

# The New Testament Believer and the Commandments of God

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*In this article, Jesus is called Yeshua out of respect for His real, actual name in the original Hebrew/Aramaic language. Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (1995 update) unless otherwise indicated.*

What does the Bible say about the relationship between believers in Yeshua (Jesus) and God's commandments in the Old Testament? Most of these commandments are found in the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books are sometimes called the *Torah*, a Hebrew word that means "God's teaching and instructions." It is usually translated in our Bibles as "the law," which is a bit misleading. The Torah does contain laws but also much more.

Believers are responsible to study and understand the Scriptures and to handle them appropriately:

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Before we go any further I want to make one thing perfectly clear. We do NOT believe or teach that salvation can be earned by obeying the commandments in the Torah. The Bible plainly states we cannot (cf. Psalms 84:10-12, Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, 3:21, 2 Peter 1:1). The idea that a person can "earn" salvation by obeying the laws and commandments of God is just as wrong as it could be.

On the other hand, the idea that a person can be in a good, right relationship with our Father in heaven and just totally disregard His commands is equally wrong. There are numerous Scriptures that teach us the importance of obeying His commands, and we will look at some of them. Here is one example:

Proverbs 28:9 If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination (ESV).

An abomination is something that is hated and disgusted. Other translations say the prayer of one who won't listen or hear the law is detestable. You can't just ignore God's law and expect your prayers to be answered. Also, please understand that in the Hebrew way of thinking, the word "hear" includes the idea of **obedience**. Proverbs 28:9 is saying that if you are not at least trying to obey God's commandments in the Torah, your prayer is a detestable abomination to God.<sup>1</sup>

This article assumes the authority of Scripture over all else. Some Christians place the ultimate authority in church leaders such as the Pope; others base their beliefs primarily on religious traditions. It is our position that the only objective and totally trustworthy authority for our spiritual life is the Word of God, the Scriptures, the Holy Bible. So let's see what the Bible says about God's commandments.

### **God's Word, Covenants, Law, Commandments, and Statutes Are Eternal**

Psalms 89:34 "My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips."

Psalms 119:151-152 151 Yet you are near, O LORD, and **all your commands are true**. 152 Long ago I learned from **your statutes that you established them to last forever** (NIV).

Psalms 119:160 All your words are true; **all your righteous laws are eternal** (NIV).

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but **the word of our God stands forever**.

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<sup>1</sup> This would not apply to a sinner's prayer of repentance.

1 Chronicles 16:14-17 14 He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. 15 **Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations**, 16 *the covenant* which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. 17 He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as **an everlasting covenant**.

Some people teach that God's laws and commandments were canceled when Yeshua (Jesus) died on the cross. Later we'll see what Yeshua Himself said about that. Let's first see that long after His death and resurrection, New Testament verses were written clearly showing that God's law was still in effect:

James 2:9-12 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James says here that we can become a transgressor of the law and can be convicted by it. How can anyone transgress and be convicted by the law if it has been abolished? The apostle Paul, who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament, says in Romans 4:15 that "where there is no law, there also is no violation." If the laws and commandments of God were abolished, it would be impossible to disobey them.

The apostle Peter confirms the permanence of God's Word as He quotes Isaiah 40:8:

1 Peter 1:25 **But the word of The LORD endures forever**" (NKJV).

Remember that "the word of the LORD" to the first century believers was the Hebrew Scriptures, what people today know as the "Old Testament." That's the only Bible that existed at the time. And in the New Testament, God's word and His law is still eternal. His commandments are everlasting and permanent.

The Bible contains a definition of sin:

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, **sin is lawlessness** (NIV).

The apostle John says here that sin is lawlessness or breaking the law. We shouldn't sin, so we shouldn't break the law. Simple enough, isn't it? Think about that for a moment. Sin is breaking or disobeying the law of God, the violation of Torah. If the law had been abolished when Yeshua died, then we couldn't be guilty of breaking or disobeying it because you can't break a law that doesn't exist or has been repealed. If God's law had been abolished, no one could be guilty of breaking it; there would be no sin or sinners anymore! If there were no law, no one would be guilty of sin and no one would need forgiveness. If this were true, then Yeshua could not have died for your sins or mine, only for the sins of the people who lived before the law was abolished. Think about it; if there is no law, we could not have sinned so we don't need forgiveness. These notions completely contradict the plain teaching of Scripture:

1 John 1:8-10 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament does not replace the Old Testament; it is a continuation, like Part 1 and Part 2 of a story. Our Creator doesn't change, and neither does His word nor His Son:

Malachi 3:6 **"For I, the LORD, do not change..."**

1 Peter 1:25 **But the word of The LORD endures forever** (NKJV).

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

## **Yeshua (Jesus) Taught That Believers Should Obey the Commandments of God**

Yeshua taught that obedience to the commandments in the Torah is definitely involved with having a deeper, closer relationship with God. He taught that if we love Him, we will keep (obey) the commandments; He said this is how we show that we love God, which He said is the greatest commandment of all:

Matthew 22:36-38 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment."

Yeshua said that the greatest and most important commandment is for us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. And how do we do that? The Bible tells us:

John 14:15 **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."**

John 14:21 **"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me;** and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

John 14:23 Jesus replied, **"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.** My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (NIV).

John 15:10 **"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love;** just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

John 15:14 "You are my friends if you do what I command you."

Scripture clearly states that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and the way that we do that is by observing His commands. And where do we find His commands? In the Torah! When Yeshua made these statements, the New Testament had not been written yet. The only commandments of God that existed were those in the Torah. These are the commandments Yeshua was talking about; He did not have a set of commands that were different from those in the Torah. His commands are the same commands that God gave in the Old Testament. If we believe the Bible's position that Yeshua was "God with us,"<sup>2</sup> it would be self-contradictory and totally inconsistent with the unity of the Father and Son for them to have different commands. Their teaching, their words, and their commandments must be the same:

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

John 12:49-50 49 "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. 50 I know that His commandment is eternal life; **therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.**"

John 7:16 "So Jesus answered them and said, **"My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."**

John 14:24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; **and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.**"

Yeshua's commands and words and teaching simply cannot be different from the commands of the Father which we find in the Torah. Therefore, Yeshua taught His followers, including us, to keep the same commandments that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai before Israel entered the Promised Land.

Another reason for us to obey the commandments of God is found in the Torah itself:

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 26 "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today..."

So two of the Bible's reasons for us to obey God's commandments are to show God that we love Him and to put ourselves in position to receive His blessings.

Consider this statement of Yeshua:

John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:23

Many people think they have trouble "hearing His voice," but they misunderstand His words. From the Hebrew perspective, the phrase "hear my voice" means "obey my teaching." Learning this one detail changes the meaning of this verse; **Yeshua was saying that His sheep (His followers) obey Him.**

**Please consider this extremely serious question: where do you place a higher priority – on the commandments of God or on your traditions?** Your church or traditions may have taught you that we don't need to be concerned with God's commandments. Yeshua asked the same question:

Matthew 15:3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Mark 7:8-9 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

Yeshua also said:

Luke 6:46 "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' **and do not do what I say?**"

Matthew 7:21-23 21 "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.** 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 **And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'**"

Notice – in verse 21, the Bible says that only those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of heaven. What is the will of the Father? What does He want? The Bible says He wants our obedience!

Deuteronomy 11:1 You shall therefore love the LORD your God, **and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.**

Deuteronomy 13:4 You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and **you shall keep His commandments**, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

Deuteronomy 26:18 The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that **you should keep all His commandments.**

Deuteronomy 27:10 **You shall therefore obey the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes** which I command you today.

Joshua 22:5 Only **be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you**, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and **keep His commandments** and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

1 Kings 8:61 Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to **keep His commandments**, as at this day.

And if you need some New Testament support for this, here it is:

1 Corinthians 7:19 ...**what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.**

1 John 2:3-6 3 **By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.** 4 **The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;** 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

1 John 3:22 ...and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

1 John 5:3 **For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments;** and His commandments are not burdensome.

2 John 1:6 **And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.** This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

Let's look again at what Yeshua said in Matthew 7:

Matthew 7:21-23 21 **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.** 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 **And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"**

Notice – in verse 23 Yeshua says that He will tell those "who practice lawlessness" (those who do not obey the law of God, the commandments found in the Torah) to depart from Him, that He never knew them! We have already seen that "lawlessness" is the Bible's definition of sin.<sup>3</sup> And please realize that according to the Bible, sin is not only doing what you shouldn't, but also not doing what you should:

James 4:17 Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

It is a mistake to think we don't need to obey God's commandments. Yeshua Himself said it this way:

Matthew 5:17-19 17 **"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law** or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 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. 19 **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.**

Some people mistakenly think that Yeshua fulfilled the Law (the Torah) in the sense of fulfilling a contract, thus ending it and making it a thing of the past. They say, "See, it's fulfilled, complete, it's over, it's done, it's finished, abolished." But if you read the entire passage carefully, **Yeshua distinctly said that He did not come to abolish the Law and that nothing would pass from the Torah "until heaven and earth pass away."** Heaven and earth have not passed away; they are still here, so nothing has passed from the Torah.

It is helpful to understand that in Bible times, the Sages and rabbis used the same idioms (figures of speech) that Yeshua used in verse 17. If they were listening to someone's teaching of Scripture and considered it to be correctly interpreted, they would say that the teacher was "fulfilling" the Torah. When Yeshua said that He came to fulfill the Law (the Torah), He meant that He came to *correctly interpret* it. We see in verse 19 that it will be better for those who obey the commandments and to teach others to do so. Yeshua clearly taught in these verses it is His desire that we keep the commands and obey the Torah.

Moses instructed the people of God to not add to or subtract from the Torah:

Deuteronomy 4:2 **"You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it,** that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

According to this foundational principle, anyone who would add or take away from the word of Moses would be violating this clear command of God; this would apply to the apostle Paul or even Yeshua Himself. Therefore, in order to be obedient to God and consistent with His Word, both Paul and Yeshua had to obey this command. Neither Paul nor Yeshua could have added a teaching that believers no longer needed to obey God's instructions in the Torah without violating this command; to do so would have been considered false teaching. No one was to teach anything that adds to or takes away from God's Word and His commandments. Anyone who did that would have been considered a false teacher.

This is so serious to God that His Torah states that any prophet or teacher who tries to persuade His people to abandon His commands should be considered evil and should be put to death!

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 "1 If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for The LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love The LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall follow The LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 3:4

His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. **5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against The LORD your God** who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, **to seduce you from the way in which The LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.**"

Even though this passage primarily speaks about going after other gods (the sin of idolatry), in a sense *any* sin is idolatry because you are placing something above the one true God. If you put your own desires above what God has told us to do, that's one form of idolatry. Anytime you obey a teacher or prophet instead of God's will expressed in the commandments, that's idolatry. If you put anyone or anything above God, it is contrary to His will and His purpose for you.

This warning from Scripture applied to anyone and everyone, even the apostle Paul. If he had ever taught anything contradictory to the commands of God in the Torah, he would have been considered a false prophet and would have been put to death.

Did you notice that even someone who performs signs and wonders is included in this warning and condemnation? This means that even if the greatest miracle worker of all time, Yeshua Himself, had taught that His followers do not need to obey God's commandments, then He would have been a false prophet! And a false prophet certainly could not have been the Messiah. Anyone who teaches that He abolished the "Old Testament Law" are actually teaching that He could not have been the Messiah!

Do you have the idea that it is impossible, or at least too difficult, to keep the commands of the Torah? If you believe that, then you are in disagreement with Scripture! Here is how Moses put it, referring to all of God's commands and statutes written in the Torah:

Deuteronomy 30:11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach."

And if you want a New Testament verse to support this, here you are:

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and **His commandments are not burdensome.**

## **The Apostle John Wrote That Believers Should Obey the Commandments of God**

The apostle John wrote:

1 John 2:3-6 **3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.** 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (NIV).

1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:21-22 **21** Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; **22** and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

1 John 5:3 **This is love for God: to obey his commands.** And his commands are not burdensome... (NIV)

2 John 6 **And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.** As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love (NIV).

Revelation 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints **who obey God's commandments** and remain faithful to Jesus (NIV).

## **The Apostle Paul Wrote That Believers Should Obey the Commandments of God**

The Apostle Paul is perhaps the most misunderstood writer in Scripture. It is mistakenly thought by many that Paul taught NOT keeping the Torah (at least to Gentiles), that he taught in Scripture that non-Jewish believers in Yeshua do not need to be concerned with God's commandments. But Paul made statements in the book of Romans that show he supported obedience to the Torah.

Romans 3:31 Do we then cancel the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law (HCSB.)

Romans 6:15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not! (HCSB)

Paul clearly says we should not sin (disobey God's laws) just because we're under grace. I'll deal with "not under law but under grace" later, but for now, remember the Bible's definition of sin:

1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

Put these thoughts together – even though we're under grace, the Law is not canceled, and we still should not sin by disobeying God's commandments. Being under grace does not mean we have the right to keep on sinning, to keep on breaking the Law, violating the Torah, transgressing the commandments of God.

Romans 7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Romans 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man.

Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

In a discussion about circumcision, Paul makes a very important statement:

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but **what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.**

**He very clearly stated here that what matters is the keeping of God's commandments!** He could not have made it any more plain, any easier to understand.

Some people mistakenly think that Paul knowingly taught something different from what Yeshua taught and that his message was different from that of Yeshua. But listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

How could he have taught something different from what Yeshua taught and be an imitator of Him?

Read what Paul wrote to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:3-4a 3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited *and* understands nothing;

All correct biblical teaching must agree with the words of Yeshua. We've already seen that Yeshua taught His followers to obey the commandments. All correct teaching must agree with that! For Paul's teaching to agree with the teaching of Yeshua, he also had to support obedience of God's commandments just as Yeshua did. Notice that Paul also said that anyone who does not agree with Yeshua understands nothing.

Here an exercise in LOGIC and CLEAR THINKING:

- **Fact #1:** Yeshua taught that His followers should keep the commandments.
- **Fact #2:** Paul supported obeying the Torah and he said that if anyone teaches something different from what Yeshua taught (obedience), that person understands nothing (he is a false teacher).
- **Conclusion:** the teaching that believers aren't expected to keep the commandments is false.

Think about it – even if Paul had taught that believers no longer needed to obey God's teaching and commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament, the Torah), his doing so would have put him in direct contradiction with both John and Yeshua! If he had done that, who would you depend on – Yeshua, who taught the same obedience that had been taught for hundreds of years, or someone who all of a sudden started teaching that obedience to God's commandments was no longer important? It would be unsettling or even frightening to side with someone who taught the opposite of what Yeshua taught. How could anyone feel comfortable with that? Sadly, many people aren't even aware of the *alleged* difference in their teachings, a difference that comes from misunderstanding the words of Paul resulting in a

perverted theology that makes becoming a disciple of Yeshua "easier." But the truth is that Paul did not teach anything contradictory to what Yeshua and Moses taught.

Paul wrote to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:8 Now we know that the law is good, provided one uses it legitimately (HCSB).

How would someone use illegitimately? By approaching it with a legalistic mindset, obeying it and thinking that it is the obedience that makes us righteous in God's eyes, rather than repentance and faith.

Paul also wrote to Timothy about the role of the house of God in relation to the "truth":

1 Timothy 3:14-15 14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, **the pillar and support of the truth.**

So the church is supposed to be the pillar and support of the truth. What is the truth?

Psalms 119:142 Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and **Your law is truth.**

Seems pretty clear, doesn't it? The truth is God's Law, His Torah. The church is supposed to be the pillar and support of the truth. How can God's people support the truth while teaching that it is no longer relevant or needed? It's impossible. His word is the only thing that is true! His truth is eternal! And God's people are supposed to support it, not say that it has been canceled. That's one big reason that Jews don't accept Christianity; most Christian teachers say that God's eternal, permanent Word, His Torah, has been abolished. Jews know better. They know that God's Word, including His commandments, are eternal.

Paul wrote that ALL scripture is relevant to believers:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

At the time Paul wrote this, the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) were the only Scriptures in existence! The New Testament did not yet exist; it was not assembled for the church until hundreds of years later. And even if the New Testament had been completed when Paul wrote this verse, he said ALL Scripture, not just the New Testament. In this verse, Paul was primarily talking about the Old Testament.

The Bible discusses Paul teaching the Thessalonians:

Acts 17:2-3 2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures,** 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying,* "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

Paul used "the Scriptures" to persuade them about Yeshua. What Scriptures did he use? Remember, the New Testament did not exist yet. His teaching came from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament!

Now let's read what the Bible says about some people known as the Bereans:

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

The people of Berea compared Paul's words with the Scriptures to see if what he said was true. Think about it – what Scriptures did they have? All they had was the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament; again, the New Testament had not yet been completed and assembled. The Bereans checked Paul's teaching against the Torah; they had to be in agreement, and they were because many of the Bereans became believers. Paul absolutely supported the observance of Torah, and taught believers to do the same.

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders there because some Jews had been spreading the false teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Torah *before* they could be saved. At that meeting Peter, Paul, and Barnabas all spoke of how God was doing miracles and

wonders among the Gentiles and made it clear that they should hear the gospel and believe. After they presented their case, James declared the verdict of the council:

Acts 15:19-21 19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues (ESV).

Verse 21 suggests that they expected the Gentile believers to go to the congregation in whatever city they lived in to hear the writings of Moses (the Torah). The Gentiles were not expected to be living in complete obedience to the Torah *before* they could join God's family, but it certainly was expected that they would attend the synagogue "every Sabbath" (Saturday), hear the reading of Moses' writings from the Torah, and start learning how to live by God's principles for His people as expressed in the commandments of Torah.

The writer of Hebrews made an interesting statement about the Law and anyone who rejects it:

Hebrews 10:28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses (NKJV).

Okay, let's get back to "not under Law but under grace." This comes from the book of Romans:

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be master over you, for **you are not under law but under grace.**

This is commonly misunderstood to mean that we are not expected to try to obey the Old Testament commandments. This is not what Paul was saying at all. In the very next verse he said:

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

"Shall we sin" means "shall we break God's Law," or "shall we break the commandments." And the answer is NO! The word "law" doesn't always mean exactly the same thing. The translators used "law" for different words in the original languages that had different meanings. For example, "law" can be used to describe principles such as sowing and reaping. It usually means the Torah, but a better definition of Torah is "God's teaching and instruction." It does include some rules and laws, and is sometimes called "the Law." Sometimes the word refers to the entire body of commandments in the Torah, sometimes it is used to refer to the Ten Commandments, and sometimes just one law in particular. The word "law" can also refer to "the law of sin and death," meaning the principle that sin results in death as punishment.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death...

Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you **free from the law of sin and death.**

It is the law of sin and death that are no longer under. This means that we are not under the condemnation and punishment of the Law IF we have repented of sin and come to faith in Yeshua. But this does not give us license to sin (to break the commandments, to disobey the Torah). We must be careful to understand what is meant when we see the word "law." Otherwise we may get off track and lose the intended meaning of an entire verse or passage.

### **The Book of James Says That Believers Should Obey the Commandments of God**

James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

### **Some of the Commandments that New Testament Believers Should be Obeying**

- **The Sabbath is the seventh day, not the first, is the biblical day of worship:**

Exodus 20:8-11 8 **Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.** 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but **the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it** you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days

the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

Leviticus 23:1-3 1 The LORD spoke to Moses: 2 "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: These are My appointed times, the times of the LORD that you will proclaim as sacred assemblies. 3 "For six days work may be done, but **on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, a sacred assembly**. You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD wherever you live" (HCSB).

Yeshua (Jesus) attended the synagogue on the Sabbath (the seventh day, not the first day):

Luke 4:16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; **and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath**, and stood up to read.

The apostle Paul also went to the synagogue every Sabbath:

Acts 18:4 And **he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath** and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

- **Biblical holidays** ("Festivals" or "Feasts"):

### **PASSOVER (*Pesach*) and FESTIVAL OF UNLEAVENED BREAD**

Leviticus 23:4-8 4 "These are the LORD's appointed times, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times. 5 The Passover to the LORD comes in the first month, at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month. 6 The Festival of Unleavened Bread to the LORD is on the fifteenth day of the same month. For seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you are to hold a sacred assembly; you are not to do any daily work. 8 You are to present a fire offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day there will be a sacred assembly; you must not do any daily work" (HCSB).

### **FESTIVAL OF WEEKS or PENTECOST (*Shavuot*)**

Leviticus 23:15, 16, 21 15 "You are to count seven complete weeks starting from the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the presentation offering. 16 You are to count 50 days until the day after the seventh Sabbath and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD...21 On that same day you are to make a proclamation and hold a sacred assembly. You are not to do any daily work. This is to be a permanent statute wherever you live throughout your generations" (HCSB).

### **FESTIVAL OF TRUMPETS (*Yom Teruah*) (also known as *Rosh Hashanah*)**

Leviticus 23:23-25 23 The LORD said to Moses, 24 "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25 Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire'" (NIV).

### **DAY OF ATONEMENT (*Yom Kippur*)**

Leviticus 23:26-32 26 The LORD again spoke to Moses: 27 "The tenth *day* of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. You are to hold a sacred assembly and practice self-denial; you are to present a fire offering to the LORD. 28 On this particular day you are not to do any work, for it is a Day of Atonement to make atonement for yourselves before the LORD your God. 29 If any person does not practice self-denial on this particular day, he must be cut off from his people. 30 I will destroy among his people anyone who does any work on this same day. 31 You are not to do any work. This is a permanent statute throughout your generations wherever you live. 32 It will be a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you must practice self-denial. You are to observe your Sabbath from the evening of the ninth *day* of the month until the *following* evening" (HCSB).

### **FESTIVAL OF TABERNACLES (or Booths) (*Sukkot*)**

Leviticus 23:33-44 33 The LORD spoke to Moses: 34 "Tell the Israelites: The Festival of Booths to the LORD begins on the fifteenth day of this seventh month and continues for seven days. 35 There is to be a sacred assembly on the first day; you are not to do any daily work. 36 You are to present a fire offering to the LORD for seven days. On the eighth day you are to hold a sacred assembly and present a fire offering to the LORD. It is a solemn gathering; you are not to do any daily work. 37 These are the LORD's appointed times that you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for presenting fire offerings to the LORD, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its *designated* day. 38 These are in addition to the offerings for the LORD's Sabbaths, your gifts, all your vow offerings, and all your freewill offerings that you give to the LORD. 39 You are to celebrate the LORD's festival on the fifteenth day of the seventh month for seven days after you have gathered the produce of the land. There will be complete rest on the first day and complete rest on the eighth day. 40 On the first day you are to take the product of majestic

trees—palm fronds, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook—and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 You are to celebrate it as a festival to the LORD seven days each year. This is a permanent statute for you throughout your generations; you must celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You are to live in booths for seven days. All the native-born of Israel must live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God" (HCSB).

- **Diet**

### **NO PORK OR RABBIT MEAT**

Leviticus 11:1-8 1 The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. 3 Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. 4 Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. 5 Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 6 the **rabbit** also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 7 and the **pig**, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. 8 **You shall not eat of their flesh** nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.'"

### **SEAFOOD, FISH – eat only if it has fins and scales (no catfish, shrimp, lobster, clams, etc.)**

Leviticus 11:9-12 9 "These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. 10 But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you. 11 You shall regard them as detestable; you shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall detest their carcasses. 12 Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is detestable to you" (ESV).

## **How the Church Came to Believe the Torah Has Been Canceled**

Jews have been hated by other nations from the beginning, and anything Jewish was hated as well. Non-Jewish people didn't want anything to do with Jews (many still don't). Even early Gentile church leaders tried to distance the Church from the Jewish people and their culture, even going so far as to label Jewish people as heretics and their religious practices as heresy. For example, here is a quote from Ignatius, an early Church leader who was Bishop of Antioch in the second century:

"To profess Jesus Christ while continuing to follow Jewish customs is an absurdity. The Christian faith does not look to Judaism, but Judaism looks to Christianity...." (Magnesians 10)

This anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic mindset grew and grew and eventually led to persecution beginning in the first century A.D., continuing in the Crusades (1095-1270), the Spanish Inquisition (1478-1808), and, of course, the Holocaust (1933-1945). Sadly, anti-Semitism continues today.

This also led to the development of "Replacement Theology" in the Church. This teaches that the Christian Church has replaced Israel as our Father's chosen people, that the Church is the "new Israel." But the Bible says that all believers become part of the Israel of God. (See discussion on page 13.)

This anti-Semitic thinking has even influenced most English translations of Scripture. The Bible has been translated in many instances with an anti-Semitic bias just because the Jews were hated so much and the translators wanted to distance themselves from them. The growth of the early Church was primarily by the addition of Gentiles who did not want to associate with Jews or be associated with them by others. As a result they didn't want to worship in Jewish ways; this led to the change from worshipping on the Sabbath to Sunday, which was made official and binding by Roman emperor Constantine and the early Roman church in the fourth century. When Scripture was finally translated into English, the anti-Semitism was firmly in place in much of the world, and it is evident in the translation of our Bibles.

For example, many personal names were changed from the original Hebrew or Jewish names to Gentile names; *YHVH* became "the LORD," *Yosef* became "Joseph," *Miriam* became "Mary," *Yeshua* became "Jesus," *Ya'akov* became "James," and *Yochanon* became John. The original names of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures changed, too. At the time of King James (17<sup>th</sup> century), Gentiles were forbidden by

law to use Jewish names, and Jews were not allowed to use Gentile names when naming their children. This was one of the reasons for tension between the authorities and the Puritans, ultra-religious people of the time who loved Jewish names and wanted to use them.

One of the rules that the King James Version translators were instructed to follow was that "good" people got Gentile names and "bad" people could be called by their Jewish names. They didn't want to give the impression that a Jewish person could be a "good guy" and they tried to separate him from his Jewishness. In other European languages the name *Ya'akov* was translated into a recognizable variation of that name (like Jacob), but James is nothing like the original. Most major English versions follow the pattern set by the KJV. Exceptions include *The Scriptures*, the *Complete Jewish Bible*, *Restoration Scriptures True Name Edition*, and a few miscellaneous Sacred Name versions, but all the most popular versions like NIV, NASB, NKJV, NLT, etc. follow that pattern of name changing, and by doing so they deny some of the Jewish elements in the original text. When you see the name JAMES in Scripture, that itself is anti-Semitic in a sense.

In addition to changing names, they changed the word *Torah* to "law." And this change is very confusing sometimes. It's not totally incorrect, as the rabbis who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek Septuagint used the Greek word for "law," but to our modern, Western mindset it suggests a very different idea than what it originally meant to the Israelites, which was "God's teaching and instruction."

Eventually the early Gentile churches started teaching that believers do not need to obey the Torah, which contradicts Scripture. The Church leaders gave themselves authority over the Word of God and changed the doctrines to further set them and their churches apart from the Jews. The common people didn't know the difference; hardly anyone had a Bible of their own to check what the leaders said. Besides changing the Sabbath (which the Roman Catholic Church freely admits doing and accepts total responsibility for), the other biblical holidays (festivals) and dietary laws in the Torah were abandoned. Eventually most of the Old Testament came to be regarded as a history lesson with prophecy and some devotional passages.

These changes in theology, reinforced by biased translations of Scripture, have resulted in the majority of believers today being taught to relate to our Creator in a very different way from what the original Scriptures say and mean. And this false teaching has been promoted so heavily and accepted so much by so many that now the truth of God's word is not recognized by most people, and it is even rejected when they do hear it. How tragic.

## **All Believers Are Part of Israel**

There is a misconception that God's commandments in the "Old Testament" were only for Jewish people.

The prophet Moses told the Israelites that God considers them to be His special, chosen people:

Deuteronomy 26:18 "The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments."

People usually think of the Church as being non-Jewish. And they usually think of Israel as being only the Jews. First, a clarification. Israel was composed of twelve tribes; the Jews came from one of the twelve, the tribe of Judah. All Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. It's like saying that all Oklahomans are Americans, but not all Americans are Oklahomans. Many Israelites came from the other tribes, so lots of Israelites are not Jews, although sometimes the words Israelites and Jews seem to be used interchangeably. It is possible for a person to be of Israelite descent without being Jewish.

More importantly, the Bible speaks of "the Israel of God."<sup>4</sup> The Israel of God is not limited to the physical descendants of native-born Israelites and Jews, nor is it limited to the nation Israel that exists in the

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<sup>4</sup> Galatians 6:16

Middle East today whose citizens are generally not religious at all. The Bible also says that not all native-born Israelites (and Jews) are included in the Israel of God.<sup>5</sup> God has expanded the true Israel into a spiritual entity, a commonwealth that includes people from all nations who repent from sin and believe in Yeshua.<sup>6</sup> It is extremely important to grasp this principle that ALL believers, Jewish or not, become part of Israel (the Israel of God). Consider the following biblical support for this statement.

Isaiah the prophet wrote that the Gentile who joined himself to the people of God from other nations should not be considered as separate from His people, the people of Israel:

Isaiah 56:3a Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to The LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people."

Yeshua said that if a believer falls into sin and refuses to repent, then the status of that believer changes to that of a Gentile (a non-Israelite):

Matthew 18:15-17 15 **"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault** in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; **and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile** and a tax collector."

So, according to Yeshua, if a believer sins (disobeys God's commandments in the Torah), then he loses his status as an Israelite and becomes as a Gentile. On the other hand, if a believer is faithful to Torah and repents when he or she sins, that believer remains part of Israel!

Yeshua also made another statement indicating that two groups of "sheep" would be combined to form one flock:

John 10:16 **"I have other sheep**, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; **and they will become one flock** with one shepherd."

He was speaking to Jews, so the "other sheep" of a different fold are not Jewish. Those He brings from other Israelite tribes, known collectively as Ephraim or Joseph, and from the Gentiles, are all added together with the Jews; they will become one flock, not two flocks. That one flock is the Israel of God.

Romans 11:17-21 clearly tells us that the believing (born again) Gentile believer is like a wild olive branch that grafted into the olive tree that symbolizes Israel among the natural branches:

Romans 11:17-21 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and **you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree**, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

In Ephesians 2:11-13 the Bible says that Gentiles were previously excluded from citizenship in Israel, but now through Christ they have been "brought near" and are included:

Ephesians 2:11-13 11 Therefore **remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh**, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands — 12 **remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world**. 13 **But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near** by the blood of Christ.

In Ephesians 2:19 and 3:6 we read that the Gentile believer becomes a fellow citizen and a fellow heir with the faithful Israelites, and becomes a member of the household of God:

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 9:6-8, Revelation 2:9, 3:9

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:11-13

Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household...**

Ephesians 3:6 *To be specific*, that **the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body**, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...

Galatians 3:7 says that believers are in the family of Abraham:

Galatians 3:7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham (ESV).

Galatians 3:29 confirms this: those who belong to Christ are Abraham's descendants!

Galatians 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

In John's vision in the book of Revelation, he describes the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven where Yeshua and His followers will live together, and John describes the gates to the city:

Revelation 21:10-12 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

Notice that these twelve gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel. **There is no gate named "Gentiles" or non-Jews" or "non-Israelites."**

Many Gentile believers (non-Israelite and non-Jewish believers) think that they are living under a new covenant that somehow eliminates God's law. It is described for us in Jeremiah 31. Let's see who this covenant is for and what it says about His law:

Jeremiah 31:31-33 31 "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**, 32 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. 33 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.

This passage clearly shows **that the new covenant is "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."** Nothing is said about Gentiles; to participate in the new covenant, one needs to belong to one of those houses, Israel or Judah. And God said that when He makes this new covenant, He will write His law (Hebrew *Torah*) on people's hearts; they will know His Torah thoroughly and they will be obedient to it.

**All repentant believers are part of "the Israel of God."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, any commands in Scripture that were given to Israel, His chosen people, apply to all believers. It does not make any difference whether you are Jewish or Gentile, because in Messiah (Christ), it doesn't matter – we are all one.**

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We already saw that God makes it very clear in numerous passages of Scripture that He wants His people Israel to obey His commandments in His Torah. Here are two examples:

Deuteronomy 5:1 Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully."

Deuteronomy 6:1-3a 1 "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which The LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear The LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do *it*, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you..."

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<sup>7</sup> Galatians 6:16

Another point to consider is **that even if believers were not considered to be part of Israel, the word of God states that there is one law for every person**, whether Israelite or "alien" (foreigner, stranger):

Leviticus 24:22 **"There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native**, for I am the LORD your God."

Numbers 15:15-16 <sup>15</sup> "As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns *with you*, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. <sup>16</sup> **There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien** who sojourns with you."

Ecclesiastes 12:13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person.

Here's what Yeshua about it said in His Great Commission:

Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

These were Yeshua's final words before ascending to Heaven. We would expect His final instructions to have been among the most important things that He most wanted His followers to do. Obeying His last commands is our mission. As we teach about salvation, we also must teach all people to obey His commandments. Coming to eternal life through repentance and faith in Yeshua is just the beginning of what God wants for His people. It is in our obedience that we are conformed to the image of His Son.

## HalleluYah Fellowship

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**www.halleluyahfellowship.net**

**Join us each Sabbath (Saturday) for worship and Bible study at 1:00**

**Come join us for passionate praise and worship and study of the Hebrew Roots of Christianity in the Bible to learn how biblical faith was intended to be understood and practiced!**

*"HalleluYah" (original spelling with a "Y" instead of a "J") is a Hebrew word that means "praise God."  
"Hallel" means "praise," and "Yah" is a short form of God's name in Hebrew (Yehováh).*

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