
Torah Faith for Non-Jews

An appeal to Christians

by Ross K. Nichols, © 2006

A Biblical Plan

The Biblical plan for humanity involves the *torah* (God's Instructions) going forth to all the nations of the world (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3).

Israel has a special mission according to the Bible. They are to be a *kingdom of priests* (Exodus 19:6), a *light to the nations and a covenant for the peoples* (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3). To the people of Israel *belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them comes the Messiah..*(Romans 9:4-5). Salvation, according to Jesus of Nazareth is also of the Jews (John 4:22).

According to the prophets, there will come a time when the nations of the world (Gentiles) will begin to seek this ancient and Divine teaching from Israel. Ten men from all the languages of the nations, the bible tells us, will grab the garment of a Jew and say, "Let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you. (Zechariah 8:23)" They will come from all nations and confess that "*their fathers have inherited lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit*" (Jeremiah 16:19-20).

Recovering the Plan

This central message (Torah Faith) was diverted during the formative years of the Church and is now being raised like a banner to the nations. Ironically, the very prophecy which proclaims the New Covenant declares that it is the Torah that will be written upon the heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Contrary to the message proclaimed from pulpits across the land, when asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus replied, "Keep the commandments!" (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-25)

As non-Jews attached themselves to Israel through faith in Yeshua of Nazareth (himself a Torah observant Jew), questions arose as to what manner of faith they should hold to. This was the point of a controversial meeting recorded in the Christian New Testament (Acts chapter 15). All of the key players were present. James, the leader of the messianic movement in Palestine was presiding. After hearing Peter, Paul and others declare what God was doing among the Gentiles, he made a decision that has all but been ignored since the time it left his lips.

The decision is recorded in Acts 15:19-21.

NRS Acts 15:19 Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. 21 For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues."

This list of 4 laws:

1. Abstain from things polluted by idols
2. Abstain from fornication
3. Abstain from things strangled (improper methods of killing animals for food)
4. Abstain from blood (this refers to eating meat that still has blood in it)

seems to be an early attempt to define the morally acceptable minimum requirements for Gentiles who are turning to God.

A couple of points can be learned from this decision. Rather than demand adherence to the entire Torah upon acceptance of this new faith, Gentiles should be, according to James, instructed in a basic set of instructions. The new convert would have time to learn the entirety of the faith by attending the synagogue on the Sabbath - where Moses is preached in every city.

In the 1st century there were Gentiles who had joined themselves to the heritage of the people of Israel without formally converting to Judaism. Various writers have commented on these groups of Gentile "God-Fearers" as they were called. The book of Acts contains 11 references to this group (Acts 10:22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14;

17:4, 17; 18:7). Two Greek words are used to refer to this group; *phoboumenos* and *sebomenos*. These "God-Fearers" followed the Torah, but as it applied to Gentiles and not precisely in the same manner as their Jewish co-religionists.

A Covenant for the Gentiles

Based upon the early chapters of Genesis, the rabbis have always maintained that the Bible defines a faith that is separate from but compatible with Judaism, which entitles Gentiles to a relationship with the God of Israel. They point out that God's first covenant was with Noah and his descendants and therefore is incumbent upon all mankind. Various attempts from antiquity seek to spell this covenant out. According to Jewish scholarship (ancient and modern), there are 7 Laws, or categories of law that govern the conduct of the descendants of Noah (all of humanity). These 7 contain a positive command to pursue Justice / set up courts, as well as prohibitions against; idolatry, blasphemy, murder, sexual immorality, theft, and cruelty to animals, which involves dietary rules and regulations. While some would strictly refer to these as a list of 7 laws, many authorities would suggest that these represent categories of Torah learning.

While seldom preached today, the original message of Jesus was not contrary to the Law. Jesus had a clear and unambiguous teaching when it came to the Torah. He did not come to do away with the Law. He did not teach that the commandments were no longer valid, and he said that those who taught such things would be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, his last words to his followers (*in addition to the command to baptize - the only point that his modern followers seem to want to carry out*) were to go and make disciples of all nations (Gentiles) and to teach them to obey everything that he commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus on Torah Observance and Commandment Keeping

NRS Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your

righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Heaven and earth have not passed away! Do and teach the commandments! Make disciples of all nations!

Those that claim to abide in Christ ought to walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). For those that seek to be conformed to the image of Jesus, do not be surprised if your faith ends up looking more Jewish than "Christian".