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Torah Questions

14: 1-4

Torah questions DIG: What issues were causing the disunity in the church at Rome? Who was the stronger and who was the weaker? What might be an issue in your place of worship today? What is the “One Law” movement? Why does it threaten Jewish distinctiveness? But what about Gentiles who sense they are called by God to worship in Jewish ways?

REFLECT: How “weak” or “strong” are you in the faith? In what areas are you “weak” or “strong?” Why? Which issues of conscience is your place of worship dealing with? How do you personally deal with people who are causing disunity in your place of worship? What principle should guide us when we are dealing with differences of conscience?

We can have different opinions, but we shouldn't be judging each other on issues of conscience; however, Isra'el's national identity must be preserved.



The issue in this passage does not come from the behavior it teaches, but from identifying precisely **who are the “strong” and “weak,”** and drawing out the implications for each. **The weak** are believers, either **Gentile** or **Jewish**, who have not yet grown sufficiently in their faith to have abstained from various practices and calendar observations. Their behavior is irrational and emotional, linked to psychological needs, social pressures, superstition, or it may be simply a matter of

habit. This is why **Paul** calls them **weak**.

*Dear Kind Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** love that took our punishment on the cross and then gave us **Your** righteousness so we could live with **You** in your holy heaven. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. Praise **You** for giving those who love and follow **You** the gift of being **Your** children. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)**.*

*Praise **You** for being such a kind and patient **Father**! When **Your child** is being tested and needs wisdom on what to do, **You** never yell at **him** or scold **him**—instead **You** invite **him** to come to **You** to ask **You** for **wisdom** and **You** promise to give it. **But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all without hesitation and without reproach; and it will be given to him (James 1:5)**. Praise **You** for your example of chesed loving kindness. Praise **You** for always being with **Your child**; always being by **his** side ready to help. **You** are Awesome! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

The principle: Now as for a person whose trust is weak, welcome him - but not to get into arguments over rabbinic opinions, or **halakhah (14:1)**. **Halakhah** are rules governing **Jewish** life and come from the Hebrew root **to walk**. **The rabbis used the term to refer to the legal way to walk out the commandments of the Torah**. It can also refer to **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ei - The Oral Law**). A single **halakhah** is a specific ruling given regarding a particular issue, **the halakhah** being the ruling accepted and observed by the **Jewish** community. Conflict is usually a sign that the focus has been shifted to areas of conscience. When we focus on personalities, preferences, interpretations, styles, or methods, division always happens.³⁵² We need to **stay away from stupid and ignorant controversies - you know that they lead to fights (Second Timothy 2:23)**.

The application: One person who has the faith/trust/belief that will allow him to eat anything, obviously refers to the **stronger**, more mature believer who understands and exercises **his** freedom in **Messiah**. **The Gospel** of the B'rit Chadashah includes no dietary restrictions, Mosaic or otherwise. In **his** first letter to **Timothy**, **Paul** wrote: **The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines**

of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth (First Timothy 4:13).

Several years after **he** began **his** apostolic ministry, **Peter** was still afraid to eat animals that were not kosher. It took **three** repeated declarations by **the Lord** in a vision to convince **Peter** to **stop treating as unclean what God has made clean (Acts 10:15-16)**. The greater teaching of the vision was that **Peter** was **not to call any person** [that is, **Gentiles**] **common or unclean (Acts 10:28)**.

But some **Gentile** believers, like some **Jews**, were troubled by eating certain foods, but for different reasons. Because of idolatry and immorality related to their former religions, they could not bring themselves to eat meat, or any other food, that had been used as an offering to a pagan deity. Like Peter, they were still spiritually **weak** in regard to such things. As a result, some **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers would **eat only vegetables (14:2)**, taking no chance of eating meat they considered defiled by idols. **Paul** is not proposing that the **Jewish** dietary mitzvot have been abolished. The issue here is vegetarianism, not kosher **halakhah**.³⁵³

The one who eats anything must not look down on the “weaker” [believer] who abstains; and the abstainer must not pass judgment on the [believer] who eats anything, because God has accepted him (14:3). **Paul** chooses **his** words carefully in order to pinpoint the sin of each. **The one who eats anything** might take pride in having thought the matter through and freed **himself** from **his** fears and compulsions, and might look down on **his “weaker” brother in the faith**. But **the abstainer** is more likely to develop a “holier-than-thou” attitude and pass judgment on **his brother** as “careless.”³⁵⁴

The freedom in Messiah: The second reason every believer should accept every other believer is that **the Lord** sustains us all. A believer who is **“strong”** about matters that are not doctrinal or moral, and that are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture, is just as much in need of **God’s** strength as the who is **“weak.”** We are all **weak** in the sense that everything good and righteous we possess is a gift from **God**, never a product of our own wisdom or efforts.

But the remaining influence of the flesh often tempts liberated believers to think legalists are so rigid and self-righteous that they sacrifice not only much personal joy, but also limit their effectiveness to **the Lord**. On the other hand, the same

fleshly influence tempts legalists to believe that liberated believers are self-centered and loose-living, and therefore, cannot serve **the Lord** effectively.³⁵⁵

Being well aware of those tendencies, **Paul** confronted both groups with the stinging rhetorical question: **Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant? It is before his own Master**, namely , namely **Yeshua Messiah**, that each believer **will stand or fall; and the fact is that every believer will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand (14:4)**. Earlier in the letter, **Paul** posed a similar rhetorical question: **So, who will bring a charge against God's chosen people? He asks: Certainly not God - He is the one who causes them to be considered righteous! Who punishes them? Certainly not the Messiah Yeshua, who died and - more than that - has been raised, is at the right hand of God and is actually pleading on our behalf (8:33-34)! For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers, neither what exists nor what is coming, neither powers above nor powers below, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which comes to us through the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord (8:38-39).**

Yeshua Himself assures those who belong to **Him**: **My sheep listen to my voice, I recognize them, they follow me, and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from my hands (John 10:27-28)**. The closing benediction of **Jude's** brief letter reflects that promise, reminding believers of **the one who can keep you from falling and set you without defect and full of joy in the presence of His Sh'khinah (Jude 24)**. Truly, **the Lord** sustains **His** own.³⁵⁶

Torah Questions: The Psalmist of Isra'el implores **Ha'Shem**, **"Open my eyes, so that I will see wonders from your Torah" (Ps 119:18)**. Is this a prayer that **Gentiles** can pray? Or can only **Jewish people** speak these words? I believe that **Gentiles** can, and should, pray this prayer with devotion. This is because **the Torah** is relevant to **Gentiles**. Many sections of **the Torah** are not directly applicable to **Gentiles** (just as there are many sections of **the Torah** that are not directly applicable to men), but there are hundreds of other commandments that are directly applicable. There are at least twenty purposes of **the Torah**. They include:

- To serve as the foundational revelation of **God**
- To remind us of **God's** love, grace and power seen in acts of creation and

redemption

- To teach us how to love **God** and our neighbor
- To teach us how to worship **God**
- To establish the oneness and sovereignty of **God**
- To teach us to be holy as **God** is holy
- To point out sin so that we might repent to **God**
- To train us to exercise faith in **God**
- To train us to be obedient to **God**
- To reveal the heart and priorities of **God**
- To reveal the wisdom and knowledge of **God**
- To train us to meditate on the Word of **God**
- To establish the order of **God's** creation
- To uphold **God's** standards of justice and compassion in society
- To draw the nations to **God**
- To foster unity among **God's** people
- To give our children a heritage from **the Lord**
- To point us to **Messiah** and **His** death, resurrection and return
- To prepare **Isra'el** to fulfill **God's** calling
- To preserve **Isra'el** as a distinct nation by **God's** design

The Torah serves all of these purposes and most of them are directly applicable to **Gentiles**. A **Gentile's** love for **Torah** commandments should include, above all, a commitment to **Torah** ethics. These are centered on **the Shema – love for God and love for neighbor**.

But **Gentiles** do not have a covenantal responsibility to keep those aspects of **Torah** that were given by **God** to serve as “boundary markers of identity” for **the Jewish people**. This relates to the last point on our list of purposes of **the Torah** – to preserve **Isra'el** as a distinct nation by **God's** design. Consider that if all **Gentile Christians** lived as **Jews**. **The Jewish people** would cease to exist as **a certain people who keep themselves separate; their customs are different from those of all other people (Esther 3:8)**. Certainly, it is not **God's** will for **the Jewish people** to cease to exist!

Stated another way, **the God of Isra'el** is a **God** who loves diversity and we see this diversity reflected in the order of creation. Consider the different kinds of plants and trees, birds and animals, and their many colors. Humanity is divided into male and female, **Isra'el** and the nations. The biblical model from beginning to end is that the kingdom of **God** is a table fellowship of **Jews** (in all their diversity) and

Gentiles (in all their diversity) whose relationship with one another is supposed to be characterized by interdependence and mutual blessing.

Those who teach that all **Gentile Christians** are supposed to live like **Jews** by embracing **Jewish** “boundary markers of identity” have embraced a teaching that **Paul** condemns in **his** letter to the **Galatians**, referring to its adherents as those who **pervert the Gospel of Messiah (Galatians 1:7)**. The modern day expression of this teaching is the “One Law” or “Hebrew Roots” movement. This movement is toxic for the following reasons: (1) **It preaches a different gospel (Galatians 1:6)** by claiming that **Gentile Christians** have to live like **Jews** in order to be faithful to **God**; (2) It is anti-**Jewish** because it opposes **Jewish** distinctiveness; (3) It is anti-**Christian** because it opposes **Gentile Christian** distinctiveness and claims that the Church is apostate if it does not live out **Isra’el’s** way of life; (4) It causes division in **Messianic** synagogues and **Christian** churches; (5) It is energized by a critical spirit and a gnostic-like quest for secret knowledge; (6) It is based on pseudo-scholarship; (7) It leads to weirdness and strange teachings, for example, **Gentiles** dressed up as Orthodox **Jews**, the belief that all **Christians** are members of the lost tribes of **Isra’el**, the view that **Paul** is a false apostle, rejection of the divinity of **Yeshua** or the triune nature of **God**, and so on.

One Law, or Hebrew Roots Doctrine (see the commentary on **Galatians Ak - The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**): One Law doctrine is based on the idea that everybody everywhere ought to be keeping **the Torah** given to the **Jews** at Sinai. In their view, **the Torah** wasn’t intended just for **Isra’el**, but for everyone. Moreover, neither the coming of **Messiah**, nor the atonement provided in the New Covenant changes anything in terms of what they see as the universal human need to relate to **God** through mitzvot of **the Torah**. Accordingly, One Law teachers, as embodied today in the Hebrew Roots movement, are highly critical of what they see as the historical error of the **Gentile** Church in not keeping “the laws” which **God** gave to **Moses** and **Isra’el** at Mount Sinai. Of particular concern to them seem to be “the laws” pertaining to Shabbat and festival observance, as well as the dietary commandments. Those **Gentile Christians** who don’t necessarily see the need to follow such “laws” are considered as “pagans.”

One Law doctrine holds that the true “Hebrew roots” of the faith are to be found in keeping all 613 commandments of **the Torah** given to **Moses** given at Mt. Sinai. Their mission, as it seems, is to promote observance of “the law” as the means of restoring the body of **Messiah** to the supposed true Hebrew roots of the faith,

which are to be found in the Sinai covenant. This mission takes on particular urgency in the end-times. One Law proponents advocate, therefore, the urgent need for all **Gentile** believers to depart from “paganism,” and to return in zeal to the “true Hebrew roots” of their faith, which is supposedly to be found in the legal observance of **the Torah**. In recent years, they have bombarded the internet with their teachings. Some of them are very savvy when it comes to this.

The Issue: Followers of “One Law, One People” movement insist that everybody ought to be **Torah** observant. Since everybody does not keep **the Torah**, they typically see their **Torah** observance as some kind of evidence of their chosen-ness. They believe they have special knowledge like the Gnostics, whose writings flourished among certain **Christian** groups until about the second century, when the Fathers of the early church denounced it as heresy. However, the “One Law” doctrine is causing just as much trouble today as the Gnostic doctrine did in the early Church. Not only does it breed a sense of legalistic pride, but there are deeper concerns. Almost inevitably, “One Law, One People” teaching is associated with the idea that people who keep **the Torah** given to **Isra’el** actually ARE **Isra’el**. This idea is usually advanced by myths about the “lost tribes.” The followers of “One Law” typically begin to identify **Isra’el** in Bible prophecy as somehow pertaining to them. Most of them think of themselves as belonging to the northern kingdom of **Isra’el**, as represented in the prophecy of the two “sticks” referenced in **Ezeki’el 37**. Thus, they see **Torah** observance as their duty as members of “the people **Isra’el**.”

The question of **Isra’el** identity always seems to be related to this doctrine of One Law. Thus, not only is it wrong on its face, theologically, but it is deeply and intimately intertwined with Replacement Theology. Obsession with **the Torah**, and with **Isra’el** identity, has caused many Hebrew Roots groups to take on the external look and feel of being **Jewish**. In Hebrew Roots conferences and in local congregational groups, for example, it is commonplace to hold meetings on Shabbat and during the Levitical feasts. In their meetings, they typically employ traditional articles of **Jewish** worship like davidic dancing, **Jewish** liturgical prayers, and shofar- blowing. It is common for people to be wearing kippot and tzitzit, using Hebrew slogans on their banners, displaying the Magen David, and even participating in **Torah** processions. It’s not an intrinsically bad thing to use **Jewish** symbolism and expression by **Gentiles**. However, such usage by legalistic, **Gentile** groups, many of whom think they are the true **Israelites**, and who are often critical and divisive toward the **Gentile** church, can cause much offense and/or confusion

in both the **Jewish** and **Christian** community. Both the **Jewish** and **Christian** communities may not be able to see the distinction between the **Messianic Jewish** community and the Hebrew Roots camp. Due to their external appearance, and the imitation of **Jewish** expression, there is potential that the practices and beliefs of these Hebrew Roots groups could wrongfully be attributed to **Messianic Jews**.

But what about Gentiles who sense they are called by God to worship in Jewish ways? Gentiles who are called by **God** to be members of **Messianic Jewish** congregations are called to embrace the lifestyle of these synagogues, not as **Messianic Jews** but as **Gentile** followers of the **Messiah**. They are **Gentiles** who practice **Messianic Judaism**, or, **Messianic Gentiles**. So, on the one hand, “calling” is the operative term here since most **Gentiles** are not called to join **Messianic** synagogues and live out **Jewish** lifestyle. But on the other hand, **Gentile Christian** churches are not violating **God’s** will if they do not keep the Sabbath on the seventh day, observe the **Jewish** festivals, and so on. The **Gentile** wing of the Church should appreciate its **Jewish** origins, its **Jewish** Scriptures, its **Jew-Gentile** identity and its **Jewish Messiah**, but the **Gentile** wing of the Church should not be viewed as deficient if it does not follow distinctly **Jewish** customs.³⁵⁷

At the end of the book of **Ezeki’el, the prophet** speaks of life during the Messianic Kingdom (**Ezeki’el Chapters 40-48**). **He** tells us that not only will **the Promised Land** be divided as an inheritance for each of **the twelve tribes**, but there will be also be **Gentiles** involved in the inheritance as well. **He** says: **You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Isra’el. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the [Gentiles] who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you that are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Isra’el (Ezeki’el 47:21-22)**. What a wonderful thought – that there will be a remnant from among the **Gentile** nations who will so desire to be identified with **Isra’el** that **the God of Isra’el** will even grant them a physical inheritance within **the Land of Isra’el**.