

# One Torah for All—Are Christians obligated to follow the Law of Moses?

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In the statement “*One Torah(Law) for All*” is the inherent question of whether Christians are obligated to “*follow the law*” of Moses? The idea is since Yeshua was an observant Jew and we are called to follow him, or to walk in his footsteps, Christians are also obligated to live a life that observes the Torah. When this topic is brought up in discussions, the typical response is “*you should read the book of Galatians,*” or “*even the Apostles admitted the Torah was a burden that no one could bear!*” These are common assertions that are made based upon a classical interpretation of *Acts 15* regarding the ruling of the Jerusalem Council on the Torah and obedience to the faith. Many theologians and their theologies [1] have their basis on an interpretation of the ruling of the Jerusalem council regarding the place of the Torah in the life of a Gentile (non-Jewish) believer. A few examples of these theologies include Bilateral Ecclesiology [2], Replacement theology, Dispensationalism, Supersessionism, etc. Others believe that Yeshua’s words in *Matthew 11:28-30*, which say, <sup>28</sup> “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 ‘Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 ‘For My yoke is easy and My burden is light,’*” (NASB) was a rejection of the Torah in exchange for something new for the Gentile believers. However, did Yeshua really teach his disciples that for the Gentiles the Torah of God was not a way of life? This question actually involves a misunderstanding of the Apostles and Paul’s words on whether a Christian should follow the law as it is developed by the rabbis of the post-Second Temple period (Tannaitic period of the Mishnah and Talmud) versus the Torah that was given at the mountain of Sinai. This is what brought about the need to convene the Jerusalem Council in the first place. In this paper we will examine the misunderstanding on whether Christians are obligated to follow the law of Moses by examining (i) what it means to be obedient to the faith in the first century, (ii) ritual conversion to Judaism by circumcision, and (iii) the meaning of the yoke of the kingdom and of Yeshua the Messiah.

## 1.1 Obedience to the Faith

Obedience to the faith was a very important concept for the first century church (ekklesia). In order to provide some context to our understanding on the opinion of the Apostles regarding Yeshua’s teachings and the Torah, let’s begin by looking at *Acts 6:7-7:1*. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the word of God continued to spread, and many disciples continued to be made in Jerusalem, and many of the priests were becoming “*obedient to the faith.*” [3] According to *Acts 6:7*, Luke writes that many were coming to faith and becoming “*obedient*” (shomer, שמר) . According to the Torah (see *Parashat Ki Tavo on Devarim / Deuteronomy 28:1*) obedience is the act of “*keeping,*” “*listening,*” “*doing,*” and “*obeying*” the commands of God. In Jewish thought, the mitzvot (commandments) are not considered burdensome but are considered opportunities to express gratitude to God for the gift of life. The one who observes or keeps the commandment of the Lord guards his own life, and by keeping the commandment one aligns his soul (nefesh) with life and truth. This is expressed in the Hebrew phrase “*shomer mitzvah, shomer nafsho,*” (*Mishley / Proverbs 19:16*) which means, “*he who keeps the commandment, keeps/preserves his life.*” A similar concept might be envisioned in *Acts 6:7* where we read “*... and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*” The question is though, “*would the priests who are becoming obedient to the faith be in the process of leaving the Torah command?*” Scripture states that obedience to the command is keeping ones life. What then is meant by the statement, “*the priests were becoming obedient to the faith?*” One suggestion may be that the priests were leaving the rabbinic halacha of the first century rabbis in exchange for Yeshua’s halacha, or that they were learning obedience through their suffering (persecution). [4]

The narrative continues in Acts speaking of Stephen who was moved powerfully by the Holy Spirit performing signs and wonders among the people. He was so powerfully moved that nobody could stand against the wisdom that God had given him and the Spirit by which he was speaking. Because of this, men from the “*Synagogue of the Freedmen,*” according to *Acts 6:13* “*... put forward false witnesses who said, ‘This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law.’*” (NASB) The Scriptures describe these men as “*false witnesses.*” Therefore Stephen was not speaking against the Torah nor against the Temple in Jerusalem at this time. In this early account of the Acts of the Apostles, false accusers were saying that this movement (Christianity) was teaching against the Torah, against Moses, and against the Temple in Jerusalem, which summarily suggests these early believers (*i.e. Stephen*) were speaking against the Lord God Himself. However, based upon *Acts 6:13* this was not the case. The apostles were teaching observance of the Torah to the people in the context of Yeshua being the risen Messiah of God. Based upon these Scriptures, has Christianity become what this New Testament text was claiming of Stephen? Rejection of the Torah is understood to be taking a stand against Moses and

against the Temple in Jerusalem, and historically is synonymous to standing against the Word of God? Today we hear much about the Torah as a burden which is not for the body of believers (the Church). This has been derived from the Apostle Paul's letters to the gentile churches and specifically from the book of Galatians.

In the book of Galatians, while Paul was visiting Antioch, he writes about Peter withdrawing from the Gentiles holding himself aloof in fear of the Jews. According to *Galatians 2:11-22*, Paul said that Peter was carried away in hypocrisy (*Galatians 2:12-13*). Paul stated that Peter's hypocrisy is characterized as "*being a Jew, he lived like the Gentiles and not like the Jews*" and he then states, "*how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?*" What exactly was Paul referring to when he said this about Peter? To set the background for what Paul is saying, we need to look at the rabbinic understanding on conversion and circumcision.

## 1.2 Judaism, Ritual Conversion, and Circumcision

In Midrash Tehillim 31, Part 8, [5] the rabbis discuss the idea of the man whose prayer the Lord hears. The conclusion is that the Lord only hears the prayers of the one who is a "*complete proselyte*." This is very important for our understanding regarding what is going on between the Apostle Paul and Peter in *Galatians 2*. The term "*proselyte*" is an Anglicization of the Koine Greek term προσήλυτος (proselutos), as used in the Septuagint for "*stranger*," a "*newcomer to Israel*," or a "*sojourner in the land*." Note in the NT this word is used as a reference to a first century convert to Judaism (see *Matthew 23:15*, *Acts 2:10*, *6:5*, and *13:43*). The Greek term προσήλυτος (proselutos) is a translation of the Hebrew phrase גר תושב (*ger toshav*, see Strongs H1616 for list of references in the Torah). Today the term "*proselyte*" has a more general meaning in the English language of a new convert to a particular religion or doctrine, also known as Proselytism. There are two kinds of proselytes in Rabbinic Judaism: (i) the *ger tzedek* (גרי הצדק, meaning "*righteous proselytes, proselytes of righteousness, religious proselyte, devout proselyte*"), and (ii) the *ger toshav* (meaning "*resident proselyte, proselytes of the gate, limited proselyte, half-proselyte*"). A "*righteous proselyte*" (*ger tzedek*, גרי הצדק) is a gentile who has converted to Judaism (taking on the Yoke of Judaism), is bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the rabbis in Judaism, and is considered a full member of the Jewish community. They are to be circumcised as adults (*this is different from a brit milah, the 8<sup>th</sup> day circumcision of infants*) and immersed in a mikvah. The gate proselyte (*ger toshav*) on the other hand is someone who lives in the land of Israel and follows only some of the precepts in the Torah for the purpose of being able to live in the community and make money.

According to the Midrash, the rabbis are commenting on the minimum requirements for one to receive God's protection in the midst of one's enemies, and those whom the Lord preserves are those who are complete converts to Judaism. What is interesting is the concept the rabbis are teaching in the midrash. The idea is that the Lord would hear a gentile's prayer only if he was a "*complete proselyte*" to Judaism. This is where the Greek verb ioudaizō (ἰουδαῖζω "*live according to Jewish customs*") comes from in the NT. This term is most widely known from its single use in the Greek New Testament in *Galatians 2:14* where the Apostle Paul publicly challenges Peter for compelling Gentile believers to convert or to become Jews (to "*judaize*") at Antioch. This is an interesting rabbinic concept since it also helps our understanding of *Galatians 5* regarding circumcision of the new Gentile believers. The point about Midrash Tehillim 31 Part 8, the rabbis are saying in order for God to hear one's prayer a person needed to be a complete convert, a "*righteous proselyte*" (*ger tzedek*, גרי הצדק). Based upon the teaching of the rabbis, Peter was doing what he knew regarding Gentile believers and when the Jews came he withdrew from the Gentiles, he was essentially receiving pressure from his friends to follow the traditions of the rabbis rather than the teachings of Yeshua. Paul said that it is by faith we are saved, not by the work of the flesh. He uses the concept of circumcision because this is the entry point to being a *ger tzedek*, (גרי הצדק) a righteous proselyte. Paul however argues that one does not enter into a relationship with the Lord by the circumcision of the flesh but rather by the circumcision of the heart. This is achieved by faith in the Messiah Yeshua. Paul parallels the works of the flesh to uncleanness that proceeds from the heart, which is described in *Galatians 5* as anger, jealousy, immorality, sensuality, idolatry, outbursts, and drunkenness. Note also that Paul said he was not teaching against circumcision (see *Galatians 5:11*). It is important to remember that Paul had Timothy circumcised (see *Acts 16:1-3*), therefore, Paul was not speaking against the Torah, or against circumcision. He was speaking against relying upon the flesh for entering into the kingdom of God and for salvation. The main issue for the Galatians was whether God would work in the life of a Gentile convert (*i.e. hear his prayer*) if they did not become a "*complete proselyte*" (*ger tzedek*, גרי הצדק). This was a very rabbinic understanding as Yeshua said "*salvation is of the Jews*" (*John 4:22*), and some people were taking this literally, along with the rabbinic understanding of salvation, to mean that in order to be saved one needed to become a Jew.

## 1.3 The Yoke of the Kingdom and of Yeshua the Messiah

Considering Yeshua's words, "*salvation is of the Jews*," and the rabbinic understanding that one needed to convert to Judaism in order to be saved (enter into the covenant), then the logical conclusion was that one needed to become a *ger tzedek*. Taking on of the "*Yoke of the rabbis (Judaism)*" is at the root of becoming a *ger tzedek* (a righteous proselyte),

but according to Paul the Yoke of Judaism is the root of the problem. In the NT, we find this “yoke” terminology being used under different contexts. How is the “yoke of Judaism” different from the “Yoke of the Kingdom,” “Yoke of the Torah,” and the “Yoke of Yeshua?” In order to sort this out let’s look at Midrash Tehillim 38, Part 2. [6]

The midrash on Psalms 38 Part 2 speaks of the works of the Lord and of Abraham. The rabbis say that a wondrous work of God was to make Abraham receive the yoke of the kingdom, not for himself but for the sake of his children. What does it mean to choose the “yoke of the kingdom?” They say that He did so for our sake so that we might endure the world. They go on to describe four things that God showed to Abraham. The Lord showed Abraham (i) the Torah, (ii) the yoke of the kingdom, (iii) Gehenna (Hell), and (iv) Offerings. According to the Rachmal [7], “Man was given the task of rectifying all creation... thus man is God’s servant and therefore has the responsibility of good deeds, this responsibility is called God’s yoke, and is very much like the yoke a master places on his slave... wearing the tzitzit, the tallit, morning prayers, these are other aspects of partaking in God’s work and this is known as acceptance of God’s yoke.” According to the Rachmal’s teachings, doing good deeds and obeying God’s word are synonymous to taking on the “Yoke of God,” also known as the “Yoke of Torah.” The Jewish Encyclopedia [8] provides a summary on Judaism’s understanding of the “yoke of the kingdom,” saying the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven” are synonymous. The establishment of a kingdom on earth requires the recognition by man whereby “man must take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of God.” Taking on the yoke of the kingdom is synonymous to becoming a part of the kingdom of God. Judaism teaches that this is done daily while reciting the Shema. According to Judaism, taking on the yoke of the kingdom is also synonymous with man casting away his idols. [8] According to the Scriptures, an idol can be more than a wooden, stone, or metal object. *Ezekiel 14* describes how men construct idols in their hearts, which can be anything that takes one away from seeking after God (e.g. lust, pride, covetousness, sports, television, mobile devices, etc). Therefore, the taking of the “yoke of the kingdom” casting away one’s idols within the context of *Ezekiel 14*, suggests that the yoke of the kingdom changes a person on the inside. Each proselyte who joins Judaism takes upon himself the yoke of God’s Kingdom.

Looking at this from a Torah perspective, according to Parashat Mishpatim (*Shemot / Exodus 21:1-24:18*), we are told about the Hebrew slave who has his ear pierced casts off the yoke of God’s kingdom to bend to the yoke of another sovereignty. This is interesting since the Torah describes God’s desire for us to be free from slavery, yet provides the option to willingly become a life long slave. Note in the Torah that the person is brought before the Lord God at His Temple (or Tabernacle) and to the door or door post of the new master, and using an awe, a ring is placed in his ear to indicate that he has dedicated his life to his master as a “bond-servant” for the remainder of his life. The Hebrew text states וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֲדָנָיו וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדֶּלֶת אוֹ אֶל-הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֲדָנָיו אֶת-אָזְנוֹ בַּמַּרְצֵעַ וְעָבָדוּ לְעֹלָם: *21:6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.* (NASB) Moses writes saying וְהִגִּישׁוּ “and he brought him near” unto God, and to “the mezuzah” (הַמְּזוּזָה, door post). This is important because the Scriptures say we are to write the Torah on our door posts (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:9*) and the rabbinic interpretation is to put a mezuzah near the door to fulfill this command. The mezuzah contains a small Torah scroll. According to the Torah the new master himself is Torah observant and would force an awe on the servants ear fixing a hole in the ear against the mezuzah, against the Torah, against the Word of God, and blood is shed. This typifies making a covenant before God. The parallel here is phenomenal where the taking on of the “yoke of the kingdom” is synonymous to becoming a bond-servant, a willful choice to become a life long slave to the Lord God Almighty. The Apostle Paul uses this bond-servant description to say who we are in Christ (*Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 7:22, Galatians 1:10*). The Jewish Encyclopedia also states that taking on the yoke of the God’s Kingdom is synonymous to the “yoke of the Torah” and that the yoke of the Torah grants freedom from all other yokes. Judaism’s understanding of the Torah is as a good thing and not something bad. The Apostles also believed the same, that the Torah is good and not bad. The Torah sets us free from bondage, it does not put us into bondage.

With these things in mind, Yeshua said the following to his disciples in *Matthew 11:27-30*:

#### **Matthew 11:27-30**

*11:27 ‘All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

*11:28 ‘Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 11:29 ‘Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

*11:30 ‘For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’ (NASB)*

Yeshua said to all who are weary and heavy-laden, he will give rest. Notice how Yeshua says “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” The taking of His yoke is synonymous to learning His ways, to be gentle, humble, and at peace with God and with one another. This suggests that the taking of the yoke of Yeshua is synonymous to submitting our lives to Him in all things and walking in the way that He walks. This yoke constrains us to walk in his ways and in his direction (side by side). When we think of a yoke, what comes to mind is the yoke as a plowing instrument, where two come together to share the burden, making the burden lighter. Therefore, to be unevenly yoked would result in all sorts of problems. When Yeshua

said to come and take His yoke, He is saying that He will help to carry our burdens and to give us rest. Webster's Dictionary defines a burden as something that is carried with much difficulty. Our burdens may be a broken relationship, problems at home, the death of a loved one, addiction, illness, and problems at work to name a few. Yeshua says to take His yoke, meaning to be yoked together with Yeshua, He will help us to bear the burden and give us peace. According to Judaism, the "yoke of the Kingdom," or by taking up God's yoke (e.g. *the yoke of the Torah*) we are joining ourselves to the Lord. What happens when we take on the yoke of Yeshua? Are we not joining ourselves with God? This is also what Judaism teaches with regard to each proselyte who takes upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of God, such a person is going to be walking in a new way and in a new direction, and seeking God our Father in heaven. We find a very similar theme in the Apostolic Writings regarding these things. Taking on the yoke of the kingdom by faith in the Messiah, our lives change. Taking on the yoke of the Torah is synonymous to that of the Kingdom of God. Taking on the yoke of Yeshua we are changed from the inside out, and begin living transformed lives, walking and living in righteousness and justice, truth and innocence, the very things the Torah instructs us to do, and thus the kingdom of God is within us (*Luke 17:20-21*). This is important background information in order to understand *Acts 15*, where we find the apostles using the "yoke" terminology that has caused so much confusion in modern day theologies.

*Acts 15* opens with the men from Judea who are teaching the brethren (the gentiles) that one must be circumcised in the flesh in order to be saved. The men from Judea are essentially asking the gentiles to convert to Judaism because it has been taught and even Yeshua Himself said "*Salvation is of the Jews.*" Those men who want the gentiles to be circumcised have the same opinion as those who wrote Midrash Tehillim 31 Part 8. Studying the Torah we know that God's Word speaks of circumcision both on the outside and on the inside. (*Note that according to the Scriptures, there is a spiritual counterpart to every physical thing we do because we are designed for spiritual things, e.g. Romans 8:28, 12:1-3*) It is also interesting to note while reading through the book of Joshua, physical circumcision did not prevent the people from entering the promised land (e.g. *crossing the Jordan river*). In fact, the Scriptures say that Joshua had the people circumcised after having entered the promised land because they had not been observing this command during the forty year wilderness journey. In addition to this, *Acts 15:1* states circumcision was a "*custom of Moses.*" Notice how the argument does not proceed by saying "*this is a command of God*" but rather this was a "*custom of Moses.*" The men from Judea believed salvation comes by circumcision to become a Jew just like the rabbis say in the midrash regarding the "*righteous proselyte.*" The apostles on the other hand recognized the physical and spiritual counterpart the Torah teaches and conclude it is more important the people had circumcised hearts, because without the circumcised heart one would not have been able to enter the "*Promised Land.*" Note that the uncircumcised heart is what prevented the older generation from entering the Promised Land who died wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. The Apostle Paul and Barnabas (*Acts 15:2-5*) recognized the importance of heart circumcision and took this matter to the counsel at Jerusalem. The Apostles and the elders came together and discussed this matter giving examples of God moving upon the gentile believers by the giving of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 15:7-9*) and say that the Lord made no distinction between the Jew and the non-Jew.

Following the discussion in *Acts 15*, Peter says, *15:10 'Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 15:11 'But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.'* Based upon Peter's words here, how does he understand the meaning of the term "yoke?" Is he referring to taking on the "*Yoke of Judaism,*" to becoming a proselyte to Judaism, or to the rabbis, the work of the flesh? It is important to note that in *Acts 15:5*, the Pharisees say '*It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.*' According to *Acts 15*, there is a distinction being made between circumcision and obeying the Law of Moses, and the reason is the disciples are trying to explain the differences between the Torah and rabbinic tradition. This distinction is being made to indicate how "*circumcision*" is a codeword for conversion to becoming a proselyte to Judaism. [9] According to the Torah, there is no explicit commandment requiring circumcision (and/or immersion) for proselytes; however, the Talmud and the Mishnah provide debates on the topic and today Orthodox and Conservative Jews still require circumcision known as "*hatafat dam brit*" (extracting a drop of blood), as a means for ritual reenactment for conversion.

The yoke that Peter is referring to is not the Torah, rather, he is talking about taking on the "*Yoke of Judaism,*" becoming a proselyte to Judaism and taking upon themselves all of the teachings, sayings, and instructions of the rabbis, including the fence laws and the minutia of the rabbinic observance of the Torah. This is a yoke that is very burdensome, and is the yoke Peter is referring to that our fathers were unable to bear. The yoke of the Torah on the other hand is not burdensome according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:6-14*.

Following Peter's words, the Apostle James speaks up and states the following in *Acts 15:13-18*:

#### ***Acts 15:13-18***

*15:13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, 'Brethren, listen to me. 15:14 'Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.*

*15:15 'With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 15:16 'After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore*

*it, 15:17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,'*  
*15:18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.*

James quotes from *Amos 9:11-12*, saying that the Lord will restore the Tabernacle of David, rebuild its ruins, and restore it, for the purpose that “*all of mankind*” may seek the Lord including all the Gentiles who are called by My Name. The point James is making is according to the prophets in the last days both the Jew and non-Jew will seek the Lord at His tabernacle. This draws us back to the very same question regarding Stephen in *Acts 6-7* and teaching against the Torah and the Temple. James is characterizing the life of a believer as one who is seeking God at the Tabernacle of God. This in and of itself provides for us a picture of worshiping and serving God from a Torah perspective. How does one seek God at His temple without instruction from the Torah? Can we live our lives without instruction from the Torah, or can we understand sin and who Christ is without instruction from the Torah (e.g. the Ten Commandments)?

James continues saying, *15:19 'Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 15:20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. (NASB)* The first thing James does is to require the non-Jew to have certain dietary restrictions and to live in separation (holiness) from idols and fornication for the purpose of drawing near to the Lord. Note this, in and of itself, is the way James is requiring the Gentiles to take on certain aspects of the “*Yoke of the Torah,*” (i.e. *dietary restrictions, fornication, idols*). In the first century a common hermeneutic technique was to summarize all of the Torah using one or two words or phrases. For example, in the rabbinic literature, the evil tongue (*Lashon Hara*) is described as being the source of all plagues and is synonymous to shedding blood, sexual immorality, and idolatry. [10] Thus when the rabbis speak of “*Lashon Hara,*” we know that this is representative of all the negative commands of the Torah. [11] When James gave these restrictions to the gentiles, was he exercising a common rabbinic hermeneutic to summarize all of the Torah by these few requirements based upon the context of *Acts 15:21, 'For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath' (NASB)?* As the Gentiles were coming to faith in the Messiah Yeshua, they would go to the only place they knew to hear the word of the Lord taught, and that is within the local synagogues, and later meeting in their homes throughout the week. Having attended the synagogue services each Shabbat, they would begin the process of learning God’s ways, and their lives would begin to change and to be conformed unto God’s standard (the Torah) by the help of God’s Holy Spirit.

## **2.0 Conclusion**

According to the *Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 2b* and *Midrash Rabba Bamidbar Parashat 1, Part 7*, our Father in Heaven offered the Torah to all the nations of the earth, and the Jews were the only ones who accepted it. It is easy to find within the rabbinic literature the idea that God intended for all men (both Jew and non-Jew) to receive and accept His Torah. The real question is how do we go about applying the Torah to our lives in the midst of our being saved in Yeshua the Messiah? Do we follow the rabbis? Do we make up our own halacha to live out our faith in Yeshua? Salvation is of the Jews therefore are we supposed to convert to Judaism and to become a Jew? These very important questions are what led the people of the first century and the Apostles to convene the counsel of Jerusalem to discuss. Based upon the discussion in *Acts 15*, the people appear to make a distinction with regard to the command of God. Circumcision is a command of God that, according to the Torah, is to be kept throughout your generations (*Bereshit / Genesis 17:12, Vayikra / Leviticus 12:3*). However, in the discussion on circumcision, the argument does not proceed by saying “*this is a command of God*” but rather this was a “*custom of Moses.*” The reason for this discrepancy was to make a distinction between rabbinic halacha verses Yeshua’s halacha and the idea of salvation by conversion. According to Yeshua and the Apostles, salvation is obtained by faith in the Messiah and not by the works of the Law. The apostles recognized that for every physical command there is a spiritual counterpart (*Romans 8:28, 12:1-3*) and conclude that the Torah teaches that it is more important the people have circumcised hearts, since it was the circumcised heart that kept one from entering the “*Promised Land.*” What conclusion can we make regarding whether Christians are obligated to obey the Law of Moses? From both a rabbinic perspective, the Torah perspective, and that of the Apostles, we learn that the Law of Moses does not stand in opposition to salvation and faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The works of the Torah were never meant to be used as a means to earn one’s way into heaven. Throughout the Scriptures we are told that God has made us holy, and therefore, we are called to live holy lives. Salvation comes first by the Grace of God, then we begin to live in a manner that honors and glorifies our Father in Heaven. The Torah is God’s instruction for offering our bodies as living sacrifices. In fact, I would go as far as to say that obeying the Torah is synonymous to walking according to the Spirit. [12-13] Are Christians obligated to observe the Law of Moses? The answer to that question is most definitely a YES!

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3. Acts 6:7-7:1, New American Standard Bible. Anaheim: Foundation, 1997
4. Tim Hegg, *"The Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter Five 150 – [5:9–10],"* <http://www.torahresource.com/Hebrews.html>, Access date: June 5, 2014
5. Midrash Tehillim 31, Part 8, *"Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city (Tehillim / Psalms 31:22), that is, in wicked Rome. For in the words I said in my haste, I am cut off (migrasti) from before Your eyes (Tehillim / Psalms 31:22), nigrasti, which comes from the same stem as garzen in "neither hammer nor axe (garzen)" (1 Kings 6:7), can only mean being cut down by an iron weapon. Another comment, I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes in wicked Rome; You heard the voice of my prayers when I cried to You in Greece. O Love the Lord, all you who worship Him (Tehillim / Psalms 31:24) that is, those who are complete proselytes."*
6. Midrash Tehillim 38, Part 2, *"... Rabbi Khinena son of Papa said, Many, O Lord my God, are the wonderful works which You have done, and Your thoughts which are towards us (Tehillim / Psalms 40:6), many were all the wondrous works and thoughts which You did conceive to make Abraham choose the yoke of the kingdom for himself; the words towards us show that he did so for our sake, that we might endure in this world. Rabbi Simeon son of Abba taught in the name of Rabbi Johanan, that the Holy One blessed be He, let Abraham see four things, Torah, the yoke of the kingdom, Gehenna, and offerings."*
7. (a) Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem and Ma'amar halkkarim, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem, New York, 1998, pg 312-315, (b) *"Three fundamental teachings on the recital of the Shema, (i) the love of God, (ii) acceptance of the yoke of His kingdom, the yoke of His commandments, (iii) remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt,"* Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem, New York, 1998, sixth edition, pg. 291.
8. *"Yoke of the Kingdom,"* <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>, Access Date: Mar. 29, 2014
9. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 263:4; Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, Bris Milah Mesorah Publications Ltd, 1985, pp.103-105; Gemara on Talmud Bavli Tractate Yevamot 4.
10. Mishnah Arachin 15b, Midrash Rabba Deuteronomy 6:8, Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer, 53, Bava Batra 164b
11. See Rambam's Mishneh Torah on the positive and negative commands (<http://www.chabad.org/>)
12. Bits of Torah Truths, *"Parashat Behar, Walking in the Spirit and not after the Law... Err... the Flesh?"* <http://www.matsati.com/index.php/bits-of-torah-truths-parashat-behar-walking-in-the-spirit-and-not-after-the-law-err-the-flesh/>, Access date: May 4, 2014

13. Bits of Torah Truths, "*Parashat Bechukotai, Walking in the Testimonies*," <http://www.matsati.com/index.php/bits-of-torah-truths-parashat-bechukotai-walking-in-the-testimonies/>, Access date: May 11, 2014