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**THE STATUS OF THE JEWISH LAW IN THE MESSIANIC ERA  
FROM THE BIBLICAL PERIOD  
TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis covers the status of the Jewish law in the messianic era as it was anticipated in Jewish texts from the biblical period until the seventeenth century. Although the predominant perspective is the law's perpetuity, a future idealized version was particularized in each age and stylized by various groups. The view of the law's continuity was challenged by streams of thought and ambiguities in the texts that allowed for changes and cessations in the law in messianic times. Concrete messianic movements, such as that of the New Testament in the first century and the Sabbatean movement of the seventeenth century, brought some of these underlying currents to the forefront with their reinterpretations of the law and their antinomian behaviour.

## **Résumé**

La présente these porte sur l'état de la loi juive relative à l'ère messianique dans les textes juifs, de l'Antiquité au XVIIe siècle. Bien que la tendance prédominante insiste sur la perpétuation de la loi juive, on retrouve une loi imprégnée de l'idéal messianique caractéristique de chaque époque. L'idée d'une continuité de la loi a été remise en question par des courants de pensée et des ambiguïtés du texte, lesquels ont permis d'appuyer l'opinion prônant des modifications, voire l'arrêt de la loi aux temps messianiques. Certains mouvements messianique importants tels que celui du Nouveau Testament au I<sup>er</sup> siècle et celui de Sabbataï du XVIIe siècle ont forcé certaines de ces idées au premier plan, de même que leurs réinterprétations de la loi et leur caractère antinomique.

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 19:13. The context refers to the continual drippings of a wife, but I will take the liberty to expand the meaning to any individual.

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## Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to analyze Jewish texts from the biblical period to the seventeenth century for their assessment of the status of the Jewish law in the messianic era. In other words, to ascertain if Jewish texts provide information about whether the law will remain the same, change in part, or be abrogated with the arrival of the messiah or the messianic era. My methodology was to examine major Jewish primary sources in chronological order for messianic passages that also spoke about the role of the law, including Temple law and the law's relationship to the gentile nations. Immediately questions of definition arise concerning terms such as law and messianic. For example, must the messianic include a personality; does law constitute both its oral and written forms? Because scholars disagree on the definition of messianic, it does not necessarily have to include a messianic figure but must envision a future redemptive period, so that biblical as well as post-biblical passages could apply.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter one will provide a further refinement of the definition of messiah. The law constitutes both its written and oral counterparts as they became somewhat indistinguishable and overlapped within time.<sup>2</sup> Martin Noth describes the law in post-exilic times as shifting from a law that was linked to the covenant to “an absolute entity, valid without respect to precedent, time, or history; based on itself, binding simply because it existed as law, because it was of divine origin and authority.”<sup>3</sup> When the Jewish community was exiled, the law became the powerful and authoritative cornerstone with unquestioned validity. The law was viewed as a unit where eventually the Pentateuch and the entire Tanakh was seen as “the law” by later sections of the Bible and early rabbinic writings. The New Testament writings argue against the high esteem placed on the law as a result of this transformation and that differentiate between the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion on how to determine a “messianic” text see Gerbern S. Oegema, *The Anointed and his People* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 21-29.

<sup>2</sup> The law's definition expanded over time and ranged from the specific laws of the Pentateuch, to the Pentateuch itself, to the entire Bible, and eventually incorporated rabbinic tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 86. Gunner Ostborn says that Torah which originally was understood from its root *Yarah*—to instruct, to teach, to direct, took on the meaning of law because the whole book of the covenant became the basis for instruction. See Gunner Ostborn, *Tora in the Old Testament* (Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1945), 53.

written and oral laws as will be discussed in chapter five. Secondary literature was crucial in guiding me to and through the primary material and assisted particularly in the selection of sources in the medieval period.

My initial desire was to cover the biblical period until the modern era, as well as the numerous messianic movements. However, with the limitations of a Master's thesis I decided to conclude with the Sabbatean movement in the seventeenth century. I included the Frankists because of their direct connection to the latter movement, although they reach beyond this time period. The Sabbateans as well as the followers of Jesus in the first century were the only concrete movements given a thorough treatment, as they were the largest and most influential in Jewish history, particularly with regard to the fate of the law. Their inclusion is paramount in order to see the interplay between messianic speculation about the law and concrete historical messianic movements.

W.D. Davies' work *The Torah in the Messianic Age* is the only major attempt to deal at length with this subject, however, he does not go beyond the early rabbinic period, and his goal is to examine Jewish works in light of the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> Although this thesis includes a consideration of the New Testament, its purpose is to determine the predominant view of the status of the law in the messianic age in Jewish literature throughout the ages.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> W.D. Davies. *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Philadelphia: SBL. 1952).

<sup>5</sup> I consider the New Testament a Jewish text as its authors (most of them Jews) were followers of what was initially a messianic Jewish movement. Harris Lenowitz in *The Jewish Messiahs* includes Jesus of Nazareth as a Jewish messiah figure. Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1998), 34.

# Chapter 1

## The Bible and the Messianic Era

### 1.1 The Bible and Messianism

Before any biblical passages can be assessed for their views of the law in relation to messianism, it must be determined that messianism is, in fact, being discussed in the Bible in general. Indeed, this seems to be where most of the discussion lies in the numerous volumes of modern scholarship that inquire into the messianic idea in the Hebrew Scriptures. For centuries, confessional Jewish and Christian scholars have endeavoured to provide numerous messianic passages to support their particular creed, while most critical scholars would dissent to their interpretations. Joseph Klausner's statement reflects this conflict of opinion when he says "Jewish scriptural interpretation and Christian theology join together in one aspiration—to find the messianic idea in many Biblical passages where in truth there is not even a hint of it."<sup>1</sup> While early rabbis and church Fathers pronounced passages such as Gen. 3:15, 49:10, Isa. 11 or 53 as messianic, critical scholars debated the degree of theological assumption this imposed on these texts. Critical scholars themselves maintain a spectrum of views concerning the degree of messianism within the Hebrew Scriptures. Most are in agreement on the lack of an explicit messianic figure, but many accept a general future redemptive picture that can be labeled "messianic."

While an explicit figure linked to the technical term "messiah" (and all its later connotations) is not found in the Scriptures, many see a developing identification of the kingly figure with a uniquely anointed role. The search for messianism within the Bible text begins by differentiating between the specific noun, "messiah," and the broader messianic concept. All scholars are in agreement that the Hebrew noun for messiah, *mashiah*, which appears thirty-eight times in the Hebrew Scriptures, was applied to patriarchs, kings, high priests and objects that were anointed with oil in order to give them a sacred or sanctified status. Most conclude that an eschatological figure is

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Klausner, "Allusions to the Messianic Idea in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets," in *Messianism in the Talmudic Era*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Ktav, 1979), 190.

associated with the “anointed one” only in post-canonical literature. There is, however, a general consensus that the Hebrew Scriptures present a picture of an ideal era. In addition, many scholars, including Marc Saperstein and Eliezer Schweid, see a redemptive future era linked to the concept of an ideal king throughout the biblical texts. Schweid notices this developing kingship idea within the text that was eventually used by subsequent sources. He states, “a vital connection between the task of the appointed king and that of the redeemer became the source of the unique significance acquired by the concept of messianism in the course of its future evolution.”<sup>2</sup> Julius Greenstone points to the prophets for their crystallization of an ideal and righteous king.<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, explains that many of the kingship passages that have been interpreted by theologians as messianic refer to the historical king, yet, they also relate and foreshadow the messianic figure.<sup>4</sup> J. Lindblom reinforces the connection between king and messiah when he says, “In the above survey the term ‘Messiah’ has been avoided, because it does not occur in the texts quoted. As we know, it belongs to a much later time. But the ideal king of the age to come is, of course, essentially the same as he who was later called ‘the Messiah’ or ‘the Messiah of the Lord.’”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, although the noun for messiah is not used in a direct connection with the future redeemer, some scholars do perceive a linkage between the ruling king and an ideal saviour of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

While Klausner and others are convinced of the imposition of a later messianic concept upon earlier biblical texts, they admit that other passages such as Lev. 26: 44 and Deut. 30:2-6, which discuss redemption from exile, do contain embryonic elements upon which the messianic idea was built.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Edmond Jacob acknowledges a subtle allusion to a salvific figure behind passages such as Gen. 3:15. He also sees various biblical figures such as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, and Samuel as types of the ideal saviour, which ultimately received a more developed identity after the time of David.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Eliezer Schweid, “Jewish Messianism: Metamorphoses of an Idea,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (New York: University Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Julius Greenstone, *The Messiah Idea in Jewish History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*. Translated by G.W. Anderson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), 95, 99, 155.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 396.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, many rabbinic texts speak of *melech ha-mashiah*—an anointed king.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 327ff.

Like Jacob, Klausner acknowledges that the messianic idea came to full fruition only after the period of the monarchy. Eventually the messianic hope included ideas such as a king descended from the house of David (2 Sam. 7), the erection of the tabernacle (Amos 9), or the reconstruction of the Temple (Joel 4:15-18), as well as direct access to divine instruction (Mic. 4:2). For some, by the time of the prophetic ministries of Jeremiah and Isaiah, messianic expectation consisted of several elements such as the judgement of the nations, the restoration of Israel to its own land, a new covenant, and a Davidic ruler. Although most scholars date a more evolved messianic idea to the post-exilic period, others, such as William Horbury and Heinrich Graetz, would place an already formed messianic myth in the exilic or pre-exilic periods. Graetz explains that notions such as a regathering from the exile, a peaceful era, a Davidic leader, and involvement of the gentiles could be included in the concept of messianism by the time of the exile. Lindblom says that the pre-exilic prophecies of Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah, reveal concepts such as the remnant, a blissful future, judgement of the nations, prosperity, re-establishment of the exiled communities, and notably religious and moral regeneration.<sup>9</sup> Horbury emphasizes that there must have been a substantial messianic idea within the Hebrew Scriptures to have motivated the interpreters of succeeding centuries to carry on this hope, although he sees it becoming more clearly defined during the collecting and editing process.<sup>10</sup> Like Horbury, R.J. Werblowsky emphasizes that the foundation of full-fledged historical messianism, as exemplified particularly in the last two centuries of the second Temple period, began in biblical times.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the biblical text is essential for any further discussion of messianism throughout the ages, because its passages contain, to a greater or lesser extent, the embryonic material that spurred on later messianic thought and movements.

## 1.2 The Bible, Messianism, and the Law

Most modern scholarly works that deal with messianism and the Bible focus on the debate about the extent of messianism in the Hebrew Scriptures, rather than on an exposition of those Scriptures that have a messianic proclivity. It is a difficult task to

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<sup>9</sup> Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 374.

<sup>10</sup> William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> R.J. Werblowsky, "Messianism in Jewish History," in *Essential Papers*, 38.

assess passages in the Scriptures for their messianic implications without being, in some manner, influenced by later interpretations. For the purposes of this thesis, references will be made to the passages within the biblical text that contain the embryonic material. That is, they must allude to an ideal period to be considered messianic, in addition to containing references to the status of the law. Lindblom says that this eschatological period is marked by phrases such as “the days are coming,” “at the end of the days,” and “on that day,” therefore, most of the selected verses will contain these or some noticeable variation of them.<sup>12</sup>

W.D. Davies is one of the few scholars who adequately analyze various biblical passages concerning the fate of the law in relation to a future messianic age.<sup>13</sup> Through examination of his choices as well as that of others, it can be seen that the Bible presents both general and specific statements about the law in relation to an ideal era. Examples of the former can be found in chapters such as Isa. 2 and Mic. 4:1-5, which depict God’s teaching as emanating from Zion and the Torah from Jerusalem. There is little detail in these passages about the content of this teaching, only that, in a general sense, divine instruction and law will be generated from Jerusalem sometime in the future. The more specific statements demand more attention. Lindblom explains that the post-exilic prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, trito-Isaiah, and certain post-exilic chapters in Jeremiah describe the establishment of a new Temple, as well as a new and eternal covenant.<sup>14</sup> When dealing with the status of the law in the messianic era, Davies, Gunner Ostborn and others focus mainly on Jer. 31:31-34, with its counterpart in Ezek. 36.<sup>15</sup> They and other scholars remark on the uniqueness of the passage in Jeremiah, because of its reference to a new covenant. It announces,

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<sup>12</sup> J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 360.

<sup>13</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Torah in the Messianic Age* (Philadelphia: SBL, 1952). His views are reevaluated in *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) after a critical article about his first work by A. Diez-Macho. Diez-Macho finds Davies overly cautious in his allowance for a new Torah in the Tanakh. See “Cesara La Tora en la Edad Messianica” *Estudios Biblicos* 12, no.2 (April-June 1953): 115-18 ; 13, no.1 (January-March 1954): 5-51.

<sup>14</sup> J. Lindblom. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 404-408.

<sup>15</sup> Some scholars do not see Jer. 31 as an eschatological passage because of its lack of universalistic and miraculous qualities. See Yair Hoffman “Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah” in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 91.

Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor, and each man his brother saying, Know the Lord. for they will all know me, from the least of them. declares the Lord, to the greatest of them, declares the Lord for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.<sup>16</sup>

Jeremiah's words occur within a seventh-century B.C.E. address to the southern tribes, where he is announcing impending judgement from the North (i.e., a Babylonian invasion). because the people of Israel had forsaken the worship of their God and exchanged it for the worship of foreign deities, such as Baal. Exile would be the main consequence of judgment, after which Jeremiah foresees a hope of return for all the tribes of Israel. Jeremiah 31 is part of this promise of a future regathering based on the words "Behold the days are coming" and "after those days." Therefore, this passage can be considered to be part of an eschatological hope that is offered to the people of Israel.

Modern scholarly discussion focuses on the significance and the consequences of the law being "written on the heart," resulting in various theories about the continuity of the external law. The majority of modern interpreters see the law as inextricably linked to the idea of covenant.<sup>17</sup> What is new here for them is not the element of law within the covenant, but the covenant itself. The content of the law remains the same, but the means of achieving obedience will change; through divine assistance, it will become internalized and an essential part of human nature. Gerhard von Rad fervently states that, within the new covenant, the commandments revealed at Sinai are neither to be abolished nor changed in any manner. The necessity of a new covenant arises because the covenant was

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<sup>16</sup> Jer. 31:31-34 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Banks as opposed to Davies does not see Torah in this context as specifically referring to traditional law. He gives it a broader connotation by designating it as "prophetic instruction" or connecting it to the "word" of the prophet because of the link with "knowledge" of the Lord in vs. 34. Therefore Torah goes beyond observance of laws although it is included in it. Robert Banks, "The Eschatological Role of the Law in Pre- and Post-Christian Jewish Thought" in *Reconciliation and Hope*, Robert Banks ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 174-175. If Bank's view is correct it suggests that annulment of the law is more difficult because it would have to abrogate knowledge of the Lord and the prophetic message as well as the Mosaic law.

broken, whereas the commandments retain their effectiveness. He asserts “Jeremiah neither says that the revelation given at Sinai is to be nullified in whole or part (how could a revelation given by Yahweh ever be nullified or taken back!), nor does he in any sense suggest alteration or expansion of its content in the new covenant.”<sup>18</sup> For von Rad, the only thing to be changed will be a necessity for the process of communication; in the new covenant, God’s will is directly placed in the heart of Israel rather than requiring the two-step process of “speaking and listening.” W. D. Davies informs us that certain Christian scholars interpret Jeremiah’s new covenant as a supersession or abolition of the Sinai covenant. He presents the example of A. S. Peake’s interpretation in the *Century Bible*, which emphasizes that the Sinai code will be achieved through an internal power. Davies then interprets Peake as seeing a superiority of the internal over the external.<sup>19</sup> Edmond Jacob would agree with this view as he states “and by announcing a ‘new covenant,’ Jeremiah and Ezekiel naturally understood the old one was to be annulled.”<sup>20</sup> J.M. Powis Smith sees an antithesis between the external and internal law: “Jeremiah declared that no external law would control the lives of the children of the coming kingdom of God but that Yahweh would write his laws upon the tablets of the hearts of the people...”<sup>21</sup> R.H. Charles is in accord with the idea of supersession but primarily in regard to the relationship between God and man: prior to Jeremiah, the Israelite related to God as part of a nation, whereas the relationship in this prophet is transformed to one that has a more personal and direct nature.<sup>22</sup> Davies and Gunner Ostborn are among those who find these ideas an exaggeration of albeit a recognized tension between the old and new covenants, although the former scholar does not think that such a tension need develop into a full-blown opposition. Davies expresses his opinion (with some reticence),

What we are concerned to emphasize is that Torah, new in some sense and yet not divorced utterly from the old Torah, i.e. the external Torah, is part of Jeremiah’s hope for the ‘latter days.’ For Jeremiah, the new covenant would probably demand both the letter and the spirit.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (London: SCM, 1968), 182.

<sup>19</sup> Peake in W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 274. Jacob says this annulment is a temporary situation and that a new covenant also brings with it new laws.

<sup>21</sup> J.M. Powis Smith, *The Prophets and Their Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1927), 191.

<sup>22</sup> R.H. Charles, *Religious Development between the Old and the New Testaments* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 106.

<sup>23</sup> W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age* (Philadelphia: SBL, 1952), 28.



Therefore Davies would object to a replacement of the old covenant as expressed by these scholars. Although most of them focus on the hierarchy of the internal over the external Torah, von Rad claims that the difference between the outward and inward adherence to the law was not even an issue for Jeremiah, just as in Deuteronomy both were required for proper obedience. He says, "We should completely ignore the distinction between outward obedience and obedience of the heart for it scarcely touches the antithesis in Jeremiah's mind."<sup>24</sup> Von Rad concludes that what is crucial for Jeremiah is not this distinction between the two forms, but the irrelevance of human participation in the internalization process.

Both Davies and Lindblom recognize a correspondance between the new covenant and the one at Sinai. Davies explains the importance of a future counterpart to the law given in the Sinai covenant where he sees some kind of prototypical event in the Sinai experience that Jeremiah uses to point to a future one. Lindblom concludes that Jeremiah's reminder of the covenant at Sinai points to its imperfection and the necessity for a superior new covenant.<sup>25</sup> Martin Noth agrees to a correlation between the old and the new covenants where, just as law is a pertinent factor to the Sinai covenant, so it will be necessary in the new covenant. However, Noth acknowledges that the exact content of this new legislation is not precisely indicated, only that man's role is subordinated to that of God for its accomplishment.<sup>26</sup>

Jeremiah may be unique in his terminology, when referring to the covenant as "new," however other prophets such as Ezekiel have expressed similar ideas regarding the spiritual transformation of the people of Israel. Many scholars find a parallel and further elaboration of Jer. 31:31-34, in Ezekiel 36:

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Message of the Prophets*, 182.

<sup>25</sup> J.Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 381-.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch*, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ezek. 36:26-27.

Ezekiel, who was among the deported exiles, was influenced by Jeremiah's words. Although Ezekiel does not mention a new covenant, and Jeremiah does not explicitly speak of the spirit as the enabling force for obedience, these verses in Ezekiel can be seen as the expanded interpretation of those in Jeremiah. Scholars like Gunner Ostborn recognize the spirit's role mentioned in Ezekiel as implicit in Jeremiah's passage and, although the term covenant is not used in this particular passage, it is found among other related verses such as Ezek. 34:25 and 37:26. Von Rad sees a remarkably close connection between the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and consequently admits to the possibility that Ezekiel had access to Jeremiah's text. He thinks that Ezekiel presents an expanded version of the text of Jeremiah with greater detail and precision in his description of the heart (i.e., from a heart of stone to one of flesh). Both texts describe similar ideas: a renewed people who have the ability to follow the commandments, obedience that is linked to the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34b=Ezek. 36:25), and the role of God over that of man in terms of enabling the obedience. In another passage, Ezekiel further clarifies the linkage between the new heart and the law of God. It states, "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them..."<sup>28</sup> It is clear from this verse, which is nearly identical to the verse in chapter 36, that the purpose of this new heart is to cause the people to obey the statutes and ordinances in the covenant. Therefore, in terms of the fate of the law in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the predominant view sees no abolition of the old Sinai covenant, only a transformation of the law from an external one to an internalized version. However, many scholars do not outrightly commit to the idea that an internalized law includes the external manifestations; only Davies is bold enough to admit that Jeremiah's new covenant might include both internal and external forms. Because of the ambiguity, later interpretations of the verses in Jeremiah are used to justify the cessationist view.

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<sup>28</sup> Ezek. 11:19.

### 1.3 The Temple in the Messianic Era

A very important element, which Davies omits from his survey of the law in the messianic era, is the role of the Temple and its cult in the future age. Before discussing these issues, Lindblom, who has a great deal to say on this subject, provides a definition of cult calling it “a system of religious performances regulated by tradition or law” that is observed primarily by the community, then by the individual.<sup>29</sup> In the pre-exilic prophets, Lindblom notices both positive and negative reactions to the cult. For example, Isaiah denounces sacrifices unless they are offered together with proper ethical deeds. However, in Isa. 28:16 and 4:5, he posits a picture in the age to come where proper religion will be practiced on Mt. Zion, the location of the Temple. Therefore although Isaiah chastises the people for their syncretistic ways and moral impurity, he envisions a future age that includes a renewed cult. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah has mixed emotions concerning the Temple and cult. He views the Temple itself as holy, but predicts its destruction because of the current excessive reliance upon it by the nation. Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah as interpreted by Lindblom, envisions a future cult with neither Temple nor sacrifices, providing examples such as Jer. 31:6, which describes the northern tribes heading to Zion to their God. Lindblom finds no references to a new Temple in the future age within Jeremiah’s writings and states that this shows that, at times, the pre-exilic prophets pictured a cult in a more spiritualized manner. He concludes that, because the pre-exilic prophets were more concerned about imminent disaster, they focused less on the provision of details for the future cult.<sup>30</sup>

In exilic prophecy, Ezekiel stands out for his detailed visions regarding the precise measurements of the future Temple.<sup>31</sup> Both for him and for Deutero-Isaiah, the reconstruction of the Temple and the reestablishment of the sacrificial system are a crucial part of the messianic age. At the same time that Ezekiel promises the renewed heart of the people, he also predicts a time when offerings will again be proffered. In chapter 20 he declares,

‘For on my holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel’ declares the Lord, ‘there the whole house of Israel, all of them will serve me in the

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<sup>29</sup> Lindblom, 351.

<sup>30</sup> Lindblom, 359-360.

<sup>31</sup> Ezek. 40-43.

land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.<sup>32</sup>

The subsequent verses confirm the eschatological nature of this prophecy by explaining that these offerings will occur when the people of Israel are taken from the countries to which they have been scattered and returned to their proper land. In addition, in Ezekiel 36, the nation of Israel is promised a new heart when they will be returned from among the nations, therefore both a new heart and reinstatement of sacrifices will be part of the future age. Other scholars find the idea of the reinstatement of the sacrifices in an eschatological passage in Malachi; which states; “then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore quite clearly, within the prophetic picture of the exilic prophets, beyond that of their pre-exilic forerunners, the Temple and its cult are given a favourable and prominent position within the future era. Lindblom explains that post-exilic prophecy is also concerned with external ceremonial practices that include sacrifices, fasting, and the Sabbath, and he concludes that the ideal picture of the messianic era for the post-exilic prophets includes ritual perfection.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, although there are some notions of a spiritualized cult, such as in the pre-exilic prophecy of Jeremiah, the exilic and post-exilic prophets view the messianic era as one that will contain a reestablishment of a ritualistic religion that revolves around the Temple.

#### 1.4 The Gentiles and The Law

Another element that arises regarding the law in the messianic era, particularly in post-exilic prophecy, is the idea of the gentiles and their participation in Israelite law in this future age. The pre-exilic prophets have a tendency to focus more on the judgements of the nations, whereas the post-exilic prophets envisage a future where the gentiles will be converted to the Israelite religion. Lindblom views Deutero-Isaiah as the first promulgator of such ideas. For example, Isa. 42:1-9 discusses the awakening of the gentiles, whereupon they receive the law. Verse 4b says, “And the coastlands will wait

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<sup>32</sup> Ezek. 20:40.

<sup>33</sup> Mal. 3:4.

<sup>34</sup> Lindblom, 421.

expectantly for his law.” The coastlands in this verse are interpreted as referring to the gentile nations. Lindblom understands these and other verses to prove that both Israel and the converted gentiles will eventually unite as a spiritual entity. One of the clearest verses concerning the union of these two groups, in addition to the importance of the Temple and cult is in Deutero-(or Trito-) Isaiah,

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.<sup>35</sup>

This pericope shows that after Israel is regathered from her dispersion, the gentiles will also participate in the law of her God. Therefore several of the prophets offer a picture of a future messianic age where both the people of Israel and the gentiles will unite to follow the commandments, which are transmitted from Mt. Zion. They will participate in a cult that includes the Temple and sacrificial offerings.

Ezekiel, while speaking again about a time after a regathering of Israel back to her land, brings together a covenant, an ideal king figure, the Temple, and the law. In chapter 37 it says,

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in my ordinances and keep my statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob my servant...and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them, it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel when my sanctuary is in their midst forever.<sup>36</sup>

It is clear from this passage that, in the future age, the ideal king will somehow be involved in causing Israel to observe the “ordinances and statutes” of God. In addition, if taken literally, a permanent Temple will be established among them. These verses are

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<sup>35</sup> Isa. 6:6-

<sup>36</sup> Ezek. 37:24-28.

among the most distinct in presenting a messiah figure, and again, as Mowinckel and others have expressed, the historical David is an adumbration of the future messianic king.

### 1.5 Conclusion

The biblical text contains various passages that relay the status of the law within an ideal age that takes place after a regathering of Israel to the land. It is certain that the law will be a crucial element in this “messianic” era but the content of the law itself is not entirely clear. Most scholars defend a correspondence between the Sinai Covenant, with its law code, and the new covenant. The majority of critical scholars do not see in the words of the prophets a replacement or abolition of the Sinai covenant, but an internalization brought about by God. Although internalization is deemed essential in pleasing God, the debate lies in whether this process precludes practicing external forms of law. The future messianic age will also include the Temple with its sacrificial system and a king who will impart God’s law, both to the people of Israel and to the gentile nations. All these ideas in the biblical text about the fate of law and its relation to the messianic era are seeds that will be developed and interpreted in post-biblical literature and by future messianic movements.

## Chapter 2

### Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Writings

#### 2.1 Introduction

The second Temple period (which covers the six centuries from the fifth century B.C.E. to the time of its destruction in 70 C.E.) saw an extensive production of Jewish texts both in Palestine and the diaspora (particularly Egypt), many of which were preserved throughout the centuries by Christian churches. The Septuagint, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, the writings of Philo, the Dead Sea scrolls, and the New Testament all provide insight into Jewish thought and thus the messianism of this period.<sup>1</sup> The literature of this era is highly reflective of the fluctuating political situation under which the Jews lived, changing from Persian, to Hellenistic/Macedonian, to Maccabean and finally to Roman rule. The canon of Scripture was in its final formation during this time, therefore the biblical text itself became an important document resulting in the uplifting of the Torah as an entity in itself. The study, interpretation, and elaboration of the Bible by a developing scribal community soon replaced prophetic utterance. Ceremonial and civil law were commented upon and expanded. Strong emphasis was placed on the law and its eternality, as can be perceived particularly in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings. Because of the high value placed on the law in this period, it was naturally assumed that a messianic age would have a legal emphasis.

Similar to the debate regarding the presence of messianism in biblical text, one finds dissenting opinions on the extent of messianism between the fifth and second centuries B.C.E. Scholars like R.H. Charles and J.J. Collins see a vacuity of messianism, while a few others, such as William Horbury and Julius H. Greenstone, perceive messianism as a pervasive element of this period. Horbury explains that writings like the Septuagint Pentateuch and the apocryphal documents acknowledge both priestly and monarchical ideas that reflect a deeply rooted messianic tradition. In opposition to some

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<sup>1</sup> Johan Lust in his article "Messianism and Septuagint," in *Congress Volume: Salamanca 1983*, ed. J.A. Emerton (*Supplement to Vetus Testamentum*, Leiden: EJ Brill, 1985): 174-191, states that one cannot generalize about the messianic exegesis of the LXX. Its translation is usually literal and non-messianic and each text must be analyzed separately.

scholars, Horbury sees a Davidic hope in both Ben Sira and 1 Maccabees. He claims that messianism was an extant force because the supposedly “non-messianic” apocryphal literature was composed contemporaneously with other messianic-oriented writings such as Jubilees, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Psalms of Solomon. Joseph Klausner admits that, while messianism is not prominent in the apocryphal literature, it was internally rooted in the Jewish people at that time.<sup>2</sup> According to many scholars exemplified by D.S Russell, the figure of the messiah cannot be found in many of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings, such as 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Ben Sira, Jubilees, 1 Enoch (excluding the Similitudes), the Assumption of Moses, 1 Baruch and 2 Enoch.<sup>3</sup> James Drummond sees the messianic idea only in its formative stage in this period, and argues that due to the Maccabean success, sufficient suffering needed to inspire messianic expectation was cut short.<sup>4</sup> Russell explains that a Davidic messianic figure was not prominent during the Persian period because of the growth of the priestly rule, the reality that prophecy was less significant, and the fear that a Davidic hope would be seen as a challenge to foreign rule. For Russell and others, the writers of this period honor God rather than the messiah as the founder of the eschatological kingdom.

## 2.2. Eternality of the Law in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Because there are few if any references to messianism in the apocryphal literature, W.D. Davies, when discussing the law in relation to the messianic age in this period, focuses on the view of the eternality of the law and its association with the concept of wisdom. He does this in order to prove that adherence to the law was not alterable even into a future era. In writings such as Ben Sira, Torah is equated with wisdom. After a lengthy discussion of wisdom it says, “All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of

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<sup>2</sup> J. Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, 356. Grabbe says that particularly during the repression of their religion (i.e., during time of Antiochus onward), uprisings occurred. These revolts were rooted in an ideology that likely included a messianic redeemer. See Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century Judaism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 69-70.

<sup>3</sup> D.S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM, 1964), 308ff.

<sup>4</sup> James Drummond. *The Jewish Messiah*, 269.



Jacob.”<sup>5</sup> The eternity of the law and its connection with wisdom can also be found in the apocryphal works of Tobit and Baruch. Baruch writes about wisdom in this manner, “She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, if wisdom is equated to the law, which is eternal, then it will endure throughout time even into the messianic period.

The Pseudepigrapha make a further connection between wisdom, law and a messianic figure. Davies explains that the Elect One in the Similitudes of 1 Enoch<sup>7</sup> is described as possessing both righteousness and wisdom, and therefore this messianic figure is understood as one who abides by Torah.<sup>8</sup> T.W. Manson relates the righteousness of 1 Enoch’s figure, the son of man, to Ben Sira’s wisdom. The son of man is described as “This is the son of Man who hath righteousness. With whom dwelleth righteousness, and who reaveleth all treasures of that which is hidden...”<sup>9</sup> Manson interprets the hidden treasure, as well as the righteousness that belongs to the son of man, as synonymous with the law because of its connection to wisdom.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to this predominant view, according to John J. Collins, wisdom being equated with Torah is not remarkable in the Similitudes. He claims the Similitudes describe wisdom as not being able to find an abode among men and therefore present a contradiction with Ben Sira. Wisdom is not openly available to humankind but must be revealed by the messianic figure known as the “son of man.”<sup>11</sup> This interpretation does not discredit the law, but reinforces the idea that it will be reinstated through a messianic figure. Overall, however, the eternity (and also observance) of the law was strongly expressed in this period, and therefore, it was logical to suppose its continuance into future times. G. F. Moore relates this idea:

It is natural that the law should not only be in force in the messianic age, but should be better studied and better observed than ever before; and this was indubitably the common belief. The priesthood and the sacrificial worship in the new temple are constantly assumed. The harps of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Sir. 24:23.

<sup>6</sup> Bar. 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> 1 En. ch. 37-71.

<sup>8</sup> Davies, 42.

<sup>9</sup> 1 En. 46.

<sup>10</sup> T.W. Manson, “The Son of Man in Daniel, Enoch, and The Gospel,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 32 (1949-50): 179-180.

<sup>11</sup> John J. Collins “The Heavenly Representative; The Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch” in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, eds. George W.E. Nicklesburg and John J. Collins (California: Scholars Press, 1980), 118.

temple musicians will have more strings than now. A high priest in the messianic times is frequently mentioned; religion without sacrifice was in fact unimaginable...<sup>12</sup>

Both Moore and Davies see the connection between wisdom and law as the basis for affirming the ongoing validity of the law. The pious Jew of this time upheld the law; apocryphal books such as the book of Maccabees emphasize faithfulness to the law of the forefathers, Judith and Tobit recount stories of pious individuals, while Baruch and Ben Sira constantly proclaim the need to obey the commandments. In the pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees, observance of Mosaic laws was ascribed to the pre-Mosaic forefathers; for example, Abraham is described as observing the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Firstfruits. Marcus says that the value placed on God's law that was seen in the Hebrew Scriptures continues in the apocryphal literature,<sup>13</sup> although he mentions little on the relationship between law and messianism in the apocryphal writings. Due to the lack of explicit passages in the apocryphal literature, scholars such as Davies work with assumptions about wisdom and its connection to the law. Pseudepigraphal writings, on the other hand, offer more extensive and explicit information regarding the messiah and the role of the law as will be examined next.

### 2.3 Pseudepigraphal Writings

To James Charlesworth as well as to Joseph Klausner, the few messianic passages that do exist in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are very valuable in terms of relaying the messianic hope of this period. Scholars like Charlesworth and Horbury acknowledge many more references to the messianic scene in the pseudepigraphal writings than in the apocryphal ones. Some Pseudepigrapha originated in the third century B.C.E., and others were produced throughout much of the subsequent millennium. This material does not provide a completely coherent messianic picture. Conflicting ideas include a this-worldly versus a supernatural figure, an eternal versus a limited reign, dual messianic personalities as opposed to a single one, and sometimes a messianic figure who dies. After Charlesworth examines the documents of the Pseudepigrapha for the technical term "messiah," he concludes that only five contain Jewish interpretations of the messiah; Psalms of

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<sup>12</sup> G.F. Moore. *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (New York: Schocken, 1958), 271.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Marcus. *Law in the Apocrypha* (New York: Columbia University, 1927), 52.

Solomon, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, and 1 and 3 Enoch. Most of the writings that constitute the Pseudepigrapha do not contain the term "messiah," but Charlesworth and others perceive messianic or eschatological passages in books such as Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Sibylline Oracles, the Similitudes of Enoch, and the Psalms of Solomon.

Although its main focus is not on eschatological matters, Jubilees, written in the second century B.C.E., does make a contribution to interpreting the role of the law in eschatological times in at least a couple of chapters. A great deal of messianic content is not found in Jubilees because of the success of the Hasmoneans, which shifted the focus on a leadership from the house of David to the Levites. Although in Jubilees a messianic figure is not explicitly mentioned, a time of future righteousness that falls after a period of unfaithfulness does exist. It is described in the verse "and in those days, children will begin to search the law, and to search the commandments and to return to the way of righteousness..."<sup>14</sup> Therefore it seems that prior to the ideal period or perhaps as a prerequisite for it, Israel will return to practicing the law. In chapter 1, Jubilees also expresses the idea of a return to God's law in the future after a time of unrighteousness. "...But after this they will return to me in all uprightness and with all of (their) heart and soul. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. And their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments. And they will do my commandments..."<sup>15</sup> Like Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, the passage expresses that God will remove the foreskin of their hearts and bestow upon them the holy spirit which will allow them to walk in his commandments.<sup>16</sup> Klausner claims that Jubilees was written by early Pharisees, which would explain the committed attitude towards the commandments.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the author most likely descended from a priestly heritage and, like many of the apocryphal writers, he had a great concern for adherence to the law, which he believed

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<sup>14</sup> Jub. 23:26.

<sup>15</sup> Jub. 1:22-25. The Book of Jubilees upholds the permanent validity of the law and hints that the future age presently exists in the messianism of the Maccabean family (although this is only temporary). See R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 2:9.

<sup>16</sup> Jub. 1:22-25.

<sup>17</sup> J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, 309.

would be essential for the restoration of the nation in his own day as well as within the messianic era.

Charlesworth describes the Psalms of Solomon (ca. 1st cent. B.C.E.-1<sup>st</sup> cent. C.E.) as providing one of the most detailed accounts of a messianic figure of any Jewish text.<sup>18</sup> In chapters 17 and 18, this messianic individual rules with wisdom, righteousness and holiness. While using the technical term for messiah, he is described as causing people to walk in God's ways;

Blessed are those born in those days, to see the good things of the Lord which he will do for the coming generation; (which will be) under the rod of discipline of the Lord Messiah in the fear of his God, in wisdom of spirit, and of righteousness and of strength, to direct people in righteous acts, in the fear of God, to set them all in the fear of the Lord....<sup>19</sup>

The role of this messianic figure is clearly to teach Israel to behave in righteous ways. Richard Horsley does not see the messiah of chapter 17 or 18 as a military ruler of the dynasty of David but claims his role to be one of instruction in Torah.<sup>20</sup> Horsley's prooftexts are found in chapter 17;

to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth at his warning the nations will flee from his presence and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts he will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness...he will not tolerate unrighteousness to pause among them....<sup>21</sup>

Like many of the other texts about the messianic reign, it is characterized by a righteousness that is associated with the law of God, even though the content of this righteousness is not spelled out clearly. Lofty terms such as wisdom, mercy, and justice are used to portray the messianic reign in order to reflect broader values and ideals. What is unique here is that this messiah is able to perceive and judge their inner thoughts, therefore this righteousness includes internal motivations. Book Three of the Sibylline Oracles does offer a more specific definition of righteousness, which occurs in the future era even though there is no explicit indication of a personal messiah. It states:

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<sup>18</sup> James Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 643.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. of Sol. 18:6-8.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Horsley "Palestinian Jewish Groups and Their Messiahs in Late Second Temple Times," in *Messianism Through History*, ed. Wim Beuken (London: SCM Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ps. of Sol. 17: 24-26.

For all good order and righteous dealing will come upon men from starry heaven and with it temperate concord best of things for men and love, faithfulness and friendship even from strangers. Bad government, blame, envy, anger, folly, poverty will flee from men, and constraint will flee, and murder, accursed strife and grievous quarrels, night robberies, and every evil in those days.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore the righteousness that characterizes the future era or messianic reign will include external and internal properties with concrete commands. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, a figure called a “Star from Jacob,” based on Num. 24, has often been interpreted as alluding to a messianic figure. This “Star” guides his followers to “walk in his first and final decrees,”<sup>23</sup> which is equated with walking in a righteous manner, therefore implying that righteousness includes decrees.

A transcendence from the law does occur in some cases in the pseudepigraphal writings. There is one allusion to righteousness defined as more than the observance of decrees. John J. Collins says that although in the Similitudes of 1 Enoch the righteous are most likely obedient to the law, more is required of them to attain this status. Collins states:

Righteousness in the Similitudes is attained through faith in a heavenly world, God as Lord of Spirits and an eschatological judge referred to as ‘son of man.’ While faith is not conceived in antithesis to law, it involves a revelation which goes beyond the Mosaic covenant, which is simply passed over in silence.<sup>24</sup>

Collins distinguishes the identity of the righteous not merely by their obedience to legal precepts but by their faith in supernal concepts such as the heavenly world and the son of man. While that faith is not in opposition to law, it is intrinsic to the character of the righteous. Those who are righteous will trust in the son of man for a future revelation, and this faith is emphasized even above the law. In addition to the Similitudes’ example, many of the terms used in the passages from the Psalms of Solomon or the Sibylline Oracles are more universal in character. Charlesworth mentions that particularly the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs emphasize these virtues rather than particular commandments of the law. In addition, he says that laws against sexual misconduct are

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<sup>22</sup> Sib. Or. 3:372-380.

<sup>23</sup> Test. of Jud. 24:4.

<sup>24</sup> John J. Collins. “The Heavenly Representative: The Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch.” in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, 124.

reproved by exhortation towards self-control or ascetic practices for which Charlesworth finds no precedents in the Torah. Altogether, Charlesworth interprets the Testaments as shifting from specific legal precepts towards a more universalistic morality. Homosexuality and idolatry are considered as sins because they do not comply with the law of nature, not because they are forbidden in the Torah.<sup>25</sup> The Greek conception of a universal law shows perhaps a further influence on the Sibylline Oracles. Two verses present the idea that a heavenly law characterized by universal values will eventually be revealed. Book Three states, "For good law shall come in its fullness from the starry heaven upon men," which will be joined by justice, concord and affection. Later on it states, "A common law for men throughout all the earth shall the Eternal perfect in the starry heaven." Howard M. Teeple suggests that these passages imply that a more universalistic law will replace the existing Mosaic law.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.4 The Temple, the Priesthood, and The Gentiles

According to a number of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal documents, this time of righteousness will include a reestablishment of the Temple and priesthood, and the sacrificial system. Tobit, Jubilees, 1 Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs all are in support of a renewed Temple. When speaking of a time after Israel will be gathered from the nations, Jubilees envisions the Temple to be an important part of the picture. It states, "And I shall build my sanctuary in their midst, and I shall dwell with them..."<sup>27</sup> The same chapter further reveals that this sanctuary will be located in Jerusalem on Mt. Zion during a time of renewal of both earth and heaven.<sup>28</sup> Book Three of the Sibylline Oracles also foretold of a time when piety will prevail whose parameters will include sacrifice:

There will again be a sacred race of pious men who attend to the counsels and intention of the Most High, who fully honor the temple of the great God with drink offering and burnt offering and sacred hecatombs, sacrifices of well-fed bulls, unblemished rams, and firstborn sheep.

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<sup>25</sup> James Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 779-780.

<sup>26</sup> Howard M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: SBL, 1957), 25.

<sup>27</sup> Jub. 1:17. Similar statements have been made in the Bible.

<sup>28</sup> Jub. 1:29.

offering as holocausts fat flocks of lambs on a great altar, in holy manner sharing in the righteousness of the law of the Most High....<sup>29</sup>

Therefore righteousness of the law is defined here with sacrifice as a crucial element. The Book of 1 Enoch elaborates further regarding the Temple. Following several verses about judgment and included in a section which Charlesworth entitles the “Messianic Kingdom,” appears a description of a transformed Temple:

Then I stood still, looking at that ancient house being transformed all the pillars and all the columns were pulled out...I went on seeing until the Lord of the sheep brought about a new house, greater and loftier than the first one, and set it up in the first location which had been covered up—all its pillars were new, the columns new; and the ornaments new as well as greater than those of the first, (that is) the old (house) which was gone. All the sheep were in it...Also I noticed that the house was large wide, and exceedingly full.<sup>30</sup>

These two passages are not alone in their expression of a renewed Temple, and a number of scholars see their inspiration arising from Ezekiel 40-48.<sup>31</sup> Apocryphal books such as Tobit, as well as other pseudepigraphal works, such as The Testament of Levi or the Testament of Benjamin, describe the reestablishment of an eternal Temple. However, the vision in many of the documents finds not only Israel worshipping in the restored Temple; it also includes the righteous among the nations as participants. The Sibylline Oracles offers one example of the gentiles in the future kingdom:

And then he will raise up a kingdom for all ages among men, he who once gave the Holy Law to the pious...from every land they will bring incense and gifts to the house of the great God. there will be no other house among men, even for future generations to know, except the one which God gave to faithful men to honor....<sup>32</sup>

It seems that the gentiles will come from their particular nation and will be permitted to enter the Temple in order to offer gifts and sacrifice. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs seem to posit a gathering of both Israel and the nations under one God. The Testament of Naphtali states regarding the end times “Through his kingly power God will appear [dwelling among men on the earth] to save the race of Israel and to assemble the

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<sup>29</sup> Sib. Or. 3:573-579.

<sup>30</sup> 1 En. 90:30-36.

<sup>31</sup> Vanderkam. *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2, 197.

<sup>32</sup> Sib. Or. 3:767-775. Cf Isa. 56:6-7 and the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. 1 Kings 8:41-43.

righteous from among the nations.”<sup>33</sup> The Apocryphal book of Tobit is very explicit concerning both the reestablishment of the Temple and the conversion of the gentiles after Israel is returned from exile. It claims:

After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God.<sup>34</sup>

This is a clear expression of the conversion of the nations and comes close to Isaiah’s prophecy, which speaks of the Temple being a house of prayer for both Israel and the nations.<sup>35</sup> Additional passages in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and in 2 Baruch describe the gentile nations in connection with the Star of Jacob or an anointed one who will offer them salvation together with Israel. The Psalms of Solomon however, do not see the gentile nations in a favourable position, but claim they will co-exist in the Land and that they will be subordinated to Israel and her God through acts of service. Therefore it seems that gentile nations will exist outside Israel; they will be under her legal rule with obligations of visitation and gift-giving, and yet individual gentiles will wholly participate together with the people of Israel united in worship and obedience to their God.

During the Persian Period, expectation of a ruler to rise from the house of David was subordinated to the idea of a ruler from the house of Levi. Some scholars say that by the second century B.C.E. the high priesthood took precedence over an anointed Davidic ruler. The priesthood in the Persian period began to dominate for various reasons. With the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., royalty lost its honor, and upon the return of some of the exiles their occupations were limited to the area belonging to the sacred or religious realm, resulting in a growth in priestly authority. Apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings such as Ben Sira, Judith, 2 Maccabees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs reflect the glorification of the high priesthood.<sup>36</sup> In 1 Maccabees, Simon was

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<sup>33</sup> Test. of Naph. 8:3.

<sup>34</sup> Tob. 14:5-7.

<sup>35</sup> Isa. 56:7.

<sup>36</sup> For example, See Jud. 4:6, 15.



honored as a high priest until a prophetic figure would arise.<sup>37</sup> The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs contain much material on the new priesthood and priestly figure. The Testament of Levi says that a king will come from Judah who will found a new priesthood.<sup>38</sup> The Testament of Reuben warns to heed Levi and Judah:

And now, my children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves above these two tribes [because from them will arise the Savior come from God]. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high priest and from Judah someone as king [God and man]. He will save the gentiles and the tribe of Israel.<sup>39</sup>

This passage reflects the rivalry or dual messiahship that existed between the Davidic and Levitical rulers in this era and which is also reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. The Testament of Joseph actually finds a ruler from Levi as superior to the king from Judah.<sup>40</sup> Anders Hultgard says that the priest of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs does not seem to be deeply involved in sacrificial duties, but like the messianic king in Isaiah chapter 11, he teaches divine wisdom, has a spirit of understanding, fights against evil spirits and is honored by the nations. While some disagree, Hultgard sees this priestly figure as an essential messianic figure in the late second Temple period, like that of the Psalms of Solomon or the son of man in the Similitudes of Enoch.<sup>41</sup> The prominence of a priestly figure emphasizes the importance of the law for this period and proves how the spirit of the age could enter their eschatological beliefs. Eventually, however, because of the disappointment with the Hasmoneans, expectation of a messiah from the Davidic dynasty repressed that of its priestly counterpart.

## 2.5 Conclusion

While the apocryphal writings contain little messianic content, they adhere to a strong notion of the eternity of the law through its connection to wisdom, and thus it can be assumed that this would not cease in the future period. The Pseudepigrapha

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Macc. 14:41.

<sup>38</sup> Test. of Levi 8:14.

<sup>39</sup> Test. of Reub. 7:1-3.

<sup>40</sup> Test. of Jos. 19:4.

<sup>41</sup> A. Hultgard, in *Ideal Figures*, 105.

contain a more explicit messianic message and also endorse the view that the law is everlasting, however, its definition is sometimes more vague. In the Testaments the shift is not from universal to specific as in the Apocrypha, but sometimes, the particular law embraces a more universalistic connotation. A deviance also occurs in the Similitudes of Enoch when faith in the son of man figure could be deemed higher than observance of the law. Although these streams of thought exist, they are not the predominant view of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature which, overall, posits a picture where the Temple, priesthood, and the Mosaic law will prevail.

## Chapter 3

### PHILO

James Charlesworth admits that, although the absence of an eschatological messiah from the Apocrypha is enigmatic, this absence is not so surprising in the writings of Philo or Josephus.<sup>1</sup> He explains that Philo was more concerned with the correlation between Jewish and Greek concepts, whereas in order to gain Roman trust Josephus merely describes messianic pretenders as marginal lunatics.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars such as Harry Wolfson and Erwin Goodenough, while acknowledging that Philo's writings do not contain explicit references to a messiah, they furnish statements that allude to messianism. According to Wolfson, Philo is in line with the messianic thought of the community in the Land of Israel, and his only variance is his use of Stoic terminology. Two statements of the messianic era are in *On Rewards and Punishments* and present a picture of a return from exile, a reign of peace and prosperity, as well as a universal law.<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as J. J. Collins object to Wolfson and Goodenough for creating a false illusion of a monolithic Judaism in late antiquity and also for assuming that Philo's messianism would be similar to that of the Land of Israel. Others interpret Philo as spiritualizing and even neutralizing messianism, as he does with many other historical events such as the Exodus.<sup>4</sup> Although Wolfson, Goodenough and others, point to passages in *On Rewards and Punishments*,<sup>5</sup> the relevant discussion of the law is in the section, *On the Life of Moses* where Philo's attitude towards the Mosaic law is revealed:

But the enactments of this lawgiver are firm, not shaken by commotions, not liable to alteration, but stamped as it were with the seal of nature herself, and they remain firm and lasting from the day on which they were first promulgated to the present day, and there may well be a hope that they will remain to all future time, as being immortal, as long as the sun and the moon and the whole heaven and the whole world shall endure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus has one phrase on the immortality of the law in *Against Apion* 2:277.

<sup>2</sup> James Charlesworth "Messianology in the Biblical Pseudepigrapha," in *Qumran-Messianism* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 23.

<sup>3</sup> *On Reward and Punishments* 28:164-165.

<sup>4</sup> Hecht, 148.

<sup>5</sup> See *On Rewards and Punishments* 16:45 and 29:165.

<sup>6</sup> Philo. *On the Life of Moses* II 3:14.

These words suggest the eternal validity of the law. Wolfson uses Philo's statement about the eternity of the law to insist that it will be ongoing even into the messianic age although "in a form, of course, evolved through a continuous process of interpretation."<sup>7</sup> Wolfson says that Philo uses the Stoic terminology of a golden age and universal law but understands the latter to be the laws of Moses which will also include the nations' conversion to his precepts. In regard to the nations Philo states,

I think that in that case every nation, abandoning all their own individual customs, and utterly disregarding their national laws, would change and come over to the honour of such a people only; for their laws shining in connection with, and simultaneously with, the prosperity of the nation, will obscure all others, just as the rising sun obscures the stars.<sup>8</sup>

Wolfson uses this passage as a proof-text to say that the gentiles<sup>9</sup> will observe the commandments of the God of Israel. He sees Philo's language as even more expressive than that of the Sibylline Oracles, which merely say that the nations will turn from their idolatrous ways, whereas in Philo, Wolfson perceives a full conversion. According to him, Philo sees many nations continuing to live as their own polities but unified under one law, which will contain the best elements of kingship, aristocracy and democracy. This ideal state will exist in the messianic age with the reestablishment of the Jewish state and with all nations acknowledging the Mosaic law.

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfson. *Philo*, 415.

<sup>8</sup> *Life of Moses* II 7:44.

<sup>9</sup> Isa. 2:24 or Mic. 4:1-2.

## Chapter 4

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

#### 4.1 A Priestly Messiah

Although only touched upon in previous literature such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the concept of a priestly messiah is an integral part of Qumran messianism. Originating from a priestly milieu and modeling itself after the priesthood, the community at Qumran, which often referred to itself as the *Yahad B'nei Tsadok*<sup>1</sup> saw itself as the true and uncorrupted version of the priestly rulers. Disillusioned with the Jerusalem priestly leadership, they withdrew and created their own ideal representation with a priestly leadership and structure. Their halakhah had marked differences from the Jerusalem establishment, such as a different calendar, which would affect festival times as well as different theological interpretations. Consequently, the sect transferred many priestly functions to the community.<sup>2</sup> Although waiting for the time when they could return to an ideal situation with the reinstatement of the Temple and its cult, they attempted no sacrifices themselves in their domain outside Jerusalem. Emil Schurer and Lawrence Schiffman both see a connection between Qumran's priestly messiah and its origins and organization.<sup>3</sup> Often this messianic figure is given a superior role to that of its lay counterpart, the messiah of Israel, because of the priestly heritage of the sect. This focus on the priest shows the importance of priestly law that will predominate in the messianic era. However, scholars warn that, although many of the texts present similar ideas, they span a period of several hundred years and should not be expected to present a completely uniform messianic doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. 1QS 5.

<sup>2</sup> Within the *Shabbat Shirot*, which Carol Newsom attributes to the Qumran sect, there is the notion that the community becomes the Temple. These writings also contain many visions of a heavenly Temple. Yet, despite these ideas, Newsom asserts that the cult is not permanently spiritualized, as they looked forward to a future time with the full reestablishment of the Temple. See Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 62.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2 ed. Geza Vermes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 550. Schiffman, *Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 6.

There is evidence of various types of messianic figures at Qumran, such as the king, priest, prophet, suffering servant and a heavenly messiah, with the most prominent being that of the king and priest and sometimes the prophet. In terms of the law, it is the dyarchic messianism of king and priest that is relevant to this thesis. Dual messianism, with both a royal and priestly messianic figure, is a much discussed topic in Qumran messianism. Although J.J. Collins sees this concept as characteristic of Qumran alone, others interpret the dual idea as stemming from post-exilic biblical texts as well as other texts from the pseudepigrapha of the time.<sup>4</sup> Scholars mention the passages in Zechariah as an example of a dual concept that might have influenced the sect.<sup>5</sup> Collins claims that although political circumstances influenced messianic ideas, much of the group's ideology flows from the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup> The various sectarian Rule documents, which, according to Collins, provide the best understanding of the sect's ideas, present both concepts of the messiah.<sup>7</sup> The only passage that directly refers to a plurality of messiahs is in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS) which says the members of the community "should not depart from any counsel of the Law in order to walk in complete stubbornness of their heart, but instead shall be ruled by the first directives which the men of the Community began to be taught until the prophet comes, and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel."<sup>8</sup> In another fragment however, this section is omitted, and therefore it cannot be relied upon alone to construct a theory of two messiahs.<sup>9</sup> Although there is a continual debate on the number of messiahs involved in the explicit statements about a messiah of Aaron and Israel, other texts present a picture of a Davidic messiah together with a priest, both with differing functions and positions.<sup>10</sup> In the *Rule of the Congregation* (1QSa), for example, both are envisioned as participating in and officiating at the messianic banquet.

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<sup>4</sup> J.J. Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 95. Collins mentions that Josephus does not present any information on priestly messiah figures, 195.

<sup>5</sup> Zech. 6:12-13.

<sup>6</sup> J.J. Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 82. For example, The Damascus Rule and The Rule of the Community.

<sup>8</sup> 1QS 9:10-11. Quotes taken from Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Charlesworth states that the fragment from cave 4 does not contain the verse regarding the plurality of messiahs.

<sup>10</sup> Four passages in the Damascus Document mention the messiah of Aaron and Israel: CD 12:22, 14:18, 19:10,33. Some see the "first directives" as being abrogated by the prophet and messiahs upon their arrival. See Bernard S. Jackson "The Prophet and the Law in Early Judaism and the New Testament" in *Jewish Law Association Studies* VII. S. M. Passamanek and M. Finley eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 74.

A hierarchy of the two messiahs can be seen at the communal meal where first the chief priest enters followed by the messiah:

And [when] they gather at the table of the community [or to drink] the new wine, and the table of the community is prepared [and] the new wine [is mixed] for drinking, [no-one should stretch out] his hand to the first-fruit of the bread and of the [new wine] before the priest, for [he is the one who bl]esses the first-fruit of bread and of the new wine [and stretches out] his hand towards the bread before them. Afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall stretch out his hand towards the bread. [And after, he shall] bless all the congregation of the community, each [one according to] his dignity. And in accordance with this regulation they shall act at each me[al,when] at least ten m[en are gat]hered.<sup>11</sup>

The function of the Priest in this passage is to perform the ritual blessings. Shemaryahu Talmon is not convinced that the Priest is seen as superior to the messiah of Israel, rather he thinks that the stress on the Priest is to equalize him with the Davidic counterpart who was always viewed as the most prominent messianic character.<sup>12</sup> Schiffman interprets these communal meals, of which they partook on a regular basis, as a foretaste of the banquet to come in the messianic era. He states “the life of the sect in this world mirrored its dreams for the age to come.”<sup>13</sup> Because, in the last days, purity would be essential, purification rites were mandatory in the present situation as a kind of preparation for the future. Schiffman explains that those who participated in the communal meals must observe strict purification procedures. Consequently, candidates who had defects or were considered sinners were forbidden to participate. Schiffman disagrees with scholars who consider the communal meals to be a substitute for Temple ritual, instead he sees it as an expectation of the messianic banquet, which will exist in addition to the Temple in the future age.<sup>14</sup> What is crucial here, in any case, is that ritual is central and the prominence of a priestly messianic figure underscores the importance of the ceremonial aspect of the law.

Other than presiding over the messianic banquet, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the roles of the messiahs. In the messianic age, both messiahs would have

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<sup>11</sup> IQSa Col. 2:17-21. G. Vermes changes the name of the *Rule of the Congregation* to the *Messianic Rule* because it pertains to the last days and a messianic war. See G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. 3d ed. (London: Penguin, 1987), 100.

<sup>12</sup> Talmon in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 112.

<sup>13</sup> Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 198.

a role where, according to Schiffman, the messiah of Aaron would lead in the religious realm, and the messiah of Israel would rule over more mundane and political matters.<sup>15</sup> For the Dead Sea sect, teaching, interpretation, and the law were central features of their regime. Their writings contain more about legal issues than about an eschatological war. Collins assumes that as in the present so in the messianic era will their particular teaching and interpretation be a crucial feature and role of the messiah in the end of days.<sup>16</sup> Some connect an eschatological “Interpreter-of-the-Law” figure with the priestly messiah.<sup>17</sup> Both the *Damascus Document* and the fragment called the *Florilegium* place the Interpreter of the Law in the end times. An interpretation of 2 Sam. 7:12-14 states, “This (refers to the) branch of David, who will arise with the Interpreter of the Law who [will rise up] in Zi[on in] the last days....”<sup>18</sup> In the present community, one referred to as “the Teacher of Righteousness” is the one who interprets the law for the sect, and in the eschatological period a similar figure (either the present one resurrected or another) will have the role of teaching righteousness.<sup>19</sup> The *Damascus Document* elaborates on the Teacher at the end of times “...decreed to walk in them throughout the whole age of wickedness, and without which they will not obtain it, until there arises he who teaches justice at the end of days.”<sup>20</sup> Michael Fishbane offers two implications of these lines: “a new epoch would be inaugurated, one which entailed either the abrogation of the Law entirely or its dispensation in some new form...”<sup>21</sup> He continues to explain that, despite some current views that the law will cease in messianic times, it is more probable that the Qumran community adhered to the view of a future deeper revelation of law. Therefore continual sectarian interpretation will be an essential element in the eschaton, and it will be performed by another figure other than the kingly branch of David who is seen as his counterpart.

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<sup>15</sup> Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Collins, 76.

<sup>18</sup> 4Qflor. vs.11-12.

<sup>19</sup> H. Ringgren in *Faith of Qumran: Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), says that the role of the Teacher of Righteousness was to interpret the words of the prophets as can be seen in 1Qhab 2:8.

<sup>20</sup> CD col. 6:10.

<sup>21</sup> Fishbane in *Mikra*, ed. Jan Mulder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 365.



## 4.2 A New Law

Because the community saw itself as the substitute for the corrupted priesthood in Jerusalem and as the faithful remnant of Israel, their particular sectarian law was understood as the correct and proper interpretation of the law. This would explain a title to which they refer themselves, “the community of the renewed covenant,” an allusion to the text in Jer. 31. Schiffman’s main thesis in the *Eschatological Community* explains that although the sect saw the messianic age as the time when purity and obedience to the law will be in their ultimate state, the ideal law of the future molded their present actions. He explains that the *Rule of the Community* is written in order to engender the messianic reality prior to the eschaton. The *Rule of the Congregation*, however, transfers the legal precepts of the community into the messianic period and describes what cannot be realized in their own times.<sup>22</sup> Schiffman sees the ideas of law and messianism as becoming united in the *Rule of the Congregation*. This is clearly stated in its opening statement “This is the rule of the congregation of Israel in the final days...” At that time, the rest of Israel will join in obedience to the sectarian commandments, which will be led by the Zadokite priesthood. The sect’s writings acknowledge two types of law, *nigleh*-revealed, and *nistar*-hidden—the second being revealed only by their particular interpretation; but in the eschaton, the rest of Israel will be taught the hidden meanings. Israel Knohl and Ben Zion Wacholder claim that because several verses speak of the law continuing “until the messiah of Israel and Aaron arise,” this indicates some kind of change in its status after his arrival. In addition, Knohl infers from this line that the messiah will bring an atonement superior to that which came before.<sup>23</sup>

Wacholder, who calls the *Temple Scroll* (11QT) 11QTorah, insists that this scroll is a new future law that positions itself as superior to the Mosaic law.<sup>24</sup> He explains that the first Torah is observed during the evil age, whereas the other is intended for the messianic times. Part of his proof is that the description of the Temple in 11QT varies from any previous historical Temple, such as in its square dimensions. In addition, he

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<sup>22</sup> L. Schiffman *Sectarian Law*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Israel Knohl. *The Messiah Before Jesus*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> B.Z. Wacholder, *Dawn of Qumran* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1983), 32.

explains that, at the end of each portion in the *Temple Scroll* its regulations are deemed eternally valid, whereas in the Mosaic Pentateuch, although the eternal validity of the law is often claimed, many portions are not concluded with this signature. Wacholder therefore deduces an intentional polemic against the first Torah. He makes a comparison with a New Testament passage in order to reinforce his point about superiority. He states, "The [*Temple Scroll*] author's attitude to the traditional Torah was perhaps similar to that found in Matthew 5:17 which in paraphrase may be rendered: 'I have not come to diminish the Law of Moses, but to complete it.'"<sup>25</sup> Michael Wise agrees with Wacholder regarding the view of *Temple Scroll* as a new law and understands the laws as valid only until the end of the wicked era, whereupon the Teacher of Righteousness will provide a new law. He interprets its author as a new Moses with a new law, which would be used when the Qumran community repossessed the land.<sup>26</sup> Schiffman and others oppose the view that 11QT is a new law. Schiffman's proof is based on the fact that the author's description of the Temple occurs prior to the end of days and therefore he concludes that the Temple in the *Temple Scroll* is ideal but not the same as the one to be created in the end of days.<sup>27</sup> J.J. Collins agrees with Schiffman calling that Temple 'reformist' but not the eschatological version that will appear in the messianic era. Evidence, however, for a belief in a restored Temple at the end of days is explicitly taught in *Florilegium*:

This refers to the house which they will establish for him in the last days, as is written in the book of Moses: A temple of the Lord will you establish with your hands. YHWH shall reign for ever and ever. This refers to the house into which shall never enter either Ammonite, or the Moabite, or the Bastard, or the foreigner, or the proselyte, never, because there he will reveal to the holy ones; eternal glory will appear over it for ever....<sup>28</sup>

This passage reveals not only the existence of a future Temple, which some connect with the one mentioned in 11QT,<sup>29</sup> it also reveals the situation of the gentiles in relation to the Temple. Not just their enemy nations but also those who have been converted will have no place in the future Temple. Although Schiffman and others do not see the Temple

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<sup>25</sup> Wacholder, *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Wise "Temple Scroll and Teacher of Righteousness" in *Mogylani* 1989, ed. Zdzilaw J. Kapera.

<sup>27</sup> Schiffman, "Temple Scroll and Nature of its law" in *The Community of The Renewed Covenant*, eds. Eugene Ulrich and James Vanderkam (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), 43.

<sup>28</sup> 4Qflor. Col.1; 2-5.

<sup>29</sup> 11QT 29:9.

Scroll as a new law, the possibility that a significant change will occur in the messianic era is evident. Even Schiffman admits that purity will be more prevalent in the messianic era, therefore implying that the current circumstances are not ideal.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Schiffman applies Gershom Scholem's categories of utopian and restorative to the idea of the law and the messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He sees both categories as playing an equal role where the law of the past is restored, yet a new observance will be possible with its perfect purity only in a renewed period.<sup>30</sup> The cessation of the era of evil as well as the capability of full obedience to the law indicates the necessity of a dramatic change that falls under the utopian rubric. Ironically, though many scholars view the Qumran community as a strongly chiliastic movement, which usually is an indicator of antinomian tendencies, they are deeply devoted to the law.<sup>31</sup> Talmon speaks of them as a unique blend where "no other faction of Judaism at the turn of the era, or for that matter early Christianity, bears upon itself the stamp ... of hyper-nomism wedded with a fervent messianism."<sup>32</sup> While the Mosaic law is the one honored, the sect's interpretation of that law is unique and will be transposed into the messianic era. The primary difference in terms of the law between the current circumstances and the future is that both the revealed and hidden meanings will be manifest through a particular messianic figure. Due to the priestly origins of the sect, the priestly legislation is the focal point both in their particular time and in the expected future era. Schiffman links the superior priestly messiah to the more utopian trend and the Davidic one to a restorative trend.<sup>33</sup> Yet restorative elements also occur because institutions of the past, such as the Temple, will be resurrected. Without losing the general legal structure and institutions of the past, the Qumran community looked forward to their particular adaptations and versions of the law in the messianic era and therefore may be offering a different perspective from what other groups within Judaism of their day may have considered appropriate legalism for the messianic era.

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<sup>30</sup> Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Talmon in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Talmon in *The Community of the Renewed Covenant*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Schiffman in Charlesworth, 129.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The New Testament**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Up until the writing of the New Testament in the first century C.E., the concept of the validity of the law in relation to the messiah had remained for the most part in the theoretical sphere. With the messianic movement of Jesus, messianism became a concrete reality, and with it arose many questions about the role of the law. For the writers of the New Testament, messianism was actualized through Jesus who was offering entrance to the kingdom of God, although the final redemptive period still lay in the future. Scholars usually place Jesus, Paul, and the author the Letter to the Hebrews, along a continuum of law adherence, with Jesus being the most observant. All three make statements that have been considered to validate as well as to undermine or to annul the law. As Jesus was examined for his messianic qualifications, the Jewish leadership investigated his understanding of the written law and the oral tradition. His response to the latter two reveals an attitude of both affirmation and reinterpretation. Paul, dealing in large part with gentile followers, needed to explain the law's validity in relation to their new faith, therefore he is often interpreted as negating the validity of the law. The Letter to the Hebrews, more than the Gospels or Paul's writings, offers extreme and explicit statements against the perpetuity of the law. Key passages will be presented that show the range of legal views. This will include the New Testament's use of passages in the Tanakh relating to a new covenant, as have been previously mentioned (i.e., Jer. 31:31), as well as the place of the Temple and of the gentiles in relation to the law.

#### **5.2 Jesus' Approach to the Law**

B.H. Branscomb uses the analogy of a chromatic scale to describe the variety of views concerning the law in the New Testament, particularly with regard to the perspective of Jesus. He provides examples that range over the full gamut of possibilities. These include the total cessation of the law, a new law that fulfills the old one, the rejection of particular aspects of the law, the rejection of oral but not written law, and

finally the complete endorsement of both oral and written law.<sup>1</sup> Branscomb's categories are just one example of the many attempts to systematize Jesus' views of the law, and they reveal the difficulty in determining one straightforward understanding of the texts.

Many scholars would agree that, in general, the Gospel's record of Jesus' attitude toward the law is ambiguous, as they do not present a systematic approach to it. The last of Branscomb's options—full acceptance of both oral and written law—describes the approach of recent Jewish (and some confessional Christian) scholars whose desire is to reposition Jesus within his Jewish heritage. David Flusser, for example, refuses to acknowledge that Jesus made any break with the law, with the possible exception of the plucking of the grain on the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> However, Flusser even justifies the actions of the disciples on this occasion, by contending that they were rubbing rather than plucking—an action which was permitted.<sup>3</sup> Scholars like Flusser, point to passages in Matthew's Gospel for evidence that supports the ongoing validity of the law. The key passage is within the Sermon on the Mount:

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.<sup>4</sup>

The issue here lies in defining the exact meaning of "fulfill" and whether it connotes observance, cessation, completion, or alteration. Davies claims that the context would render its meaning as "to complete" or "to bring to its destined end."<sup>5</sup> Jesus explicitly states that abolition of the law is not his intention, however, he seems to be implying some kind of elaboration, change, or completion, justified by his arrival. His explanation in the following verses (often called the antitheses) render the implications and meaning

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Branscomb, "Jesus Attitude to the Law of Moses," *JBL* 47 (1928): 32.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 12:1-8. Flusser in Donald Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academic Book, 1984), 95-96.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 5:17-20.

<sup>5</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 100.

of “fulfill” quite clear. In them, Jesus explains that sins such as murder and adultery do not begin with the act itself but initially fester within the heart where they are to be halted. He explains that murder begins as anger against one’s neighbour.<sup>6</sup> His interpretation links external sins to their internal motivation and therefore requires an even stricter demand of obedience. The letter of the law is not done away with but must follow upon an inner catalyst. David Daube elaborates on the correlation between the law and Jesus’ interpretation:

The relationship between the two members of the form is not one of pure contrast; the demand that you must not be angry with your brother is not thought of as utterly irreconcilable with the prohibition of killing. On the contrary, wider and deeper though it may be, it is thought of as, in a sense, resulting from and certainly including the old rule, it is the revelation of a fuller meaning for a new age. The second member unfolds rather than sweeps away the first.<sup>7</sup>

Daube does not see a cancellation of the law in Jesus’ interpretation, but a further revelation of the existing law. Thus it seems clear that the relationship between the Mosaic law and the teachings of Jesus is not antithetical but is one of elaboration and completion. Furthermore, the Sermon on the Mount has been interpreted as a second Mt. Sinai experience, with Jesus as the new lawgiver. Although Matthew does not use explicit terminology such as “new Torah” or “new Sinai,” he does portray Jesus as a prophet on a mount reminiscent of Moses. Because of the connection to Moses, Davies understands the entire sermon as a kind of messianic Torah, not different from its Mosaic counterpart but a reinterpretation or expansion of the Mosaic law.<sup>8</sup> Despite the emphasis on the continuation of the law, there is a hint here that at some future time. (i.e.. the age to come?), the law will pass away. The passage states that the smallest stroke will not be removed “until all is accomplished” implying an eventual cessation. Howard Teeple

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<sup>6</sup> Matt. 5:22.

<sup>7</sup> David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson. 1956), 60.

<sup>8</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1966). 31. Bernard Jackson sees Matt: 5:17 as an allusion to Deut. 18, making Jesus a prophet-like-Moses who had authority to suspend the law for a period of time (Matt. 12:1-4) or perpetually, add laws or completely establish a new law. However, he does not see “the antitheses” in Matt. 5:18ff. as interpretations of the law but presented as its original significance. Bernard Jackson, *The Prophet and the Law*, 75-76.

suggests that “perhaps the Law will no longer be required since God will rule in a perfect state.”<sup>9</sup>

After “fulfill,” the second clue to understanding the Matthean pericope is the phrase, “righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.” For the most part, Jesus did not endorse imitating the religious leadership as he describes them inconsistent in their practices; “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”<sup>10</sup> While some of the religious leadership may not be properly observing the law, Jesus acknowledges nevertheless that their words should be followed. Therefore, to exceed their righteousness implies both internal purification as well as external obedience. In this context, it is unclear if this is referring only to the written law or to the oral law as well, although some scholars see this as an endorsement of the latter; “On the level of the evangelist this means that Matthew is binding his (Judeo-Christian) congregation to the Halacha of the rabbinical wise men of this time.”<sup>11</sup> In another passage, he indicates a hierarchy between the ceremonial and the ethical: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”<sup>12</sup> In this verse Jesus establishes a hierarchy between the ethical laws, which he considers “weightier,” and the ritual of tithing. Although he does set up this comparison, he nevertheless does not reject the law of tithing, which he says should not be neglected. Tithing, however, is contained in the written law, therefore his position on the validity of the oral tradition is still undetermined.

His views on the oral law are clarified by other passages. In terms of going against tradition, Jesus’ disciples are accused of abstaining from the ritual of washing their hands when they eat bread.<sup>13</sup> Jesus responds again by establishing a hierarchy of

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<sup>9</sup> Howard M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: SBL, 1957), 25. Some interpret “until all is accomplished” as signifying until his death and resurrection.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 23:1.

<sup>11</sup> Klaus Wengst, “Aspects of the Last Judgment in the Gospel according to Matthew,” in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 238.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 23:23.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 15:3-11.

internal over external: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man: but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”<sup>14</sup> The Greek word for “defile” means to make or consider profane, call common or unclean.<sup>15</sup> The focus is on the inward cleansing of sins rather than outward purity. Jesus accuses the Pharisees and scribes in this context of placing too much importance on their tradition while forsaking the commandments of God.<sup>16</sup> According to Jesus, they do not observe the commandment of honouring their parents through monetary provision. Instead they define their piety as tithing to the Temple rather than providing for them. In the end, they annul the proper intention of the law for the sake of their own interpretations. For Jesus, law begins on an inner level, which is deemed essential for right practice. He allows and perhaps even encourages his followers not to wash their hands, in order to stress this essential. In this instance they relinquish traditional observance.

Jesus’ teaching about the law in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere stems from what he views as the fundamental underlying motivator of the law. When he was asked to determine the most important commandments, he responded that love of God and love of one’s neighbour are the primary commandments, whereas everything else hangs on these laws.<sup>17</sup> He considers this emphasis on love something new: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”<sup>18</sup> The Greek word for “new” is *kainos* which has the significance of new in quality not in time. Therefore although the Mosaic law also commands to “love your neighbour” there is a claim being made for a greater quality or depth of love.<sup>19</sup> If this is not kept, the rest becomes superficial. This understanding is depicted in a series of controversial miracles performed on the Sabbath. For example.

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<sup>14</sup> Matt. 15:19-20.

<sup>15</sup> James Strong. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Peabody: Hendrickson, n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 15: 1-6. Jesus accuses them of tithing to the Temple at the expense of financially forsaking their parents. For him this is invalidating the law because giving to God would not preclude the welfare of people.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 22:36-40.

<sup>18</sup> John 13:34.

<sup>19</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (New Jersey: Revell Company, 1981). See Lev. 19:18 for the verse in the Torah. See also the First Epistle of John 1:7-8 which affirms that a new commandment is not being written but one that existed from the beginning. However, it also brings a newness to the commandment because of the occurrence of a spiritual change from darkness to light that facilitates a new kind of love.



when he is questioned about healing on the Sabbath, he explains that consideration for a man's welfare does not break the Sabbath.<sup>20</sup>

Underlying Jesus' words on the law, is an authoritative manner in which he pronounces his interpretations. Most scholars consider Jesus' commanding approach to be an important issue. He regards himself as fulfiller of the law with the power, credentials, and understanding, to explain its true purpose. Matthew is concerned with positioning Jesus as master over the law. Jesus responds to accusations that his disciples broke the Sabbath by picking grain with the statements that "...something greater than the Temple is here" and "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>21</sup> These phrases indicate his superiority over the law, which allow him to determine its correct meaning. In his discussion on divorce, Jesus elaborates upon Mosaic legislation<sup>22</sup> by saying that Moses allowed for certificates of divorce because of the callousness of the heart of man. By referring to Gen. 1:27, Jesus proclaims this was not the original intention of God and he maintains it should only be permissible in adulterous circumstances.<sup>23</sup> His elaboration is not an annulment of the Mosaic legislation because he appeals to another part of the law of Moses to interpret it, yet it is a unique and bold approach.<sup>24</sup> Donald Hagner, while acknowledging that Jesus did not intend to invalidate the law, does not concur with scholars who merely attempt to fit Jesus into the same mold as his Jewish contemporaries. He insists that Jesus was proclaiming a new kingdom where certain matters were "weightier" than others<sup>25</sup> and where true understanding of the law could now be attained because the messiah had the ability and right to interpret it.<sup>26</sup> Robert Banks succinctly expresses the point, "It therefore becomes apparent that it is not so much Jesus' stance towards the Law that he [Matthew] is concerned to depict; it is how the Law stands with regard to him, as the one who brings it to fulfillment and to whom all attention must now be directed."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Matt. 12:12. The Talmud writes about the precedence of life over the Sabbath. See BT Yoma 85b.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. 12: 6, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Deut. 24:1.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 10:2-9.

<sup>24</sup> A.H. Silver explains that Jesus' view of divorce reflected the stricter school of Shammai. *Messianic Speculation in Israel*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Matt. 23:23.

<sup>26</sup> Donald A.Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 226.

The centrality of Jesus is taken further in the Gospel of John where he becomes the personification of Torah. Jesus is described as being “the way, the truth and the life.”<sup>28</sup> Davies interprets this as the Torah being fulfilled in him. It is not just his message that is considered as new Torah, but the person himself who should be followed and believed in.<sup>29</sup> During the Passover festival, Jesus reapplies the meaning of the symbols to himself stating, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” and when referring to the unleavened bread, he says, “This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”<sup>30</sup> There is no mistaking that Jesus is depicted as possessing a self-awareness of being a redemptive figure, applying rituals from the Exodus event to himself. This was more than legal direction. It was an assertion that something greater than the previous deliverance had arrived; something with the authority to reinterpret the law because he was its embodiment. But it was also a pronouncement that, due to his special status, he was able to offer redemption. The Gospel of John links Jesus to the Passover sacrifice stating, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore the law is not abolished but takes on a new meaning, as it is applied to and fulfilled in the messianic figure. However, if the first Exodus is an adumbration of the messianic redemption, the latter, which becomes its fulfillment, implies a superior status.

In the New Testament, the validity of the law varies depending on whether it is for the initial entrance into the kingdom of God or for the continuation of living as “a believer.” Jesus seems to be in agreement that the former does not require the works of the law. He reveals this in his discussion with a religious teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, whom he tells to be “born again” in order to be admitted to the kingdom of God and have eternal life. By this pronouncement, Jesus suggests that Nicodemus’ works of the law are insufficient to give him a place in the kingdom of God, as well as the afterlife. Jesus claims that belief in him and the reception of the spirit are the requirements for entrance

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<sup>28</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 22:19-20.

<sup>31</sup> John 1:29.

rather than works.<sup>32</sup> For Jesus, admission into the kingdom of God, demands an acceptance of his messiahship, insinuating the insufficiency of the law in this respect.

Matthew's Gospel emphasizes the ongoing validity of the law in an intensified form, i.e., it must stem from the inner being. Overall, Jesus' connection to the law of Moses is strong, validating its role (with proper intention), until the "heavens and earth pass away." Yet, it also stresses Jesus' superiority over the law and his ability to transform, interpret, and even alter or annul some elements. He rejects oral tradition when its focus overrules the intention of the written law. Furthermore, Jesus implies the temporality of the Mosaic law in terms of forgiveness of sins. The latter can be fully accomplished only through a belief in him who becomes a personification of that law. Therefore the law without its interpretation by and transformation through the messiah becomes invalid. James Dunn explains that, although forgiveness and atonement were accessible prior to Jesus, that atonement has now been made ineffective because of his death and resurrection.<sup>33</sup> As for post-salvific regulations, the Sermon on the Mount interpretations should be used as guidelines that are imparted by the spirit of God. Once a person was "in messiah," they were under his law. This meant that the message and life of Jesus should be used as a model to be followed. Matthew's Gospel presents particulars, i.e., the Sermon on the Mount, on how to live and requires both an internal and external righteousness. In terms of ongoing lifestyle, Jesus endorses the idea of the necessity of the spirit in order to internalize the law and to distinguish the "weightier matters." His reference is always to the specific laws of the Torah, which helps to validate the law.

### 5.3 Paul and the Law

Like the Gospels, Paul's writings also contain statements that indicate the law's continuity and cessation. James Dunn affirms the variety: "there is a spectrum in Paul's references to the law, a spectrum running from what sounds a highly positive approbation to what sounds a highly negative condemnation."<sup>34</sup> Most scholars agree that negative statements are attached to the role of the law in connection with the salvation experience.

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<sup>32</sup> John 3.

<sup>33</sup> James D. G. Dunn ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), 334.

<sup>34</sup> James Dunn ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, 328.

Paul is no less convinced than Jesus as portrayed in Matthew's Gospel, that he was the goal of the law and the true interpreter of it. Paul emphasizes the necessity of the figure of Jesus for redemption, more than the particulars of the law, although he is also concerned with the conduct of post-salvation living. For Paul, the law becomes an entity that points to Jesus as messiah. Paul says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."<sup>35</sup> Thus, the law directs a person to the messiah, who then becomes the object of faith and giver of righteousness. Whether "end" is interpreted as "goal," "culmination," or "cessation," a reshifting of focus is required towards Jesus. Gershom Scholem chooses this verse as the pinnacle of Paul's antinomian theology that was justified on the basis of the higher importance of redemption over law.<sup>36</sup> As Jesus reapplied the Passover symbols to himself, Paul also sees Jesus as the Passover sacrifice,<sup>37</sup> which is typical of how the law is portrayed as completed in Jesus by Paul. In Colossians, Paul claims that festivals, new moons, or Sabbath days, "are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."<sup>38</sup> The implication in this context is that once the substance appears the shadow recedes; definite hierarchy implicates the substance as the goal. For Paul, the true intention of the law is upheld through a faith that must be applied to the messiah. He elaborates further on the role of the law in relation to faith in the messianic figure:

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made...Is the Law contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that

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<sup>35</sup> Rom. 10:1. Robert Selzter sees Paul's understanding of the law as an apocalyptic approach to salvation history based on the centrality of the messiah. Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People Jewish Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 235.

<sup>36</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor. 5:7.

<sup>38</sup> Col. 2:16-17. Although Paul is addressing gentiles, it is his general philosophy that upon the messianic advent all prior events recede. See Phil. 3:5-9 where Paul speaks of his Jewish heritage and his righteousness in the law. He no longer boasts in these things but in the knowledge of the messiah.

faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For all are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

The law in this pericope has a finite role because it is compared to a tutor whose job is finished once the lesson has been learned (i.e., messiah has come). Thus for Paul, the law has a temporary status.

The law is given a new understanding (and some view as more negative) in the Letter to the Galatians. The latter proposes that the law was given in order to increase sin and cause death, and thus also the wrath of God: “for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”<sup>40</sup> The result is the necessity for forgiveness, which according to Paul can be found only in Jesus.<sup>41</sup> Paul’s view of the messiah is connected to his perspective on sin—that through the law the knowledge of sin is unleashed.<sup>42</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach contends that Paul’s antinomianism lies in his understanding of sin and man’s nature.<sup>43</sup> A hierarchy is established between the law and faith in the messianic figure of Jesus, the latter overruling the former. However, according to Dunn, the judgement upon sin was always a part of the law. i.e., known as forgiveness and atonement. and in this sense there is continuity. Discontinuity occurs because it is the messiah (and not the sacrificial system) that provides the atonement. In addition, further change occurs because forgiveness is offered to a broader range of people, which includes the gentiles.<sup>44</sup> Paul also establishes a hierarchy between the two covenants through an allegorical presentation of Ishmael and Isaac; the son of Hagar represents bondage to the law from Sinai and Sarah the new covenant whose partakers (both Jews and gentiles) are described as freed from slavery and as receptors of the promise.<sup>45</sup>

Whether of Jewish or gentile background, those who possess that faith are viewed as fulfilling the law. Therefore salvation is based on their status “in messiah” and not their works. Paul is adamant in Romans and Galatians that both Jew and gentile can only

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<sup>39</sup> Gal. 3: 19-26.

<sup>40</sup> Rom. 4:15.

<sup>41</sup> Rom. 5:20.

<sup>42</sup> Rom. 3:20.

<sup>43</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), 1:302.

<sup>44</sup> Dunn, *Paul and Mosaic Law*, 334.

<sup>45</sup> Gal. 4:21-31.

be made righteous before God by their faith and not by the law; both become part of one community through their acceptance of the messiahship of Jesus.<sup>46</sup> In Romans he states,

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.<sup>47</sup>

For Paul, Jew and gentile have the same requirements to acquire righteousness before God—by faith. If this is accomplished, it is equivalent to fulfilling the law. Paul denies that the law is “nullified” but affirms that it is “established,” i.e., its intended purpose is accomplished through faith.

In much of Paul’s writings, his focus is on faith in Jesus, which is required for an initial entrance into the messianic community and for an endurance in that faith through the spirit of God. While in Acts he is depicted as engaging in purification rites in order to prove his allegiance to the law of Moses, in Galatians, he condemns Peter at Antioch for not eating with the gentiles in front of certain religious men from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> A council from Jerusalem in Acts designated certain laws for gentiles; they are exempt from laws about idolatry, eating blood, and immorality; circumcision and other rites are not required of them.<sup>49</sup> Scholem describes the leniency on the law for the gentiles as an outright abrogation that resulted from outside forces. The conversion of the gentiles, necessitated a lessening on the demand for obedience to the law.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for Paul a freedom in the spirit as part of the new walk in the messiah takes precedence over tradition. While Paul makes many positive statements regarding the holiness and goodness of the law, he believes it does not have the same power as the spirit of God to transform the individual.

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<sup>46</sup> The Mosaic law is viewed as a wall of partition that separated the Jews from the gentiles who previously did not have access to God. This separation is reversed and the wall of partition broken down by the death of Jesus. See Eph. 2:15.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 3:27-31.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 21:24; Gal. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Acts 15.

<sup>50</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea*, 57.

which can only be received upon the belief in the messiahship of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> Paul emphasizes the spirit as a guiding force in living a holy life, which was received upon initial salvation through faith and should be relied upon continually in the life of a “believer as opposed to works of the Law,” (in this case circumcision).<sup>52</sup> He describes the kingdom of God as characterized by “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,”<sup>53</sup> and not the laws of eating and drinking which were causing some in the church at Rome to have a judgmental attitude toward others. However, the question arises as to whether the spirit precludes the law. Paul often refers to the “fruits” of the believer, which result from the indwelling of the spirit of God. Davies thinks that Paul understands the holy life of the believer, as seen in the list of fruits in Gal. 5, to be linked to the same spirit that is offered through Jesus.<sup>54</sup> He should be imitated both in words and actions. Paul, like Jesus, then offers particular moral regulations and not vague instruction. Davies affirms the specific guidance of the spirit and views it as similar to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount:

St. Paul speaks more often, it is true, of the power of the Spirit. As the transforming influence in the Christian life; but it is quite wrong to imagine that he thinks of the leadings of the Spirit as a succession of formless impulses or vagrant illuminations. Here, in correlation with the call for obedience, he thinks naturally enough of the specific moral instruction in which the guiding of the Spirit is given concrete expression. (Phil. iv. 8-9). For all his faith in the Spirit, the Apostle thinks of the Christian life as disciplined and ordered in keeping with clear and concrete instruction given by precept and example.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, Paul does not endorse a life without obedience or regulations. He offers specific directions as guided and imparted by the spirit of God, which would concur with the legal interpretations of Jesus in the Sermon and elsewhere. Davies explains that Paul was familiar with the message of Jesus, and therefore the guidance of the spirit was based on the latter’s moral instruction.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Paul repeats Jesus’ words regarding the most important commandments; “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement,

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<sup>51</sup> Rom. 7:12, 2 Cor.3:6-11. Here the new covenant is characterized by the spirit which is seen as superior to what is engraved on stone, i.e. the law.

<sup>52</sup> Gal. 3:3.

<sup>53</sup> Rom. 14:17.

<sup>54</sup> Davies, *Setting of the Sermon*, 349.

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Setting of the Sermon*, 365.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>57</sup> This was Jesus’ point in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul also encourages the followers to carry each other’s burdens in order to fulfill the “Law of messiah.”<sup>58</sup> The concern for the welfare of others is the same emphasis Jesus places in his interpretations of the Sabbath and other laws. Paul explicitly refers to Jesus’ message as “the law of messiah,” thus, in an implied sense, categorizes the legal interpretations in Matthew with that of his own.<sup>59</sup> The commandment to love your neighbour is not hollow, in that it shows itself through actions. Paul applies concrete examples from the Mosaic law claiming that the commandments such as, “you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,” are based in the love commandment. While the possession of the spirit does not lead to strict legalism, neither does it suggest an outright antinomian approach. Paul emphasizes the spirit for guidance in righteous living.<sup>60</sup> Although his ministry requires spending less time on elaborating the particulars of the law, he still provides general precepts for the life of a believer that are similar to the “intention” as stressed by Jesus in his interpretations of the law.

#### 5.4 The Letter to the Hebrews and the Law

The Letter to the Hebrews focuses on Jesus’ role as superior to the law (particularly its ceremonial aspects, i.e., the priesthood), and therefore it has been placed on the extreme end of the spectrum that endorses an abolition of the Torah. While quoting the new covenant passage in Jeremiah, Hebrews makes it explicitly clear that a new covenant supersedes the old one. Hebrews comments, “When He said, ‘a new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”<sup>61</sup> The author continues to explain that the messiah who entered heaven is the mediator of the new covenant, and that “at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus is

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<sup>57</sup> Gal. 5:14.

<sup>58</sup> Gal. 6:2.

<sup>59</sup> He formulates them into a “law of messiah.”

<sup>60</sup> Most of Paul’s epistles deal with the theme of the necessity to differentiate between the new life “in messiah” and unbridled sensuality or the idea that believers have free rein.

<sup>61</sup> Heb. 8:13.

<sup>62</sup> Heb. 10:26.



considered the head of a new priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek that replaces the old priesthood, whose sacrifices are rendered obsolete. It states, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also."<sup>63</sup> Hebrews says that the law was set aside because of its weakness under the old priesthood showing the inadequacy of the former Levitical priesthood.<sup>64</sup> The author concludes that, because of Jesus' one-time sacrifice, which ranks higher than any earthly sacrificial system, the believer in the messiah will receive a permanent atonement. His words mark a distinction and establish a hierarchy between the sacrificial requirements of the Mosaic law and that of the new covenant as created by the messiah. Andrew Chester sees both a connection with and a break from the Mosaic covenant stating, "Hence it is a covenant that is radically and disjunctively new, but one which is also deliberately linked to Jeremiah 31 and Exodus 24...what is radically rejected at one level, and judged negatively, is appropriated at another and used, positively and typologically, to define the distinctive nature of the new community."<sup>65</sup> Therefore, even though Hebrews uses phrases, such as "the law is a shadow," or "obsolete," or "new covenant," to indicate an abolition or cessation of the Mosaic law, it also tries to link this cessation to verses in the Tanach in order to validate its shift. Just as the Passover symbols were applied to Jesus in the Gospels and in the latter's presentation of the superiority of his atonement, Hebrews remarks on the permanence of the sacrifice of the messianic figure. Although its language is direct, its essence is similar to the message of Jesus and Paul in terms of the superiority of the redemption offered by the messianic figure over that offered through the law.

Although Hebrews is clear in its perspective towards the ceremonial aspect of the law, it continues to endorse the moral elements. Hebrews stresses the ethical laws such as hospitality, love of one's neighbour, the respect for marriage, and the care of prisoners, all of which are similar to Jesus' interpretations of law in the Gospels (and the prophets). While it sees the new covenant as superior to the old one, it is not a lawless covenant and incorporates many of the latter's regulations.

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<sup>63</sup> Heb. 7:12.

<sup>64</sup> Heb. 7:18.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Chester, "Messianism, Torah and Christian tradition," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Graham Stanton and Guy Stroumsa (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 326.

## 5.5 The Temple in the New Testament

In the New Testament more than any of the previous texts, the Temple is clearly spiritualized and portrayed as eventually superseded. There are no references to Ezekiel's Temple as described in chapters 40 through 47.<sup>66</sup> In the Gospels, Jesus is not only able to predict the Temple's downfall, but he uses its destruction and rebuilding to refer to his death and resurrection, applying the physical structure to his own body. In Paul's writings, those who enter the community of faith are considered to be housing the spirit and thus are called "the temple of God."<sup>67</sup> In the Gospel of John, Jesus is quoted as setting in contrast the mountain in Jerusalem, which is currently used for worship, with an eventual true worship described as "worshipping in spirit and in truth," that does not require the physical location.<sup>68</sup> In the future, either in the messianic era<sup>69</sup> or afterwards, the physical Temple will no longer be necessary. The book of Revelation states this clearly:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband....I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.... The nations will walk by its light [glory of God], and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it [the city].<sup>70</sup>

At some point in the future era, God, and Jesus (who is portrayed as a lamb) will replace the Temple, and a new Jerusalem will replace the existing city. In addition, the gentile nations will be participating in the new scenario. Thus, the physical Temple will be replaced by God himself (and his messiah) who will have a more direct relationship to the people. There will no longer be a need for the mediating role of the Temple, suggesting the temporality, inferiority, and limitations of the physical structure. Its validity has ceased because of the actual presence of God and his messiah.

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<sup>66</sup> There is an allusion to a literal Temple that will exist during a time of tribulation. See Rev. 11:1-2.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16.

<sup>68</sup> Heb. 4:21-24.

<sup>69</sup> The time of Jesus is not considered the messianic era per se, although the kingdom of God was available. The time of full external redemption with its visible manifestations, i.e., peace, was still to come in the future. Matt. 24, Rom. 8:23, Rev. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Rev. 21: 2, 22, 24.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Although it seems that Jesus, Paul, and the author of Hebrews are at varying places along the spectrum of acceptance or rejection of the law, all the statements allow for the authority of a messiah to rule on or to fulfill the law. Paul agrees with Matthew's Gospel that the messiah was the goal to which the law was pointing, and Hebrews also insists that the law was a mere shadow of something superior to come.<sup>71</sup> For Paul, while the law is acknowledged to be holy, it is weak in terms of transforming humans to follow God's ways, which was intended to be the implication of the atoning work and person of Jesus. Abolition does not adequately describe the status of the law in the New Testament, but rather absorption into a messianic Torah whose boundaries are now defined by Jesus. The preponderance of evidence within many of the books of the New Testament reveals a hierarchy of the ethical over the ceremonial laws. Most important is the emphasis on the law's lack of power in bestowing righteousness upon the individual necessary for salvation, which can be accomplished only through faith in the messianic figure of Jesus. The law in this respect ceases to be effective. The law will continue to be transformed in the age when redemption will encompass the entire world, as indicated by the lack of role for the physical Temple. Although the messianic hope has begun for the followers of Jesus in the first century they await a complete fulfillment of the Torah with the second advent of their messiah (i.e. a literal millennial period of peace).

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<sup>71</sup> Heb. 10:1.

## Chapter 6

### Early Rabbinic Texts

#### 6.1 The Mishnah and The Tosefta

Although the first and second centuries of the common era were filled with messianic fervor, the foundational rabbinic work, the Mishnah, compiled around 200 C.E., does not reflect it. Within its sixty-three tractates, only two brief passages mention an eschatological messiah.<sup>1</sup> All other statements that use the term “messiah” refer to the traditional priest in the literal sense of “anointing.” Jacob Neusner sees the Mishnah as well as the later work, the Tosefta, as ahistorical documents concerned with sanctification of the nation through obedience to the commandments.<sup>2</sup> Due to the Mishnah’s philosophy and format as a legal treatise, he claims that it finds no significant place for eschatological messianism. Some scholars perceive this as an intentional absence reacting against prior messianic events (e.g., Bar Kochba and the Jesus movement).<sup>3</sup> The energies that would generally be projected towards a future hope are channeled into the present submission to rabbinic law. Some see this focus on the law in the current situation as a messianism partially fulfilled. Yet, others view the entire Mishnah as having a definite messianic bent. Lawrence Schiffman remarks that, although the messiah is barely mentioned, the Mishnah does present a pervasive restorative rather than utopian messianic approach. For example, its worldview is one where the Temple, the sacrificial system and the High Priest are active. Because the Mishnah’s perfect world would be one where these institutions would be restored, it can be imagined that in the messianic age they would continue to exist.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the extent of messianism found in the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Ber. 1:5 and M. Sot. 9:15 (Danby edition used for all Mishnah quotes).

<sup>2</sup> J. Neusner, “When did Judaism Become a Messianic Religion,” in *Messianism Through History*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Messiah In Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Schiffman, “The Concept of the Messiah in Second Temple and Rabbinic Literature.” *RE* 84 (1987), 243. Neusner says that the messiah was not mentioned even regarding passages that refer to the rebuilding of the Temple, *Messiah in Context*, 56. Schiffman further states, “What to Neusner is an absence of serious messianic concern is in fact the opposite. The Mishnah speaks not of the apocalyptic Messiah but of the restorative age. Why else would it dwell so much on the Temple and on ritual purity, if not because the sages involved in its redaction earnestly expected that these will be restored?” *JQR* 70, no.2-3, 243.

Mishnah, all these views connect the messiah with the law, whether it is fulfilled in the present or in the future.

For some, messianism is transformed into the framework of the Mishnah so that it becomes closely connected to the law. B. M. Bokser views the Mishnah and the Tosefta as texts that spiritualize messianism, because they apply the messianic hope to present experiences rather than emphasize the fulfillment in a future period. The first passage in the Mishnah that relates to messianism states,

The going forth from Egypt is rehearsed at night. R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Lo, I am like to one that is seventy years old yet failed to prove why the going forth from Egypt should be rehearsed at night until Ben Zoma thus expounded it: It is written, *That thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life*. "The days of thy life" would mean the days only; but *all the days of thy life* [means] the nights also. The Sages say: "The days of thy life" [means] this world only, but *all the days of thy life* is to include the Days of the Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

Bokser asserts that, because the Exodus from Egypt is mentioned in relation to the Shema, the implication is that the command to remember the Exodus should be followed on a daily basis. Therefore the Exodus commandment gains a continual purpose and is not merely a type of the future redemption; "The Mishnah thus spiritualizes or depoliticizes the notion of *yeṣi'at misrayim*. Whatever the future will bring, one central aspect of the messianic heritage has already found fulfillment in current religious life."<sup>6</sup> Thus for Bokser, this passage asserts that messianism can exist in the current circumstances, and it changes the importance of its future role to the present. While most would agree with the idea that the Mishnah was concerned with the law and its application to daily life rather than the future, others view the time to come as vitally linked to, and as the fulfillment of, the present law (e.g., the reestablishment of institutions).<sup>7</sup> Thus Anthony Saldarini interprets "all the days of your life" to include this world as well as the days of the messiah and concludes that the praying of the Shema will

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<sup>5</sup> M. Ber. 1:5.

<sup>6</sup> B. M. Bokser, "Messianism, The Exodus Pattern, and Early Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Messiah*, ed. James Charlesworth, 248.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Uses of Apocalyptic in the Mishna and Tosefta," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 407.

continue in messianic times.<sup>8</sup> Whether the messianism in this passage is for the present or the future, it still is crucially connected to the law.

The Tosefta to M. Ber. 1:5, offers additional insight on the status of the law in the messianic age. It is worth quoting in full:

- A. *We mention the exodus from Egypt at night* [viz. in the evening recitation of the *shema*].
- B. *Said, R. Eleazar ben Azariah, "Behold I am nearly seventy years old and did not merit understanding why the exodus from Egypt [should] be mentioned [or recited] at night until Ben Zoma expounded it:*
- C. *"As scripture states: So that you may remember the day on which you left Egypt all the days of your life. (Deut. 16:3).*
- D. *"The days of your life [would have implied only] the days; all the days of your life [includes] the nights.*
- E. *And sages say, "The days of your life [would have included only] this world; all the days of your life includes the messianic age" [M.Ber. 1:5].*
- F. *Said to them Ben Zoma, "But does one mention the exodus from Egypt in the messianic age?*
- G. *"For has it not already been said, Therefore, behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lived who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country [and out of all the countries where he had driven them]' (Jer.23:7-8)?"*
- H. *They said to him, "It is not that [mention of] the exodus from Egypt will be removed from its place [in the liturgy], but that the exodus from Egypt will be [mentioned] in addition to [the restoration of God's] Sovereignty. Sovereignty [will be] primary and the exodus from Egypt [will be] secondary.*
- I. *Similarly, no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name (Gen.35:10). It is not that the name Jacob will be taken from him but that [he shall be called] Jacob in addition to Israel. Israel will be [his] primary [name] and Jacob [his] secondary [name].<sup>9</sup>*

This passage questions whether the commandment to remember the Exodus will be continued in the messianic age. The response is that it will not be removed from the liturgy (implying that liturgy is part of the messianic age), but that it will carry less importance in comparison to the rule of God.<sup>10</sup> The example of Jacob's name being

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 402.

<sup>9</sup> Tos. Ber. 1:10 (to M. Ber. 1:5) (Neusner Translation and Formatting).

<sup>10</sup> The rabbinic liturgy includes many pleas for the advent of the messiah, as well as a rebuilding of the Temple. Prayers such as the Amidah, the Kaddish, and the Aleinu, all include references to the messiah.

changed to Israel prevents contemplating the notion of abolition or supplantation, yet by analogy it establishes a hierarchy where the command will be lower in rank. This Tosefta erases any notion of doubt that the law will not continue in the messianic age and affirms that a new orientation does not totally dismiss former events or laws.<sup>11</sup>

The second example from the Mishnah that discusses messianism describes the time just prior to the arrival of the messiah, which is characterized by its lawlessness:

With the footprints of the Messiah presumption shall increase and dearth reach its height; ...and the empire shall fall into heresy and there shall be none to utter reproof. The council chamber shall be given to fornication... Children shall blame elders, and the elders shall rise up before the children, for the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. The face of this generation is as the face of a dog, and the son will not be put to shame by his father. On whom can we stay ourselves?—On our Father in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

Although Neusner does not view this reference to the messiah as a significant part of the context, it does have some pertinent implications for the role of the law.<sup>13</sup> If the time just prior to the coming of the messiah is described as heretical, by implication his arrival would signify its contrast, marked by obedience. There will be a reversal of the lawless situation in the time of the messiah, even though the current advice is to rely on God and less on the future messianic hope. Like Neusner, Gerbern S. Oegama concludes that, because the Tosefta to Sotah 9 has completely neglected the messianic elements the redactors of the Tosefta, as well as the Mishnah, place an emphasis on proper living although their ultimate view is the future.<sup>14</sup> This mishnah concludes with the words of R. Phineas b. Jair; “heedfulness leads to cleanliness, and cleanliness to purity. purity leads to

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According to Ismar Elbogen portions of these prayers stem from pre-Hasmonean times, (The Amida) but their final forms took shape after the 70 C.E. post-destruction of the Temple. There is no indication of any changes or abolitions in the liturgy. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993), 27.

<sup>11</sup> The Talmud's explanation of this mishnah is similar to the Tosefta. The Gemara questions whether the Exodus from Egypt will be mentioned in the days of the messiah. The response to Jer. 23:7-8 was: “This does not mean that the mention of the exodus from Egypt shall be obliterated, but that the [deliverance from] subjection to the other kingdoms shall take the first place and the exodus from Egypt shall become secondary.” (BT Ber. 12b). One deliverance (Babylonian) takes precedence over the former one (Egypt), but does not remove it. Thus again, there is a confirmation in the Talmud against any removal of the command to remember the Exodus.

<sup>12</sup> Sot. 9:15.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Messiah In Context*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Gerbern. S. Oegama, *The Anointed and His People* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 279-180.

abstinence, and abstinence to holiness, and holiness leads to humility, and humility leads to shunning of sin, and the shunning of sin leads to saintliness, and saintliness leads to (the gift) of the holy spirit, and the holy spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. And the resurrection of the dead shall come through Elijah of blessed memory. Amen.”<sup>15</sup> Stress is on holy living, which does, however, lead to eschatological events. Thus from both the above passages, eschatological messianism is downplayed or transformed, although it is still not completely dismissed. The focus is on how to abide by the commandments and to live presently the ideal that the messianic age will eventually offer. The law remains a central element, whether it is loosely or strongly connected to messianism and whether that messianism is partially fulfilled in its current day or in the future.

## 6.2 The Targumim

The Aramaic translations of the Scriptures developed within rabbinic Judaism in the first few centuries of the common era, in the synagogue milieu where they were recited together with the Hebrew text. These “translations” often supplemented the Hebrew originals and the additions contain passages of messianic importance. Samson H. Levey sees the messianic content of the Targumim as both similar to, and at variance with, other rabbinic messianic concepts. The extent of messianic exegesis of the biblical text varies depending on the particular Targum.<sup>16</sup> While the Targumim are not consistent on all points regarding messianism, common themes tend to appear throughout many of them. In regards to the law, Targumim generally agree: the messiah will restore the Temple and Jerusalem, the Torah will become the universal law over all of the nations, and the messianic rule will be characterized by justice and righteous judgement.

Targum Onkelos is one of the more conservative Pentateuchal Targumim in terms of messianic expansions. In its translation of Gen. 49:10-11, it does, however, add messianic content. Concerning “Shiloh,”<sup>17</sup> from the biblical text it says, “...until Messiah

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<sup>15</sup> M. Sot. 9:14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), 143.

<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew of this verse has been debated and could be rendered, “until Shiloh comes” or “until he comes to Shiloh.” The Targum identifies Shiloh with the messiah, as do Tgs. Ps. Jon. and Neofiti. The midrash and Talmud also provide a messianic rendering of Shiloh and thus it seems this was a common



comes, to whom the Kingdom belongs, and whom nations shall obey. He shall enclose Israel in his city, the people shall build his Temple, the righteous shall surround him, and those who serve the Torah by teaching shall be with him....”<sup>18</sup> The Targum links the messiah to a reestablishment of the Temple, as well as to the teachers of the law. Thus the Torah will continue to be taught and studied in the messianic age. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragmentary Targum elaborate further on these verses and depict the messiah as observant of Halakhah; “...not looking upon incest and the shedding of innocent blood. His teeth are pure, according to the Halakah, refraining from partaking of that which is taken by violence or robbery....”<sup>19</sup> Levey claims that this interpretation reflects the period of Bar Kokhba, when Halakhah and Torah study had been denied by Hadrian.<sup>20</sup> Although there are few messianic elaborations on the Pentateuchal text, those that exist characterize the messianic era with the liberty for full expression of the written and oral law.

The translation of the Prophets, Targum Jonathan offers more examples of messianic interpretation, but it refrains in certain contexts that would have easily called for a messianic application. When the targumic texts speak of the messianic figure, he is usually associated with the law. The translation of Isa. 9:5 shows the centrality of the law; “...a boy has been born unto us, a son has been given unto us, who has taken the Torah upon himself to guard it; and his name has been called...Messiah, in whose day peace shall abound for us...He shall make great the dignity of those who labor in the Torah and of those who maintain peace, without end....”<sup>21</sup> As head of the government, the messiah’s role is to guard the Torah and honour those who observe it. In this Targum’s translation of Isa. 11, messianism is prominent, however, Levey remarks on the absence of any explicit reference to Torah. He acknowledges that it is implied in the broader concepts, such as wisdom or righteousness. Levey denies any implication because of this lack of direct reference, that Torah study will not be a crucial component

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interpretation in the Talmudic era. See Sanh. 98b, Midrash Eikhah Rab. 1:16. For additional references see M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 7. Jerusalem, 1929.

<sup>18</sup> Tg. Onk. Gen. 49:10-11.

<sup>19</sup> F. Tg. Gen. 49:12.

<sup>20</sup> Levey, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Tg. Jon. Isa. 9:5.

in the time of the messiah.<sup>22</sup> Other passages do equate these loftier terms with the law. Jonathan's interpretation of Jer. 23:5, which translates the text "Behold, days are coming," says the Lord, "and I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king, and be wise, and do justice and righteousness in the land," as "Behold, days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Messiah, and he shall reign as king, and prosper, and shall enact a righteous and meritorious law in the land."<sup>23</sup> The wider concepts of justice and righteousness are considered as "meritorious law," which will be dispensed by the messiah. This is again repeated nearly verbatim in the translation of Jer. 33:15,<sup>24</sup> supporting the connection between the universal and specific. The translation of these vaguer terms into the more specific notion of law reveals its centrality. The Targum to Isa. 42 explains that, although Israel's eyes will be opened to the Torah, it is designated not only for them but for the nations as well. The Targum to Isa. 42:1 translates, "he will bring forth justice to the nations," as "Behold, my servant, the messiah, whom I will bring near, my chosen one, in whom my *memra*<sup>25</sup> takes delight; I will place my holy spirit upon him, and he shall reveal my law to the nations."<sup>26</sup> Again justice is rendered as law, which will be given also to the nations.

At times, Targum Jonathan does not offer messianic interpretations to texts where they would easily fit, such as the New Covenant passage of Jer. 31. Because it does not interpret Jer. 31, Ezek. 36, Zech. 9:9 or Mal. 4:5 as messianic, Levey characterizes it with the same messianic reticence that exists in Targum Onkelos. Although its messianic exegesis is absent in some of the obvious passages, from what they do say, the Targumim offer a fairly consistent portrayal of messianism and its relation to the status of the law. There is also no messianic application to Ezek. 36, where statements about the reestablishment of the Temple could be brought forth. However, other passages do, offer

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<sup>22</sup> Levey, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Tg. Jon. Jer. 23:5.

<sup>24</sup> Tg. Jon. Jer. 33:15.

<sup>25</sup> *Memra* is the Aramaic for "word" but it is also broader signifying God's command. *Memra* appears frequently throughout the Targumim. It is often linked to the name of God. It is similar to Philo's *logos*. "Like the Shekinah, it is a surrogate of God, but it is more than a manifestation of God's presence. It is everything God is supposed to be, and its manifold activity encompasses the entire spectrum of divine endeavor...." Samson H. Levey, *The Aramaic Bible. The Targum of Ezekiel*. (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987), 15. Levey explains that *Memra* is used in varying ways throughout the Targumim that it becomes difficult to give it one English meaning. Overall, he says that it is a designation for God in his relationship to Israel. See *Aramaic Bible. The Targum of Isaiah*.

<sup>26</sup> Tg. Jon. Isa. 42:1.

the idea of the Temple's being rebuilt. Targum Jonathan's translation of Isa. 53 calls the servant the messiah and again affirms the reinstatement of the Temple. "And he shall rebuild the Temple, which was profaned because of our sins...."<sup>27</sup> The reestablishment of the Temple by the messiah, is again confirmed in the translation of Zech. 6:12-13, "...Behold the man whose name is 'The Messiah. He is destined to be revealed and to be anointed, and he shall build the Temple of the Lord."<sup>28</sup> There is however, an exceptional passage that presents the idea of a new Torah. The Targum to Isa. 12 states, in reference to a messianic period, "and you will accept a new teaching (*ulpan ha-dat*) with joy from the chosen ones of righteousness (*mabhire ṣaddiqayya*')." <sup>29</sup> Some scholars interpret this as a new law, and others insist that because *mabhire ṣaddiqaya* ' is plural, thus indicating more than one individual, it is unclear how a new Torah could be implicated here.<sup>30</sup> Outside of this controversial passage, the key elements regarding the law in the messianic period found in the Targumim are the reinstatement of the Temple and the continual observance and study of the Torah with its halakhic interpretations, which will be disseminated both to Israel and the nations by the messiah.

### 6.3 The Talmudim of Palestine and Babylonia

Messianism in general is not a notable component of the large corpus of material in the Talmud.<sup>31</sup> Its subdivisions, such as the role of the law in the messianic era, are even of lesser importance; but a messiah figure or age plays a greater role in the Talmud than in the Mishnah, as its discourses comment on the Mishnah and also go beyond its details. Neusner explains the shift to a greater messianic emphasis as possibly resulting from the eschatological evidence in the Scriptures, as well as the suffering of the nation.<sup>32</sup> The Talmud's understanding of the messiah stems from concepts known for centuries, but, according to Neusner, a particular rabbinic stamp transforms the ideas characterized by the connection between the messiah and the obedience to the commandments. For

<sup>27</sup> Tg. Jon. Isa. 53:5.

<sup>28</sup> Tg. Jon. Zech. 6:12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Tg. Isa. 12:3. Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Banks, "The Eschatological Role of Law in Pre-and Post-Christian Jewish Thought," in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 183.

<sup>31</sup> The focus here will be mainly on the Babylonian Talmud which contains the majority of references.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Messianic Themes in Formative Judaism," *JJAR* 52, no.1 (March 1984): 372.

example, the arrival of the messiah is sometimes viewed as conditional upon the observance of the Sabbath by the entire nation.<sup>33</sup> Neusner explains that Israel was taught that, if they kept the will of God as expressed in the rabbinic system of law, the messianic figure would appear. The messiah is thus linked to the philosophy of sanctification central to the Mishnah, but goes beyond it by adding a future element. He concludes, "...the charismatic Messiah myth served as the engine to draw the train of fixed practices and patterns down the 'routinized' tracks of the law."<sup>34</sup> Thus messiah and law are inextricably connected prior to the messiah's coming, and by implication, this partnership would continue after his advent as well.<sup>35</sup> For the most part, the Talmud's understanding is the perpetuity of the law, including the reestablishment of the Temple in the future age, however several statements challenge that overall perspective, and these will be discussed in order to see whether they are anomalies or truly an important part of early rabbinic thought.<sup>36</sup>

To complicate matters further, confusion arises in the attempt to differentiate the messianic era by the use of other terms, such as "the world to come." This is significant because, there are instances when changes occur in the law only in the latter. At times the Talmud uses these terms interchangeably, and at other times they are clearly distinct.<sup>37</sup> Jastrow defines *le-'atid la-vo'*, with two meanings: "in the messianic future", and "in the hereafter," depending on the context.<sup>38</sup> For *'olam haba'*, he also offers a range of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 373.

<sup>34</sup> Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> Prior to the advent of the messiah, the law had a significant role. i.e., either it would be a time of lawlessness, or it would be strictly observed. In addition, Elijah is connected with the law right before the messiah's coming in rabbinic writings. His role included explaining and giving new interpretations to the laws. On Elijah see, BT Ber. 35b, Shab. 108a, Pes. 13a, 70a etc.

<sup>36</sup> Sanh. 51b is an example of the prevalent early rabbinic view about the law in the messianic era: "...Do we need to fix a halakhah for the days of the messiah?—Abaye answered: if so, we should not study the laws of sacrifices, as they are also only for the messianic era..." This implies there will be a reinstatement of sacrifices in the messianic era. The passage means that the laws of the cult should be studied even though they will only be applicable in the messianic era. The rabbis of the Talmud also found discrepancies between the vision of Ezekiel and the law of Moses regarding the sacrifices of the future Temple. Because they could not reconcile certain verses, they concluded that Elijah would interpret these seeming contradictions in the future and thus were able to continue with their stance that supports the immutability of the law. See BT Men. 45a.

<sup>37</sup> For examples of uses of the terms "messianic era" and "world to come" where there is a clear distinction see Sanh. 99a, and Zeb. 118b, Arak. 13b. For interchangeability see Baba Bat. 122a or BT Ber. 12b—particularly in the Mishnah of the Palestinian Talmud the terms seem equivalent.

<sup>38</sup> Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 1129.

meanings: “the world to come,” “the hereafter,” “the messianic days,” and “the days of resurrection.”<sup>39</sup> Joseph Klausner suggests that the messianic era and the world to come should not be confused, even though the two inevitably deal with a general future time period, as opposed to a current one. He applies the afterlife, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgement as well as a new world, to the world to come, while he categorizes all other elements within the messianic age.<sup>40</sup> Klausner relegates the more extreme view regarding the future abolition of the law that is found in the midrashim to the world to come and not to the messianic era. For our purposes, the context should reveal the distinction, but if it does not, they will be viewed as interchangeable.

One passage that has been used to prove the abrogation of the commandments is found in tractate Niddah.:

Our Rabbis taught: A garment in which *kil'ayim*<sup>41</sup> was lost may not be sold to an idolater, nor may one make of it a packsaddle for an ass, but it may be made into a shroud for a corpse. R. Joseph observed: This implies that the commandments will be abolished in the Hereafter. Said Abaye to him: but did not R. Mani...states ‘this was learnt only in regard to the time of the lamentations but for burial this is forbidden?’—the other replied: But is it not stated in connection with it, R. Johanan ruled: Even for burial? And thereby R. Johanan followed his previously expressed view, for R. Johanan stated: ‘What is the purport of the Scriptural text, *Free among the dead?* As soon as a man dies he is free from the commandments.’<sup>42</sup>

This passage discusses the hereafter, although Davies thinks that it can also possibly refer to the messianic age.<sup>43</sup> Abba Hillel Silver and Davies agree that, according to this passage, the commandments will not be necessary in the future world.<sup>44</sup> Others interpret this as referring to the exemption of the dead from the commandments, since they are no longer able to observe them.<sup>45</sup> The latter interpretation seems to follow the context.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 1052.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea*, 414, 418.

<sup>41</sup> *Kilayim* is the prohibition against hybridization (animals, plants, mixed fibers, wool and linen).

<sup>42</sup> Nid. 61b (Soncino ed.).

<sup>43</sup> Davies, *Setting*, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Silver, *Messianic Speculation*, 9. Silver quotes Nid. 61b, to explain the understanding of the day. He states, “The incoming Millennium would of itself do away with the Law entirely. This was the view commonly held by the contemporaries of Jesus.”

<sup>45</sup> C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 670. See also Robert Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope*, 178.

Another passage that some use to indicate the cessation of the Torah is found in a couple of tractates:

The Tanna debe Eliyyahu taught: The world is to exist six thousand years; the first two thousand years are to be void; the next two thousand years are the period of the Torah, and the following two thousand years are the period of the Messiah....<sup>46</sup>

This statement contains a clear distinction between the period of the Torah and that of messiah, and therefore some writers conclude that they preclude one another. This is exemplified in Leo Baeck's understanding of how this passage was understood in that time; "There is thus, not a perpetuity, but a 'period,' of the Torah. If the 'Days of the Messiah' have commenced, those of the Torah came to their close. On the other hand, if the law, the Torah, still retained its validity, it was proclaimed thereby that the messiah has not yet appeared."<sup>47</sup> Others explain regarding this teaching, that the rabbis were merely concerned with establishing the date of the messiah and not the fate of the Torah.<sup>48</sup> Because the meaning was not elaborated upon in the context, it is nearly impossible to gauge the intention of the author as to whether or not the messianic period supersedes the era of Torah.

Another passage that has been interpreted as implying the cessation of the law in the messianic age and whose meaning has also been debated is in tractate Shabbat, which states,

It was further taught, R. Simeon b Eleazar said: Perform [righteousness and charity] whilst thou canst find [an object for thy charity], has the opportunity, and it is yet in thy power, and Solomon in his wisdom too said: *'Remember also thy creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come'*—this refers to the days of old age; *'and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them'*—this refers to the Messianic era, wherein there is neither merit nor guilt. Now he disagrees with Samuel, who said: The only difference between this world and the Messianic era is in respect of servitude to [foreign] powers, for it is said. *For the poor shall never cease out of the land.*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ab. Zar. 9a and Sanh. 97b.

<sup>47</sup> Leo Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1958), 161.

<sup>48</sup> Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope*. 179. See also Freedman in the Soncino edition Sanh., 657 for support of the latter idea.

<sup>49</sup> Shab. 151b.

Within this passage itself there is dissension on what occurs in the messianic era. For Samuel, nothing will change in this period except the submission to other nations. The debate lies in the interpretation of “wherein there is neither merit nor guilt.” Some understand this to mean that, if there is no Torah in the messianic age, there will be neither reward (i.e., merit) nor punishment (i.e., guilt), for the respective obedience or disobedience. Davies sees the status of those living in the messianic age as similar to the dead in terms of the law, i.e., exempt from observance.<sup>50</sup> Robert Banks thinks that what underlies this passage is the concept of the abolition of the evil inclination in the messianic period. The latter results in the cessation of the need to receive merit or guilt through the Torah, but not the discontinuation of the Torah itself.<sup>51</sup> Overall, the Talmudic passages do not lend abundant proof to an invalidation of the Torah in the messianic era. The evidence for proof of the law’s abrogation is tenuous, hanging on passages that are ambiguous and seem to apply to the hereafter or to the deceased.

#### 6.4 Midrashim

Neusner explains that messianism is not extensively incorporated within the line-by-line exegetical midrashim, such as the Mekhilta, Sifra and Sifre, but it comes to the forefront within its expository counterparts such as Leviticus Rabbah or the Pesikta de Rav Kahana.<sup>52</sup> Statements regarding the messiah and the fate of the law exist particularly in these more discursive midrashim. These texts, reflect rabbinic thought from the second century to the medieval period and provide a variety of opinions on the future status of the Torah. The range extends from the cessation of certain laws to the provision of a new Torah. However, because of the ambiguity of some of the texts, it is sometimes difficult to discern the intended meaning, and therefore conclusions often vary among interpreters.

Two midrashim incorporate passages from the book of Jeremiah within their discourse on the fate of the commandments in relation to the messianic age. Leviticus Rabbah states,

R. Phinehas and R. Levi and R. Johanan said in the name of R. Menahem of Gallia: In the time to come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of

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<sup>50</sup> Davies, *Setting*, 170.

<sup>51</sup> Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope*, 178.

<sup>52</sup> Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, 160-161.

thanksgiving will not be annulled, and all prayers will be annulled, but that of] thanksgiving will not be annulled. This is [indicated by] what is written: Jer. xxxiii. ii.<sup>53</sup>

Although Klausner does not think this passage pertains to the messianic era, but to the age to come, Davies insists that because of its relation to the messianic prophecy of Jeremiah it is referring to the messianic time.<sup>54</sup> Because the point is not to focus on the object of annulment but on what remains ongoing in this future period, continued validity is implied. In other words, the emphasis is less on the concept of abolition and more on the idea of bringing thanksgiving offerings to God. Nevertheless, the thought of cessation of sacrifices and prayers has been brought forth, possibly as a result of the notion that this period will be characterized by a lack of sin.<sup>55</sup> A similar style is used in the Yalkut on Proverbs, where cessation is mentioned but is not emphasized:

All the festivals will cease but not Purim since it is said (Esther ix.28) ‘... these days shall be...throughout every generation...and should not fail from among the Jews...’ R. Eleazar said: The Day of Atonement too will not cease since it is said (Lev. xvi.34) ‘And this shall be unto you an everlasting statute.’<sup>56</sup>

The stress is placed on the perpetuity of Purim and the Day of Atonement, rather than on the cessation of the festivals, although Davies recognizes the latter as an important indication that “radical changes in the festivals in the messianic age were contemplated.”<sup>57</sup> Scholem sees such midrashim as hyperbolic statements with a utopian thrust. He also mentions the possible danger in the probable pun in this passage, where *Yom ha-Kippurim* will be “like Purim,” which, because of its solemnity, is Purim’s traditional opposite, implying a change in this day as well.<sup>58</sup> Although the primary goal of these passages is to stress the importance of certain festivals, they also hint at the stoppage of others, as will later be brought out in the medieval literature.

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<sup>53</sup> Lev. Rab. 9:7 (Soncino).

<sup>54</sup> Davies, *Setting*, 161-162.

<sup>55</sup> See Tana Debe Eliyyahu ch.4, which comments on Ezekiel 36 and states that in the days of the Messiah there will no longer be a subjection to the evil impulse, because a new heart will be given and a new spirit that motivates to good deeds.

<sup>56</sup> Yalk. on Prov. 9:2. See Midrash Mishle 9:2.

<sup>57</sup> See Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope*, 178; Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (London, 1944), 321; and Davies, *Setting*, 162.

<sup>58</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea*, 55.



Ecclesiastes Rabbah also refers to Jeremiah's words but this time specifically to the new covenant prophecy.

R. Hezekiah said in the name of R. Simon b. Zabdi: All the Torah which you learn in this world is 'vanity' in comparison with Torah [which is learnt] in the World to Come; because in this world a man learns Torah and forgets it, but with reference to the World to Come what is written there? I will put My law in their inward parts (Jer. xxxi, 31).<sup>59</sup>

This statement is similar to another one in Ecclesiastes Rabbah, that might help to confirm the equivalence of the world to come with the messianic era in this context: "The Torah which a man learns in this world is vanity compared with the Torah of the Messiah."<sup>60</sup> As Davies explains, this passage does not imply the supersession of a messianic Torah over the Torah of the world, but the manner in which it is studied improves in the future era. Yet, if the second verse (11:8) is taken alone without the other one (11:2), it could be understood that the Torah of messiah is of a superior nature to the one from this world. Ephraim Urbach states that R. Simon b. Zabdi is referring to the quality of the Torah ranking the Torah of the messiah as a higher form of heavenly wisdom.<sup>61</sup> But Banks claims that the saying in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 2:1 is earlier than the one in 11:8, and therefore he insists that the alteration will occur in the study of Torah and not in the Torah itself.<sup>62</sup> James Drummond concurs stating, "Here, however, the word rendered 'law' refers...to the mode of studying the reasons for its precepts..."<sup>63</sup> My law in their inward parts" is explained by the idea that the students of Torah will not forget what they have learnt.<sup>64</sup> Thus these midrashim present a continual, albeit superior, study of the Torah in the messianic era.

Another passage that might indicate further alterations in the Torah, is found in Midrash Psalms:

The Lord will loose the bonds (Ps. cxlvi.7). What does the verse mean by the words loose the bonds? Some say that of every animal whose flesh it is forbidden to eat in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, will declare in

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<sup>59</sup> Eccl. Rab. 2:1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 11:8.

<sup>61</sup> Ephraim E Urbach, *The Sages*, vol. 1, 311.

<sup>62</sup> Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, 326.

<sup>64</sup> Davies, *Setting*, 175.

the time-to-come that the eating of its flesh is permitted. ...But why did God declare the flesh of some animals forbidden? In order to see who would accept His commandments and who would not accept them. In the time-to-come, however, God will again permit the eating of that flesh which He has forbidden. Others say that in the time-to-come, God will not permit this...Though nothing is more strongly forbidden than intercourse with a menstruous woman—for when a woman sees blood the Holy One, blessed be He, forbids her husband—in the time-to-come, God will permit such intercourse....Still others say that in the time-to-come sexual intercourse will be entirely forbidden....Now since God, when He revealed himself for only one day, forbade intercourse for three days [on Sinai], in the time-to-come, when the presence of God dwells continuously in Israel's midst, will not intercourse be entirely forbidden?<sup>65</sup>

Although the passage presents dissenting voices, there is an indication that the distinction between unclean and clean foods, as well as the laws of purity, will be abolished in the future era. At the same time, those in disagreement stress that certain laws such as marital intercourse will become stricter in that time. Whether they are stricter or more lenient, change is the relevant factor.<sup>66</sup>

Another passage that indicates changes as well as the possibility of a new Torah is found in *Leviticus Rabbah*. After a discussion of how the Behemoth will violently slaughter Leviathan in the world to come by a means impermissible in the present world, it states, “R. Abin b.Kahana said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Instruction [Torah] shall go forth from Me (Isa. li.4) [that is, an exceptional temporary ruling will go forth from Me].”<sup>67</sup> Davies explains that this final line of text differs in the Vilna and Warsaw editions which replace “Instruction” with *Torah Hadashah*. Davies mentions that Edersheim, Strack-Billerbeck, Diez Macho and others interpret this to indicate a new Torah for the messianic period.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the translation of *hidush torah* as “an

<sup>65</sup> Mid. Teh. 146:7. In the middle ages the notion that the pig would become a permissible food during the messianic era developed. According to an article by H. Karlinsky, “The Pig and Permission to Eat it in the World to Come” (Hebrew), *Shanah be-Shanah* 2 (1971): 243-254, the idea arose among the masses and was inspired by Christians who were trying to convert the Jews. They misinterpreted a midrash by taking it literally instead of acknowledging that it speaks allegorically of the pig as Rome. During the middle ages Jewish commentators responded to the circulating midrash. Abrabanel for example, says that the pig will be permissible only for a temporary period of time, during the war of redemption. Karlinsky also cites Ibn Attar’s *Or Hahayim* where it states that it will be permissible to eat the pig because its nature will change, i.e., it will have cloven hoofs and chew its cud. Thus the Torah will not change, but the pig will.

<sup>66</sup> See also Lev. Rab. 13:3 which allows for the eating of *nebelah* (animals that died not through ritual slaughter) in the world to come.

<sup>67</sup> Lev. R.ab. 13:3 (Soncino).

<sup>68</sup> Davies, *Setting*, 167.

exceptional temporary ruling” has been viewed as apologetic gymnastics.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the possibility exists that in the messianic era there will be a new Torah that permits forbidden laws in the present world. The Yalkut Shimoni on Isaiah, although it is a thirteenth century compilation, contains a relevant part that is perhaps to be dated earlier. It speaks of a new Torah; “...God will sit and expound a new Torah which He will, one day, give by the messiah’s hand.”<sup>70</sup> Davies finds this latter verse one of the clearest statements on the idea of a new Torah in the messianic age. Later commentators like Isaac Abrabanel translate *ta’amei torah hadashah*, as *ta’amei torah hadashim*, signifying “expounding the grounds for Torah,” while others translate it as “new grounds for Torah” rather than “expounded new Torah.” Banks thinks it is grammatically valid to interpret it as “new grounds for Torah.”<sup>71</sup> In addition, if it does refer to a new Torah, the context includes the gentiles and Israel as receptive to it. Discussions of the commentators and scholars show that the meanings of words are not always clear, and while some of the midrashim suggest the possibility for the coming a new law, this notion is not founded on solid grounds.

The gentiles in relation to the law are spoken of again in a passage in Genesis Rabbah, that indicates that they will be alone in their need for the messiah’s instruction in the law:

R. Hanin said: Israel will not require the teaching of the royal Messiah in the future, for it says, *Unto him shall the nations seek* (Isa. xi, 10), but not Israel. If so for what purpose will the royal Messiah come, and what will he do? He will come to assemble the exiles of Israel and to give them [the gentiles] thirty precepts....<sup>72</sup>

Some explain that Israel will not need the teaching of the messiah because they will have direct access to God, who will teach them directly. According to this passage, the gentiles will be the target of the teaching of the messiah, which includes learning thirty precepts. Although other passages indicate the full submission of the gentiles to the law, or at least to the Noachian laws, the implication is that the law will have a pertinent application to the nations.

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<sup>69</sup> See Barthelemy in Davies, *Setting*, 167. Urbach translates as a “new Torah.” *The Sages*, vol. 1, 311.

<sup>70</sup> Yalkut Shimoni on Isa. 26:2.

<sup>71</sup> *Reconciliation and Hope*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> Gen. Rab. 98:9.

## 6.5 Conclusion

While, for the most part, the statement from the Tana debe Eliyyahu, “In short, in the days of the Messiah you will savor a double portion [of Torah],” sums up the rabbinic view of the intensification or continuation of the Torah in the messianic age, the concept of the abolition of or changes in certain elements does exist. In fact, ‘double portion’ implies an alteration in status that indicates a hierarchy between the two ages. The cessation of specific laws does not necessarily imply the replacement of the entire law by a newer one. While certain scholars, like Banks, do not support the idea of any abrogation of the laws in rabbinic literature, others find proof in the aforementioned passages for alterations.<sup>73</sup> Abrogation has been associated with certain festivals and sacrifices and as we will see, these midrashim will be central to the debate in the medieval period with Christians who use them to support the belief in the abolition of the law. The main themes that run throughout the messianic discussions indicate a perpetuity of the Torah that involves a deeper study and understanding, intensified observance, clarification of the ambiguities in the laws, and participation of the gentiles in the precepts of the law.

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew Chester criticizes Davies and others for finding any indication of an abrogation of the law in rabbinic literature. He sees no evidence for a new Torah or abolition of any kind. See “Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, 319.

## Chapter 7

### Medieval Literature

#### 7.1 Introduction

From the time of the Geonim,<sup>1</sup> Jewish literature proclaimed and defended the doctrine of the immutability of the Torah, from prominent groups who called for its abolition. This defense included polemical material written against Christians, Muslims, and even certain Jews.<sup>2</sup> Medieval rabbinic responsa contained answers to questions about those who used a range of early rabbinic texts, particularly the midrashim, to support their antinomian perceptions. The Geonim include writers like Sa'adia of the Sura Academy who in the tenth century wrote polemical treatises as well as expositions of the Hebrew Scriptures, in order to combat attacks on the eternity of the law by Christians, Muslims, and heretics. Even though Sa'adia fought against the Karaite rejection of the oral tradition, Jacob Al-Kirkisani, a contemporary Karaite, concurred with Sa'adia in the writing against the theory of the abrogation of the Mosaic law.<sup>3</sup> Medieval commentators elaborated upon previous rabbinic literature, which many of their opponents used to justify the abrogation of the law, and expounded on various biblical, targumic, and

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<sup>1</sup> Gaon is short for *rosh yeshivat geon ya'akov*, which is a title meaning the "head of the academy which is the pride of Jacob." From the seventh century, gaon was the title to refer to the heads of rabbinic academies in Babylonia, particularly at Sura and Pumbeditha. They shared leadership of the Jewish community with the Exilarch, whose status eventually declined. Their main role was in establishing legal rulings and creating binding halakhah for the Jewish Diaspora.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, David Kimchi, *The Book of the Covenant*, and also the *Nizzahon Vetus* (The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages), translated by David Berger (Philadelphia: JPS, 1979). On Jer. 31:31, it states that the heretics (i.e., Christians) use this verse to say that Jesus brought a new Torah, replaced circumcision with baptism, and the Sunday for the Sabbath. It then proceeds on how to respond to these heretics by affirming the Mosaic Torah.

<sup>3</sup> The messianism of the Karaites is discussed in their Bible commentaries, particularly on the Prophets, the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and Daniel. Yefet Ben Eli wrote a great deal on the messianic ideal, which would include a priestly messianic figure, the restoration of the priests as the true leadership of Israel (some have found similarities with the Dead Sea Sect), and the reestablishment of the Temple. One branch of Karaite messianists were the Mourners of Zion, who viewed salvation as the end of exile and the return to Torah. They saw the messianic era as a time when sacrifices will be so numerous that new suburbs will have to be built to accommodate the influx of people, including the gentiles who will participate in the Temple services. The priests will be the leaders and the teachers of Torah. The Mourners of Zion abstained from meat and wine and propagated a return to Palestine. See Yoram Erder., "The Negation of the Exile in the Messianic Doctrine of the Karaite Mourners of Zion," *HUCA* 48 (1997): 109-140. See also "The Doctrine of the Two Messiahs Among the Karaites," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 no. 1 (1955): 14-23.

talmudic passages. In relation to the status of the law, they offered opinions on Jeremiah 31, on the role of the Temple and the nations in the messianic era, and on controversial midrashim that could lend themselves to a rejection of the law. Commentators such as Moses Maimonides and Isaac Abrabanel wrote at length about the messianic era, including the role of the law. While some, like Maimonides, were unmovable in terms of the irreplaceability of the law, others, in particular Joseph Albo, made allowances for the possibility of changes, as will be presented in the following pages.

## 7.2 Sa'adia Gaon and Jacob Al-Kirkisani

Sa'adia commences his section dealing with the abrogation of the law in the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* by stating outright that the children of Israel are informed by their prophets that the laws of the Torah are unchangeable. This pronouncement is part of his twofold method of attack against the notion of abrogation. His approach is to use Scripture and rational arguments to support his view. After this introductory remark, he continues to affirm this belief by citing several biblical prooftexts. For example, Sa'adia mentions how many of the laws in the Bible are followed by phrases such as "a perpetual covenant," or "throughout their generations," thus proving their enduring nature. Following this argument, he mentions that, according to the promise in Jer. 31:35, God would never obliterate the nation. He claims that, because Israel is a nation distinguished by its laws, neither will its ordinances ever cease. He then cites another scriptural text from Malachi, where Sa'adia views the Torah existing until the day of the resurrection, which would be marked by the arrival of Elijah.<sup>4</sup> After rejecting abrogation based on scriptural grounds, he proceeds to argue against seven rational points. The seventh argument he refutes states that a new law would be permissible after the Mosaic law, just as the latter differed from the Abrahamic covenant. Sa'adia responds by claiming that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are exactly the same, even though the latter contained some additions due to particular events. But additions do not constitute abrogation

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<sup>4</sup> Sa'adia does not discuss, in this context, the status of the law after Elijah's arrival or if this is considered the messianic era or the world to come. For the Scriptural arguments see, Sa'adia Ben Joseph al Fayyumi. *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by Samuel Rosenblatt (New haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 157-158.

according to Sa'adia.<sup>5</sup> After quoting his own scriptural and rational arguments, he responds to scriptural prooftexts brought by others. In sum, through the use of scriptural citations and rational arguments, Sa'adia vehemently negates any notion of future abrogation of the law.

Although Sa'adia and Jacob Al-Kirkisani were in different religious camps, they shared many endeavours, such as the use of the Arabic language, the composition of polemical writings and commentaries, and the affirmation of the eternal validity of the Torah. Al-Kirkisani debated Muslims, Christians, and Jews, particularly the sect called the Isawiyya, who proclaimed Abu Isa al-Isfahani as their redeemer.<sup>6</sup> In dealing with the antinomianism of the latter, Kirkisani needed to defend the eternity of the law. Like Sa'adia, he uses the Scriptures (and many of the same prooftexts) to affirm that the law has eternal validity for the Israelites (as well as for future generations including the rest of humankind).<sup>7</sup> Despite Kirkisani's strong stand on the perpetuity of the law, he also argues against the Ananites (presumably part of his own sect) about their extreme denial of any possibility of abrogation of the law at any time. This led them to believe that the precepts were preexistent and that Adam, for example, observed the Mosaic legislation. In his discussion, he opposes their view by admitting changes can occur in the law according to varying circumstances. Kirkisani's interpretation accepts that some preexistent precepts are unalterable but allows other laws that have not been proclaimed as immutable to be possible subjects of abrogation.<sup>8</sup> Kirkisani also debates the meaning of the command in Deuteronomy that there should be no additions to or subtractions from the Torah, where he concludes that only man and not God is given this prohibition. Like Sa'adia in his debate against the seventh rational argument, he claims that adding precepts does not equal abrogation, which can be seen in the writings of the prophets.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 162-163.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the teachings of the eighth-century messianic figure from Isfahan. Abu Isa include: annulled sacrifices, prohibition of divorce, institution of seven prayer services a day, prohibition of eating flesh and alcohol, confession of the prophetic nature of Jesus and Mohammed. See H. Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs*, 72-74.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Al-Kirkisani in *Kitab al-Anwar wal-marakib* (Book of Lights and Watchtowers) III.14:2-4, in Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 203. Like Sa'adia, Kirkisani supports his argument with the phrases in the bible—"statute forever" or "for all future generations," as well as the verse from Mal. 4:4, that the law will not cease until the arrival of Elijah. (Anwar III.15.2 in Adang, 204).

<sup>8</sup> Anwar IV.52.2 (in Adang, 207). Kirkisani mentions that some Jews resort to claiming that all laws are preexistent because they are polemicizing against Muslims.

Kirkisani, supports only the addition and not the removal of precepts.<sup>9</sup> For him, the messianic era will include the return of the Jews to observing the Mosaic law, as well as the adoption of it by the nations, who will visit and worship during the Feast of Tabernacles and will observe the Sabbath as well.<sup>10</sup> Overall, Kirkisani, shares many ideas on this subject with Sa'adia, but he seems a little more flexible than his rabbanite colleague in the allowance of changes to the law.

### 7.3 Maimonides on the Law and the Messianic Era

The many works of Moses Maimonides contained his views of the messianic era. Maimonides was a master of systematization, which is reflected by his codification of the Talmud and his philosophical works. Within his legal code and his letters, he systematized his messianic doctrines, although streams of messianic thought can be found in his philosophical writings as well. What became neatly categorized in the former were inspired by his philosophical views and by historical circumstances. Maimonides formulated the messianic idea into a fundamental creed, including it as the twelfth article in his thirteen principles of faith.<sup>11</sup> Anyone who denies this belief also denies or abrogates the Torah. His ninth principle reflects the stance of many of his other works regarding the eternity of the law; "...the abrogation (of the Torah), that is to say that this Torah of Moses will not be abrogated and no other Torah will come from God. One may not add to it nor delete from it, neither in the written nor the oral Torah, as it is written: Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it..."<sup>12</sup> Maimonides took a definitive stand against any who would consider the abolition of the law of Moses, even in the messianic era. *Hilkhot Melakhim* in his *Mishneh Torah*, the tenth chapter of his *Commentary on the Mishnah Sanhedrin*, and his *Epistle to Yemen* contain significant material about his views on the status of the law in the messianic era. They reveal his stance on the centrality and immutability of the law of Moses, which some scholars say is

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<sup>9</sup> Anwar, IV.58.1 (in Adang, 210).

<sup>10</sup> Anwar III.15.10 (in Adang, 206). He uses prooftexts from Isa. 66:23 and Zech.14:18 in regards to the gentiles and the law.

<sup>11</sup> *Commentary on the Mishnah. Tractate Sanhedrin*. Ch. 10. These principles must be adhered to by Jews if they desire immortality. Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo (fifteenth cent.) took issue with Maimonides' formulation of a creed.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



linked to his restorative messianic approach. Yet, others perceive in Maimonides' views some utopian elements that could consequentially lead to changes. In addition, his explanations of the reasons for the commandments in the third part of his *Guide of the Perplexed* can be perceived as an eventual call for their abrogation.

For Maimonides, the messianic era is one which remains within the historical sphere and allows for no alteration in either the laws of nature or the law of Moses.<sup>13</sup> Only in the world to come, which Maimonides clearly distinguishes from the messianic era, will complete change ensue. The messianic era will be characterized by the freedom to study the Torah with the goal of gaining life in the world to come;

Hence, all Israelites, their prophets and sages, longed for the advent of the Messianic times, that they might have relief from the wicked tyranny that does not permit them properly to occupy themselves with the study of the Torah and the observance of the commandments; that they might have ease, devote themselves to getting wisdom and truth will increase....The ultimate and perfect reward is the life in the world to come. The Messianic era, on the other hand, will be realized in this world; which will continue in its normal course except that independent sovereignty will be restored to Israel. The ancient sages already said, "The only difference between the present and the Messianic era is that political oppression will then cease."<sup>14</sup>

This passage reveals the distinction between the messianic era and the world to come, in which the latter signifies total perfection; it also indicates that the messianic period will be distinguished by the study and the observance of the commandments. Maimonides uses a talmudic statement to support his view that the messianic era will bring about no legal changes; it will see only a change in the full sovereignty of Israel.<sup>15</sup> Total perfection and change are attributes of the world to come, not the messianic era. A more direct statement in the *Mishneh Torah* underscores the perpetuity of the role of the law in the messianic era;

King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All ancient laws will be reinstated in his days; sacrifices will again be offered; the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will again be observed in accordance with the commandments set forth in the Law....The general principle is: this Law of ours with its statutes and

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<sup>13</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Book of Judges, Kings and Wars.* Ch. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Book of Knowledge, Repentance* 9:2.

<sup>15</sup> Ber. 34b.

ordinances [is not subject to change]. It is for ever and all eternity; it is not to be added to or to be taken away from....If there arise a king from the House of David who meditates on the Torah, occupies himself with the commandments, as did his ancestor David, observes the precepts prescribed in the Written and Oral Law, prevails upon Israel to walk in the way of the Torah and to repair its breaches, ...it may be assumed that he is the messiah. If he does these things and succeeds, rebuilds the sanctuary on its site, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is beyond all doubt the messiah. He will prepare the whole world to serve the Lord with one accord....<sup>16</sup>

According to the above, Maimonides establishes criteria to assess the veracity of the messiah; he must not change any laws—any antinomian behaviour implies a false messianic figure. He must be knowledgeable in the law, and he must reestablish Israel's sovereignty, which includes the rebuilding of the Temple. The messiah's attitude towards the law is a key feature that proves or disproves his validity. The messiah will reinforce both written and oral law and reestablish the Temple and its cult. He himself will observe the commandments and cause Israel and the nations to be inculcated in the ways of God. Avi Ravitsky sees Maimonides' philosophy of the welfare of the body (political) and the soul (individual/spiritual) as connected to and influential in his messianism. In the messianic era, because there will be freedom to study the law (welfare of the body), spiritual life will benefit as well (welfare of the soul). The messianic era will produce both welfares. Ravitsky thinks that the *Guide* sets out in theory what is concretized in the legal writings, including the supremacy of Mosaic prophecy.<sup>17</sup> For Maimonides, even the messiah will only "approach" Moses but not surpass him;<sup>18</sup> Sinai becomes the key event highlighted by the messiah. He does not supersede but returns to and fulfills the Sinai covenant, whose central feature is the law.<sup>19</sup>

One of the main stimuli that led Maimonides to establish policies on messianism was his defense against messianic pretenders and other religious faiths that claimed the

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<sup>16</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Book of Judges.* 11.

<sup>17</sup> Avi Ravitsky, "'To the Utmost Human Capacity': Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in Joel L. Kraemer, ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 221-256. The Mosaic law will be restored in the messianic age as part of the restoration of the "virtuous community" first established by the Patriarchs and Moses. At that time there will be "adherence to the Law of Moses, without care, anxiety or constraint..." Commentary on the Mishnah as discussed in Joel L. Kraemer "Maimonides' Messianic Posture" in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky, vol.2. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 110.

<sup>18</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Repentance.* 9:2.

<sup>19</sup> See David Hartman "Sinai and Exodus..." 379.

cessation of the Mosaic law. In his *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides responds to a situation that includes a false messianic figure, as well as persecution from an Islamic leader whose faith claimed supremacy over the Jewish religion.<sup>20</sup> Because of this situation, Maimonides takes the opportunity to describe the messianic era as well as the qualifications of the messiah. In order to combat the claims of false messianism and the muslim faith. Maimonides stresses the Sinai event, emphasizing its eternal existence and relevance. He claims any faith, that proposes supersession over the Sinai covenant. i.e., Christianity or Islam, deviates from the Scriptures and true faith. He advises the Yemenite community to reenact the Sinai event on a regular basis in order to remind themselves of their election.<sup>21</sup> Again, he affirms that a faith or a messianic candidate who upholds the Mosaic legislation can be trusted. Their messianic claims should only be investigated after this prerequisite has been established. Part of the role of the messiah will be to “propagate true religion.”<sup>22</sup> In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides also reinforces the validity of the Mosaic law against Christian or Muslim opponents. He states that anyone claiming any changes is a denier of the law: “...he who says that the Creator changed one commandment for another, and that this Torah, although of divine origin, is now obsolete, as the Nazarenes and Moslems assert. Everyone belonging to any of these classes is a denier of the Torah.”<sup>23</sup> Against Jesus, he states, “Even of Jesus of Nazareth, who imagined that he was the Messiah...He was instrumental in changing the Torah and causing the world to err...”<sup>24</sup> Anyone who claims that the Mosaic law was not eternal is viewed by Maimonides as a false candidate for messiahship. He states, “Similarly, Since Moses has taught us that the law is eternal, we definitely stamp as a prevaricator anyone who argues that it was destined to be in force for a fixed period of time, because he contravenes Moses.”<sup>25</sup> Without a foundation based on the Mosaic law, anything else, such as miracles, cannot validate a messianic figure or a faith. The only positive role that

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<sup>20</sup> Maimonides mentions five messianic figures in his Epistle, besides the one in Yemen, but he does not mention the antinomian behaviour of David Alroy nor of Abu Isa.

<sup>21</sup> Prior to this he clearly emphasizes that the Torah “will never be abrogated or superseded, neither supplemented nor abridged.” *Epistle To Yemen*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> *Epistle to Yemen*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Repentance. 3:8.*

<sup>24</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Judges 11* (uncensored text in Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*).

<sup>25</sup> *Epistle to Yemen*. Translated by Abraham Halkin (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985), 112.

Maimonides attributes to Muslims and Christians is their usefulness in spreading the concept of a messiah to the nations.

Although many other medieval commentators anticipate a change in human nature during the messianic era that would allow them to observe the law more readily, Maimonides insists that the evil inclination and free choice will continue in messianic times. Yet, because the Torah will be available for everyone to study, the public will be more elevated, "Hence Israelites will be very wise, they will know the things that are now concealed and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost of the human mind..."<sup>26</sup> Even though elitism is diminished in the messianic era, knowledge of God is still dependent on the capacity of each individual. Perfection and total transformation await the world to come, to which the messianic era is merely its preliminary.

While some scholars such as Scholem categorize Maimonides' messianism as restorative, lacking the supernatural element, others perceive a utopian tendency. For example, the peaceful era that will be established by the messiah requires some kind of deviation from the previous state. Because of the latter, Amos Funkenstein perceives a contradiction in Maimonides' views of the messianic era and states that the messianic era will surpass the earlier historical one.<sup>27</sup> Ravitsky also sees a perfection in the messianic era that was not possible in prior periods:

The redemption depends upon an as yet unknown perfection, upon a realization of models that have never yet been fulfilled. The Messianic vision returns upon history and renews it as it ought to have been.... This is a return and restoration in the sense that it does not anticipate a new world, a new man, a new Torah, or a new consciousness, but is directed towards that which was inherent from the beginning in this given Torah and this given man....<sup>28</sup>

Despite an indication of change that brings about a kind of perfection previously unavailable, continuity of many elements, including the law, is paramount.

Thus far, all of Maimonides' writings agree on the eternity of the Mosaic law and its continuity into the messianic era. However, one passage in the *Mishneh Torah*

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<sup>26</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Judges. 12.*

<sup>27</sup> G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea*, 27ff; Amos Funkenstein, *Maimonides: Nature, History and Messianic Beliefs* (Tel Aviv: Mod Books, 1997), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Avietzer Ravitsky, "To the Utmost Human Capacity: Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, 235.

deviates from his overall approach. After a discussion of fast days that arose due to tragic situations, Maimonides offers a more positive view for the messianic future;

All the fast days mentioned above are destined to be abolished in the time of the Messiah; indeed, they are destined to be turned into festive days, days of rejoicing and gladness, in accordance with the verse, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; therefore love ye truth and peace* (Zech. 8:19).<sup>29</sup>

Reminiscent of some of the midrashim that indicated the abolition of certain festivals, Maimonides clearly states that any fast days that were established in order to mourn tragic events, such as the Ninth of Av commemoration of the destruction of the Temple will be transformed into celebrations in the messianic period. This evidences certain changes.

From the tenth century onwards, medievals like Sa'adia were proposing reasons for the commandments in order to prove their rationality and the ideal quality of the Mosaic legislation. Maimonides disagreed with Sa'adia's division of the commandments into rational and irrational components, proposing that each commandment had a rational explanation. In the *Guide*, Maimonides states that the sacrifices were given as a concession because of the familiarity with idolatry:

Those laws concerning sacrifices and repairing to the temple were given only for the sake of the realization of this fundamental principle [apprehension of God]. It is for the sake of that principle that I transferred these modes of worship to My name, so that the trace of idolatry be effaced and the fundamental principle of my unity be established.<sup>30</sup>

Because sacrifices are seen as inferior to prayer and a temporary form of worship, some conclude that sacrifices can be replaced, particularly in the messianic era.<sup>31</sup> Funkenstein raises the question of the relevance of the sacrifices after their purpose (the weaning from idolatry) has been achieved. He notes that Maimonides does not address this issue

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<sup>29</sup> *Mishneh Torah. Book of Seasons. Fast Days* 5:19.

<sup>30</sup> *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:32.

<sup>31</sup> Marcel Poorthuis sees a tension between the *Guide's* statements on sacrifices whose purpose is to lead away from idolatry towards monotheism and the view in the *Mishneh Torah* where sacrifice will be restored in the messianic age. The former view implies an eventual cessation. "Messianism Between Reason and Delusion" in *Messianism Through History*, 67.

directly, but that a hypothetical answer can be reconstructed from his various works. He concludes that Maimonides makes no connection between the reasons and the observance of the commandments. One is not exempt from the law if the reason assumed to underlie it ceases to apply. Maimonides will not admit to any changes in the law in the messianic era, because the masses will waver in their devotion to a law that is mutable and revert to idolatry. Funkenstein states, "The danger, which existed in the past exists today as well, and will exist in the messianic era. It is possibly as a result of this, that Maimonides appreciates the need for sacrifice in the messianic era too, and then especially."<sup>32</sup> Funkenstein is implying that, for Maimonides, sacrifice is a kind of ruse to keep the people's respect for the law but in itself is not ideal. Despite the ploy for the benefit of the masses, the law can allow for a certain degree of change when the occasion calls for it. Funkenstein states, "The absolute immutability of the law may be a necessary fiction for the masses, but the legal experts of every generation have the right and the duty to adjust the law in *casu necessitatis*."<sup>33</sup> Whether Maimonides believed that sacrifices will continue to be made in the messianic era to assist the masses or because they have some other inherent value (or both), they will exist nonetheless.

Nachmanides also agrees on the eternal value of sacrifice. He describes the idea of sacrifices as a somewhat mysterious element of worship but as eternally valid and existing into the messianic era:

Anyone who possesses the power of sight and perceives what is written in Scripture will indeed admit that the subject of the offerings is of a very wondrous nature [and is analogous to] any curative substance whose essence is unknown. [Despite its indefinable nature] its power and importance are [nevertheless] indicated by its healing effect. Even of the Messianic future it is said, *With your sweet savor will I accept you*, and it is further written, *Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Eternal, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years*. The [sections dealing with] offerings at the end of [the Book of] Ezekiel contain laws designed for the Messianic era, and of the altar it is written, *This is the table that is before the Eternal*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A. Funkenstein, *Maimonides: Nature*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> A. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 147.

<sup>34</sup> M. Nachmanides, *Ramban Writings and Discourses*, vol. 1, 100.

Therefore, in this context, unlike Maimonides, Nachmanides does not try to explain the reasons for sacrifices, admitting their effects are unknowable. Yet, he affirms their continuance in the messianic era as described in the final chapters of Ezekiel.

Like the other medieval commentators, Maimonides was living in an environment that required a defense of Jewish beliefs against other threatening faiths. As well, messianic pretenders caused many difficulties for the Jewish community and necessitated a responsive formulation of Jewish beliefs. Antinomian potential was closely linked to utopian ideology, causing Maimonides to stress the restorative elements of messianism. Marcel Poorthuis suggests that writing produced under the strain of persecution has different results from that composed under other circumstances and necessitates sometimes reading between the lines for the author's true intention. Because he finds contradictory messianic ideas in Maimonides' various works, he thinks this perception of "reading between the lines" aids in understanding but is also applicable to all of the medieval writers and their stances on the law.<sup>35</sup> It is impossible to ascertain whether had the historical circumstances differed and not necessitated an apologetic or defensive position, the medievals' views on the status of the law would have been less staunch.

#### 7.4 Joseph Albo on the Law in the Messianic Era

Joseph Albo discusses the possibility of the existence of a prophet greater than Moses who could have the ability to abrogate the Mosaic law, with the exception of the Ten Commandments. Albo dissents from Maimonides' formulation of a creed for Judaism, by explaining that divine law consists of three fundamental principles: the existence of God, providence, and revelation, as well as eight derivative principles, and six beliefs, which belong to all who profess the law of Moses.<sup>36</sup> The six beliefs include his view of the law and the messiah. The third belief affirms the immutability of the law of Moses; "...the Law of Moses will not be repealed nor changed nor exchanged for

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<sup>35</sup> Poorthuis, *Messianism Between Reason and Delusion*, 60. See also David Hartman in the chapter "Discussion of the Epistle to Yemen," who states that the epistle cannot be used to explain Maimonides' messianism as it is written for a specific occasion in *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, translated by Abraham Halkin (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985), 153.

<sup>36</sup> The messianic idea comes from reward and punishment which are branches of Providence. Albo disagrees with Maimonides' use of Deut. 13:1 to prove that new precepts cannot be added to or subtracted from the Torah.

another by any prophet.”<sup>37</sup> However, they may be altered if the recipients require it. For example, Albo explains that, although it was forbidden to Adam, the descendants of Noah were permitted meat because of the sin of Cain and his descendants. Therefore changes in the commandments are associated with the progression of time and the change of circumstances.<sup>38</sup> The sixth belief refers to the messiah. Albo does not think that the advent of the messiah belongs to the fundamental principles, which if denied would abrogate the law; i.e., the Torah can stand on its own without these beliefs.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the doctrines are not essential to the existence of the law of Moses, yet anyone who claims to believe in the latter must also accept them.

Albo explains that, just as the Mosaic law superseded the Noahic law, so a prophet who might arise after him has the potential to abrogate the Mosaic law. However, this prophet must be proven to be a greater prophet than Moses, and his mission must be verified with an external manifestation similar to the Sinai event, which was presented before 600 000 people; only then could any abolition of precepts occur: “Accordingly, if his mission is proved in the same manner as was that of Moses, it is proper to listen to the second prophet even if he desires to abolish the precepts of the first.”<sup>40</sup> However, the Ten Commandments are exempt from this equation because they come directly from God.<sup>41</sup> As for the abolition of all other commandments, Albo states that the prospective prophet must be publicly approved by all Israel. In effect, he allows for little possibility of another prophet to supersede Moses, as he says, “Therefore if any prophet...should come and say that he has attained a higher grade than Moses, which is impossible, and should say that we should listen to him and abolish any of the commands of Moses, not as a temporary measure merely, we will refuse to listen to him, but will tell him that he must prove his superiority to Moses...”<sup>42</sup> Albo goes on to list the many miracles wrought by

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<sup>37</sup> *Sefer Ikarim*, ch. 23 Husik, vol. 1, 136, 183.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, ch.14, 127.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 4, 413. Albo learned many of his views from his teacher Hasdai Crescas.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol..3, 173.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Vol..3, ch.19, 182. However, the last eight commandments may be changed temporarily, 171.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol..3, ch.19, 176. Levi Ben Gershom (Gersonides, 1288-1344) is also ambiguous about whether a new Moses could arise that would legislate a new law. Gersonides states that no one equals Moses nor his legislative capabilities because of their miraculous nature. This is mainly brought out in his commentary on Deuteronomy. Robert Eisen sees a variation in the Gersonides' views from his other works which he attributes to Gersonides' attempt at reconciling Aristotelian philosophy with Judaism. The former challenges the latter because it sees prophecy as a natural phenomenon that would not allow for Moses to



Moses and thus creates many obstacles for any potential redeemer. Yet, he also admits to the potentiality that a messianic figure could fill this role; “And yet it is not possible that there shall never arise another like him or even greater than he, for the Messianic king will be equal to him or greater.”<sup>43</sup> He discusses the likelihood of a prophet being publicly validated and concludes that, although the rabbis were certain of a future revelation, he leaves it up to the will of God.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, after consolidating Albo’s statements on the messiah and the law, it would seem that he supports (although with reticence) the idea that there may arise a future redeemer who will only supersede Moses after many proofs and who has the right to repeal all the laws except the ten commandments.

### 7.5 Isaac Abrabanel on the Law in the Messianic Era

After having been expelled from Spain, Isaac Abrabanel wrote his *Rosh Amanah*, which both comments on Maimonides’ principles of faith and defends him against critics like Joseph Albo. In the discussions of the ninth and twelfth of his thirteen principles, Abrabanel proclaims his views on the immutability of the law. After praising Sa’adia for providing a lengthy argument for the eternity of the law, he decides to add further proof. He concludes that the ideal support comes from the one who gave the law:

We thus see that the best way of proving the truth of the eternity of the Torah is from the aspect of the Agent who gives it...God in His wisdom arranged the matters upon which were to stand and endure all things after their creation, in accord with His mercy for them, just as He arranged nutrition for all living things in accordance with their needs....Just as He arranged the necessary nutrition for man’s body, which cannot survive without it, so He arranged the necessary nutrition for the soul in the Torah. Just as the [proper] nutrition for the human body will never change or pass away, since it is ordered by God, so the divine Torah, which is the [proper] nutrition for the human soul, will not change since the two of them are nutrients arranged by one wisdom and one Agent.<sup>45</sup>

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have an elevated status. See Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People*. (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 84.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Vol. 3, ch.20, 183. Both Albo and Crescas differ from Maimonides on the supremacy of the messiah over Moses. See Marc B. Shapiro in “Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles, the Last Word in Jewish Theology,” *Torah U-Maddah Journal* 4 (1993): 208, who sees the possibility in Albo for the abolition of the commandments.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Vol. 3, ch.19, 181.

<sup>45</sup> Isaac Abrabanel, *Principles of Faith (Rosh Amanah)*, 122-123.

Using the analogy of the continual necessity of human nutrition, Abrabanel reinforces the eternal role of the Torah as required in order for the soul to remain nourished. He refutes Albo's claim regarding the mutability of the laws of Adam and Noah by claiming they are merely conventional law and are not used for the perfection of the soul, whereas the Mosaic law is divine and leads to this ultimate goal. Abrabanel also responds to another of Albo's arguments, that once the messiah has come the twelfth principle (i.e., belief in the coming of the messiah) is no longer valid. Abrabanel replies that the words of the prophets will always remain truthful and timeless, and the messiah's advent will only verify their prophecies, not annul them.<sup>46</sup>

After debating some of the alleged changes of the law in the Bible, he offers an alternative solution that reinforces the eternity of the law. He explains that any changes made by the prophets or the sages through their additions, subtractions, or hedges, as well as any future alterations that will occur in the messianic era (i.e., the abolition of the festivals and the permission to eat swine)<sup>47</sup> have always been part of the Torah, and were "commanded to Moses at Sinai, either by a particular or general command, to perform them in their [proper] time. He transmitted these things by oral tradition."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, there is no abolition when the time for these changes occurs, as they were foreordained.

## 7.6 Jeremiah 31:31 as Interpreted by Medieval Exegetes

Most of the medieval commentators' expositions of Jeremiah 31:31 react against its interpretation as a new law that superseded the Mosaic one and strongly espouse the law's eternal validity. Although Sa'adia does not discuss the subject of the abrogation of the law in the messianic age in the section on "Redemption" in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, he nevertheless makes the connection between messianism and law at the end of the unit: "These are, then the arguments that may be offered in refutation of the doctrine of the Christians aside from the objections to be raised against their theory of the suspension of the laws of the Torah..."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, although the abrogation of the law is not discussed in this section, he knows it is a central theme that relates to messianism.

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<sup>46</sup> *Principles of Faith*, 144.

<sup>47</sup> On the latter see the footnote about H. Karlinsky's article in the chapter on Early Rabbinic works, the section on midrashim.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 133-134.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 322.

Sa'adia thoroughly elaborates upon the notion of abrogation in his section on "Command and Prohibition," where he refutes in detail many of the arguments against the immutability of the law. He denies any idea of a new covenant and offers his own interpretation of the passage from the book of Jeremiah:

I also found still others who cited as proof of their theory the statement of Jeremiah: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31). To these I said: "Why don't you look at what follows this verse, where it is explicitly stated that this new covenant that was mentioned before was the Torah itself? Thus Scripture says: But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put My law in their inward parts...(Jer.31:33). It would only be different from the first covenant in this respect: that it would not be broken this time as it was the first time, as Scripture says: Forasmuch as they broke My covenant, although I was a lord over them (Jer. 31:32).<sup>50</sup>

Sa'adia interprets the new covenant as the Mosaic Torah. The distinction made between the two covenants is that the ability to break the covenant was formerly a possibility, whereas the followers of the new covenant will not have that capability, because the law will be internalized. Although he does not explicitly attribute this covenant to the messianic era, he understands Jeremiah's prophecy in general to be directed to this age. Sa'adia's lengthy discourses on the eternal validity of the law affirms its inviolability and indirectly implies it will endure into the messianic period.

Isaac Abrabanel is also opposed to the idea of a new law in his exposition of this passage. For him, the law of Moses is unalterable and irreplaceable. According to this prophecy, the Israelites will be able to observe the commandments, because through a "new covenant"—not a new law—they will have direct access to God without the need for study:

The new covenant mentioned in Jeremiah does not mean a new law, because the Law of Moses will never change or be substituted by another law at any time. But it means that Israel will now truly fulfill the commandments of the divine Law and that all of the Israelites—young and old—will know God not through study and investigation, but in a direct

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 167.

and natural way. They will know God just as people know the first axioms about which there is no doubt in their minds.<sup>51</sup>

Abrabanel denies any new law and affirms only a deeper submissiveness and intuition for the commandments received at Sinai. In addition, the messiah's role will include expounding the reasons for the precepts in a clear manner.<sup>52</sup> Both Abrabanel and Moses Ben Nachman interpret Jeremiah's words as indicating a renewed nature for humankind. Abrabanel sees a restoration in the spiritual status, where sin will be abolished and the righteousness that was with Adam will prevail.<sup>53</sup> Nachmanides interprets Jeremiah 31 as the elimination of the evil inclination and a renewed desire to pursue good. Therefore change occurs in the individual and not in the law.<sup>54</sup> The nature of man and beast will become perfect again in the time of the messiah; "This [state of affairs] is destined to be annulled in the days of the Messiah...;"<sup>55</sup> "...man will return at that time to what he was before the sin of Adam, when by his nature he did what should be properly done...it is this which Scripture states in Jeremiah, Behold the days come. saith the Eternal that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel..."<sup>56</sup> In the same passage. Nachmanides uses the terminology of Shab. 151b regarding merit and guilt in the messianic era. He states, "But in the days of the Messiah, the choice of...men's genuine good will be natural; the heart will not desire the improper...There will be no evil desire in man but he will naturally perform the proper deeds and therefore there will be neither merit nor guilt in them, for merit and guilt are dependent upon desire."<sup>57</sup> If there is no evil desire or inclination, there is no sin and no need for merit or guilt. He then links Jeremiah to Ezekiel 36, which describes the new heart's connection to the ability to follow the statutes of the law. For Nachmanides, the commandments in the messianic era will

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<sup>51</sup> *Mashmia Yeshua* 34d, 38bc, translated in Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abrabanel*, 323-324. He also reiterates his view on Jer. 31:33 in *Principles of Faith*, 133, stating that it was the same Torah from Sinai, not another Torah, which in the days of the messiah will be in their inward parts.

<sup>52</sup> Abrabanel, *Yeshuot Meshiho* 68ff. *Mashmiah Yeshua* 34d, 38bc as discussed in Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature*, 290ff.

<sup>53</sup> *Yeshuot*, 69b; *Mashmiah* 6b.

<sup>54</sup> David Hartman. "Sinai and Exodus: Two Grounds for Hope in the Jewish Tradition," *Religious Studies* 14 (1978), 376.

<sup>55</sup> Nachmanides, *Writings and Discourses*. Col. 1. Translated by Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1978), 74.

<sup>56</sup> Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* (Deut. 30:6).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

continue to be observed as a normal outcome of humankind's renewed nature. The perpetuity of the Mosaic precepts, with perhaps a greater comprehension and a new nature where the law will be written on people's hearts, is the predominant exegesis of this passage.<sup>58</sup>

## 7.7 Medieval Commentary on the Midrashim

During the medieval period, Christians buttressed their arguments for the cessation of the law by using some of the previously mentioned midrashim. While most Jewish medieval exegetes confirmed the eternal validity of the law in their disputations or written refutations, at times, they also allowed for the possibility of changes.<sup>59</sup> As revealed by the Responsa literature of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, the notion of cessation of the law was often derived from the midrash that referred to the abolition of all festivals (except for Purim and Yom Kippur).<sup>60</sup> One questioner addresses Solomon Ben Adret of Barcelona (Rashba) regarding the possibility of the abolition of the festivals implied in this midrash. Ben Adret responds by redefining "abolition." He explains that Israel will suffer so greatly in the future that they will not remember how to enjoy the festivals. The lack of rejoicing signifies abolition, but suffering will never be so overwhelming as to cause the Jews to forget the meaning of the deliverance celebrated during Purim. As well, the Day of Atonement will never cease because of the efficacy of its atonement that surpasses Israel's forgetfulness.

In the sixteenth century, R. David Ibn Abi Zimra (Radbaz) also received inquiries about the abolition of the festivals mentioned in this midrash. He affirms the law's immutability with a verse from the book of Deuteronomy, "All this word which I command you, that shall ye observe to do; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."<sup>61</sup> After referring to Ben Adret's solution, he offers further explanations. He claims

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<sup>58</sup> Baruch Spinoza sets a hierarchy between the law on tablets and that of the heart; "Religion was imparted to the early Hebrews as a law written down, because they were at that time in the condition of children, but afterwards Moses (30:6) and Jeremiah (31:33) predicted a time when the Lord should write His law in their hearts." *Theologico-Political Treatise* ch.12, 165. He is implying that the second status of the law is the more mature position.

<sup>59</sup> See Crescas. Hasdai. *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, as an example of a refutation against a new Torah (ch. 9) that strongly supports the perfection of the law of Moses that requires no fulfillment.

<sup>60</sup> Yalkut on Prov. 9:2. Midrash Mishle 9:2.

<sup>61</sup> Deut. 13:1.

that every day of the messianic age will be as celebratory as the festivals and therefore indistinguishable from them. Thus it will seem as if the latter are abolished. Purim will be exceptional, because the people will not forget the deliverance from the suffering of this occasion.<sup>62</sup> The existence of questions regarding the abolition of laws within Responsa literature reveals the importance of these midrashim, as well as the tendency to focus on the cessation portion rather than on the statements of continuity. They conclude that the festivals will continue, only that either lack of enjoyment or an abundance of rejoicing will make them seem “abolished.” Although these contradictory answers may seem contrived or defensive, the desire to preserve the law reveals its importance in the medieval period, particularly because of attacks on its legitimacy.

At the end of *Yeshu'ot Meshiho*, Abrabanel responds to an opponent who used various aggadic statements to prove the abolition of the law.<sup>63</sup> Abrabanel concurs that this midrash does not signify the abrogation of the festivals. However, he does infer from the Mishnah and its talmudic explanation that a cessation will take place in the command to mention the Exodus.<sup>64</sup> He says that there will be no command to remember the festivals because the time of redemption will overwhelm the past events; “For in seeing the great trials to which God will put them in the days of the Messiah they will forget the earlier ones and not recall them to mind.”<sup>65</sup> Only the Day of Atonement and Purim, which are characterized by judgement, repentance, and miracles, remain in their fullness.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, he explains that, in the days of the messiah, Passover will not have to be mentioned, although the obligations to observe the holiday, eat *matza*, and abstain from *chametz* will remain. He also explains—regarding the aggadic statement that all sacrifices will be abolished except that of Thanksgiving—that in the messianic era the evil inclination and the heart of stone (Ezek. 36) will be removed, relinquishing the need for sacrifices.<sup>67</sup> Rashba also states that the command to remember the miracles of the

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<sup>62</sup> Louis Jacobs, *Theology in Responsa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 63, 117.

<sup>63</sup> Sarachek mentions that the apostate whom Abrabanel is reacting to Joshua Lorki, who authored the *Tractatus contra Judaeos*, accusing him of not interpreting the midrashim in a proper manner and sometimes fabricating his proofs. See Sarachek, 228 and *Yeshu'ot*, 67 on Eikhah Rabbah.

<sup>64</sup> M. Ber. 1:5 and BT Ber. 12b. He states it is “only an abrogation of that which they recall, since they were all ordained ‘as a memorial to the Exodus from Egypt.’” *Principles of Faith*, 131.

<sup>65</sup> Isaac Abrabanel, *Principles of Faith*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> Abrabanel includes Rosh ha-shanah in the Day of Atonement, *Principles of Faith (Rosh Amanah)*, 131.

<sup>67</sup> *Yeshu'ot*, 69-72.

Exodus is overshadowed by the new redemption. Joseph Albo associates an abolition in connection to this midrash;

Similarly the expression, “a statute forever,” is used in relation to the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles, and yet our Rabbis say in “Vayyikra Rabbah” that all festivals will be abolished except Purim and the Day of Atonement. It would seem then that their interpretation of the expression, “a statute forever,” is that we may not abolish them on our own account, but that there is a possibility of their being abolished by God’s command.<sup>68</sup>

In this context Albo, is trying to show the limitations of words like “forever” in connection with the law in the Scriptures. He claims they do not always signify an infinite amount of time and therefore, even though it is applied to certain festivals, the term can indicate a finite period. He does admit that “forever” means that God and not man has the authority to change the law. Although in theory Abrabanel and Ben Adret aver to the immutability of the law, they also characterize the redemption of the messianic age as transcending the historical festivals, implying a change. Sacrifices, which comprise a large portion of the Mosaic law, do cease as they are no longer necessary.

## 7.8 The Temple and the Nations in the Messianic Era

Sa’adia presents one of the more elaborate descriptions of a literal rebuilding of the Temple. He bases his vision on a compilation of verses from the Hebrew Scriptures, including Ezekiel 40 and several passages from Isaiah:

The structure [of the city] and the Temple will be of the form explained by Ezekiel [in the passage beginning with words]: In the five and twentieth year of our captivity (Ezek. 40:1). They will be studded with jewels and precious stones, as Isaiah said: And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles (Isa. 54:12)... Then the light of God’s presence will appear shining upon the Temple with such brilliance that all lights will become faintly dim in comparison with it... So brilliant will that light be that anyone who does not know the road to the Temple will be able to travel by its brightness, for it will extend from heaven to earth...<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Albo, *Ikkarim*, Ch.16, vol. 3, 142.

<sup>69</sup> *Book of Beliefs*, 310.

Thus Sa'adia adheres to the notion of a literal rebuilding of the Temple with supernatural qualities. Just prior to this description, he explains the fate of the gentile nations in this era. They are classified in several categories, which places them in the service of the Israelites within their homes, fields, and cities. Yet others still subjugated to Israel. return to their native lands with the obligation as decreed by the messiah. to return each year to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>70</sup> Thus, for Sa'adia, the messiah has a definite role in supervising the law for the nations, yet they remain distinct from the Jewish nation.

Although most of the medieval commentators agree on the idea of the reinstatement of the Temple and its cult based on the differences between Ezekiel's vision and the Mosaic law, many acknowledged changes and cessations in its services.<sup>71</sup> Abrabanel foresees the restoration of the Holy of Holies, including the ark, the scroll of the law, the anointing oil, etc. However, he does see discrepancies between Ezekiel's Temple and the priestly rituals of the Mosaic law; though some of the sacrificial variations will exist only during the time of dedication, other differences will be permanent.<sup>72</sup> These include, larger measurements, particular offerings for the first of Nisan, and new instructions for the ruler's entrance to the Temple.<sup>73</sup> The establishment of the final Temple will be celebrated for a longer period of time than previous Temples.<sup>74</sup> Some sacrifices such as atonement and sin offerings will cease completely because of the improved state of the people. Like Sa'adia, Abrabanel states that the nations will journey to Jerusalem, particularly in the interim between Passover and the Feast of Weeks.<sup>75</sup> As well, the messiah will decree commands to the nations from his Temple outpost. The gentile nations will again be under the Noahic laws, but they will also be obligated to fulfill two commands of Succah and Lulav, which will celebrate Israel's victory over her final enemy, Gog.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Zech. 14:16. *Book of Beliefs*, 301.

<sup>71</sup> Rashi uses *le-'atid la-vo'* to refer to Ezekiel's Temple in chap. 40- as a future temple. *Mikra'ot Gedolot 'Haketer.* Sefer Yehezkel. Ed. Menachem Cohen (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000), Ezek. 40:1, 259.

<sup>72</sup> *Mashmia* 50a-51b. Rashi says that the Torah does not mention the bull offering in Ezek. 45:22. Radak also says that any innovations in the sacrificial system in Ezek. 45 and 46 are for the messianic era.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: JTS, 1932), 236.

<sup>74</sup> *Mayene ha-Yeshua* 51a.

<sup>75</sup> *Mashmia*, 32b.

<sup>76</sup> *Yeshu'ot* 67b.



For Maimonides, as monotheism becomes the supreme force in the messianic era, the gentile nations and the Israelites will live under its umbrella. Maimonides believes that Christianity and Islam were used in the process of enlightening the nations to the monotheistic faith; "...Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite (Mohammed) who came after him, only served to clear the way for king Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord..."<sup>77</sup> Scholars debate whether Maimonides perceives the nations as remaining distinct but under the hegemony of Israel or participating in a conversion process.<sup>78</sup> Menachem Kellner supports the view that the gentiles will not become Noahides but will fully convert. He reaches this conclusion primarily on the assumption that the views in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* must be complemented by theories in the *Guide*. The latter claims that the goal of humankind is moral and intellectual perfection, which will be possible during the messianic era. At that time, Jews and gentiles will adhere to the Torah, which will allow them to attain the same goal. Others maintain that Maimonides views the gentiles as obedient only to the seven Noahide laws. Whatever option is chosen, the Torah is available for all of humankind, and the Mosaic law will be the ideal legislation for the world.

## 7.9 Conclusion

The mainstream medieval view of medieval Jewish exegetes, particularly for Jewish community leaders such as Sa'adia and Maimonides, was the immutability of the law of Moses. Despite their involvement in polemics, others such as Abrabanel, Kirkisani, and Albo admitted to changes in the law in the messianic era because of a future redemption that overshadowed any past deliverances or events. Most agree upon notable changes in the Temple and its cult in the messianic times, although its reinstatement is guaranteed.

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<sup>77</sup> Twersky, Ch. II (uncensored).

<sup>78</sup> Ya'acov Blidstein adheres to the view that there will be no distinction between Jews and gentiles in the messianic era according to Maimonides in M. Kellner, *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 46.

## Chapter 8

### Jewish Mysticism

#### 8.1 Introduction

The twelfth to sixteenth centuries witnessed a development in Jewish mysticism in which messianism progressively united with kabbalism. Whereas the early kabbalists<sup>1</sup> were more concerned with creation, the later ones took more of an intensified interest in the redemptive future. The status of the halakhah in relation to the kabbalah was a central theme in the mystical writings, and the main kabbalistic work of the thirteenth century, the *Zohar*, exhibits some tendencies towards establishing a hierarchy between the esoteric and exoteric interpretations of the Torah. However, the dichotomy and superior nature of the former is fully brought to the fore in the later strata of the *Zohar*, the *Ra'ya Mehemna* (RM) and the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* (TZ). Using various biblical symbols, these works emphasize the preexistent and supernal nature of the mystical Torah, as compared to its literal counterpart, which is a necessity only in the time of exile. Thus, the messianic era is the full revelation and disclosure of the spiritual Torah.

After the Spanish expulsion, the center of Jewish mysticism moved from Spain to Safed in Palestine, where Isaac Luria and Hayyim Vital elaborated upon the idea of redemption and the role of Torah in relation to it. Prior to the sixteenth century, halakhah and kabbalah had more or less peaceful co-relationship. However, beginning with Lurianic kabbalah, a demand for active participation in bringing about the messianic era through a process called *Tikkun* produced a shift in that relationship that culminated in various challenges to the status of the law. Throughout these centuries these writings contained antinomian elements that eventually influenced and were used to justify the anti-halakhic doctrines and behaviour of messianic movements, in particular seventeenth century Sabbateanism.

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<sup>1</sup> Second to seventh centuries.

## 8.2 The Zohar, Ra'ya Mehemna, and Tikkunei ha-Zohar

The hierarchy between the two aspects of the Torah—the inner spiritual meaning and the literal exoteric one—stems from the main body of the Zohar. It is exemplified by the following passage:

Rabbi Simeon said: Woe to the man who says that the Torah is intended simply to relate stories and the words of commoners....But all the words of the Torah are exalted and are supernal mysteries...When it [Torah] came down into the world, the world could not have tolerated it if it had not clothed itself in the garments of this world. Consequently, the narratives of the Torah are the garments of the Torah.... There is a garment that is seen by all. And when fools see a man in a garment that appears to them to be beautiful, they look no further. [But] the value of the garment resides in the body, and the value of the body resides in the soul. Similarly, the Torah has a body. The commandments of the Torah are the bodies of the Torah. This body is clothed in garments, which are the narratives of this world. The fools in the world look upon the clothes, which are the narratives of the Torah; they know no more, and do not see what is beneath the clothes. Those who know more do not look upon the clothes, but upon the body beneath the clothes. The wise...in the time to come they are destined to look upon the soul of the soul of the Torah.<sup>2</sup>

This Zoharic text reveals several insights. It states that one aspect of the Torah was preexistent, and in order to exist in this world this aspect needed to be covered by a protective garment, which is the narratives or literal level of the Torah. Although it is a hidden layer, even in this world some people have access to it, but many look only at the literal level and do not contemplate further. A hierarchy is established, because the outer layer is deemed valueless without its inner significance but the former is seen as necessary for the existence of the inner layer in this world. This inner level is described as containing the commandments. In the above passage the future period is distinguished by the full revelation to the wise of the inner aspect of the Torah. This hierarchy is not an abrogation.

In the Zohar, the messianic era signals certain definite changes. Yehuda Liebes describes the Zohar's vision of the messianic future as a harmony within the sefirotic realm, particularly the unification of *Tifereth* and *Malkhut*. But this unification process is also possible during the exilic period through the observance of the commandments.

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<sup>2</sup> Zohar III, 152a. For other examples of the hierarchy between the esoteric and exoteric see Zohar II. 99b.

which have a value in themselves and are not simply to bring on redemption, as is sometimes taught in later kabbalistic works.<sup>3</sup> Despite this attainability in the present world, the messianic era ushers in a greater unveiling of the inner secrets of the Torah. Liebes mentions the elimination of the need for sexual modesty as a significant change in the law in the messianic era. The present world requires these laws because of the *sitra ahra*,<sup>4</sup> but “in the time to come when *sitra ahra* does leave her, in that day the Lord shall be one, and his name one.”<sup>5</sup> Liebes explains that the need for modesty originated with the fear of *sitra ahra*, but in the messianic era shame will not exist.<sup>6</sup>

The RM and TZ make stronger distinctions between these aspects of the Torah than does the Zohar. They distinguish between two Torot—*Torah de-Beriah* (Torah of Creation) and *Torah de-Atsiluth* (Torah of Emanation)—often reinforcing their differences through the use of various images. Like the Zohar, the RM and the Tikkunim recognize the Torah of Creation as the garment of the Torah of Emanation: “The Torah of Creation is the garment of the *Shekhinah*. And if man were not created the *Shekhinah* would remain without covering, like the poor. Consequently, whoever sins strips, as it were, the *Shekhinah* of her garments. And this is man’s punishment. And whoever fulfills the commandments of the Torah clothes, as it were, the *Shekhinah* in her garments.”<sup>7</sup> The *Shekhinah*, which is the essence of the Torah of Emanation, is protected by the Torah of creation, through the observance of the commandments. Due to the sin of man, this essence requires a covering. Based on this and other passages, Isaiah Tishby does not think that the Torah of Emanation contains commandments at all because it is heavenly.<sup>8</sup> But other statements in the RM connect the commandments to the Torah of Emanation with no separation between them, and therefore Tishby finds contradictory notions about the value and role of the commandments and their implications for the messianic era.<sup>9</sup>

One of the symbols that is transformed to indicate opposing and hierarchical aspects of the Torah by the RM and TZ is that of the tree of life and the tree of the

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<sup>3</sup> Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, translated by Arnold Schwartz et al. (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Sitra Ahra* means the powers of the demonic or “other side.”

<sup>5</sup> Zohar II, 133b-134b.

<sup>6</sup> Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Zohar I, 23a-23b (Tikkunim).

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3 vols., translated by David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3: 1102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Zohar III, 82b-83a.

knowledge of good and evil. The former corresponds to the Torah of Emanation and the latter to the Torah of Creation. A passage that uses this imagery envisions the rule of the tree of life in the future:

Israel will be put to a similar test at the final redemption. This is the significance of 'Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and refined...' 'But they who are wise'—from the aspect of *Binah*, which is the Tree of Life—'shall understand.' Concerning them it is said 'they shall shine as the brightness (*zohar*) of the firmament' (Daniel 12:3)...And since Israel will taste of the Tree of Life, which is this book of brightness, they will emerge from exile in mercy by its means....And the Tree of Good and Evil, which is the forbidden and the permitted, uncleanness and cleanness, will no longer rule over Israel, for they will derive their sustenance only from the Tree of Life, where there are no problems from the evil side, and no arguments from the spirit of uncleanness...But when the Tree of Life rules the Tree of Good and Evil will be subdued, and the ignorant will have only that which is given them by the scholars, and they will be subject to them, and it will be as if they had never been. Similarly, the forbidden and the permitted, uncleanness and cleanness, will not forsake the ignorant, because on their side the only difference between the age of exile and the Messianic Age will be [the destruction] of oppressive political power, for they will not taste of the Tree of Life, and they will need the halakhic teachings of the forbidden and the permitted, the unclean and the clean...<sup>10</sup>

According to this passage, the messianic age will have the tree of life as its rule, or the Torah of Emanation will be fully disclosed. Like the idea in the Zohar about the repression of *sitra ahra* in the messianic era, the wise will no longer be subjected to the "evil side." However, the foolish or ignorant will still necessitate many prohibitions and will be subjected to the wise, who by implication will not be subjugated to the tree of good and evil or to the prohibitions that pertain to it. Therefore for some people, being exposed to the Torah of Emanation means that the obligation to follow certain laws will cease, because they will no longer be necessary.

### 8.3 Sixteenth Century Kabbalism

The polarization that existed within the RM and the TZ inspired Hayyim Vital, who further associated the kabbalah with the Torah of Emanation and the messianic era in contradistinction to the halakhah, which is part of the Torah of Creation needed in the

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<sup>10</sup> Zohar III, 124a-126a (RM).

time of exile. The kabbalah became the means to hasten redemption, which was needed after the devastation of the Spanish expulsion. The participation of humankind in redemption known as *Tikkun* was developed by Isaac Luria, Vital's teacher. When it is complete, this process of restoration or unification of the Godhead consummates in redemption. The elite can achieve this through prayer with proper intention (*kavannah*), but most must achieve it through performance of the commandments. Because the arrival of the messiah was viewed as dependent upon the study and widespread acceptance of the kabbalah, it challenged other levels of interpretation and the law; "this process was expressed realistically in terms of a struggle to establish a new position for the Kabbalah in relation to the peshat and the Halakha."<sup>11</sup> The struggle occurred because the kabbalah propagated certain changes in Jewish life in order to hasten the messianic era, as reflected in the introduction to Vital's *Etz Hayyim*. The latter places a superiority of the spiritual Torah—identified with various kabbalistic writings—over the literal law (or Pentateuch):

The literal Torah, its stories, its laws and its commandments, when they remain literal, express no awareness and knowledge of the Lord, blessed be he; on the contrary, there are laws and commandments which the rational mind cannot fathom, almost all the Biblical commandments and especially their legal details are unbearable for the mind—and, if this is so, where is the splendor of the Torah, its beauty, and its greatness?<sup>12</sup>

The goal of the kabbalist is to go beyond the literal approach to the esoteric meaning in order to discover the "beauty of the Torah." Any other method is superficial and negates the messianic perspective, where the ideal Torah will reign supreme. Before Vital, it was not entirely clear whether the law was associated with the supernal Torah or with the tree of life. According to Rachel Elijor, the kabbalah represents the tree of life, whereas the halakhah is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Vital asserts: "regarding the Torah in its literality, which is the Torah of the Mundane world, it is worthless when compared to the Messianic Torah and the Torah of the world to come..."<sup>13</sup> This statement is reminiscent of the midrash claiming the Torah of this world to be vanity in comparison to the one of the messiah. It is likely he had this in mind, but he hyperbolizes "vanity" as worthless in order to make his point. For Vital, the legislation of both Talmud and

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Elijor, "Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization," *REJ* 145 (1986), 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Etz Hayyim*, 5 quoted in Elijor, 39.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 2, in Elijor, 41.

Mishnah is the exoteric layer which he deems inferior: “Regarding the Mishna, there can be no doubt that the Mishna’s literal aspects are but veils, shells, and outer wrappings when compared to the hidden mysteries which are inherent and insinuated in its inner aspects [i.e., the kabbalah] since all literalness is only of this world and belongs to the lesser material affairs.”<sup>14</sup> Again he is stressing the need for contemplation of the deeper layers of the law. Elijior does not think these statements indicate an antinomian attitude, but only that these kabbalists desired to emphasize that the exoteric study of the law alone without its hidden meaning is futile and loses all sense of messianic vision. She remarks that the opposition is between two methods of interpretation and not between the kabbalah and the halakhah. Because the former is linked to redemption, it becomes essential: “The situation is desperate since it is only by means of the kabbalah that redemption can be brought about while to refrain from it would delay the restoration of our temple and our glory.”<sup>15</sup> In order to bring about the messianic era, the study of kabbalah takes precedence over any other method of interpretation. It is important to note that this era will include a restoration of the Temple, because it can be assumed that with the dawning of the messianic era, the laws will be spiritualized and their literalness will disappear. Implications for the latter can be derived in the attempt at explaining the proper mystical interpretation of the Talmud brought out in *Galia Raza* in the fourteenth century:

Hence, we have evidence that the measures of the ritual bath were constituted esoterically according to the secrets, thus we ought to believe faithfully that all quantities and all the measures that our sages constituted in all our commandments, are allusions to heavenly, spiritual matters and that the earthly rates are paralleled in heavenly measures.<sup>16</sup>

The anonymous author of the *Galia Raza* believed that the only way to understand the Talmud was through hermetical assumptions and kabbalah. Because the commandments are allusions to heavenly counterparts, it would seem that, at the time of the greater revelation of the esoteric, there would be no need for the earthly version.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to

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<sup>14</sup> *Etz Hayyim*, 4.6, in Elijior, 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Etz Hayyim*, 4 in Elijior, 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Galia Raza*, 30 in Elijior, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu Kohen Ittamari of Smyrna states that the Torah remains eternally valid into the messianic era, only the combination of letters that form the words of the Torah will be changed. See Gershon

this, a contemporary of Luria, Moses Cordovero, stresses the eternal validity of the Torah into the messianic age, even though its material covering will be removed. At that time, "the veiled faces of the Torah will become radiant, and the righteous will study them. And yet in all these stages the Torah will be the same as it was in the beginning; its essence will never change."<sup>18</sup> Luria affirms this: "In the messianic age, every single man in Israel will read the Torah in accordance with the meaning peculiar to his root...."<sup>19</sup> Scholem concludes that, when the world is under the tree of life and holiness will pervade, restrictions will be unnecessary, yet despite certain changes in halakhah, its essence remains the same. While a definite hierarchy is established between the various aspects of the Torah, the esoteric does not annul the exoteric. Yet antinomian danger lay dormant as long as the messianic era was not a reality. Once a concrete movement broke into the scene, their interpretations of the mystical texts led to practical abolitions of the law.

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Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1960), 75.

<sup>18</sup> Scholem, *ibid.*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> *Sefer ha-Kavvanoth*, 53b in Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 65.



## Chapter 9

### The Sabbatean Messianic Movement and its approach to the Law

Antinomianism has been defined as the “subversion of a religious or moral code.”<sup>1</sup> On a superficial level, this may be perceived as motivated only by a rebellious attitude towards authority. Yet what might outwardly appear as subversive behaviour may truly be an inner desire to affirm religious truth as the protagonists define it, or as they interpret a particular religious tradition. Unintentional factors may also motivate antinomian behaviour, such as the psychological state of the individual or group involved. As discussed above, several texts offered the theoretical aspect of antinomianism, whereas messianic movements such as Sabbateanism put forth the practical reality. Sabbateanism and its offshoots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provide the full spectrum of antinomian actions in relation to messianism and range from moderate to radical extremism. However, a progression in development as well as in awareness of this behaviour, which begins with Shabbetai Zevi prior to his conversion to Islam, continues with him and his followers after the apostasy, and in the eighteenth century reaches an explosive extreme with the Sabbatean, Jacob Frank. Although for some within the movement, there can be a lack of depth in many areas—in the reasons for participating in the movement, in the theology, and in the level of commitment, particularly within the branches of the radical side—for the majority who participate there is deep involvement. Therefore, the major motivation of the Sabbatean movement in terms of antinomianism cannot be explained merely by the desire to be nonconformist, but other internal and external factors must be considered as well.<sup>2</sup>

In the medieval period, prior to the rise of Shabbetai Zevi in the seventeenth century, the seeds of antinomianism were being sown in Jewish mystical works. According to Isaiah Tishby in *Mishnat Ha-Zohar*, the anonymous author of the later

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol.5. 557.

<sup>2</sup> Scholem links the success of the spread of Sabbateanism to the prior widespread dissemination of Lurianic Kabbalah. Moshe Idel disagrees with this view, claiming that Lurianic kabbalah was not propagated among the masses, but only among elite circles. See Moshe Idel, “One From a Town, Two from a Clan—The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination,” *Jewish History* 7, no.2 (Fall 1993): 79-103.

strata of the *Zohar*, the *Ra'ya Mehemna* and the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*, expressed antinomian ideas, although they were neither overtly negative nor inchoate. Even in terms of the changes in the law in the messianic era, the antinomian elements in these works were a little ambiguous and not fully developed. It is Tishby's view, however, that the author of the *Ra'ya Mehemna* had an anti-Talmudic disposition that ultimately signified an antagonism towards rabbinic religious authority of his day.<sup>3</sup> These works emphasized through various typologies, a superiority of a supernal or more spiritual Torah called *Torah de-Atziluth*, over an earthly Torah of Halakhah, termed *Torah de-Beriah*. The former Torah is pre-existent, without limitations, and is superior to the latter. The theology maintains that, because of the sin of man, the supernal Torah could not appear in this world without a covering. The mystical writings view the earthly Torah as a necessary protective garment for the supernal Torah within the historical world, and only in the messianic era will the latter's essence be revealed in full. Because of the implied hierarchy between the two Torahs, a danger arose in diminishing the importance of the Torah of creation. Tishby confirms that other mystical works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the *Sefer ha-Peliah* and the *Sefer ha-Kanah*, also have an antinomian bent.

Shabbetai Zevi, who was born in 1626 in Smyrna, was educated as a youth not only in Talmud but also in these kabbalistic works, and therefore he had been acquainted with and influenced by their underlying antinomian notions. Zevi and his movement brought the anti-halakhic elements of these texts to the forefront. Scholem suggests that Zevi had been carrying within himself ideas he drew from the reading of the *Peliah* and *Qanah*, and that, through him, the quiet antinomianism of the texts was amplified. Commenting on the opinion of Gershom Scholem, David Biale suggests that Jewish mysticism had appropriated and transformed Gnostic ideas into an acceptable orthodoxy, however the underlying antinomian and nihilistic strains came to full fruition in the Sabbatean movement which had adopted these ideas.<sup>4</sup>

In his lengthy treatise on Zevi, Gershom Scholem explains that the latter's actions had been "blind and haphazard" in the period prior to his apostasy, however

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:1112.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Saperstein, *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History* (New York: NYU Press, 1992), 521.

afterward they were determined and directed by a mature ideology that can be described as “the paradoxical character of holy deeds through sinning.”<sup>5</sup> Zevi’s vision revealed itself in many transformations, exemplified by alterations (in 1658) such as that of the traditional daily morning prayer, changing “loosening of them that are bound [asurim]” to “loosening of all bonds [issurim]” implying a kind of anarchic freedom. Scholem does not credit Zevi with enough intellectual acumen to have created the developed system of changes to the law that characterized the later Sabbatean movement. Zevi is portrayed by Scholem more as a victim of his psychological turmoil which, during a manic phase, led to his strange acts, and which Zevi himself considers part of a mystical world beyond comprehension. At first it was only Zevi who performed unusual acts, yet, when more authority was bestowed upon him, these acts were seen by some within the movement as basic to their theology and practice. Eventually, the melancholia that Zevi experienced was interpreted as a necessary part of the messianic journey.

During the early period of Zevi’s development towards a full messianic declaration, he engaged himself in a variety of deviations from traditional law. As testified in one of the letters by a disciple, Israel Hazzan, the main act performed by Zevi that went contrary to rabbinic tradition was the uttering of the Ineffable Name of God, i.e., the tetragrammaton.<sup>6</sup> Zevi was forced to leave Smyrna because of his messianic claims and deeds and wandered through many places including Jerusalem, Constantinople, Salonika, and Egypt. Opposition arose in many cities and recordings were made of Zevi’s acts. Emmanuel Frances of Leghorn, a poet and enemy of the Sabbatean movement, compiled reports in 1667 from various sources about the life of Zevi. He describes Zevi’s acts in one of his poems;

Is he the Lord’s anointed or a traitor,  
A Wicked sinner and a fornicator?  
In public he the Sabbath desecrates,  
And of the synagogue he breaks the gates.  
To pronounce the Name Ineffable he dares,  
And with profanity he impiously swears.  
Forbidden women he embraces;  
As first the one, and then the other he caresses.

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<sup>5</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

The foolish people, gaping as spellbound,  
Affirm: this is a mystery profound.<sup>7</sup>

A foe of Zevi, Frances depicts some of Zevi's antinomian actions, which are confirmed by other sources. In one of the more detailed accounts, which is difficult to verify completely, Zevi and some followers were greatly disappointed when Zevi tried unsuccessfully to make the sun stand still at midday. As a result of this failed miracle, some haughty comments from Zevi, and his engagement in kabbalistic practices, the leaders of Smyrna deported him. Outside Smyrna, Zevi continued to perform bizarre deeds. On one occasion in Constantinople, he created a visual representation of a rabbinic tradition. According to Jewish tradition, the idea of redemption would take place under the sign of Pisces. Zevi illustrated this idea by purchasing a large fish, dressing it up as a baby, and placing it in a cradle. He provided astrological explanations for this act, explaining that Israel's time of redemption would occur during the age of Pisces, with the cradle symbolizing Israel in its premature stage of growth toward complete redemption.<sup>8</sup>

The rabbis at the time of Zevi's manifestations attributed his behaviour to mental illness, and Scholem agrees that most of Zevi's strange acts were done at times when Zevi was in a "manic" phase. Zevi was diagnosed by Scholem as a manic depressive, which involves symptoms of self-aggrandizement and delusion, as well as hostility towards conformity. Scholem does not think that Zevi's manifestations were seen by most people as proof of his messiahship, as Jewish tradition expected a messiah who would explain and not deviate from the law.<sup>9</sup> Stephen Sharot notes that most of Zevi's followers in the year 1666 were not aware of Zevi's personality or of his propensity to melancholia, and those who were close to him explained his random antinomian acts as integral to the messianic role.<sup>10</sup> However, David J. Halperin portrays Zevi (as well as his followers) as more consciously aware and in control of his deeds. Halperin does not subscribe to Scholem's victim explanation but sees Zevi as consciously aware that his actions have significance.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 404.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 191.

which he attributes to the idea that Zevi had tapped into the Metatron myth.<sup>11</sup> The idea of Metatron was developed in the Babylonian Talmud to explain Exodus chapter 24, verse one, where God refers to himself as “Lord” in the third person rather than as to “me” in the first person. The rabbis of the Talmud explain that this “Lord” is Metatron, whose name is like his master’s name, because his name is in him. However, they warn not to confuse Metatron with God. The Hekhalot literature<sup>12</sup> further develops the Metatron idea, transforming and elevating men, particularly Enoch, to a divine status. His promotion includes the receiving of a robe, a crown and a new name. The myth takes on further features in the later strata of the *Zohar*, where Metatron and the demon king Samael are combined into one figure, therefore he is seen as embodying both good and evil. Furthermore, the *Zohar* is aware of the fact that Metatron has the same numerical value as God’s name, *Shaddai*. Therefore if Metatron is linked to divinity, and Zevi is identified with Metatron, Zevi has divine authority over the law.

Sharot explains that antinomianism tends to be a part of religions whose creed allows for an identification or interaction with the divine, because divinity implies control of the moral system.<sup>13</sup> Halperin thinks that Zevi was well aware of the Metatron idea through the Zoharic and Hekhalot traditions, as well as through the *Sefer Zerubabel*.<sup>14</sup> Halperin states of Zevi, “In his actions before the apostasy he showed himself to be grandiose, erratic, given to despotic cruelty, and to arbitrary tampering with hallowed traditions.”<sup>15</sup> He insists that the followers of Zevi, even prior to the apostasy, were aware of his tendency to perform bizarre acts in which he did not fear abolishing tradition. The “despotic cruelty” to which Halperin refers is illustrated by a couple of events. Zevi is said to have justified the torture on the Sabbath by his followers of a skeptic in Venice.<sup>16</sup> Another event occurred at the Portuguese Synagogue in Smyrna in December of 1665.

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<sup>11</sup> Halperin, David, J. “Sabbatai Zevi, Metatron, and Mehmed: Myth and History in Seventeenth-Century Judaism” in S. Daniel Breslauer, ed., *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response* (Albany: SUNY, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Hekhalot literature is from the late Talmudic period or early medieval. This literature speaks about humans who entered the angelic realm, particularly Enoch, who ascended to heaven and was transformed into a higher being, a kind of lesser god, and who takes on the divine name.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic*, 127.

<sup>14</sup> *Sefer Zerubabel* is a seventeenth-century Hebrew apocalypse in which Metatron is equal to the God of the Bible. The prophecies of this book had been used by Nathan, Zevi’s prophet.

<sup>15</sup> Halperin, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 291.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 304 (note 91).

Although the synagogue had locked its doors on the Sabbath to Zevi, he broke his way through the doors with an ax. When he gained entrance, he terrorized and forced the attendants to pronounce the Name of God. Halperin sees this forced entrance as reminiscent of the Metatron myth as it appears in the Hekhalot literature. Halperin further elaborates that Zevi embodied not only the divine aspect of the Metatron myth, but also the evil aspect, which revealed itself fully in his willful acts prior to his apostasy and helped to explain the reason for his conversion to Islam. Halperin states, "His high handed violation of Jewish religious norms, on this and countless other occasions call attention to what is perhaps Sabbatai's most strongly Metatron-like feature: his unabashed representation of himself as one who is in significant part, a being of evil."<sup>17</sup> Abraham Cardoso, a supporter of Zevi and a former Marrano, reinforces the Metatron link by referring to Zevi's repetition of the Metatron motif in his discussions, wherein he proclaimed himself "the administrator of the upper and lower realms, raised higher than Metatron."<sup>18</sup> This statement, which Zevi was claimed to have stated one hundred times, at least shows Zevi's awareness of the concept. Elliot Wolfson agrees with Halperin, stating that many Sabbatean documents clearly refer to Zevi as the Metatron manifestation in the earthly realm.<sup>19</sup> Sharot disagrees with such conscious intentionality and awareness prior to the apostasy and explains that, during the peak of the movement, Zevi's strange acts were not known to most of his followers but were transformed into a central element only after his conversion.<sup>20</sup> Zevi's erratic behaviour can be understood when at one point he regretted his behaviour on the Sabbath and announced that the following Sabbath would be a day of fasting for atonement. However, during the middle of the day he changed his mind and started feasting. This kind of inconsistency strengthens Scholem's idea that Zevi had mental instability (and little self-awareness), which would result in alternating periods of antinomianism and conservatism.

In 1658, when Zevi was in Constantinople, he continued to change tradition which represented a pattern of altering traditional dates that would continue throughout his life. Thus he celebrated the three festivals of pilgrimage (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 282.

<sup>19</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Engenderment of Messianic Politics," in *Towards the Millenium*, 218.

<sup>20</sup> Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 92.

one week, in order to atone for Israel's sins, which were committed during all previous festivals. At this time, Zevi also began using the new benediction "to permit that which has hitherto been forbidden" which he continued to use thereafter. Towards the end of his life, he again celebrated Sukkot and Shavuot in one week. This shifting of dates was just the beginning of his tendency to alter the calendar, which included changing the Sabbath to Monday or the officially sanctioned Day of Atonement to another day. Halperin believes the shifting of dates was Zevi's intentional way of proving that he had authority over the calendar.<sup>21</sup>

An increase in antinomian behaviour and a greater self-realization came on the seventeenth of Sivan (1665) in Gaza, when, with the encouragement of Nathan his Prophet and propagator Zevi proclaimed himself as messiah. At an earlier time, in 1648, he had also announced his messiahship to a close circle, as this was the redemptive date predicted in the *Zohar*, however, he was not taken seriously by most authorities. From the time that Zevi recognized himself as the messiah, he became aware that time took on a new significance. Scholem claims that Zevi never really understood Jewish festivals in terms of their historical, i.e., biblical foundations, but viewed them always from a kabbalistic perspective. In addition, rabbinic and biblical holidays were not distinguished in his mind, and therefore all were subject to change.<sup>22</sup>

At the time of his messianic pronouncement, Zevi's strange acts increased intensely. Followers were encouraged to partake in ascetic practices such as fasting, which led to some deaths from prolonged lack of food. Some repented because they were adherents to Zevi's message and others as a general means of hastening redemption. Extreme acts of repentance included fasts that endured a week, ritual bathing, naked rolling in the snow, inflicting the body with thorns, and pouring boiling water upon naked bodies.<sup>23</sup> Traditional fast days were turned into feasts, because anything commemorating the destruction of the Temple or Israel's exilic situation needed to come to an end. The Fast of the seventeenth of Tammuz was turned into a feast day and was celebrated as a day of rejoicing in Gaza and Hebron. This fast was abolished, because Zevi believed that

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<sup>21</sup> Halperin, 304.

<sup>22</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 617.

<sup>23</sup> Sharot, 90.

the ingathering of the exile would commence and that the Shekhinah had been revealed.<sup>24</sup> The fast of the tenth of Teveth and the ninth of Av were also abolished. Although in 1665 a minority followed Zevi's instructions, by the summer of 1666 for example, the majority celebrated fast days as feasts, even though many leaders in Jerusalem refused to abolish the tradition. The particular abolition of the ninth of Av, which was also Zevi's birthday, marked the peak of the movement in the East.<sup>25</sup> Zevi probably was aware of the indication in the rabbinic literature of the reversal of fasts into holidays of feasting that would take place in the days of the messiah, which he was progressively beginning to realize were at hand.

With the increase in antinomian behaviour, rabbinic authorities began attempts to suppress the movement. While in Palestine, Zevi had informed Nathan that he had the authority to transgress the law using the talmudic idea of a unique dispensation, which described the temporary cessation of ordinances. Scholem does not think that Zevi's explanation for his transgressions had the same kind of depth that was eventually revealed by Nathan. Opposition arose in Jerusalem, particularly because Zevi had caused his own people to eat forbidden fat while proclaiming his customary blessing. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden."<sup>26</sup> Because the eating of forbidden fat was in the same list of prohibitions as many sexual prohibitions such as incest or fornication, this implied that these prohibitions were also reversed. Rabbinic opposition had arisen, particularly by the Dutch Rabbi Jacob Sasportas, who considered Sabbatean innovations to be rooted in evil. Sasportas foresaw a schism within Judaism that eventually did take place after the apostasy. As a result of the antinomian behaviour, Zevi was expelled from Jerusalem in 1665.

Zevi returned to Smyrna where he continued his anti-traditional behaviour. He attended synagogue each morning and partook in ascetic practices that seemed rather benign and did not cause controversy at first. However, during the week of Chanukah he entered the synagogue dressed in royal garb and stirred up the people through ecstatic singing. He was reported to have returned to his odd behaviour such as pronouncing the Ineffable Name and eating forbidden fats which acts, according to Scholem, were all

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<sup>24</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 237.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.



recognizable as related to his states of his "illumination." Nathan, however, gave kabbalistic significance (drawn from Lurianic Kabbalah) to Zevi's illness, although the interpretations were not widely known in 1666. His explanation was that the messiah's soul had gone to the same place where the sparks had gone after the primordial breaking of the vessels that contained God's essence. In this place, Zevi was tortured by serpents, and only when in his "manic" phase could he overcome them.<sup>27</sup> Zevi continued to do uncustomary acts, such as reading in the synagogue from a printed copy of the Torah rather than from a scroll and calling up women and laypeople rather than priests and Levites to the reading of the law. Similar actions had been done in Jerusalem, where Zevi had commanded a priestly blessing to be performed at the afternoon prayer by non-priestly Israelites. On one Sabbath, the name of the Turkish Sultan in the prayer for the rulers of the nation was replaced by a prayer for Shabbatai Zevi as the new messianic ruler. Its transformation is as follows:

He who giveth salvation unto kings...whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom...may he bless, preserve, guard, exalt ever more our Lord and our Messiah, the Anointed of the God of Jacob, the Celestial Lion and Celestial Stag, the Messiah of Righteousness, the King of Kings, the sultan Sabbatai Sevi. May the supreme king preserve him and grant him life....<sup>28</sup>

Although Zevi's transgressions of the law caused him to be expelled from various places, including Smyrna, Salonika and Constantinople, in a short time, he became honoured, from Cairo to Hamburg to Salonika, from Marocco to Yemen, and from Poland to Persia, with believers calling him "Our Lord and King."

By 1666 Jews in the Diaspora became increasingly aware of Zevi's innovations to the law. Those in Europe were informed that rabbinic authority had been superseded by a new messianic one. Those who were considered "infidels" (against Zevi) were persecuted, some even being given over to Turkish authorities and imprisoned. Amsterdam was quite open to change, and in its Portuguese community the Priestly blessing was now recited each Sabbath, where previously it had been a part of the service only on major holidays. Believers in Amsterdam and Hamburg established yeshivot for prayer, penitence and charity. Poland in 1666 did not have a notable following. The

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<sup>27</sup> Sharot, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Saperstein, 315.

Balkans abolished the mourning ritual of the ninth of Av and celebrated joyously. Non-Jews also considered the year 1666 significant; it was endowed with much messianic enthusiasm, as it represented the return of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Therefore the spirit of the age may have created an additional openness within the Jewish people of the Diaspora.

Imprisonment and apostasy only provided further building blocks for the theology of Zevi and his devotees. Turkish authorities thought Zevi to have surpassed his limits, and during his journey from Smyrna to Constantinople he was arrested and imprisoned in a fortress in Gallipoli. Imprisonment reduced the fervor neither in the East nor in the West, as can be seen through many of his follower's gatherings outside his new home. Even while in prison, where Zevi was treated more like a king than a criminal, he continued his strange rituals. For example, he sacrificed a lamb, which was forbidden outside of Jerusalem. Eventually, however, the sultan summoned Zevi and gave him the choice to apostatize to Islam or face death. Zevi decided to accept the turban and was renamed Mehmet Effendi.

Halperin concludes that Zevi was motivated less by the possibility of death than by his self-awareness of the Metatron myth, where, like Metatron, Zevi must enter a foreign godlike world.<sup>30</sup> Halperin compares a description from the Hekhalot literature, *Third Enoch*, with a story written in the 1680's about Zevi's conversion and finds many similarities. In both, a person is transformed and promoted through the reception of a new garment, a new name, and a crown/turban, and by doing so this hero transgresses a central religious prohibition, i.e., to convert or to claim equality with God. Wolfson agrees with the Metatron link but adds another dimension. He sees the turban as equivalent to the messianic crown, which in kabbalistic terms would be depicted as the corona on the phallus of the divine anthropos. Within the sefirotic realm, restoration of the divine or redemption occurs when *Malkhut* (the bottom sefira) reunites or crowns *Yesod*. Zevi's coronation was the external symbol of this mystical process. Therefore both Halperin and Wolfson characterize Zevi's acceptance of the turban as purposeful for reasons beyond external reality. Zevi does seem convinced that his destiny was to convert, which is explicit in his letter to his followers after his conversion. He states, "My

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<sup>29</sup> This concerned mainly the most extreme antinomian Christian sects.

<sup>30</sup> Halperin, 294.

brothers, know...that the True One, which only I have known for many generations and for which I have toiled, wanted me to enter Islam with all my heart...and to invalidate the Torah of Moses until the end of time.”<sup>31</sup> Yehudah Liebes says that Zevi apostatized out of a sense of duty to God but at that time did not fully comprehend its significance. He mentions that Zevi gave several explanations at various stages ranging from the punishment of Israel to its being a “great mystery.”<sup>32</sup> The first explanation, which sees the conversion as a punishment of Israel, is related to the Moslem idea that the Koran has permanently replaced the Torah. Zevi took this idea but altered it from a permanent to a temporary replacement, during which Israel is under chastisement. When this period comes to an end, Israel and its Torah will be reinstated. Zevi also had the notion that he must fulfill both the Law of Truth (Moses) and the Law of kindness (Islam).<sup>33</sup> He seemed to change his mind several times about the explanation for the apostasy, a pattern that fits well with his previous behaviour. His ambivalent theories led to acts that embodied customs within both Judaism and Islam. For example, stories that described Zevi as sitting both with the Koran and the scroll of the law circulated. In 1667, he reinstated the mourning of Tisha B’Av, and in 1671 he said that all believers should observe it for an entire week. Zevi seemed to be creating a religion of his own that was neither Jewish nor Muslim, and yet he incorporated many elements from both traditions. Whether or not Zevi was totally aware of the mystical significance of his conversion, Nathan soon endowed it with a profound and a complex spiritual interpretation.

Although imprisonment had not moved believers from their faith, the conversion to Islam did lead to a crisis of faith for some and a division among believers. On September 16, 1666, Zevi received the garments of conversion from the sultan and is negatively described by an adversary, Rabbi Joseph Halevi of Livorno: “He threw his cap on the ground, and spat on it. He insulted the Jewish faith and profaned God’s name, in full public view.”<sup>34</sup> Halevi points out the irony in that Zevi’s followers expected him to receive the messianic crown from the sultan, but instead he donned the turban. Many adherents returned to a traditional way of life, admitting they had been in error, while

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<sup>31</sup> Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 100. Halperin, 274.

<sup>32</sup> Liebes, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 864.

<sup>34</sup> Halperin, 273.

others would not relinquish their faith and became divided on their interpretation of the conversion. Sharot describes the experience of the “faithful” believers as one of “cognitive dissonance” with two contradictory cognitions that needed to be reconciled.<sup>35</sup> Scholem agrees that, although there were differences among the believers, they were all of the same mind in their desire to explain the discrepancy between an internal and an external reality. Sabbatean doctrine arose out of the necessity to explain the gap between the two realities and was developed by those who refused to view the conversion as a failure. Sabbateanism was founded on an apparent paradox, which in turn led to many new paradoxes. Conflicting elements had already been present in the explanation for Zevi’s strange acts prior to the apostasy, but Nathan expanded them into a fully elaborated vision. The interpretation claimed that apostasy was necessary to lift the Shekhinah out of exile. Nathan states in one of his letters, “Even though he wore the holy turban, his holiness was not profaned on account of this, for he is holy and every act of Sabbath [Zevi] is holy.”<sup>36</sup> Outward reality was the evil clothing of the good within. The messiah was to descend into the abyss or state of sin in order to struggle against evil; externally this appeared as an entrance into Islam. Isaiah 53:5 was reinterpreted from “he was wounded for our transgressions” to “he was profaned for our sins.” In other words, for the messiah to atone for the sins of Israel, he needed to become profane through the wearing of the evil turban. The doctrine maintained that, although the external world remained the same, the internal one was being renewed. The split among believers, which resulted in moderate and radical factions, arose when during this transitional period where inward and outward reality were not yet in harmony, they tried to interpret their function in relation to the law.

Both moderate and radical groups arose based on their disagreement over the need to imitate Zevi’s apostasy. This ultimately affected their view of the significance of the law. The moderates took a negative stance against the imitation of apostasy, as this was the role of the messiah alone. Outwardly, for the moderates, no changes in the law except for small ones, such as that of the ninth of Av, were to be pursued, as long as the Jews remained in exile. For them, redemption was a gradual process where performance of the

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<sup>35</sup> Sharot, 117.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfson, 226.

commandments was still a necessary mystical process of *Tikkun* (reparation of the cosmos), and only Zevi was free from the law. Because it was understood that the internal reality was the “true” reality while the external was more of a kind of ruse, some opponents questioned the real commitment of the moderates to their external religious tradition. The moderates could be found in groups in various areas such as Morocco, Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Italy, Poland, Turkey and the Balkans. The radical counterpart arose in 1683 when several hundred families converted to Islam and could be found mainly in Salonika, southern Poland and parts of Europe. Not all converted, but those who did maintained a couple of contrasting ideas. First of all these believers claimed that all must partake in the redemptive act, which externally manifested itself as apostasy. In other words, Zevi’s descent into impurity was a paradigm they needed to emulate, and therefore they were led to perform strange acts. In order for evil to be destroyed, believers needed to descend and to conquer evil in its abode. The second idea maintained that those who belonged to the messianic world could not sin. Zevi had eradicated the sin of Adam and allowed for the new Torah to be established. They transformed sin into something holy, i.e., the adoption of a notion of redemption through sin. Although there were divisions about what this meant, in reality both these ideas meant that the radicals were committed to sin’s redeeming power and that sinning became holy. Actions which seemed outwardly sinful were viewed as internally holy. Some saw it as starving the *Kelippot* (world of evil) from their sparks of holiness until they died; others saw it as inundating the *Kelippot* with sparks of holiness until they burst from the pressure. The *Torah de-Atzilut* was to be secretly observed, while the *Torah de-Beriah* was to be transgressed. Because antinomianism tends to draw more attention than quiet traditionalism, ultimately the moderates were associated by the normative establishment with their more radical brethren. The moderates did not survive historically, as they were assimilated among their traditional Jewish brethren, but although they encountered further divisions themselves, the radicals endured the test of time and lasted for several hundred years after the initial movement. Zevi’s death had come about while he was banished in Albania in 1676, and only his followers had seemed to be concerned with the event. Afterwards, Sabbatean followers could mainly be found

in Turkey, Italy and Poland, although there were still believers in other parts of the diaspora.

It is important to note that the centre of Sabbatean antinomianism arose in Salonika, a home for former Marranos. Not only could the former conversos of Spain and Portugal relate to the external facade of the apostasy, but they might be drawn to a kind of anti-rabbinic religion as the halakhah for them was new and somewhat overwhelming. In addition, according to Sharot, Salonika in the latter half of the seventeenth century was under an economic strain and taxes were high; conversion to Islam meant lessening the taxation burden. Moreover, focusing on a spiritual world that was beyond worldly possessions was attractive to those who were sinking into economic hardships.<sup>37</sup> According to Yerushalmi, some of the characteristics of the religion of the Marranos were: “the need for secrecy, absence of Jewish books...and observance, obvious syncretism, and the tendency toward messianism.”<sup>38</sup> Not only were Marranos known to provide messiah figures themselves, in 1525 they were highly responsive to messianic pretenders such as David Reuveni. Because of their experiences of forced conversion and their secret adherence to Jewish tradition, the Marranos were more prepared than most to accept Zevi’s conversion. They could sympathize with his external mask and trust that other processes were at work internally. In addition, they could justify their own past behaviour because the messiah himself had to undergo a similar experience. Abraham Cardoso proudly claimed that “it is ordained that the king messiah don the garments of a Marrano and so go unrecognized by his fellow Jews. In a word, it is ordained that he become a Marrano like me.”<sup>39</sup> Because Marranos could understand that Zevi was not leaving his faith when he decided to convert, they were prime candidates for the reception of post-conversion theology.

The opponent, Jacob Sasportas, had previously predicted a schism in the religion, which came to fruition in the sect which came to be called the “Doenmeh.” The Doenmeh (Turkish for apostate), grew out of the radical sect of Sabbateanism and held to the belief that Zevi’s followers must imitate his conversion. Therefore these Sabbateans, who numbered a few hundred, also converted externally to Islam while remaining Jews

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<sup>37</sup> Sharot, 128.

<sup>38</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York: Columbia, 1971), 35.

<sup>39</sup> Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 95.

internally. They practiced a combination of the Jewish and Muslim traditions, but they also developed their own ceremonies. The early writings of the Doenmeh show that they had “eighteen commandments” that were their rules of behaviour. Their rules included a repetition of the Ten Commandments, with some leniency on the fornication law. Within their homes, they kept unrecognizable synagogues (without altars or scrolls) yet they continued to pray Muslim prayers in mosques. One of their prayers reveals their paradoxical attitude towards the law. Part of it states,

I believe with perfect faith that this Torah (of Moses) cannot be exchanged and that there will be no other Torah; only the commandments have been abolished, but the Torah remains binding forever and to all eternities.<sup>40</sup>

The paradox is explicable by understanding the two kinds of Torah that existed for them. Like other Sabbateans, they believed in two aspects of Torah—Torah *de-Beriah* plus Torah *de-Atziluth*, which would only be revealed at the time of redemption. Because redemption was not yet complete, the Torah of Creation still reigned until the second coming of the messiah. The Doenmeh’s belief in the supremacy of the supernal Torah led to exploring many freedoms, with particular emphasis on sexual license. They married only among themselves, avoiding both Jews and Muslims. They were known for their freedom of exchanging wives during sexual intimacy and in this regard many opponents arose, including Abraham Cardoso, who accused the Doenmeh of being “foolish victims of demons.”<sup>41</sup> The Beth Din of Thessaloniki, which did not consider them Jews, caused them to leave the city for Constantinople, where the majority continued to live. Within the first fifty years, the Doenmeh split into two groups—the Izmirlis and the Jacobites—the latter of which was established by the brother of Zevi’s second wife. In 1700, the Izmirlis were split again when Barukhia Russo was proclaimed as a new incarnation of Zevi. Under Russo the sect known as the Konyosos, became even more radical in terms of sexual freedoms. Some of its members made many missionary journeys to Poland, Austria and Germany. Scholem claims that the Doenmeh were still recognizable as a sect even into the 1900’s. Barukhia’s influence led to a new movement in Poland, led by Jacob Frank, which was marked by extreme libertine behaviour. Barukhia, who among other things, justified the abolition of the incest prohibition by the rise of the *Torah de-*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 165.

*Atziluth* over the *Torah de-Beriah*, influenced the new Frankist movement (a label actually developed later).

Jacob Frank was born in Podolia in 1726 and was acquainted with Sabbateanism from his youth. In the 1750's he developed a radical branch of the Doenmeh but replaced Islam with Catholicism. Frank now declared himself the next reincarnation of Zevi but went beyond even what Zevi or Nathan could have predicted. He claimed "I have come to abolish all laws and religions and bring life to the world...Do not believe that only the Jews have to be saved, God forbid, all mankind has to."<sup>42</sup> The Frankists had a list of statements of belief that included anti-halakhic principles. For example, one stated that "the Talmud which is full of unparalleled blasphemies against God, should and must be rejected."<sup>43</sup> Unlike Zevi, Jacob Frank did not need a manic phase to inspire his antinomian behaviour, as it permeated his entire theology. Antinomianism, along with millenarianism and divinization of man, were all central elements of the Frankist religion. Scholem states that Frank avoids some of the more abstract concepts of Sabbateanism, such as *Kelippot*, *Beriah* and *Atziluth*, and focuses more on "exoteric" ideas such as "the Good God," "the Big Brother" and "the Virgin."<sup>44</sup> For Frank, even though the spiritual *Torah de-Aztiluth* is the ideal one, it is unattainable, consequently nihilism is the solution so that eventually the "Good God" can manifest himself in this world. Frank openly declared war on tradition, a policy that manifested itself in ecstatic singing and orgiastic ritual. Like Zevi's thinking after his conversion, Frank's doctrine underwent further elaboration, where the messiah first needed to descend into the abyss (Rome). Frank believed that the world was created by an evil entity and that the laws of this world did not come from the true God. Therefore part of redemption meant a negation of these laws as expressed in all religions and morality, i.e., nihilism. However, sinful acts which were viewed as holy needed to be done in a secretive manner. Christianity was seen as the garb that could mask their inner process of redemption. He states:

This much I tell you: Christ as you know, said that he had come to redeem the world from the hands of the devil, but I have come to redeem it from

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<sup>42</sup> Arthur Mandel, *The Militant Messiah* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), 37.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Doktor, "Jakub Frank, A Jewish Heresiarch and His Messianic Doctrine," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 76 (1997): 60.

<sup>44</sup> Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 128.



all the laws and customs that have ever existed. It is my task to annihilate all this so that the Good God can reveal Himself.<sup>45</sup>

Some scholars, such as Ben Zion Wacholder, conclude that Frank's antinomianism was only temporary—lasting until Edom was defeated—whereupon Israel would return to performing the commandments. He says that although antinomianism did eventually become central to the Frankist movement, in its initial stage, as implied by Frank's disciples in a Hebrew-Zoharic letter, "...it had been a mere stratagem to please the Christians." Therefore, although Frank rejects the main tenet of Judaism, as expressed in his interpretation of Psalm 119:126, "It is time to do for the Lord; Destroy the Torah!" it is a means to an end; apostasy is necessary for the arrival of the messiah. Some followers believed in the necessity to renounce Judaism, while others felt they needed only a "spiritual" conversion, i.e., they partook in some concepts of Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Many would only convert on certain conditions, such as the continual maintenance of a Jewish identity. They were not granted their wishes and, after a dispute, Frank and five hundred followers from Podolia were baptized, although most followers in other parts of Poland were not. Sharot suggests that not all were ready to imitate Frank, as this meant a schism with the Jewish community. Even though many desired a less strict observance, Frankism did not provide complete freedom, since acts could only be performed in concealment. Scholem thinks that Frank's ideas were not rational but part of a mythological fantasy and that through him the worst elements of Sabbateanism were brought to their greatest potential.

Unlike Wacholder, most scholars see antinomianism as a goal of Frankism. They perceive Frank to be an example of a strong personality who seeks personal gain from his beliefs. Jacob Allerhand explains that the inhabitants of Podolia and East Galicia could easily "fall prey to a pathological fanatic" because of conditions of extreme poverty, Gentile animosity, and religious confusion.<sup>47</sup> Sharot would agree that the disintegrating social climate as well as "the absence of religious leadership made these areas [Poland]

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Doktor, *Jakub Frank*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob Allerhand, "The Frankist Movement and its Polish Context," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Poles and Jews: Myth and Reality in the Historical Context* (New York: Columbia University, 1983), 97.

particularly receptive to the religious teachings of charismatic leaders.”<sup>48</sup> These faithful followers, like those of Zevi, continued to follow him and to worship him as God incarnate, even after his arrest in 1760. However, after his death in 1791, a Frankist sect with the intensity and complexity of the earlier Sabbateans did not emerge. Many among those who returned to traditional ways became part of the secular or reform movement. Those who had been baptized were still recognizable for several generations, however most eventually could not be distinguished from other Christians in Poland.

From the beginning of Shabbatai Zevi’s messianic claims in Smyrna to the post-conversion events, rabbinic opposition arose in various places. From 1674 to 1680, Abraham Cardoso was the main leader in Smyrna, and his response could be placed in the moderate camp. Even though the moderates seemed rather unchallenging to their mainstream Jewish counterparts, they did display some opposition, which is exemplified in the letters between Abraham Cardoso and his brother Isaac. Abraham Cardoso was a prolific writer for the Sabbatean movement in the form of letters and tracts, which, after Nathan in importance, helped spread the ideology. Although both Abraham and Isaac came from the same “converso” background, they approached Sabbateanism from opposing viewpoints. Isaac lived in Verona, Italy, and he had witnessed disorder in his town during the abolition of the ninth of Av in 1666. Abraham had been in Leghorn, Egypt, and finally in Tripoli during 1666 to 1668, where he and his brother Isaac disputed through a series of letters. It appears that Abraham wrote Isaac before the conversion in 1666. His letters did not contain much information on Zevi’s antinomian acts, and when Abraham had composed the letters he had already become fully observant. In line with the moderate faction’s theology, Abraham viewed the conversion as necessary only for the messiah and fought against those who sought to imitate him. Abraham expressed to his brother that Zevi’s earlier changes in the law were necessary for a certain period of time and that in the messianic age the Torah will be changed.<sup>49</sup> He stated, “The Torah as it now exists will not exist in the messianic age.”<sup>50</sup> Isaac Cardoso, however, refused to believe in the temporality of the law of Moses and insisted that Israel must always observe its precepts. Isaac was willing to concede that only for a limited amount of time

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<sup>48</sup> Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 135.

<sup>49</sup> Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court*, 328

<sup>50</sup> Sharot, 124.

can a prophet violate a law, but he must return to observance thereafter.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Isaac was adamant against the turning of fasts into days of feasting. This disapproval is revealed both in his letters and works that criticize Zevi who

elated by the acclamations of the ignorant masses, thought that he was permitted to do many things. He transgressed a number of precepts of the Law, violated the Sabbath, uttered the ineffable Name of God, offered sacrifices outside the Temple and the Holy Land, profaned the fasts instituted by our ancestors, and converted into a festival the celebrated fast of the month of July which was instituted in memory of the overthrow of Jerusalem by Titus and was wont to be observed by wailing, grief and tears, because he was born on that day. His pupils and followers immersed themselves in banquets. While others sat, praying and beating their breasts, affected by the fast... they gave themselves to meals and banquets; while others were overwhelmed by hunger and thirst, showed their bitterness, they danced and joyously played their instruments....<sup>52</sup>

Isaac Cardoso's words represent the sentiment and cynicism of the opposition. In the early days of the movement, as well as after the apostasy, rabbinic leaders were hostile to Zevi and his challenges to established ritual. They observed that Zevi's antinomian actions were not in conformity with the standard rabbinic prerequisites for the messiah. However, the rabbinate in the late-medieval period was not a unified establishment, and this contributed to their lack of success against revolutionary movements. As well, religious authority continued to be under attack from various groups, including those exiled from Iberia and the conversos. Safed and Jerusalem were cities where rabbinic authority attempted to centralize itself, particularly under Jacob Hagiz in Jerusalem. Hagiz had been responsible for the ban of excommunication against Zevi. After Jacob Hagiz died without having accomplished his goal to augment and centralize rabbinic authority, his son Moses Hagiz made another attempt. By the time of Moses Hagiz, Sabbateanism had developed into a complex movement. In the eighteenth century, Hagiz was involved in three anti-Sabbatean controversies. He thought Sabbateans should be separate from the Jewish community and compared them with groups such as the Samaritans, Saducees or Karaites. Hagiz and Isaac Cardoso were just two of many opponents of Sabbateanism that arose because of the threat to traditional religion.

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<sup>51</sup> Yerushalmi, 334.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 345.

Despite the opposition, Sabbateanism with its various degrees of antinomianism spread swiftly within the Jewish community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although Gershom Scholem does not believe that persecution or crises led to the quick acceptance of Shabbatai Zevi, the general mindset of the Jewish people throughout the ages, particularly those who experienced or at least heard of the many expulsions and persecutions, would always be one of messianic longing. The existential state of the Jew in exile is one of a conscious or unconscious sense of powerlessness or insecurity. Naturally, an offer of salvation would be considered seriously, even if it did not totally conform to tradition. Some scholars think that Zevi was able to project his own longing and illness onto the Jewish people, who would then themselves sense the need for a solution. One scholar comments, "Sevi's extraordinary qualities of body and soul were also essential to the success of the movement, as was his persistence in projecting his desperate inner patienthood to the mass level in search of a cure."<sup>53</sup> In other words, Zevi's illness reflected the state of the Jew in Diaspora. Once the masses realized they were in need, the changes that Zevi made in the law became a necessary part of the solution to their sense of desperation.

The Jewish tradition contains contradictory statements on the nature of the law in the messianic era, and therefore when antinomianism appears in an historical movement it might not be considered too unusual. Jewish tradition does not have a complete consensus on the fate of the law in the messianic era, and Jewish texts, particularly those with a mystical leaning, provide ammunition for those who would like to see changes or abolitions. Consequently, when opinion is diverse and includes the notion of a "Torah of the messianic age" it becomes difficult to judge whether or not a messianic figure or movement is in keeping with tradition. This lack of clarity manifested itself within the Sabbatean movement. There were several factions within Sabbateanism where adherence to the law became a central issue that distinguished one from the other, and even within the various Sabbatean branches disharmony existed concerning the extent of antinomianism. The latter was justified through concepts within mystical literature and was further ignited by a charismatic individual. Shabbatai Zevi himself did not place

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<sup>53</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, "The Mahdi and the Messiah," in *Religious Resurgence* (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1987), 104.

restrictions on the law and this only provided encouragement to his followers after him. Although Sabbateanism at its inception was not so extreme in its anti-halakhic sentiment, it contained the elements that could attract those who would take it to dangerous levels.

Zevi's initial movement, although short-lived, made an impact that lasted for hundreds of years, because it had deep roots that had begun in the Jewish mystical texts which then intertwined with historical reality. However, those who rode on the tail of Zevi's accomplishments did not have the same depth as those who originally inspired and wrote interpretations for his antinomian acts. Zevi and his followers were not simply a group of anti-establishment heretics but were committed to their ideology. Although they often went against halakhic authority, they sought to explain their behaviour on the basis of authoritative traditional texts. They believed that they were participating in a mystical reparation process, even though their opponents viewed it otherwise. However, there is an acute difference between those such as the Marranos, who had a deep and serious connection to the ideology, and others who merely used it for their own self-interest as did many of the Frankists. Like members of many messianic movements, some Sabbateans sought to affirm their inner religious truth, whereas others were mainly motivated by personal desire or rebellion. Sabbateanism fizzled out with Jacob Frank, because he was more of a charlatan who exploited the principles of the movement for his own benefit. After his death, Frank's daughter Eva could barely carry on a legacy that was so superficial.

The anti-traditional spirit of the age proclaimed itself through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Christian movements such as the Anabaptists, Evangelicals, the Separatists, the Familists, the Ranters, and the Independents in France, England and the Netherlands.<sup>54</sup> These groups broke away from the established Church tradition and often developed revolutionary ideas. W.D. Davies affirms in his article, "Reflections on Sabbatai Zevi," that "the experience of the freedom of the children of God led to antinomian tendencies."<sup>55</sup> It can be deduced that Sabbateans worldwide were participating in this emerging outlook of freedom. In a world that gradually came to facilitate more intellectual discourse and more ideological freedom, combined with an

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<sup>54</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, v.1, 458.

<sup>55</sup> Saperstein, *Essential Papers*, 342.

eternal inner Jewish desire for redemption and justified by mystical texts, the antinomian aspects of Sabbateanism did not seem so heretical.

## Conclusion

From antiquity until the seventeenth century, major Jewish works contain passages about messianism, and whether it is a pervasive part or just a minor component of the source, the law is always inextricably linked to it. The fate of the law falls into several different categories that range along a spectrum of continual validity towards abrogation. Because of the debate about the meaning of various passages the placement of the texts within the spectrum is not always straightforward.<sup>1</sup> Scholars like Davies represent the more moderate faction that views Jewish texts (up to the early rabbinic period) as containing some elements of change in the law. Others like Diez-Macho see Jewish texts as presenting a clear picture of a new Torah in the messianic age, while some as exemplified by R. Banks or A. Chester are on the opposite extreme end of the scale, seeing little evidence for the idea of a new Torah in Judaism prior to the destruction of the Temple. Nor does Banks hold to the notion of abrogation in post-second Temple literature, where he finds only the idea of the reinterpretation of the law. These scholars do not deal for the most part with post-talmudic literature, which offers possible notions of mutability of the law in the messianic era.

The Bible, the foundational document on which many succeeding works base their messianic pictures can be placed in several of the categories. Perpetuity of the law is expressed through an idealized kingship with an eschatological vision where the law will both emanate from Zion and will be internalized in the hearts of the people. The ambiguity of the new covenant passage of Jeremiah 31 leads to its use throughout the ages to justify a new law sometimes without external manifestations. This debate becomes particularly heated in the Middle Ages during disputations with Christians. As a result, Jewish commentators fervently support a non-abolition stance regarding this passage and many others.

The desire to stress the eternal validity of the law always maintained a momentum, often because continual threats to its existence were encouraged by political

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<sup>1</sup> Categories themselves can become confusing when, for example, trying to determine if a change in the degree of observance of the law is equal to a change in the status of the law. For example, many scholars accept Jer. 31 as a change in human nature but not in the law itself.

circumstances and philosophical tendencies in and outside of Judaism. During the second Temple period, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were written against a political landscape where the law becomes a weapon against opponents and an entity that must be guarded from all its potential destroyers. As a result, any present day messianic figures (i.e., Maccabees) or future redeemers are portrayed as those who safeguard and fearlessly proclaim the perpetuity of the law. In addition, the law's connection to wisdom reinforces its eternality. The Dead Sea sect, with its break from the Jerusalem priestly establishment offers its sacerdotal and intensified version of the law, which becomes the ideal and continual legislation for the messianic era. Philo proclaims the eternality of the law in Stoic garb. The early rabbinic texts transform the messianic law into a rabbinic system of halakhah that the messiah will properly transmit and interpret. The medieval world fought against threatening religions and false messiahs and also needed to comment upon the wealth of earlier Jewish texts resulting in the support of the continuity of the law sometimes to an extreme point. In general, each group supported the continuation of the law but placed their distinct stamp on the details. The attitude toward the participation of the gentile nations in the law was also determined to a large extent on reaction to historical events. Judgement towards the nations was prevalent in all the texts because of current persecutions, yet the notion of at least a portion of the gentiles who wholly or partially engage in law and worship with the Jewish community is seen as the ideal for the messianic era.

Although the texts reflect the need to aver continually to the immutability of the law, in each age streams of thought allow for eventual changes and cessations. Pre-exilic prophets like Jeremiah do not mention a new Temple, whereas Ezekiel speaks of a Temple different from anything previously described. Texts from the second Temple period, such as 1 Enoch, sometimes consider the attainment of righteousness through the belief in supernal concepts like the son of man over the observance of the law. Certain pseudepigraphal works emphasize universal values rather than specific law. If Wacholder's theory is correct, the *Temple Scroll* speaks of a new law. Various midrashim speak of abolitions of festivals and sacrifices. Medieval commentators like Abrabanel and Albo leave room for the possibility of a new reality where the future redemption will be greater than previous redemptive events and lead to changes in the law. The Dead Sea



scrolls, early rabbinic texts, and medieval mystical volumes predict a greater revelation of interpretation in the messianic era, when ambiguous passages will be fully understood. Whether some or all of these changes will occur in the messianic era, a considerable shift will be required in order to establish the conditions that will allow for the purity reflected in the vision of the Dead Sea scrolls, the fuller revelation discussed in the other literature. the universal dissemination of the law, the reestablishment of the Temple. or the change in human nature that will be needed for observance of the law. Some modern scholars may not accept these streams as serious evidence in Jewish texts, particularly the early rabbinic ones about cessations or alterations in the law, yet, messianic movements perceived these notions and were influenced by them.

The shattering of the theoretical portrayal of messianism as mainly supportive of the law's continuity came when a concrete movement arrived onto the historical scene. In the first century, the New Testament reflects a movement that relied heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures for validation, and also transformed those same writings endowing them with new interpretations. The New Testament did not have the early rabbinic works or medieval and mystical texts to contemplate as did the Sabbatean movement of the seventeenth century. Its main point of reference was the Bible and it placed a high value on its contents.<sup>2</sup> Specific laws within the Pentateuch are transformed: rituals like those of the Passover are reinterpreted in light of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount is evidence of the importance placed on the inner motivation of the law as interpreted by the latter, and the sacrificial system becomes obsolete due to the atoning work of this messianic figure. The Temple many times is spiritualized and will eventually be of no value due to the immanent presence of God. The authority of Jesus allows him to reinterpret Mosaic law and criticize oral tradition.

The more radical expression of antinomianism came from the Sabbatean movement. Its leader had studied talmudic and mystical texts and its propagandist Nathan, purposefully used them to explain the changes made to the laws by Zevi.<sup>3</sup> As a

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<sup>2</sup> If one of the definitions of the law for the New Testament was that it signified "The Prophets and the Law" then its numerous quotes and allusions from the Bible would be one of its ways of expressing completion or fulfillment.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that its reliance upon mystical texts rather than the Bible, partially contributed to its eventual downfall as the latter is the base from which many Jewish works revolve and its contents penetrated all

result of the streams regarding the changes in the status of the law in many Jewish texts, particularly those with a mystical bent, messianic movements like Sabbateanism felt at liberty to express an antinomian attitude. The two major aforementioned movements made an important impact in Jewish history, yet, others appeared throughout the centuries who perhaps also fed on the antinomian or utopian strains in the texts and who consequently, challenged the overall restorative approach with its restitution and perpetuation of the law.

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levels of society. Kabbalistic sources did not have the simplicity or accessibility of the Bible and therefore movements that relied on the former texts had less of a chance for survival.

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