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MINISTRIES

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Is the Torah for Gentiles, Too?

Sometimes, when we recommend that Christians keep the Torah—that is, God’s law given through the prophet Moses—some will argue that the Torah was given only to Israel. Israel is the people with whom God made his covenant at Mount Sinai, and the Torah functions as the terms of that covenant. This seems pretty straightforward. After all, God’s covenant was *with Israel*, not Egypt, Babylon, or any other nation. So, it is only the people of Israel who are required to keep this covenant.

However, many will then define “Israel” to mean *only* the ethnic descendants of Jacob. The result of this perspective is that the commandments in the Torah—such as the Sabbath, dietary laws, and festivals—apply *only* to the physical descendants of Jacob, and not to Gentile followers of the God of Israel.

In this teaching, we will explore this topic by looking at how the Bible defines “Israel,” how the Bible describes the identity and expectations of the “sojourner” who worships God, and what impact this has regarding the Torah’s role in the lives of Gentile Christians. This teaching seeks to answer the question, “Should Gentiles keep the Torah too?” We will argue that the answer to this question is yes.

But to begin, let’s consider the argument of someone who answers “no.” Christian author R. L. Solberg articulates why he thinks Gentiles are not required to keep God’s commandments in the Torah. Here is what he says:

Whom does God say will be His treasured possession and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation? His words were addressed to “the house of Jacob” and “the people of Israel.” In biblical Hebrew, “house of” refers to a person’s physical descendants or family. Thus, the phrase לְבַיִת יַעֲקֹב (*l’bayit ya’akov*, house of Jacob) is an explicit reference to the descendants of Abraham through Jacob ... Thus, the phrase “people of Israel” in Exodus 19:3 is a synonym for “house of Jacob.” At Sinai God entered into a covenant with the physical descendants of Jacob, who, through that covenant, became the nation of Israel. This is the ethnic group referred to in the Bible as “the Israelites” and later known as the Jewish people ... What Yahweh commanded in the Mosaic Law He required of Israel alone to set them apart from all the other peoples.

—R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin, TN:

So, according to Solberg, unless you are a physical descendant of Jacob, you do not have to keep the commandments of the Torah. But does the Bible teach this idea? Let's consider Solberg's argument, which can be put into the following syllogism:

1. God gave the Torah only to Israel.
2. Israel is the physical descendants of Jacob.
3. Therefore, God gave the Torah only to the physical descendants of Jacob.

Regarding the first premise, it is true that God originally gave the Torah to Israel. However, what seems to be neglected by dispensationalists like Solberg, is that God intended to make his Torah known to the whole world *through* Israel. The Torah was intended to be Israel's wisdom in the eyes of the nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). The prophets of Israel yearned for the day when the Gentiles would hear and obey God's righteous laws as the Torah went forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:1-4). Isaiah prophesied that God's justice expressed in the Torah is how Israel shines forth her light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 51:4-8). Isaiah also looked forward to when the Gentiles would "join themselves" to YHWH and keep his Sabbaths, and when God's house would be called a house of prayer for "all peoples" (Isaiah 56:1-8). These prophecies about the Gentiles joining Israel and obeying God's laws are fulfilled in the "great commission." The apostles were commanded to make disciples of "all the nations" and to teach them to observe all that Yeshua commanded (Matthew 28:19-20), which included his instructions to observe even the least of the Torah's commandments (Matthew 5:17-20).

So, although God did give the Torah to Israel, the Torah was not meant to *stay* with Israel only. Through Israel—and ultimately through Israel's Messiah—God made his righteous laws known *to the whole world*. One of God's goals with the Torah was to reach all the nations so that they would join Israel in worshiping and obeying him. Thus, the first premise of Solberg's argument is incomplete. God gave his Torah to Israel, and through Israel to *all* nations.

Now let's focus on the second premise, which is that Israel is made up of only the physical descendants of Jacob. Is that true? What happens when a Gentile aligns himself with YHWH through faith? Is he excluded from worshiping YHWH fully because he is not a physical descendant of Jacob? Is a Gentile's responsibility toward God as a believer different from a Jew's? Dispensationalists say yes, but is that what the Scriptures say?

The Bible does not say that "Israel" is made up of *only* the physical descendants of Jacob. Granted, in the Old Testament, *most* of the members of Israel were ethnic descendants of Jacob, but the Bible is clear that Israel was *not exclusive* to ethnic descendants of Jacob. As the scholar R. L. Watson remarks:

[F]rom the Exodus onwards, we begin to find Gentiles being included into that body of people [that is, Israel] as a partial fulfillment of the promise made to Abram that 'in him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' As these Gentiles joined the people of Israel, they experienced and shared in their covenant blessings. Moreover, not only were the same rights afforded to them; the same obedience and faithfulness was expected of them.

—R. L. Watson, *Forgotten Covenant* (Port Orchard, WA: Ark House Press, 2021), 177

Let's examine some passages that show how Israel includes more than just the physical descendants of Jacob.

A Mixed Multitude

When Israel left Egypt, the Bible records that a group of people called the “mixed multitude” went with them:

Exodus 12:37-38

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. **A mixed multitude also went up with them**, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

This “mixed multitude” refers to people who were not ethnically descended from Jacob. These people left Egypt with the ethnic descendants of Jacob and were incorporated into the broader people of Israel. The Scriptures later refer to this group of people as “sojourners,” “strangers,” or “aliens.” As Christian scholar Douglas Stuart remarks:

This verse confirms that the Israelites of the exodus (and thereafter) **were actually a mixed people ethnically**—something that most Christians are unaware of. The verse would best be translated as follows: “A huge ethnically diverse group also went up with them, and very many cattle, both flocks and herds.” To what was Moses referring? To the fact that **many other persons who were not descended from Abraham or Israel joined the Israelites as they left Egypt**. These people had observed the miraculous work of Yahweh, Israel’s God, and had become convinced that conversion to him and life among his people would represent their best hope for the future.

—Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 303

So, in Exodus 12:37-38, we see that the people of Israel who left Egypt were comprised of not only ethnic descendants of Jacob but also many others who were *not* ethnically descended from Jacob. This fact has significant implications regarding whether Gentiles should keep the Torah. How so? Because this same mixed multitude stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the covenant, along with the physical descendants of Jacob. They were part of the group who said, “All that YHWH has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8).

For more on this mixed multitude, see our teaching, [What Was the Mixed Multitude?](#)

Even R. L. Solberg is forced to admit that this mixed multitude was with the descendants of Jacob when Israel received the Torah. Nevertheless, he dismisses this fact as insignificant and maintains that it was still *only* the ethnic descendants of Jacob who were given the Torah:

Regardless of the ethnic make-up of the Sinai attendees, as we saw above, Yahweh made His covenant exclusively with the descendants of Abraham through Jacob ... Despite who else may have been at Sinai, God’s words in Exodus 19 make it clear that the criteria of eligibility in His promise—the people with whom He was making this Covenant—were the descendants of Jacob.

—R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin, TN: Williamson College Press), 104

So, it does not matter that the people of Israel who left Egypt included a mixed multitude. According to

Solberg, this fact does not mean that Gentiles who worship YHWH should keep the Torah because “Israel” is only physical descendants of Jacob by definition. Gentile believers were not invited into this covenant relationship. But do the Scriptures bear this out? No, they do not.

Who is Israel?

The issue comes down to this: for dispensationalists, “Israel” has a very narrow definition. It means only ethnic descendants of Jacob. As we saw earlier, Solberg bases this definition of Israel on passages where the term “Israel” is equated with the “house of Jacob” (e.g., Exodus 19:3). But is this term really so narrow? Besides the example of the mixed multitude, is there anywhere else in Scripture where “Israel” includes Gentiles? Does Scripture ever say that people who are *not* ethnic descendants of Jacob can be covenant members?

Consider the following passages:

Deuteronomy 29:1

These are the words of the covenant that the LORD [YHWH] commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.

This verse introduces an interesting section of Scripture. Here, Moses calls on the new generation of Israelites to commit to the covenant. This is not a new covenant but a renewal of the previous covenant. As scholar Daniel Block explains:

What is happening on the Plains of Moab is not the establishment of a new covenant, but the renewal of the original covenant first made with Abraham and then established with Israel at Sinai. Since the people standing before Moses were not involved in the proceedings at Horeb forty years earlier, these procedures are necessary to bind this generation to the covenant ratified at Horeb (5:2–3) and to ensure that they enter the Promised Land as the covenant people of Yahweh.

—Daniel I. Block, *NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 662

So, this new generation of Israelites is being invited into a covenant relationship with God, which is the Sinai covenant renewed. Significantly, Moses explicitly identifies the people with whom God is making this covenant. The people involved in this covenant renewal ceremony include not only physical descendants of Jacob but also the sojourner:

Deuteronomy 29:10-15

You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD [YHWH] your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD [YHWH] your God, which the LORD [YHWH] your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord [YHWH] our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.

As we can see from this passage, the people of Israel are called to accept the covenant and be God's people. The sojourner is explicitly included among those who are being established as God's "people" in this passage. Here, sojourners are as much a part of the covenant as the physical descendants of Jacob. This offer also extended to "whoever is not here with us today"—that is, to future generations who would accept this covenant. Whoever accepted this offer to enter this covenant relationship took on the responsibility of living according to God's commandments:

Deuteronomy 29:9

Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.

Another passage that helps us see that sojourners are included among the people of Israel as covenant members is found in Joshua chapter 8. As Joshua was leading the people into the land, they performed a covenant reaffirmation ceremony. Here is what the passage says:

Joshua 8:30-35

At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD [YHWH], the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD [YHWH] had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD [YHWH] and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. **And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born**, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD [YHWH], half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD [YHWH] had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, **and the sojourners who lived among them.**

Here we see that "all Israel" rehearsed the blessings and curses of the covenant to reaffirm their commitment to God. And once again, the sojourner is fully included in this ceremony.

To drive this point home, let's consider one more passage. In Deuteronomy 26, Moses instructed the people of Israel that after they enter the land they are to recite a formal liturgy when they present their firstfruits offering at the tabernacle. Here is what Moses said to do:

Deuteronomy 26:5-11

And you shall make response before the LORD [YHWH] your God, "A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the LORD [YHWH], the God of our fathers, and the LORD [YHWH] heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the LORD [YHWH] brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD [YHWH], have given me." And you shall set it down before the LORD [YHWH] your God and worship before the LORD [YHWH] your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD [YHWH] your God has given **to you**

and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

The first thing to note about this remarkable passage is that everyone who lived in the land was instructed to recite this liturgy when they offered their firstfruits. Moses explicitly mentions that the sojourner is to do this too. This liturgy acknowledges the covenant blessings of God given to Abraham's descendants, which the sojourner likewise recites. The sojourner is to call Jacob his father.

Second, the passage states that God's blessings are given "to you and to your house," which then goes on to include the sojourner. Thus, those who are not part of the "house" of Jacob are nevertheless fully included in the covenant blessings. Isaiah 14 corroborates this:

Isaiah 14:1

For the LORD [YHWH] will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

Third, notice that the liturgy does *not* say, "A wandering Jew was my father." Jacob was a sojourner in a foreign land for much of his life. Every time the people would recite this liturgy, they were reminded of that fact. This is why God commands Israel not to oppress the sojourner, because the people of Israel themselves were sojourners. The native Israelite is commanded to love the sojourner as himself and is to treat the sojourner as an equal:

Leviticus 19:33-34

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD [YHWH] your God.

While the nation of Israel came from Jacob's physical line, the blessings of the covenant were not meant for Jacob's physical descendants only. They were also meant for "all the families of the earth" who would be blessed by their connection to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:3). That is why the sojourner who attaches himself to YHWH by faith is included in Israel's covenant privileges and responsibilities.

The sojourner: an analogy for the believing Gentiles

These passages about how the sojourner can be a covenant member of Israel provide a good analogy for how we should think about the Gentiles coming to faith in Israel's Messiah. In the New Testament, Paul wrote that the Gentiles coming to faith in the Messiah become part of the commonwealth of Israel:

Ephesians 2:11-13, 19

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

In this passage, Paul says that the Gentile believer in Messiah *used to be* alienated from the

commonwealth of Israel and was a stranger to the covenants of promise. Now, through Messiah, the Gentile has been “brought near” by Messiah’s blood. He *now is* a fellow citizen and member of God’s household. He is no longer alienated from God’s covenants. Thus, the Gentile believer in Messiah is fully included in the blessings and responsibilities that come with being a covenant member. That is what is understood by the “commonwealth of Israel.” The Greek word for “Commonwealth,” *politeia*, means the “overall project of common life, including programs of education, the organization of labor and leisure, moral rules, etc. (Francis Wolfe, “politeia,” *Dictionary of Untranslatables* [United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2014], 802). In Messiah, the Gentile believer is fully included in Israel. He shares in Israel’s identity, blessings, and responsibilities.

Before we move on from this passage, it is worth asking, “Why were these Gentiles excluded from the commonwealth of Israel to begin with?” Paul explains that there was a “dividing wall of hostility” that existed between Jew and Gentile, which Messiah has broken down. What was this dividing wall? Well, many understand it to be the Torah. This is based on what Paul says in verse 15:

Ephesians 2:14-16

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by **abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances**, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

It would be overly simplistic to interpret verse 15 as referring to the Torah itself since the word “law” there is qualified by the constructions “of commandments” (τῶν ἐντολῶν) and “expressed in ordinances” (ἐν δόγμασιν). According to the scholar Lionel Windsor:

[T]he qualifications perform more than a descriptive function. Rather, they perform a defining function: they specify what would otherwise be ambiguous. In other words, the qualifications indicate that what has been abolished is not necessarily the law in every sense, but rather the law as understood and used in a certain way: “the law of the commandments in decrees.”

—Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission Through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 136-137

These qualifications have a significant impact on how this phrase should be understood. They function to define the “law” more specifically as a particular understanding and use of the law. In light of the precise language, then, Paul seems to be referring to man-made laws that are derived from a misapplication of the Torah. It is worth noting that the word translated “commandments” sometimes refers to man-made orders. John 11:57 uses this term to refer to the “orders” given by the Pharisees. Acts 17:15 uses this term to refer to Paul’s “command” for Silas and Timothy to come to him. Moreover, the word translated “ordinances” almost exclusively refers to the decrees of earthly leaders or rulers (e.g., Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7). When this term appears in the Septuagint, it always refers to man-made laws (e.g., Esther 4:8; 9:1; Daniel 6:12).

Given these facts, it makes more sense to interpret this phrase as referring to extrabiblical traditions and teachings developed from a misapplication of the Torah. Many of the Jewish leaders at the time misused the Torah to develop man-made laws that created hostility between Jew and Gentile. *That* is what the Messiah abolished, not the Torah itself. One example of a man-made law that created division between Jew and Gentile is the prohibition against Jews and Gentiles eating together. The Torah never commands that Jews and Gentiles must eat separately, but Jewish texts like the book of Jubilees did

(Jubilees 22:16), and some of the Jewish groups that confronted the apostles held to this same unbiblical and divisive tradition (Acts 11:3).

This more nuanced perspective on the phrase “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” makes sense in light of the historical background of Paul’s letter and his precise verbiage in this passage. In the second Temple, a wall was constructed that literally separated Jews and Gentiles and restricted Gentiles from the more “sacred” parts of the Temple precincts. Paul seems to be alluding to this wall when he speaks of the “dividing wall of hostility.” Josephus records that this wall included an inscription that imposed a death sentence upon any foreigner who entered spaces that were “forbidden” to them (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.417; *Jewish Wars* 5.193-94; 6:124-26). This inscription is a good example of an “ordinance” (δῶγμα).

It is essential to recognize that God did not command this wall in the temple to be built. In fact, he allowed any foreigner who desired to draw near to him the same access to his presence that the native Israelite had (Numbers 15:11-16). This wall was built by men in order to restrict Gentiles from God’s presence. Interestingly, the logic behind constructing this wall is based on a misapplication of Numbers 1:51, which commands the Levites to execute any outsider who comes near the tabernacle. This command in Numbers was intended to prevent anyone from approaching the tabernacle in an unauthorized way. But Jewish leaders in the first century misapplied this commandment to prohibit Gentiles from fully participating in worship at the Temple. Given this background, it seems clear that, for Paul, what is being “abolished” in Ephesians 2:15 are these extrabiblical and divisive rulings, not the Torah itself.

As Windsor remarks:

[W]hat has been abolished is the law understood primarily as a set of “commandments” as expressed and promulgated by certain authoritative “decrees” concerning the observance of these commandments. The law understood in this way had indeed produced hostility between Jews and gentiles—as illustrated by the officially sanctioned inscription at the dividing-wall in the temple. This is what Paul is claiming to have been abolished by Christ. Paul is not denigrating the law itself, nor is he ruling out any possible attempt to apply the law to the lives of believers. This is confirmed by the fact that Paul later quotes a Mosaic “commandment” as the basis for moral instruction of gentile believers, noting that it is (literally) “[the] first commandment in promise” (ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ, Eph 6:2). The “promise” in view here involves Israel’s inheritance of the promised land (Eph 6:3), an inheritance in which the gentiles have also come to have a share (Eph 1:13-14; 3:6, cf. 2:12).

— Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission Through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 139-140

So, Ephesians 2 describes the Gentile believer just like the Tanakh, or Old Testament, describes the sojourner in Israel. Gentile believers who have aligned themselves with YHWH by faith are full covenant members. It was not the Torah that was abolished. What was abolished were the man-made laws based on misapplications of the Torah, which caused division between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Sadly, it seems that many modern believers wish to reconstruct the old wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Many misapply the Torah to exclude Gentiles in various ways. For example, many will say that the Sabbath and festivals are only for Jews and that Gentiles are not expected to participate in

worshipping God the way he prescribes in the Torah. Some outright *discourage* Gentiles from following the Torah's commands. Such traditions fly directly in the face of the Torah, Prophets, and New Testament writings. Paul says that Gentiles who are in Messiah are full members of the commonwealth of Israel. Far be it from anyone to exclude those whom God has welcomed!

Moving on, Acts 15 is another passage that demonstrates that Gentiles were not to be excluded from the community of Israel. In this passage, the apostles opposed those who insisted that the Gentile believers must convert to Judaism and get circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1). The apostles taught that the Gentile believers are saved the same way Jews are saved—by grace through faith in Messiah, not by getting circumcised (Acts 15:11). The Gentiles did not need to convert to Judaism, but they *did* have to start with following four commandments from the Torah to demonstrate to the Jewish community that they had fully renounced idolatry and were committed to the God of Israel (Acts 15:20). These four commandments obviously were not the only things the Gentile believers had to obey forever, as the next verse makes clear. They were a starting point. James implies that these Gentiles were expected to attend the synagogue services every Sabbath to be instructed in Moses's teaching (Acts 15:21).

Scholar William Willimon likewise sees the Gentiles coming to faith in Israel's Messiah as analogous to the "sojourners" or "strangers" in the Tanakh. While commenting on Acts 15, Willimon writes:

James seems to regard these gentiles as analogous to "strangers" in the Hebrew Scriptures ... Nowhere does Luke suggest that Jesus abrogates the Torah. Even gentiles are to keep that part of the Torah which applies to them as non-Jews.

—William H. Willimon, *Interpretation: Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 130-131

This is an insightful observation by Willimon! But the question is, what are the covenant responsibilities given to the sojourner? We actually don't have to wonder. The Torah explicitly tells us—repeatedly—that the same laws given to the native-born Israelite also apply to the sojourner. Here are some examples of passages where the sojourner is mentioned explicitly:

The sojourner is to keep the Sabbath in the same way as the native Israelite (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14).

The sojourner is to observe Passover and Unleavened Bread in the same way as the native Israelite (Exodus 12:19, 48; Numbers 9:14). In fact, if he does not observe the command to remove the leaven from his home during the days of Unleavened Bread, he is to be "cut off from the congregation of Israel." This punishment assumes that the sojourner is a member of the congregation of Israel.

The sojourner is to observe Shavuot, also known as Pentecost (Deuteronomy 16:10-11).

The sojourner is to observe Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29).

The sojourner is to observe Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:13-14).

The sojourner is to participate in the tabernacle services and give the prescribed offerings (Leviticus 17:8-9; 22:17-18, 31; Numbers 15:14-16).

And finally, the sojourner is to keep *all* the Torah's commandments. During Sukkot, when the Torah is read to the community, the sojourner is admonished to hear and observe "all the words" of the Torah:

Deuteronomy 31:12

Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, **and the sojourner within your towns**, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD [YHWH] your God, and be careful to do **all the words of this law**.

So, it appears that the second premise of Solberg's argument is flawed. Israel is not made up of only the physical descendants of Jacob. The Gentile who aligns himself with YHWH by faith becomes part of Israel and is afforded the same covenant blessings and responsibilities. This fact is evident in both Old and New Testaments, as we have seen. Given the flaws in the two premises we have examined, we are right to reject the conclusion that God gave the Torah only to the physical descendants of Jacob.

Answering Objections

Now, there is a potential rebuttal to the idea that sojourners must keep the law just like native-born Israelites. The Torah has some laws which do not seem to apply equally to native-born Israelites and Gentile sojourners. For instance, consider this verse from Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 14:21

You shall not eat anything that has died naturally. You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the LORD [YHWH] your God.

According to Solberg:

This is the Torah telling us in no uncertain terms that non-Jews are allowed to eat things that Jews are not. Notice the Israelite's holiness—their set-apartness—from the foreigners and the sojourners among them.

— R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin, TN: Williamson College Press), 107

Does Deuteronomy 14:21 justify Solberg's assertion that the Torah is given only to the physical descendants of Jacob? No, it does not. Even if we grant Solberg's interpretation of this verse, at most, all it means is that *this particular commandment* applies differently to the sojourner than it does to the native Israelite. As we have seen, the sojourner is still explicitly commanded to keep the Sabbath, festivals, and so forth. Though Solberg wishes to stretch this verse to support his broader claim that the Torah is not for Gentiles, this verse is simply not enough to deny the sojourner his obligation to keep all the other Torah commandments he is explicitly told to keep.

Still, how do we understand this apparent double standard? *Is there a double standard?* Consider the parallel commandment in Leviticus:

Leviticus 17:15

And **every person** who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, **whether he is a native or a sojourner**, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening; then he shall be clean.

Here, the command applies to the native Israelite *and* to the sojourner. Anyone who eats an animal that has died naturally will be ritually unclean until evening and must perform the prescribed ritual washings. So, regardless of how one interprets Deuteronomy 14:21, Leviticus 17:15 treats the native Israelite and the sojourner equally.

Nevertheless, the Deuteronomy passage does discourage making oneself ritually unclean by eating an animal that has died of natural causes. Why is this standard is relaxed for the sojourner? One theory is that the sojourner in the land of Israel is presumed to be poor.

The sojourner is often mentioned alongside other economically disadvantaged groups, such as widows and orphans (e.g., Deuteronomy 14:29). Thus, this permission for the sojourner to eat the meat of animals that have died naturally could be seen as a weightier matter of the Torah. That is, the survival of the poor sojourner is more important than ritual purity. And if the sojourner does eat this meat, then according to Leviticus 17:15, all he would need to do to become ritually clean again is to wash his clothes and bathe. This is the same thing a native Israelite who eats this meat would need to do. Thus, the different “standards” are not due to ethnicity *per se* but rather due to different social conditions and God’s concern for the poor. However, one weakness in this explanation is that, if the intent of this command was to provide for the economically disadvantaged, we might expect widows and orphans to be given this permission as well, but they are not mentioned in the text.

Tim Hegg takes a different approach to solving the apparent contradiction between Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He views the “sojourner” in Deuteronomy 14:21 as not a covenant member but merely a visitor in Israel. Hegg suggests that the Hebrew word for “sojourner,” *ger*, may be further defined by the word “foreigner,” *nochri*. The word *nochri* is typically used to describe an idolater and not a covenant member of Israel. Thus, the sojourner in Leviticus 17:15, and elsewhere throughout the Torah, is not the same as the sojourner mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:21. Here is what Hegg says:

[H]ere the *ger* [sojourner] who is “in your gates” must denote a “visitor” not on the same level as the *ger* in Leviticus 17:15. The added phrase “or sell it to a foreigner” (‘*o machor l’nochri*’) further clarifies the *ger* in this context to be one who is not a covenant member and has not accepted upon himself the rule of Torah. We may rightly interpret the *vav* as pleonastic and translate: “You may give it to the alien (*ger*) who is in your town, so that he may eat it, that is, to a foreigner (*nochri*).”

—Tim Hegg, *Fellow Heirs: Jews & Gentiles Together in the Family of God* (Tacoma, WA: 2013), 4

There may be some support for Hegg’s proposal in how early Jews have interpreted this verse. The Jewish translators of the Septuagint consistently translate the Hebrew word *ger*, “sojourner,” with the Greek *proselutos*. The term *proselutos* has connotations of conversion—that is, it describes someone who has “converted” or committed oneself to Israel’s faith and way of life. However, in Deuteronomy 14:21, the Septuagint translators translate *ger* with the word *paroikos*, which is a more general term for a foreigner. This indicates that, at least for the Septuagint translators, the sojourner in Deuteronomy 14:21 was not a covenant member of Israel, unlike the sojourners mentioned elsewhere throughout the Torah.

In any case, Deuteronomy 14:21 does not prove that the Torah was given only to physical descendants of Jacob. Once again, at most, this verse indicates that *only this single commandment* applies differently to the native Israelite than to the sojourner who worships YHWH. But even that point is debatable.

Solberg cites God's commandments about loans (Deuteronomy 15:2-3; 23:20) as another example of a double standard:

The Torah teaches a clear difference in the treatment of Jews and Gentiles under the Law of Moses. Israelites can require repayment and charge interest on loans made to Gentiles, but not so with their fellow Israelites.

— R. L. Solberg, *Torahism: Are Christians Required to Keep the Law of Moses?* (Franklin, TN: Williamson College Press), 107

However, when we examine the passages that Solberg cites, we discover that they are not describing Gentiles who are covenant members of Israel. In Hebrew, the word translated “foreigner” in Deuteronomy 15:3 and 23:20 is *nochri*, which again, is a word used to describe foreigners who are not followers of YHWH. This word is used for “foreign altars” (2 Chronicles 14:2) and “foreign gods” (Deuteronomy 32:12). The foreigner in these passages does not equate with the sojourner who is aligned with YHWH by faith. No foreign altars or gods were allowed in Israel, no matter who was worshipping them (Exodus 34:11-13); so, these foreigners could not be the same as the sojourners who were living in Israel. Thus, when it comes to loans, there is no double standard between covenant members, whether native-born or sojourner, but only between Israel and the foreign nations who don't worship YHWH.

While these apparent distinctions could be examined and debated, again, it ultimately does not change the fact that Gentiles are not excluded from God's covenant and the Torah. We should take William Willimon's remarks that we quoted earlier as a starting point: “Even gentiles are to keep that part of the Torah which applies to them as non-Jews.” What have we discovered applies to Gentiles? Basically, everything that applies to the physical descendent of Jacob, with *maybe* one or two *possible* exceptions. We cannot take these one or two *possible* exceptions as the rule. The rule is that, for those in covenant relationship with YHWH, the same law applies to both the native Israelite and the sojourner.

In conclusion, although God did give the Torah to Israel, the Torah was not meant to *stay* with Israel only. Through Israel, God made his righteous ways known *to the whole world*. Gentiles who put their faith in Israel's Messiah become covenant members of Israel. These Gentile believers are analogous to the “sojourners” in the Torah. They are to keep the commandments given to the sojourners, which are basically all the same commandments given to native Israelites. The one or two *possible* distinctions in standards between the native Israelite and the sojourner do not negate the fact that Gentiles who align themselves with YHWH by faith are full covenant members of Israel and called to Torah observance.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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