel had not yet been established as a covenant community (cf. Num. 27:11), it did not relate to him as an individual and as a Gentile who had not yet been integrated into Israel, which commenced in the Exodus (cf. Exod. 12:38).

Appendix 3: The Immutability of Scripture and Other Pronomian Attributes

Much has been written in chapters of systematic theology labeled “Bibliology.” The study of Scripture is exhaustive and, among the majority of Protestant evangelicals, its attributes are unanimously agreed upon. There are, however, other attributes worthy of consideration, whether they be considered independent or extensions of already agreed upon attributes. There are pronomian attributes of Scripture that have yet to be established in systematic theology and should be considered in studies of bibliology: *Scripture is Ethno-encompassive*, intended for all people; *Scripture is Unified*, a single library without division; *Scripture is Illimitable*, neither bound by time or regressive in nature; and *Scripture is Immutable*, unchanging in nature.

Scripture is Ethno-encompassive (Eccles. 12:13; Jer. 31:31–34; 2 Tim. 3:16–17)

It is difficult to contend that Scripture is ethnocentric in nature and only for the Hebrew/Jew.⁶²¹ The Scriptures, however, attest the oneness of what God has delivered to those who believe in Him. “*There was not a Torah code for the native of Israel to follow, and then another Torah code for the sojourner within Israel... there was one primary Torah code for all to be instructed by, in upstanding ways of holiness.*”⁶²² Just as there is “one body and one Spirit... one hope of your calling; one Lord,⁶²³ one faith, one baptism, one God and

⁶²¹ After rhetorically asking the question whether keeping the Torah is the special mark of identity for the Jewish person, McKee answers by citing the apostle Paul in Romans 2:28–29. J. K. McKee, *One Law for All: From the Mosaic Texts to the Works of the Holy Spirit* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 138–39.

⁶²² McKee, *One Law*, 44. Italics original.

⁶²³ “Knowing that the concept of ‘one law’ is first mentioned in association with the Passover, and how the ultimate Passover is [Lord] Yeshua the Messiah, it is quite safe for us to conclude that the concept of ‘one

Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6),⁶²⁴ one “law [Torah] shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Exod. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15–16, 29; Isa. 56:6–8).⁶²⁵ The commanded instructions were intended for both redeemed Jews and Gentiles, and to label festivals or laws as “Jewish” is disingenuous and inconsistent with the record of Scripture. Redeemed Gentiles have been grafted-in to be partakers and practicers of the Torah and its blessings, for alongside the redeemed Jew, believers are to “keep His commandments, because this applies to every person [כָּל־אָדָם; “mankind”] (Eccles. 12:13). All Scripture is for the redeemed ἄνθρωπος (2 Tim. 3:17), both the under-shepherd and the designated flock. Its very nature is intended to encompass all ethnicities of the world.

Scripture is Unified (Ps. 19:7; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16–17)

The Scriptures are כְּמִנְיָן, complete and whole; they are perfect and are in no need of altering or compartmentalization (Ps. 19:7). It cannot be λύω; they are not to be dissolved, loosened, or separated so as to be considered two canons. Jesus makes clear the order of the Tanakh (an acronym for the Torah, Prophets, and Writings composing the OT), starting with Genesis and ending with 2 Chronicles (Matt. 23:31–35),⁶²⁶ but there is in no sense a division

law’ must be understood in light of our Lord’s actions and admonitions in relation to the Torah.” McKee, *One Law*, 15.

⁶²⁴ While contextually written to believers in Ephesus (cf. Eph. 2:11–21), this principle is universal.

⁶²⁵ This may also include the Davidic Covenant, which is intended for Jews and Gentiles alike in the Millennium. Walter Kaiser states that 2 Samuel 7:19b should be translated “the charter by which humanity will be directed.” Young’s Literal Translation also renders it “this is the law [Torah] of the Man.” See Kaiser’s “The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ P&R, 1974), 311–14.

⁶²⁶ Likewise, while Christianity refers to there being thirty-nine books in the Tanakh, it was also understood that there were twenty-four (cf. apocryphal 2 Esdras 14:45–46), as many of the books that were later separated into two were in fact read as a single volume (e.g., 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings).

in Scripture, particularly one that occurs after the OT; it is all Torah (Jer. 31:33; 1 Cor. 14:21; 1 Tim. 5:17–18; cf. John 10:34; 12:34). All Scripture (πᾶσα γραφή) allows no room for there to be two canons, for such a post-canon framework has resulted in distinction throughout Church history that has rendered the OT lesser than the NT, ranging in charges of its preserving the story of an angry and distant God, to interpretations that most, and in some cases all, of its laws and history pertaining to Israel are of secondary interest to the newly “created” Church (in the wake of progressive and superseding revelation).

Scripture is Illimitable (Ps. 19:7; 111:7–8; Isa. 40:8; Zech. 1:5–6)

Scripture is not bound by time, and its truths are not altered by the passage of time; what was once truth cannot become an irrelevant truth with successive generations. It is נצח, established and standing firm. It is created by a timeless Creator who does not bind it with the precept of time. The Scriptures of God are eternal and “are upheld forever and ever” (לְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם). The progressive character of divine revelation grew the body of literature that would become Scripture; it was not regressive in nature. It “endures forever” (Isa. 40:8), unlike the creation around it that will one day perish. They overtake (אֲשַׁר) and transcend the human mouths that, though inspired, are no longer among the living (Zech. 1:5–6).⁶²⁷

⁶²⁷ Many commentators and scholars have tried to contend that the concept of “forever” does not always mean forever, and that instead it is entirely determined by context or whether a rhetorical device is being used (e.g., Jon. 2:6). Unless otherwise stated, the word most often speaks of an ongoing period of time without a predetermined date. As Macrae notes, “though *’ōlām* is used more than three hundred times to indicate indefinite continuance into the very distant future, the meaning of the word is not confined to the future... there are at least twenty instances where it clearly refers to the past... [and] such usages generally point to something that seems long ago, but rarely if ever refer to a limitless past.” Allan A. Macrae, “עוֹלָם,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer, and Bruce K Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 672.

*Scripture is Immutable—A Case Study*⁶²⁸

The immutability of God is that He is unchanging and unchangeable. Defined in full, immutability speaks of His inability to change in any manner, both physically and willfully. God does not change from one form to another or change His mind in response to the activity of humanity, nor does change take place as He progressively reveals more information about Himself and His teachings over periods of time. That which appears new to humanity was always present, self-existing, and true of God. Change does not take place either internally or externally, and any change perceived by humanity reflects only the mutability of its own character and mind. His persons, precepts, promises, prophecies, and will on earth are the same as in Heaven.

Scripture reveals several passages which attest to the immutable nature of God. Numbers 23:19 declares, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” This verse contrasts God with humanity and implies that characteristics natural to humans—lying, repentance, what they have spoken not coming to fruition—are not present in God. Next, Psalm 102:26–27 states, “Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” God is the one who initiates change; change is not initiated within God; He is “the same” and unchangeable. In Malachi 3:6, speaking of judging sinners, it is written “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” God personally attests that what He has declared previously by His mouth and preserved in the Word will not change with time. Finally, James

⁶²⁸ This section is a heavily revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. See: Benjamin Szumskyj, “God-breathed: Considering the Immutability of Scripture as an Extension of God’s Attribute,” or “The Immutability of Scriptures: The Missing Link in Bibliology” (class paper submitted in THEO 626: The Doctrine of God at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2020).

1:7 affirms that “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” The disciple’s comment addresses any charges of variance in God, particularly in light of the Incarnation. He states that God does not vary in form, which also means shifting character.

There are those who contend that God is not truly immutable by citing verses that He “changes” His mind (Gen. 6:6; 22:12; Exod. 32:14; Jon. 3:10). As explained above, however, God does not change His mind. What appears to be the change to the human eye was always the intention of the divine mind. His sovereignty declares Him as knowing all; humans know only that which He allows them to know, and He knows all about those for whom He died and whom He will judge. As one scholar writes, “God doesn’t change by coming to be or ceasing to be; by gaining or losing qualities; by any quantitative growth or diminishment; by learning or forgetting anything; by starting or stopping willing what he wills; or in any other way that requires going from being one way to being another.”⁶²⁹ Boice adds,

The immutability of God as presented in Scripture, however, is not the same thing as the immutability of “god” talked about by the Greek philosophers. In Greek thought immutability meant not only unchangeability but also the inability to be affected by anything in any way. The Greek word for this, the primary characteristic of “god,” was *apatheia*, from which we get our word “apathy.” Apathy means indifference, but the Greek term goes beyond that idea. It means a total inability to feel any emotion whatever. The Greeks believed “god” possessed this quality because we would otherwise have power over him to the degree that we could move him to anger or joy or grief. He would cease to be absolute and sovereign. So the “god” of the philosophers (though not of the more popular mythologies) was lonely, isolated and compassionless.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Tim Pawl, “Divine Immutability,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/div-immu/>.

⁶³⁰ James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, 2nd rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 142.

In discussing the ethical immutability of God, Ware proposes that what God has revealed, commanded, declared, and preserved as being from His mind and will is ethical. As such, He is bound to ethically fulfill and maintain what He has decreed and promised; to imply that one can selectively choose from that which He has commanded us, or that His progressive revelation results in a change, would render former ethical commands inoperative. In being consistent with this thinking, if God were to change what He has revealed, His divinely breathed Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16–17), this would challenge the consistency of God. Ware states,

The God of the Bible is also unchangeable in his unconditional promises and moral obligations to which he has freely pledged himself. This may be called God's "ethical immutability," the faithfulness and reliability of God by which he is true to his word and unailing in accomplishing what he has promised. The divine ethical immutability is secondary and derivative in nature in that it presupposes (1) God's ontological changelessness, (2) the existence of a contingent and temporal moral order, and (3) the free decision of God to pledge himself to his creatures in certain ways that accord with his intrinsic nature. As such, then, God's ethical immutability is a second-order type of changelessness. It involves the free commitment of God in relation to his moral creatures to act in certain freely-determined ways and carry out certain freely-determined promises. These commitments and promises to which God pledges himself are not intrinsic to his immutable divine nature as such, in that it is possible for them never to have been made. Were God not to have created a moral order, or were he not to have pledged himself in the ways he has, these commitments and promises would not be. But God has created and has so pledged himself, and these pledges, rather than being intrinsic to his very nature and hence necessary, are instead freely self-imposed and self-determined. God's ethical immutability, then, is the expression in time of God's eternal intrinsic nature both of the ways in which he freely chooses to pledge himself and of his utter reliability and faithfulness in accomplishing all he has promised.⁶³¹

This thinking lays a foundation for the understanding that if His immutability appeals to His ethics and faithfulness, then that which God breathed and preserved as Scripture is also

⁶³¹ Bruce A. Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 4 (December 1986): 436.

ethical, faithful, and hence immutable. Similar in thought, Chalamet establishes a biblically rational balance between the doctrines of immutability and faithfulness in relation to the attributes and character of God. He does not see them as conflicting but complimentary. He postulates the idea of God and His Word being inseparable and therefore, His Word being immutable as well.⁶³² This dualist understanding of God ensures that His emotional actions towards humanity do not eclipse His unchanging nature and, in turn, such emotions are not eclipsed by His immutable persona:

The grain of truth of the old doctrine of divine immutability is the following: God's purpose or telos as creator, covenant partner, reconciler, and redeemer does not vary. It is indeed unchangeable. In all eternity God is communion in God's inner life, God seeks communion with God's creation.... I would advance that God's will to save is "immutable," unchanging. But God's liveliness and faithfulness is hinted at in the repeated mentions, in Scripture, of God who "remembers" God's covenant, God's love. This is no mere anthropomorphic talk. It signals what could be called the eternally actualized will of God to be God for and with God's creation. And I would argue that the term "faithfulness" is much more adequate than "immutability" as theologians attempt to speak of this eternally actualized divine will.⁶³³

God and all that He is, from His thoughts to His breath, are immutable.

Distinction: Immutability Being Different and Distinct from Impassibility

It has been stated that change is often intermittent with emotion, so if God is impassible, He cannot personally suffer or be affected by the suffering of creation. Impassibility, historically, has been defined as God not being able to express emotions and therefore not experiencing sadness, suffering, or other emotional actions or reactions. If His

⁶³² Christophe Chalamet, "Immutability or Faithfulness?" *Modern Theology*, vol. 34, no. 3 (July 2018): 460–61.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 466.

character is that of passibility, that would seemingly render God mutable, for passibility involves the changing of one emotion to another. Lewis asserts that Thomists (the school of thought dedicated to the works of Thomas Aquinas) understood passibility as involving “potentiality and potentiality involves change. Unrealized potential and change in the Deity seemed to contradict their understanding of God’s immutability, transcendence, self-existence, self-determination, and perfection.”⁶³⁴ It is possible that theologians in the East promoted this concept in the Early Church. Bercot quotes Irenaeus (1.374 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*), who comments that Gnostics were misguided in emotionally endowing God, for Scripture teaches that “God is not like men. His thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those dispositions and passions that operate among them.”⁶³⁵ Origen (4.277 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*) wrote that “We maintain God is altogether impassible and is to be regarded as wholly free from all the affections of this kind.”⁶³⁶

God expressing emotions does not contradict, but rather affirms, His unchanging character. As God is loving and just, attributes that are immutable, He reveals this through His emotions, which, in themselves, are best understood anthropomorphically (e.g., Isa. 40:11; 43:5–7; 49:15; 66:13). Immutability as a word may be problematic and perhaps in need of replacing. Some contend that God is both immutable in nature and passible and that an emotional God does not imply changeability, believing the doctrine of impassibility as theologically faulty to begin with and that no such distinction with immutability need be made, for it should not be taught. One such scholar’s assessment of the doctrine of

⁶³⁴ G. R. Lewis, “Impassibility of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 553.

⁶³⁵ David W. Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Writings: A Reference Guide to more than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 313.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

impassibility, often interconnected with immutability, proposed that it is more an import from Greek philosophy into Christian doctrine than a naturally developed theology from the Scriptures. Impassibility, then, becomes a doctrine that might not be best used in relation to God and His preserved Word, yet immutability remains. He writes,

Among the many Greek philosophical ideas imported into Christian theology, and into Alexandrian Jewish theology before it, is the idea of the *impassible* God (απαθής Θεός), and this idea furnishes us with a particularly striking illustration of the damage done by the assumption of alien philosophical presuppositions when they are applied to Christian theology. So alien is this idea, so foreign is it to Hebraic-Christian thought, that it makes nonsense of the revelation of God in the Old Testament, it makes the Incarnation no real Incarnation, and it reduces the sufferings and death of Christ to a purely human work.⁶³⁷

Therrie adds that “in describing God’s attributes, especially His incommunicable ones, we must not allow philosophical presuppositions to determine the terms for us, rather Scripture must be heard with its full voice.”⁶³⁸ Philosophy is neither inspired nor infallible.

The Immutable Breath of God: The Immutability of God-breathed Scripture

In understanding that God Himself is immutable, it can be argued that His breath is unchanging, which Scripture affirms as the essence of the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 attests that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The English word “inspired” is in Koine Greek *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος), composed of two words, *theos* (θεος; God), and *pneuma* (πνεω; to breathe).

⁶³⁷ T. Evan Pollard, “Impassibility of God.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8, no. 4 (1955): 356.

⁶³⁸ André-Philippe Therrie, “God’s Immutability & Torah,” *Torah Resource: Alumni Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2017): 11, https://www.academia.edu/31179147/Gods_Immutability_and_Torah.

To state that the breath of God is mutable, if by definition it is immutable, would be problematic. Paul understood that the Scriptures were perfect because they could not change. The anonymous author of Hebrews speaks of the immutable nature of God in relation to what He has verbally revealed when he writes, “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:17–18). His emphasis on God not changing His promises and inability to lie is based on what God has spoken into existence and preserved in the Scripture.

These truths are affirmed in the Psalms, which provide many of the verses that argue for the Scriptures being immutable, two in particular. The first is Psalm 19:7–11, which speaks of a perfection: for it does not change, does not need to change, nor will ever change. The second is Psalm 119:89: “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.” This speaks of an unchanging nature, one that in being perfect, does not change and thus, rendering some part abolished, inoperative, and superseded. Like Jesus Christ settling in Heaven after His ascension (cf. Heb. 10:12) in all His perfection, so too have His Scriptures; His special revelation is unchanging and unchangeable.⁶³⁹

Scripture is not a creation of God. That is not to say that the words do not preserve the stories of the world He created and the inhabitants He created but that, being His breath, it was not created but rather, *from* and *of* Him. Frame is the closest of all theologians to consider the immutable nature of Scripture in understanding that “one cannot separate the word of God from God Himself.”⁶⁴⁰ He goes on to state that

⁶³⁹ Hebrews 7:12 does not imply change but a suspension that will be resumed in the eschatological Millennium. Likewise, Galatians 3:19–25 does not change the content of what the tutor taught but rather how it was delivered to redeemed humanity.

⁶⁴⁰ John Frame, *Salvation Belongs To The Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 46.

the speech of God has divine attributes [Gen. 18:14; Ps. 19:7; 119:7, 86, 89, 129, 160; Isa. 55:11; 2 Tim. 3:15]... only God has these attributes in total perfection. So, the word is God... *The word of God is an object of worship* [Ps. 56:4, 10; 119:120, 161–162; Isa. 66:5]... since David worships the words here, we cannot escape the conclusion that the word is divine... [and] *The word is God* [cf. John 1:1]... this passage does not only identify Jesus with God; it also identifies God’s speech with God.⁶⁴¹

In this insightful analysis, Frame positions Scripture as divine in origin, not created by God but an extension of His persons and character. To state then that Scripture is not immutable would indirectly question the attributes and nature of God. God, unchanging and unchangeable, speaks in a likewise manner and to truly believe and espouse that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8) is to say the same of the Scriptures.

Though an unbeliever, religious scholar Khan makes a direct correlation between holy texts sharing the nature of the deity from which they were originated and uttered; God, being immutable, speaks immutable truths that are preserved. While one disagrees that this logically can be true for all religious texts and for his false faith in particular, the concept itself—in the context of relating to the one and true God of the Scriptures—is sound. He writes as follows:

The immutability of divine texts takes two distinct forms: linguistic immutability and substantive immutability. The two forms are not mutually exclusive since a divine text may be immutable in both language and substance. Linguistic immutability is tied to the language in which a divine text is revealed. Linguistic immutability means that the original language of the divine text cannot be lawfully altered... The second, and perhaps the more important, notion of immutability focuses on the core teachings of a divine text. Substantive immutability empowers human beings to teach and learn divine texts in any written or oral language. This empowerment, however, is limited. It recognizes no human authority to amend or repeal any message of divine texts. The truth of divine texts cannot be twisted to serve human desires... Substantive immutability is more meaningful in cases where a divine text has not been preserved in the original language of the transmitter-

⁶⁴¹ Frame, *Salvation Belongs To The Lord*, 48.

prophet. Jesus, for example, spoke Aramaic, but his divine message was originally recorded in Greek and later translated into Latin. For believers, this shift in language from Aramaic to Greek and from Greek to Latin and eventually to the vernacular is inconsequential since the substantive message of the New Testament has remained intact.⁶⁴²

Khan's thinking is correct in that if the special revelation of the divine changes, whether by the hand of man or by the will of divinity, then it is no longer immutable. In fact, one of the clearest pieces of evidence that the Qur'an are not divine words is that it has changed much of what was revealed in the original Scriptures it claims to supersede (both Old and New Testaments).⁶⁴³ The reason that biblical language scholars, linguists, and even translators seek to identify and understand every word of the Scripture so precisely is that they believe it to be the inspired words of God, words that do not change. The words are unlike the words of mere man. They are immutable. Furthermore, Christianity sailed dangerously close to the pagan Islamic doctrine of "tahrif," which contends that writings (and by extension interpretations) prior to Qur'an are theologically corrupt; hence why Islam sees their holy books as superior texts. If the earlier OT and NT canons confirmed anything in the Qur'an, it was seen as divine evidence of authority of the Qur'an over them (Sura 4:47; Sura 6:92); if there were contradictions, those sections of the earlier texts were regarded as unreliable and corrupted (Sura 2:59; 2:75; 2:79; 3:78; 4:46; 5:14). Those Christians who maintain that the NT is a superior text to the OT and that much of the contents of the OT are no longer applicable or relevant may be seen as echoing this troublesome teaching.

Let us consider the nature of a doctrine which does not change—e.g., salvation. Scripture reveals the means of salvation. As such, it is imperative that what has been breathed out by God, inspired, has and will not change, particularly in regards to soteriology. One

⁶⁴² Liaquat Ali Khan, "The Immutability of Divine Texts," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3 (2008): 810–11.

⁶⁴³ The irony here is that Khan does not believe in YHWH of the Scriptures but a pagan god of the moon called "Allah" as attested in the Qur'an (Sura 53:19–20).

cannot be consistent as a believer to state that some aspects of Scripture have changed but others have not. An example in the context of salvation, and election in particular, illustrates this point. In challenging Reformed teachers and theologians in their view of Israel, while not following through entirely with the thought process that a God who changes His mind in Scripture can change anything, MacArthur makes this point regarding salvation:

The irony of this is that a-millennialism is most popular among Reformed people that are reformed in their theological sense, meaning they are believers in divine, sovereign election. They believe in the doctrine of election; that's basically what it means to be reformed. You believe that God chooses who will be saved, God makes promises and then God by His sovereign power keeps those promises. This is very strange that they would believe in sovereign election, they would believe in the doctrine of election and not believe that God will keep His promise to elect Israel. He says repeatedly in the book of Isaiah, "Israel Mine elect." This is an election by God and in Romans 11, the election or the callings of God are not revokable, but strangely these people who believe in divine election and believe that God does what He determines and fulfills His promises and whoever He elects He will bring to salvation, strangely while believing that think that the promises God made to elect Israel have been forfeited by Israel's unbelief cancelled and now given to the church and there is no future for Israel. That's called replacement theology.⁶⁴⁴

The contention here is that if God, who is unchanging, would state something in the past but not remain consistent and thus change at a later date, this would render Him no longer immutable. Boice affirms this, saying that "if God varied as his creatures do, if he willed one thing today and another thing tomorrow, who could confide in him or be encouraged by him? No one. But God is always the same. We shall always find him as he has disclosed himself to be in Jesus Christ."⁶⁴⁵ Another pastor was closer to bridging the gap between the immutable nature of God and His Scripture in light of salvation when he preached that the "Immutable

⁶⁴⁴ John MacArthur, "Why Every Calvinist Should Be a Premillennialist, Part 2," *Grace To You* (April 2007), accessed May 9, 2019, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-335/why-every-calvinist-should-be-a-premillennialist-part-2>.

⁶⁴⁵ James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, 2nd rev. edn. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 144.

counsel of God is based on the eternal immutability of God Himself... is not a product of man's device and must not be regarded as such... [and] is the only authorized means of salvation."⁶⁴⁶ Likewise, in affirming the immutability of the Scriptures, Therrie rhetorically asks, "If God is not faithful, then how can we be sure of God's promises to us who by faith have believed in His name, that it has saving power and that the redemption offered at the cross is complete and has affected our account with God?"⁶⁴⁷

While agreeing with MacArthur and his commentary on the doctrine of election, one cannot help but to extend his thinking to the entirety of Scripture. Consider the following predicament. Premillennial Dispensationalists have declared the Law as either being ceremonial, civil, and moral and, besides the last of these, now inoperative. However, they will be reinitiated again, as seen in the appointed festivals (Ezek. 45:17, 21, 25; 46:1, 9, 11; Zech. 14:16, 18, 19) and kosher eating (Isa. 66:15–18). This begs the question, does God expect these to be practiced since the giving of the Law? Has He done away with them entirely since the death of Jesus Christ, or was this true for several dispensations, suspended for one dispensation, and to be resumed again in a future dispensation (this view being upheld by many who advocate Premillennial Dispensationalism)? An immutable view of God and Scripture would hold to the first view, whereas an immutable view of God but oddly mutable view of Scripture would be aligned with the other two views.

Understanding the Scriptures as being immutable reinforces a higher view of bibliology in seeing Scripture as a unified work and not dividing canons and superseding earlier works with later works. It maintains a more accurate understanding of progressive revelation. Progressive revelation, the theological concept that God progressively reveals more about His character, plan of salvation, and will, is clearly documented throughout the

⁶⁴⁶ Arthur H. Coleman Sr., "The Immutable Counsel Of God," *Apostolic Bible Study Church*, accessed May 9, 2020, <http://www.abschurch.org/pastors-blog/the-immutable-counsel-of-god>.

⁶⁴⁷ Therrie, "God's Immutability & Torah," 12.

Scripture. What was revealed in one dispensation will differ to some degree with another, but that does not—and should not—imply a change, nor does the fulfillment of a former truth render it no longer applicable or relevant. As one writer defines it, progressive revelation

means that God revealed Himself to His people over many centuries, periodically giving new information that built on but did not contradict or deny what came before. For example, the Lord spoke to Abraham and gave him the promise of salvation. Later, He spoke to Israel through Moses, the old covenant mediator, adding the law, which did not overturn the promise but rather reinforced Israel's hope in the promise (Gal. 3:15–29). After that, the prophets gave more revelation regarding God, and then the Lord's final revelation came in the incarnation of His Son and the Apostolic writings that explain His person and work (Heb. 1:1–2). Progressive revelation means that while Scripture's application to old covenant believers is different in some ways from its application to new covenant believers, we do not reject any of God's Word. It reveals one message of salvation that we cannot fully grasp unless we consider the whole of the Bible.⁶⁴⁸

What is frustrating about this definition, which would be agreed upon by most Christians, is that in practice it is not true. That is to say, while a believer will say that “we do not reject any of God's Word,” in reality, one practically does so by mislabeling the Law as ceremonial, civil, and moral, and thereby stating that two thirds are no longer operative, thus “disobeying God, whether within the sphere of daily life [civil] or specifically matters relating to one's worship [ceremonial], always falls into the realm of moral [moral] or ethical behaviors,”⁶⁴⁹ or interpret that when Jesus did not come to abolish but fulfill the Law, this is to be defined as the closing of a chapter which we are no longer bound to, which, in reality, is abolishment by its very definition. Connecting this to Romans 10:4, we read, “For Christ is the end [or goal] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” This verse has often been used to justify an argument against the Law, yet further study weakens that position. If “telos” just

⁶⁴⁸ Ligonier Ministries, “Progressive Revelation,” *Tabletalk Magazine* (2016), accessed May 6, 2023, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/progressive-revelation/>.

⁶⁴⁹ Hegg, “Didn't God abolish?” 135–36.

meant end, then Jesus abolishing the Law would make sense. But in His own words, He came to “fulfill” it (Matt. 5:17–20), which is why His being the goal makes more sense, not merely grammatically, but theologically.⁶⁵⁰ As Kaiser Jr. rightly notes, the “term *telos* in Romans 10:4 means ‘goal’ or purposeful conclusion. The law cannot be properly understood unless it moves toward the grand goal of pointing the believer toward the Messiah, Christ. The law remains God’s law, not Moses’ law (Rom. 7:22; 8:7). It still is holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12,14) for the Israelite as well as for the believing Gentile.”⁶⁵¹

Bahsen, a Theonomist, believes that the “moral” laws of the Old Testament apply to Christians today, yet in his arguments for their inclusion in contemporary Christianity, the same arguments could easily extend to “civil” and “ceremonial.” In his own words, he puts forward a school of thought that could easily be applied to the entirety of the Law:

Evangelicals have always argued that, although we must do our tough homework—and learn from our mistakes—God himself is the One who requires that his inspired Word be applied in this way (“every scripture” of it, 2 Tim 3:16–17) and who promises to bless the effort with the illumination and strengthening of his Holy Spirit. The alternative of abandoning God’s ancient, written revelation of his will in favor of modern wisdom may have greater simplicity, but it is treason against the King of heaven and earth. If God chose to reveal his will once for all in writing, that writing will in the nature of the case be in a language and communicated in terms of a culture that are both different from the many other languages and cultures to which this revelation must be applied. God chose to speak (in Hebrew) about rooftop railings, expecting us in the twentieth century to learn thereby what to say (in English) about swimming-pool fences (and many other applications). Let us not allow the difficulty of the task to make us hesitant to give it our best, sanctified efforts.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰ “Within Romans 10:4, the Apostle Paul is by no means communicating that Yeshua the Messiah is the abolition of the Mosaic Torah; in being the *telos nomou*... Yeshua the Messiah is the Torah’s goal, its climax, its inevitable outcome, or even its dénouement... Arriving at saving faith in the Messiah of Israel is the *resultant end*, with Him being the consummation to whom the Torah points.” J. K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away with the Law?* (Richardson, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), 123.

⁶⁵¹ Kaiser Jr., “Law as God’s Gracious Guidance,” 188.

⁶⁵² Greg L. Bahnsen, “Should We Uphold Unchanging Moral Absolutes,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 3 (1983): 314, <https://search-ebSCOhost->

His arguments for their practice are the immutable nature of Scripture (and the morals commanded by God), which could just as easily be applied to the totality of the Law. If God and His “moral” laws are unchanging, then by extension so are the other laws, hence, the entirety of Scripture. The righteousness of God does not change and in citing Deuteronomy 6–11, Therrie states we “read righteousness is eternal and determined by God’s eternal and holy standard... [if] God has truly changed His standard for righteousness as mainstream Christianity unconsciously asserts, does that not abolish (pardon the pun) God’s immutability?”⁶⁵³

Excursus: Dispelling the Myth of Bibliolatry

In teaching a high view of bibliology, there have been claims that a view that is too high will inevitably lead to bibliolatry. This is the belief that there are Christians who worship the Scriptures in a manner equal to the honor and reverence given to God Himself. This, however, is a foolish charge, and one that no believer can or should take seriously, for no believer physically worships their Scriptures. As one commentator postulates, “what most people label ‘bibliolatry’ is simply a pejorative expression that masks one’s biblical illiteracy or unwillingness to submit to the scripture’s teaching on some matters.... in a more plain sense, those willing to throw around such a term are often the same who would adopt post-modernism or relativism when it comes to understanding of the scriptures, and subsequently,

com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000961713&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

⁶⁵³ Therrie, “God’s Immutability & Torah,” 14.

the authority of the scriptures is severely undercut.”⁶⁵⁴ In addressing the concept, Packer brings not only clarity to so-called “bibliolatry” but authentic consideration behind the charges of a high view of bibliology:

Others tell us the final authority for Christians is not Scripture, but Christ, whom we must regard as standing apart from Scripture and above it. He is its Judge; and we, as His disciples, must judge Scripture by Him, receiving only what is in harmony with His life and teaching and rejecting all that is not. But who is this Christ, the Judge of Scripture? Not the Christ of the New Testament and of history. That Christ does not judge Scripture; he obeys it and fulfills it. Certainly, He is the final authority of the whole of it. Certainly, He is the final authority for Christians; that is precisely why Christians are bound to acknowledge the authority of Scripture. Christ teaches them to do so. A Christ who permits His followers to set Him up as the Judge of Scripture, One by whom its authority must be confirmed before it becomes binding and by whose adverse sentence it is in places annulled, is a Christ of human imagination, made in the theologian’s own image, One whose attitude to Scripture is the opposite to that of the Christ of history. If the construction of such a Christ is not a breach of the second commandment, it is hard to see what is. It is sometimes said that to treat the Bible as the infallible word of God is idolatry. If Christ was an idolater, and if following His teaching is idolatry, the accusation may stand; not, however, otherwise. But to worship a Christ who did not receive Scripture as God’s unerring word, nor require His followers to do so, would seem to be idolatry in the strictest sense.⁶⁵⁵

Bibliolatry is a theological “bogeyman.” It is, however, an unconsciously utilized weapon by those who adopt a belief in the “Spirit of the Law” versus the “Letter of the Law,” a false dichotomy without basis.⁶⁵⁶ Such claims require immediate dismissal, for one can maintain a high view of Scripture and not also make it an idol in his or her life.

⁶⁵⁴ Grayson Gilbert, “A High Regard for Scripture is Not Bibliolatry,” *Patheos.com: The Chorus in the Chaos* (February, 2017), <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/chorusinthechaos/high-regard-scripture-not-bibliolatry/>.

⁶⁵⁵ J. I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985) 61–62.

⁶⁵⁶ As briefly discussed in Chapter 2.

Appendix 4:

Offerings and Festivals in the Millennial Temple: An Exposition of Ezekiel 45:9-46:15⁶⁵⁷

After several chapters of exploring the measurements and layout of the Millennial Temple, followed by the introduction of an individual called the “Prince” (Ezekiel 44:3) and the allotment of land to him, the tribes of Israel, and God Himself (Ezekiel 45:1-7), the prophet Ezekiel begins to focus on the internal workings of the Temple and related spaces during the Millennium as led by the Prince (Ezekiel 45:9-46:15). The passage is one that sees a future Temple fully restored and operational, as it always was intended to be, until the consummation of the age. The primary focus of the text is the role of offerings and festivals in the Millennial Temple. In eschatologically envisioning the future restoration of Israel and God’s glorious inhabitation of its rebuilt Temple during a thousand-year long reign of His Son, the Messiah, Ezekiel details not only how the Temple and surround lands will look, but how they will operate under the tutelage of a fellow saint, the Prince. In instituting princes who individually lead the twelve tribes of restored Israel, God raises a single Prince who will not only represent the princes and the Messiah, but administrate in the Temple-centered kingdom, to provide offerings at the feasts, new moons, sabbaths and appointed feasts.

Exposition of the Text

God establishes a holy economy led by the Prince who will practice offerings associated with His holy days and appointed feasts (45:9-17)

⁶⁵⁷ This section is a heavily revised excerpt from a previous paper of the author. Benjamin Szumskyj, “Offerings and Festivals in the Millennial Temple: An Expositional of Ezekiel 45:9–46:15” (class paper submitted in OBST845 Prophets II (D01) at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Spring 2022).

It is important to establish early, that the events detailed in the studied chapters relate to a future reality, not one that has taken place in history or is intended to be read metaphorically (or allegorically, or even, symbolically). This position is upheld by two points. The first, is that history does not attest to such a Temple being built, or associated events, whether in the field of archaeology or in the surveying of relevant literature. To argue from the absence of evidence might be frowned upon by some scholars, but it is objective and consistent with an archaeological record that often attests to the events, individuals and locations read about in Scripture.⁶⁵⁸ The physical nature of the Temple is paramount, not one that is imagined or only possible in Heaven. Its creation is not only possible, it is the future. As Strong notes that “Ezekiel intended that temple one day in the future to have its earthly counterpart... and that this text itself was both a first instalment of the founding of the temple and a reference document for the post-exilic generation to study when the time came to build [it].”⁶⁵⁹

Second, is that the level of detail provided by Ezekiel, contradicts one’s understanding of apocalyptic literature and the genre as a whole. There are techniques, each with distinct rules, that shaped such writings and in approaching claims that these chapters are metaphorical, can be swiftly dismissed by the universal understanding that when apocalyptic imagery is utilised by an author, it’s true literal nature is often explained directly after (or at least, close to the text in question). That does not happen with Ezekiel. There is nothing inferred in the text that Ezekiel is “actually” speaking of events, institutions or people

⁶⁵⁸ As Biwul declares in light of Ezekiel 37:1–14, “Israel’s exilic condition was hopeless and practically irreparable. The people had lost the priesthood and its rituals; the monarchy and its respect; the temple and its glory; Zion, the city of David/Yahweh and its integrity; Yahweh’s presence and glory; their ancestral land; and their pride as a people. Israel, regrettably, lost such national repertoires when her ancestral land was disposed and, subsequently, was forcefully deposited in a foreign land.” Joel K. T. Biwul, “The Restoration of the ‘Dry Bones’ in Ezekiel 37:1–14: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis,” *Scriptura* 118, no. 1 (2019): 3. While the current “birth” of present-day Israel is prophetic in nature, the prophecy of true restoration in the land is forthcoming.

⁶⁵⁹ John T. Strong, “Grounding Ezekiel’s Heavenly Ascent: A Defense of Ezek 40–48 as a Program for Restoration,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26, no. 2 (2012): 201, 210.

removed from the culture and land in which he is writing from. To be so specific about, for example, measurements, makes clear that this text is to be exegetically as both literal and regarding a future event. As Peterson highlights, the “detailed measurements given in the temple vision also have a theological purpose of separating the holy from the profane ... in undertaking this surveying activity they will be made aware of what Ezekiel is trying to teach them by the dimensional minutiae of vision.”⁶⁶⁰

While volumes have been written about the Millennium,⁶⁶¹ it is sufficient to state that the time period Ezekiel is writing in, is indeed the future. As it is marked by the presence of sin, hence the continued need for sacrifices, it cannot be speaking of the new Heavens and Earth. Likewise, in the quest to establish truly holy and honest practices associated with the Temple and in designating spaces intended solely for the Messiah and not for humanity, these events must be taking place after the “day of the Lord,” the time in which God’s judgement covers the world. That there are no references to such a time, as many prophets of the Tanakh did, implies that this is indeed a reign between the second advent of the Messiah and the creation of new Heavens and a new Earth. Hence, it is my contention that at the end of a seven-year period of Tribulation (Daniel 9:24-27), there will be a physical and public return to earth of the Messiah to defeat the forces of Satan and establish a literal one thousand year “millennial” kingdom in Israel (Zechariah 14:4-11; Luke 1:32–33; Revelation 19:11-16, 20:1-6).⁶⁶² As Cook wisely notes, in “Ezekiel 40-48, evil remains a dark, potent force[; a]

⁶⁶⁰ Brian Peterson, “Ezekiel’s Rhetoric: Ancient Near Eastern Building Protocol and Shame and Honor as the Keys in Identifying the Builder of the Eschatological Temple,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (2013): 726–27.

⁶⁶¹ Michael J. Vlach, “Premillennialism and the Kingdom: A Rationale for a Future Earthly Kingdom,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 29, no. 2 (2018): 207–32.

⁶⁶² One is fully aware of the wide-ranging interpretations of those passages cited. Take for example, Zechariah 14. While not advocating for Dispensationalism, as this school of thought is the one that primarily chooses to interpret the passage literally, it is worth hearing the criticism against this interpretation, even if it is somewhat convoluted. Wolters writes that “the hermeneutical assumption that Old Testament Jerusalem (and Israel) cannot, indeed must not, prefigure the New Testament church, that is the great Achilles’ heel of his interpretation... the entire edifice of dispensationalist hermeneutics stands and falls with this assumption.”

literary utopia is not the eschaton, where evil and death are defeated by God, but an alternative world that exists alongside present reality and challenges it.”⁶⁶³

Finally, it is important to highlight again that the studied texts take place in the wake of much detail pertaining to the Temple and Millennial conditions. As Leveen summarises, there is no room for passivity: “Ezekiel aims to capture the exilic community’s active attention and engagement, to ensure that they respond to his tour by reinvigorating and deepening their dedication to a restoration of the people Israel... its priests... and its temple in the promised land as quickly as possible.”⁶⁶⁴

The princes are commanded by God to be honest in their commercial practices (scales and currency standard), in preparation for Temple activity (45:9-12)

In the Millennium, it speaks of princes that are commanded by God to be honest in their commercial practices (scales and currency standard), in preparation for Temple activity (45:9-12). These princes are unlike previous leaders of the land, who were prone to commandeering property that was not rightly theirs (Ezekiel 22:27; cf. Numbers 36:7-9). The identity of these leaders is initially unclear, as their introduction into the text is assumed by the reader. Hence, it is most likely that they are leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, being Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin (cf. Revelation 7:4–8).

Albert M. Wolters, “Zechariah 14: A Dialogue with the History of Interpretation,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13 (2002): 52–53. One’s object here is to contend that the ekklesia of God before the incarnation of Jesus is the same at the community after His death and resurrection and comment that it is in fact hermeneutically possible to identify in a passage a literal and figurative interpretation.

⁶⁶³ Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London, UK: Yale University Press, 2018), 235.

⁶⁶⁴ Adriane B. Leveen, “Returning the Body to Its Place: Ezekiel’s Tour of the Temple,” *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 4 (2012): 386.

The scales and currency standard of the Millennial era are precise and reminiscent of those established previously in Israel's Temple. As Feinberg notes

The ephah was the dry measure equal to about eight or nine gallons or one bushel, divided into sixths for calculation purposes. The bath was a liquid measure equal to about nine gallons or ninety-one pints, divided into tenths. A hin was the sixth part of a bath. The Hebrew followed the decimal system... Verse 12 is admittedly very difficult... it is acknowledged to be a conjecture, and it appears to be a quite colorless one, but it is certain that multiples of five are repeated.⁶⁶⁵

The purpose of such detail, is to enshrine honesty in the system in anticipation of sin still existing in the world; Millennium takes place after the second advent of the Messiah, but before the "new heavens and new earth" (Isaiah 66:22; Revelation 21:1–5). Hence, while this period of time is not meant to perfect, so to be glorified and free of sin forevermore, it is meant to be reminiscent of Eden (Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25) and humanity's formative years post-Eden. This is because, as Hullinger succinctly notes, after the Second Coming, "[o]ne of the results of this judgment will be the admission of saved but nonglorified individuals into the kingdom... since these individuals will be present with the residing glory of God, the danger will once again exist that the divine presence may be ceremonially polluted."⁶⁶⁶

The establishment of offerings for the Prince of Israel (45:13-16)

Determining the identity of the "Prince" is imperative to understanding the passages studied. To begin with, the title of Prince, rather than King, is important as it is a title improperly and poorly translated when speaking of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6. Jesus is not the

⁶⁶⁵ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 264.

⁶⁶⁶ Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Divine Presence, Uncleaness, and Ezekiel's Millennial Sacrifices," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 652 (2006): 410.

“Prince” of Peace, for He is a King. The correct translation is actually “Commander,” as the Hebrew word שָׂר *sar* is translated in Genesis 1:22; Job 39:25, for example. Even “Captain” (cf. Isaiah 3:3,21:5) would make more sense, contextually. By titling Jesus as the Commander of Peace or Captain of Peace, ensures distinction between Him and this eschatological Prince.

The Prince is first introduced in Ezekiel 44:3. Over chapters 44-46, one assembles a clearer picture of who he might be, by seeing what he does. He “shall sit in [the gate] as prince to eat bread before the Lord” (v.3). This denotes that he is not divine and as such, not a member of the Trinitarian God, God. This is affirmed later in that he is not allowed to enter by the East gate which is solely reserved for the Messiah (Ezekiel 44:2). He must not perform priestly duties (Ezekiel 45:19), he sins and as such, must offer sacrifices (Ezekiel 45:22), and he is expected to worship the Lord (Ezekiel 46:2). It is also revealed that he father’s sons (Ezekiel 46:16-18). This then, cannot be the Messiah,⁶⁶⁷ however, his importance is greater than other princes and he represents the Messiah. This leaves some possible options.⁶⁶⁸

In surveying several scholarly interpretations, Goswell notes that “the prince is not explicitly identified as a Davidide; he is not designated Y[HWH]’s “servant” (עֶבֶד); there is no use of “king” in application to him; and no shepherding (רֹעֶה) role is specified... [however, t]hese omissions, however, do not require the explanation that a different [Davidic] figure is in view.”⁶⁶⁹ He goes on to astutely comment that the Prince’s office has little independence, his location is a city belonging “to the whole house of Israel” and not

⁶⁶⁷ As suggested by Jenson, though without a shred of scriptural evidence or rationale. Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 326.

⁶⁶⁸ What can be dismissed is that the offerings in Ezekiel’s vision are comparable or influenced by Babylonian celebration of the *Akītu* festival and that the Prince is to be compared and contrasted with its *ahu rabu* (high-priest). Tova Ganzel, “First-Month Rituals in Ezekiel’s Temple Vision: A Pentateuchal and Babylonian Comparison,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2021): 390–406.

⁶⁶⁹ Greg (Gregory Ross) Goswell, “The Prince Forecast by Ezekiel and Its Relation to Other Old Testament Messianic Portraits,” *Biblische Notizen* 178 (2018): 58.

designated as “the city of David,” and he does not appear to come from any Israelite tribe.⁶⁷⁰ As such, he clarifies that while the Prince may not be David resurrected or be descended from David himself, he does share a Davidic nature and overtones. He is not greater than the Davidic figure of Jesus (cf. Luke 20:41–44) nor have any connection to the fulfilling of the Davidic Covenant in the Millennium, yet he does appear to assist Christ’s work in some way. The “*nasi*’ [Prince] is not the royal patron or protector of the cult, as was the case with the Davidic kings (1 Kgs 8)... [t]he Temple sanctuary in the plan is not located within the royal residence compound... [for i]n Ezekiel’s plan it is the Zadokite priests who are the guardians of the sacred, not the *nasi*’.”⁶⁷¹ Boyle, in surveying recent scholarship on the Prince’s identity, finds three points of agreement regarding the Prince: that the Hebrew term for him is “a pre-monarchical descriptor for a chieftain type figure who had a representative role for his clan,” this word is complex and used particularly and exclusively by Ezekiel, and is rendered in a positive way to be both a provider and representative co-worshipper.⁶⁷² What is clear then, is not so much who the Prince is or what his lineage is, but rather, his character and his role. Continuing on with the studied text, it is written by Ezekiel that “all the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel” (Ezek. 45:16). These are described in v.13-15. It is insinuated in this text that while he is not a High Priest, he is practising commands associated with the Temple, not only for himself and even by the side of his fellow worshippers, but it appears, on behalf of Israel. This is indeed a unique role, almost intercessory in its nature.

⁶⁷⁰ Goswell, “The Prince Forecast by Ezekiel and Its Relation to Other Old Testament Messianic Portraits,” 59.

⁶⁷¹ Brian Boyle, “The Figure of the *Nāśi*’ in Ezekiel’s Vision of the New Temple (Ezekiel 40–48),” *Australian Biblical Review* 58 (2010): 15. This article is extremely insightful and provides more information than space allows here.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

The Prince's responsibility will be to provide for the public

Burnt offerings (45:17a)

In having established the importance of the Prince, the text explores the responsibility that he will need to provide for the public. The first is burnt offerings. These are offerings in which an animal (which differed pending on when it was conducted) is brought to the Temple, disassembled, its blood sprinkled upon the altar, and is atoning in nature (Leviticus 1:1-17, 6:8-13). Sometimes they were daily (Exodus 29:38-42; Numbers 28:2), on Sabbaths (Numbers 28:9-10), at a new moon (Numbers 29:6), or during appointed festivals (Numbers 28:19,27, 29:1).

While discussed throughout this paper, it is important to establish early, the perceived “issue” of animal sacrifice being revived in the Millennium. It is helpful at this stage to establish early a basis for this practice. Hullinger, in exploring the purpose of such sacrifices in the Millennial Temple, comes to similar conclusions shared by this paper’s author: that sacrifices will restore the believer and theocracy of Israel, thanksgiving and worship were always integral to the sacrificial system, the divine Presence of God in the land demands sacrifices, the reparational nature of sacrifices, and need for ceremonial cleansing by way of sacrifices due to personal sin.⁶⁷³

Rather than subscribing to a “memorial” view of the sacrifices, they are to be seen as restorative in nature, a reinstatement and renewal of God’s holy standard in relation to the Temple. This does not suggest that Christ’s sacrifice was in vain, but rather, are to be contrasted so as to highlight the superiority of His salvific act.

⁶⁷³ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Animal Sacrifice,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 17, no. 50 (2013): 59–61.

Grain and drink offerings at the feasts (45:17b-c)

Taking place after a burnt offering, grain offerings were usually barley or wheat that was grounded, neither leavened or sweetened and could be either raw or prepared, given to a priest who would offer a portion to the Lord and some kept by the priest himself (Leviticus 2:1–16). Drink offerings, were those that accompanied burnt and grain offerings, was when wine was entirely poured out at the altar by the priest (Numbers 15:4-12). Depending on the animal sacrificed, the amount of wine offered varied; for a lamb it was one-quarter hin (Numbers 15:4-5), a ram it was one-third hin (Numbers 15:6), and for a bull it was one-half hin (Numbers 15:10). It appears to be a libation of the worshipper's labor. In exploring the grain offering's purpose in the Millennial Temple, Hullinger insightfully comments that as there is no enlarged function to the role of grain offering, it must achieve the same purpose it did in Leviticus; it will be a welcome gift, just as those given to God in the current age.⁶⁷⁴

On the new moons and on the sabbaths (45:17d)

In discussing new moons, it must be understood that Israel operated according to a lunar calendar. New moons marked the beginning of a month and resulted in celebration. It is commanded that “at the beginning of each of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord: two bulls and one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect; and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, for each bull; and two-tenths of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, for the one ram; and a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering for each lamb, for a burnt offering of a

⁶⁷⁴ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Function of the Millennial Sacrifices in Ezekiel’s Temple Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 665 (2010): 57.

soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the Lord. Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull and a third of a hin for the ram and a fourth of a hin for a lamb; this is the burnt offering of each month throughout the months of the year” (Numbers 28:11-14).

Refraining from work (Nehemiah 10:31) and trumpet blowing (Numbers 10:10) was also customary. More information will be provided regarding Sabbaths below.⁶⁷⁵

At all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel (45:17e)

Scripture explicitly states several of the appointed feasts (festivals) that will be practiced in the Millennium. The Passover festival and Unleavened Bread festival are mentioned (Ezekiel 45:21-24). The Sukkot festival is mentioned (Ezekiel 45:25; Zechariah 14:16-19). It is possible that the phrase here, along with v.46:9-11, could denote those feasts (such as Pentecost or the festival of Trumpets) not mentioned later in the studied passage, especially as two of those earlier cited were annual pilgrimage festivals that were required under the law. It is apparent that in light of the rebuilt Temple, the festivals are to be practiced in full.

Sin offering (45:17f)

Sin offerings were those that were atoning in nature (Leviticus 4:1-35). Individuals who intentionally sinned were to bring a bull to be sacrificed, to be disassembled by the priest in its entirety, part of being burnt while the rest of it properly disposed of (v.3-12). If the intentional sin relates to the entire congregation, the elders are to undergo the same practice

⁶⁷⁵ Interestingly, the “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice,” a series of thirteen songs found in fragment form among the Dead Sea Scrolls, is attested by the use of similar Hebrew words in each text such as “sanctuary” and “vestibule.” James R. Davila, “The Macrocosmic Temple, Scriptural Exegesis, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 9, no. 1 (2002): 5–6.

(v.13-21). If leaders unintentionally sin, they are to bring a male goat to be sacrificed by the priest (v.22-26). If the common people unintentionally sin, they are to bring a female goat to be sacrificed by the priest (v.27-31). Alternatively, a female lamb may also be presented (v.32-35). In the Millennial Temple, on both the first and seventh days there is a sin offering given, in the building of the altar of burnt sacrifice a sin offering is given again, and atonement offerings include sin offerings as well (though no time frame is attached to when this should be practiced).⁶⁷⁶

Grain offering (45:17g)

As mentioned above, these were offerings given to the priest who offered a portion of the grain to the Lord and kept some for themselves (Leviticus 2:1–16).

Burnt offering and peace offerings (45:17h)

As mentioned above, burnt offerings were those in which an animal's body and blood were disassembled and sprinkled by the priest upon the altar as an act relating to atonement.

Peace offerings (Leviticus 7:11–21) were a voluntary act of thanksgiving, “votive [or] freewill” in nature (v.20). The worshipper was to present three unleavened bakes (two cakes and one wafer), plus a leavened cake, and “present one of every offering as a contribution to the Lord; it shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offerings” (v.14). Animals brought to be sacrificed, a portion is to be given to the priest, with the remainder to be entirely consumed by the worshipper on the same day. The emphasis here is that, in being an offering of thankfulness, only a portion of the unleavened and leavened bakes, in addition

⁶⁷⁶ Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 285.

to the meat of the animal, was actually given to the priest; the majority was intended to remain with the worshipper.

In the Millennial Temple, peace offerings express “thanksgiving to God and celebrate... the presence of peace between the worshipper and God,”⁶⁷⁷ much as they did in the past and as there is no further information on how they would differ during this time, one can safely assume they will be practiced and achieve the same goal as they did historically. For “there is nothing in the worshipful expression of this offering that would impugn the efficacy of the cross of Christ.”⁶⁷⁸

To make atonement for the house of Israel (45:17i)

This picture here, is that all of the offerings and sacrifices above, were collectively, a way of making atonement for the house of Israel, not in a way that detracts or substitutes the atoning work of Messiah, but rather, as a restoration of practises in Israel’s previous theocracy. There are differing views however. While recent scholarship has entertained a view that reads these sacrifices as not so much literal but representative in nature,⁶⁷⁹ the dominant interpretation by those who hold to a literal eschatology insist they are memorial in nature.⁶⁸⁰ Others though flatly reject this. Ryrie argues that, as they “make atonement,” they

⁶⁷⁷ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Function of the Millennial Sacrifices in Ezekiel’s Temple Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 666 (2010): 168.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁷⁹ “A typological use of Old Testament imageries and entities in prophecy is not unusual... [and] careful contextual interpretation of these Old Testament imageries leads one to consider their typological significance in one’s exegesis of them and to reject a careless literalism... [Hence, a] restoration of animal sacrifices would move backward against the pattern set by progressive revelation, which reinforces the idea that a typological interpretation may be more tenable.” R. Todd Mangum, “Can we Expect a Restoration of Levitical Animal Sacrifices? A Progressive Dispensationalist Opinion,” *Eastern Regional Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Langhorne, PA, 2001.

⁶⁸⁰ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 454–63. He cites Dispensational scholars who agree with him.

cannot truly be memorialising the past but must infer something different so as not to diminish the Messiah's work on the cross. After exploring different ways of defining "atonement" and concluding his favorability of understanding it as "propitiation and purging," he writes that as Israel was a theocracy, sin was both governmental and spiritual in nature. He adds:

The atonement made by the Levitical sacrifices would restore the sinner to his privileges and position in the theocracy, including his theocratic relation to God. This would be true whether or not the Israelite was a believer whose sins were also eternally forgiven. All, believers and unbelievers, needed what I call "theocratic forgiveness" when they sinned.⁶⁸¹

Therefore, the sacrifices made one right with the law, not the Lawgiver; that privileged required saving faith. While intriguing, Ryrie's argument is stronger before the atoning work of Messiah, than after. That is to say, it is valid to argue that faith in God may have not been present in all that presented offerings under the Levitical system prior to the Messiah's incarnation, but the events of Ezekiel speak of a full understanding of what Messiah achieved. True, unbelievers will arise in the Millennium (children, grandchildren, etc. of the first generation that survived Messiah's second advent; cf. Revelation 20:7-10), but it appears that those worshipers in the Millennial Temple are indeed, redeemed Jew and Gentile.

More effective than the "memorial" view is those proposed by Hullinger (explored elsewhere in this paper) and by Bolender. Bolender proposes to look at the animal sacrifices as a type of shadow, as the predominant memorial view is inconsistent with the scriptural record. In summarizing the nature of memorials and determining such a label cannot be affixed to these sacrifices, he contends that they must be seen as "shadow ritual" for "[s]ince the Old Testament animal sacrifices were shadows of an as-yet unrevealed reality, we assume

⁶⁸¹ Charles C. Ryrie, "Why Sacrifices in the Millennium?" *Emmaus Journal* 11, no. 2 (2002): 304–5.

that the millennial animal sacrifices will be shadows of an as-yet unrevealed reality.⁶⁸²

Whether one adopts Hullinger's restorative view⁶⁸³ or Bolender's, they are interpretively better than the memorial view, which seems to be wrought with hermeneutical challenges.

Excursus: Differences between Ezekiel and Moses

In studying the offerings, one begins to notice slight differences, not to the point of changing their nature or purpose, but worth noting nonetheless, in addition to acts not prescribed in the Torah. Klein helpfully summarises these differences:

[1] The sin offering of a bull, to be made on the first, seventh, and fourteenth of Nisan, [2] While Ezekiel prescribes seven bulls and seven rams as burnt offerings on each day of Passover, the Torah ordains only two bulls and one ram, but seven lambs also, for the sacrifice... [3] The burnt offerings that Ezekiel prescribes for the Sabbath [and Rosh Hodesh differ] [4] Ezekiel requires that one lamb be brought each morning as a burnt offering, whereas the Torah ordains the sacrifice of two [5] Ezekiel makes no mention of the special sacrifices... for the second day of Passover [and other festivals] [6] The meal-to-animal ratios in Ezekiel do not correspond to those in the Torah... [and 7] The quantity of libation accompanying each meal offering in Ezekiel also differs.⁶⁸⁴

In seeking to answer a reason for the variations, one is only left with speculation, for the text does not account for it. It is possible that, while retaining their essence and core meaning, differences may be as a result of livestock availability in the Millennium, whereas his fifth point will be explored later in this paper.

⁶⁸² Bob Bolender, "Memorials and Shadows Animal Sacrifices of The Millennium," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2002): 38–39.

⁶⁸³ They "will appease God's wrath for a time and keep his home pure in the midst of a still sinful world... the sacrifices in this regard are essentially a hedge against defilement that allows for sinful people to live in the Messiah's world until the sin-free Eternal State commences." Matthew Bryce Ervin, *One Thousand Years with Jesus: The Coming Messianic Kingdom* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2017), 114–15.

⁶⁸⁴ Reuven Chaim (Rudolph) Klein, "Reconciling the Sacrifices of Ezekiel with the Torah," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2015): 212–13.

Through the Prince, God enlarges the meaning and means of practicing appointed feasts (45:18-25)

The New Atoning Festival (45:18-20)

In exploring the concept of “new” in the Scriptures, one learns that there is a difference between that which has been progressively revealed by God for the first time, contrasted with those practices He renews, so not to change them but rather enlarge them. This is exemplified earlier in Ezekiel, when referring to the renewed covenant (Ezekiel 36:24-28), which has been mistranslated as the “New Covenant” so as to denote that which has never appeared before. However, the “Renewed” Covenant both renews that which has been perpetually established⁶⁸⁵ and equally enlarges in nature.⁶⁸⁶ It is important to note here that the covenant itself does not at all conflict with the notion of revived animal sacrifice. Hullinger notes a) the exegetical connection between Ezekiel 36-39 and 40-48, b) that the provisions of the covenant include land, a new heart, and a new Temple, c) the nation of Israel has yet to experienced the blessing detailed in the eschatological chapters, d) the covenant is unconditional, and e) the covenant will magnify His glory according to His purposes; as such, *“the prophets were comfortable in linking the promises of regeneration and a new heart with animal sacrifices [and n]ot only will the Temple be built, but it will also include all of the concomitants seen by Ezekiel, including sacrifices and the glory of the Lord.”*⁶⁸⁷ As such, in these verses one reads of what appears to be a “new” festival, but it

⁶⁸⁵ It renews His relationship with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31) and renews the presence and practice of His Law (Jer. 31:33).

⁶⁸⁶ It reveals that through the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua the Christ, it has been enacted and He is its Mediator (Luke 22:19-21), it reveals that its recipients have now been enlarged to include redeemed Gentiles (cf. Jer. 31:31), it reveals that the canon of Scripture has been enlarged (cf. Jer. 31:33), it reveals the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34), and it reveals the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:27).

would be stubborn as to not see parallels with the Day of Atonement (better rendered “Covering”; Leviticus 23:27-28; cf. 16:1-34). That is the festival in which the high priest entered the “Holy of Holies,” the inner sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, to make a reconciliatory sacrifice with God and Israel for their sins as a nation. It was the only fast ever commanded in Scripture, being a response by the people to meditate upon one’s sin and the mercy of God in His forgiveness of them (Leviticus 16:29, 23:26-32, 25:9; Acts 27:9). During this festival, it is commanded to “humble yourselves and not do any work” (Leviticus 16:29), provide an offering (Leviticus 23:27) and “sound a horn all through your land” (Leviticus 25:9).

In exploring this festival, one sees direct parallels. There is reference to the sacrifice to a bull, the use of its blood, and atonement. As such, it is possible that the Day of Atonement is renewed in the Millennium, so as to shift its place on the calendar (to Abib) and have the blood of the slain bull utilised in an alternative manner. It is possible that this festival will be progressively revealed in the future and will be in addition to the Day of Atonement, however this may cause a contradiction as both festivals share the same theological goal. In saying this however, Hullinger here helps us navigate our understanding of atonement and how the Scriptures themselves attest to “two atonement realms.” In understanding that animal sacrifices were efficacious in removing one’s ceremonial uncleanness, the “dilemma presented by the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament was that an animal was not an appropriate sacrifice for a man bearing the *imago Dei*... [as such,] the blood of Christ achieved what the blood of animals never could *nor was ever intended to achieve*, namely, internal cleansing resulting in salvation and access (both presently and

⁶⁸⁷ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Animal Sacrifice,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 17, no. 50 (2013): 56–59.

eschatologically) into the immediate presence of God.”⁶⁸⁸ So, even if the interpretation of this being an enlargement of the Day of Atonement is rejected, one can easily still interpret this Millennial festival as progressive revelation of God and not contradict or diminish the atoning work of Messiah.

The Passover festival enlarged (45:21-24)

In Ezekiel 45:21–24, there are no explicit statements that imply a change to the intended nature of the Passover.⁶⁸⁹ The text designates Passover and Unleavened Bread are to be seen as one unit, however, that does not erode their distinct natures as festivals. Wagenaar (in studying Ezekiel 45:18-25 and the priestly festival calendar) highlights the overlapping nature of each festival, but maintains their distinction, when accounting for how they are dated. In understanding that a Passover meal took place first and then was followed by a week of partaking in unleavened bread,

[t]he inevitable adaptation of the early post-exilic practice to the Babylonian custom to reckon the days from sunset to sunset instead of sunrise to sunrise entailed that the nocturnal [P]assover meal which was originally celebrated in the night of the fourteenth henceforth overlapped with the festival of unleavened bread beginning in the night from the fourteenth to the fifteenth.⁶⁹⁰

The Prince “shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering... a burnt offering... [and] a grain offering” (v.23-24) during this season, revealing again, that

⁶⁸⁸ Jerry M. Hullinger, “Two Atonement Realms: Reconciling Sacrifice in Ezekiel and Hebrews,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11, no. 32 (2007): 48, 58, 62–63.

⁶⁸⁹ Exodus 12:1–13, 23–28, 42–51; Leviticus 23:4–5; Numbers 9:1–14; 28:16–25; 33:2–4; Deuteronomy 16:1–7; Joshua 5:10–11; 2 Kings 23:21–23; 2 Chronicles 30:1–5, 13–19; 35:1–19; Ezra 6:19–21; Ezekiel 45:21; Matthew 26:17–35; Mark 14:1–2, 12–31; Luke 2:41; 22:1, 7–23; John 2:13, 23; 6:4; 12:1; 13:1–5; 18:28, 39; 19:14; Acts 12:4; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:28.

⁶⁹⁰ Jan A. Wagenaar, “Passover and the First Day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the Priestly Festival Calendar,” *Vetus Testamentum* 54, no. 2 (2004): 267.

animal sacrifices have been reinstated with the rebuilding of the Temple. This does not contradict Hebrews 10:1-4, rather, it makes clear that in the past, such sacrifices never took away the sin of an individual but was a lesson in anticipation of the forthcoming Messiah's ministry; in the wake of His arrival, such a festival commemorates that anticipation manifested.

The Unleavened Bread festival enlarged (45:21-24)

As mentioned above, the Festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread⁶⁹¹ are seemingly merged, but this does not mean that they are not to be understood separately. Through Scripture, the two are differentiated more than they are merged, but there are examples of the latter (Exodus 12:14-15). Interestingly, in the past, the Levitical priesthood taught “good insight *in the things* of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 30:22) during this season. This appears to be true yet again, with the reinstating of the Levitical priesthood in the Millennium (Ezek. 44:15).⁶⁹²

The Sukkot Festival Enlarged (45:25)

Though not mentioned by name, the verse “in the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt

⁶⁹¹ Exodus 12:14–22, 39; 13:6–7; 23:15; 34:18; Leviticus 23:6; Numbers 28:17–25; Deuteronomy 16:3–8, 16; 2 Chronicles 8:13; 30:21–23; 35:17; Ezra 6:22; Ezekiel 45:21; Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:1–2, 12; Luke 22:1–2, 7; Acts 12:3; 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:8.

⁶⁹² To clarify, the Levites will primarily be caretakers of the Temple in the Millennium (Ezek. 44:11, 14) when “Ezekiel 44:15–31 discloses the duties for the only Levites who are allowed to serve as priests in this regard: the line of Zadok (cf. 1 Chr 6:1–8)... [As God] promised Zadok’s ancestor, Phinehas, that his descendants would become a perpetual priesthood (Num 25:13) ... the restitution of the priestly functions to the Zadokites fulfills God’s promises to their forefathers.” Matthew Bryce Ervin, *One Thousand Years with Jesus: The Coming Messianic Kingdom* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2017), 98–99.

offering, the grain offering and the oil,” reveals that this is the festival of Sukkot. The festival of Sukkot.⁶⁹³ Interestingly, Cook notes that “By not naming the feast, the text maintains its focus on how temple purification rites should occur every six months[; t]he authors’ primary concern is clearly not with the individual contours of Israel’s traditional festivals.”⁶⁹⁴

The Prince’s offerings and interaction with the Temple within the holy district of inner Israel (46:1-15)

The shutting of the east-facing inner court other than on the Sabbath and the day of the New Moon (46:1)

In shutting the gate for six days, it is clear that the full intention of the Sabbath ((Exodus 20:8-11; cf. 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:12–15) will be restored. What was intended by God (cf. Jeremiah 17:22-27) will be made a reality and His believers will commit to the instructions that He progressively revealed regarding the holy day throughout the Tanakh. This also infers a correction of how the world is to reckon time, as reference to lunar observation will reinstitute God’s preferred calendar model.

The priests provide the Prince’s offerings, being an example of spiritual obedience to be emulated (46:2)

The Prince does not question the validity of how God is to be worshipped in the Millennial Temple. There are no appeals to Scripture, so as to raise an argument that would

⁶⁹³ Also known as Feast of Ingathering or Festival of Tabernacles; Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:33–43; Numbers 29:12; Deuteronomy 16:13–16; 31:10; 2 Chronicles 8:13; Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:13–17; Zechariah 14:16–19; John 1:14; 7:2.

⁶⁹⁴ Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London, UK: Yale University Press, 2018), 258.

lay the ground to a contradiction, so as to question the will of his Lord. He understands that this way of worshipping the Lord in light of a rebuilt Temple with a reinstated sacrificial system, is consistent with how God desires to be approached on holy land. While the Temple's absence in history was because of the Lord's judgement, this did not mean that He no longer has any use for the Temple or did not desire the Temple to be rebuilt. Ezekiel reveals that the Prince delighted in sacrificing for the Lord and as such, establishes a model for other believers in the Millennium.

The People Emulate the Prince (46:3)

Scripture attests that emulation of godly saints should be encouraged, for they emulate the Messiah (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 3:17; Philemon 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). This is true in the Millennium, for in the Prince, believers see a fellow saint that lives according to the commands of God, not excusing such devotion as legalism or as a works-based sanctification. He knows he is saved and the work of the Messiah and this has led him to work for Him. His role here is to show others how one lives out their faith in light of a rebuilt Temple. As such, the call for the "people of the land [to] also worship at the doorway of that gate before the Lord" is heeded. They have a living example to show them how it is done.

The Prince's Offerings are Described (46:4-7)

As has been attested, the details which Ezekiel takes time in providing his readers, seems unnecessary if such passages and by extension, chapters, were intended to be read as allegorical, metaphorical or symbolically. The specific nature demands a literal reading, one

that ensures Ezekiel's readers are understanding that these events have not yet taken place but will do so at a time later in the prophetic calendar of God. The presence of sin, as inferred by the offerings, makes it clear that this is not the "new heavens and new earth" (Isaiah 66:22; Revelation 21:1-5), but an undisclosed epoch in which the "day of the Lord" has passed.

The Prince enter and leaves by "way of the porch of the gate" (46:8)

Soon will learn of an exception to the rule of where the Prince can travel in the Temple complex (Ezekiel 46:12), however, the primary designation of his travails is through the gates' vestibule for it is almost exclusively for the Messiah (Ezekiel 44:2). This again is another example ensuring that Ezekiel's readers do not mistake the Prince as the Messiah, by another form and name, as He was when he appeared as "the Angel of the Lord" in the past (Genesis 16:7-12; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; Exodus 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2 Samuel 24:16; Zechariah 1:12; 3:1; 12:8).

The people practice the appointed feasts by entering the north gate (46:9)

The Millennial community of believers is one that harkens back to the time of Moses (Acts 7:38) and includes both Jew and Gentiles (cf. Ezekiel 44:6-9). For one "law [Torah] shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you" (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:15-16,29; Isaiah 56:6-8). They understand the importance of the appointed feast, their relation to the Messiah, and their perpetual nature (e.g., Exodus 12:14). They continue the ways of their spiritual ancestors and restore what has been forgotten through the history of the ekklesia.

The Prince accompanies the people in practicing the appointed feasts (46:10-12a-c)

As stated above, the Prince is to be emulated and accompanies his fellow believers in practicing the appointed festivals. He “shall go in among them,” implying that he is one with the covenantal community, so not to be seen as superior in his spirituality, but as equal in salvation and responsibilities as one saved and now being sanctified in holiness.

The Prince permitted to enter the east gate, reserved for the Messiah, when providing a freewill offering (46:12d)

This event is momentous in that the Prince is given license to enter a location reserved primarily for the Messiah, further strengthening the figures’ Davidic lineage. The gate’s vestibule is accessible to him, though such permission does not equate equality.

The Prince’s offerings are further described (46:13-15)

In further commenting on the activities of the Prince, Ezekiel reminds his readers that specifics matter. The concise and sometimes repetitive nature of his commentary pertaining to the Millennial Temple serves as further evidence that such chapters are neither allegorical or symbolic in nature. They are not a metaphor for other individuals or institutions. They are clear a continued framework of how God wants to be worshipped, where, and of fulfilling His promises. As Cook eloquently summarised,

The final, climactic position of the section in Ezekiel 46 on the daily (tāmîd) sacrifices (vv. 13–15) probably emphasizes a recurring theme of Ezekiel 40–48: the importance of Israel continually communing with the Presence dwelling in its midst. The tāmîd offerings reflect foods that most families

could afford: lamb meat, grain, and olive oil. The implication, then, is that this is a meal for each Israelite, who, the reader may infer, should ideally enjoy a sort of daily “table fellowship” with the Presence.⁶⁹⁵

Theological Significance

Ezekiel 45:9-46:15 highlights three theological significance; the literal restoration of the Temple, the literal establishment of the Millennium, and the literal practice of Appointed Festivals.

God’s promises do not go unfulfilled and He has long stated His intention to restore the land of Israel, return its redeemed inhabitants, and establish His presence among them. The notion that He has replaced or superseded what He established is inconsistent with the scriptural record. The Millennial Temple was an eschatological reality prophesied by several prophets (Isaiah 2:2-3, 56:6-7, 60:7,13; Jeremiah 33:17-18; Joel 3:18; Haggai 2:7-9; Zechariah 1:16, 6:12-15, 14:20; Malachi 3:1-5). It is a literal promise, yet to be fulfilled for which there is no evidence of its existing historically or intended to be read metaphorically.⁶⁹⁶

The Millennium’s literal nature is also attested throughout the Scriptures (Zechariah 14:4-11; Luke 1:32–33; Revelation 19:11-16, 20:1-6) and focuses on an epoch before two cumulative events, the second advent and the creation of new Heavens and an Earth. Eden-like in its description, it is a time in which God remains consistent to His words and fulfills several promises and prophecies, regarding His people, covenants and at the same time, magnifying His glory by ensuring that all elected for salvation are cared for prior to the final

⁶⁹⁵ Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London, UK: Yale University Press, 2018), 250.

⁶⁹⁶ Ezekiel’s detailed restoration of sacrifices and festivals associated with the Temple can be interpreted in two ways: as a restoration of what had been ceased by God in the first century AD or a requiem and return of practices long abandoned by His believers which He had always intended for them to partake in. One is not bound geographically by worship and those customs associated with the Temple (Neh. 8:14; Dan. 6:10).

judgement. The Millennium paints a theological picture of a way worshippers were meant to approach God and live alongside His Temple, prior to its fall, and of the ingathering of both redeemed Jew and Gentile serving Him in accordance to the fullness of His Law.

Finally, one sees the Appointed Festivals shine as a chief means of worshipping God. The festivals are to be practised by all believers, Jew and Gentile alike. During the thousand-year (“Millennium”) kingly reign after His Second Coming (Revelation 20:2-7; cf. 2 Samuel 7:10–13; Isaiah 9:3–7; 11:1–10; Luke 1:32–33), Jesus Christ will rule from Israel (Zechariah 8:3). During this time, several (perhaps all) of the festivals will be practised in the future (Isaiah 56:6-8; Jeremiah 33:15-18; Ezekiel 43:18-46:24; Zechariah 14:20-21 cf. Zephaniah 3:18). These restored festivals will remind the people in the Millennium of what God accomplished in the past, in addition to their Christological (prophetical) nature.

Ezekiel 45:9-46:15 then, is a testament to the consistency of God and the importance of Temple and festivals in relation to worship. God has detailed clearly, a way He desires to be worshipped and this passage reveals that He never envisioned their abrogation through the ministry of His Son Jesus, during His first advent. There are no acceptable forms of worshipping God other than those prescribed, often in detail, according to the Scriptures. Just as He was displeased with Korah’s “strange fire” (Leviticus 10:1, Numbers 3:4,26:61) and condemns “meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do” (Matthew 6:7), so to does God reject worship that changes what He has instituted and teach that what He has instituted has been abolished with most, or, all of the Law.

Believers have no right to abolish divinely ordained festivals and practises nor do they have the right to establish new “holy days” or rename those that have been clearly designated titles. A believer is to uphold the language of Scripture. Their perpetual nature makes clear that they were intended for all time and it would be contradictory for God to progressively reveal His will, only to progressively regress it at a later stage.

Likewise, though the Temple is currently absent from the land of Israel, its presence did not absolve believers from following commands associated with it (Nehemiah 8:14; Daniel 6:10; cf. Genesis 14:18). Believers are referred to in Temple language (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19) and anticipate its future restoration, as prophetically envisioned by Ezekiel. A believer is eschatologically modelled a way of worshipping God that, while not able to be practised in full, can be practised in part literal and through principled actions. Believers are likened to a Temple, they do not replace it.⁶⁹⁷

In the studied passage, one envisions a time in which believers live in the land according to the will of God. All that has been changed by believers, contrary to His Word, will be restored and He will dwell on the earth one last time, before the final judgement of unbelievers, their imprisonment in Hell, while believers will behold and enter a new Heaven and Earth for eternity for those whose name was in the Book of Life and who believed in the triune God as Lord and Savior (Revelation 21–22).

⁶⁹⁷ Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul*, 121–22.

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