

IS THE TORAH-LAW STILL RELEVANT IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

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According to a recent article posted April 2017 by Abigail Geiger the Bible is not viewed or revered the same by everyone. In this article Geiger offers five facts on how Americans view the Bible. First she submits, “about a third of Americans (35%) say they read scriptures at least once a week, while 45% seldom or never read scripture.”<sup>1</sup> The frequency of people reading scripture speaks to whether or not people find the Holy Writ relevant today or not. Second she suggests, “three-quarters of Christians say they believe the Bible is the word of God.”<sup>2</sup> Eight-in-ten Muslims (83%) say the Quran is the word of God. Far fewer Jews (37%) say they view the Torah as the word of God.” This implies that not everyone who says ‘the word of God’ is referring to the same literature. Third Geiger explains, “Christians, who make up a majority of U.S. adults (71%), are divided over how to interpret the Bible.”<sup>3</sup> While some say it should be taken literally there are those who hold to the position that the Bible should not be interpreted literally. They, of course, are those who adamantly believe the Bible is a book written by flawed men thus disqualifying it from being the word of God. Geiger continues and gives a fourth fact, “In 2014, about four-in-ten Christians (42%) said reading the Bible or other religious materials is an essential part of what being a Christian means to them personally.”<sup>4</sup> Without a doubt you have those who believe that although reading the Bible is important is not essential to being a Christian. Then there are those who do not believe that reading the Bible is at all important to their Christian identity. Geiger’s fifth fact was even more thought provoking. She submits:

“Seven-in-ten Americans (71%) know the Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. A similar share know that Moses was the biblical figure who led the Exodus from Egypt, and 63% could identify Genesis as the first book of the Bible, according to our 2010 religious knowledge

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1 Geiger, Abigail. *5 Facts on how Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts*. pewresearch.org, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/14/5-facts-on-how-americans-view-the-bible-and-other-religious-texts/>. (14 April 2017).

2 Ibid., *5 Facts on how Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts*.

3 Ibid., *5 Facts on how Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts*.

4 Ibid., *5 Facts on how Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts*.

survey. But fewer than half of adults (45%) could name all four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)...”<sup>5</sup>

These facts offered by Geiger give a small peak in to the mindset of Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century regarding their thoughts about the Bible. Americans are, of course, not the standard measuring rod for the rest of the world but it’s a starting point for the discussion. It is safe to say that there are fewer who are aware of the Torah-Law and its significance or lack thereof.

It is my position that the Torah-Law has been the foundation of the world’s moral and ethical compass for ages. Without it we would be loss and left to our innate evil proclivities toward ourselves and the people around us. Its relevance and influence today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still as vital and necessary as it has always been.

There are many who argue against this stance for various reasons nonetheless it hold as truth for me. I am of the percentage of individuals who faithfully read the Bible on a weekly basis. It gives me life, hope and encouragement. It is alive and is a breathing wonder and mystery. Of course, in order to read the Bible you first have to start with the Torah-Law. It is the Torah-Law that sets the stage for an understanding and foundation for the rest of the Bible.

In this research paper I seek to layout the origin of the Torah-Law. Where did it come from? Who wrote it? Why did it come into existence? Who was the intended reader? We will discuss my stance that it was intended to be the voice of God, give distinction to God’s chosen people and to create order amongst them. This piece of history has always been under attack and closely watched and critiqued by so many some would say. Here we will discuss the opposition and scrutiny the Torah-Law has had to face over the centuries since its conception. It has had to contend with questions about its authenticity, credibility, relevance and self contradictions. Lastly, I will attempt to reveal the significance and the vitality of the Torah-Law politically, economically and socially today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., *5 Facts on how Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts*.

The term Torah has a range of meanings. It is widely known as the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) which is also known as the Pentateuch and the Law of Moses. It is a Hebrew term meaning instruction or teaching. The Torah-Law was intended for the people of God to serve as the voice of God to instruct them in the way to live as His people. After a total of fifty days when the people of Israel, the Jews, completed their Exodus from Egypt, God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him what the Jews believed was the way of living. The Torah, when observed as the voice of God, is seen as written instructions guiding others towards a way of living. From the Torah the people of Israel received a set of morals, religious obligations and civil laws that embodied the teaching, culture, and practice of the Jewish nation. These instructions were believed to be called into existence and given by God, through their leader Moses, on which the people of Israel abided by forming a covenant with God. As it states in the scripture, “These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.” <sup>6</sup>(*Leviticus 26:46 KJV*)

There has been this debate on whether God actually spoke audibly on Mt. Sinai through thunder or other means. This specific discussion is not our focus of discussion in this paper. The intent here is to highlight that the Torah-Law is to be taken as the instructions of God. He chose an earthly leader that He would speak through in order to lead and teach His people. God’s people were able to connect with God, learn His ways and know what was expected of them through the Torah-Law. So initially it was created and used as God’s voice.

The Torah-Law was also created to serve as a way to provide a guideline by which the people of God were to live with the purpose of keeping them distinct and distinguished from all other nations and people groups. God intended for His people to be Holy as He is Holy and sanctified. Holy simply means different, sanctified means to be set aside and set apart. The Torah is seen as the commencing of the Jewish nation. The people of Israel and those who followed the law of Moses were held to a

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<sup>6</sup> *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Thomas Nelson Inc., 2003.

standard of customs and religious practices likened to no other nation of people. The people of Israel believed the Torah-Law was given to them exclusively as a result of being chosen to be in covenant with God. This covenant also served as a means of charging them with a purpose far different from all others. Their ultimate purpose was to be a light to the whole world. It is within the Torah-Law that this purpose was spelled out through laws, ordinances, commandments, customs, ceremonies and rituals. God was forming a new nation – His nation – and they must resemble what God represented. Paul Cuny gives great insight to this truth in his book, “Secrets of the Kingdom Economy: How You Can Flourish in God’s Economy.” He writes:

Moses was saying that by the presence of God and by His personal involvement in the details of the culture of this new nation of people, they would be distinguished from all other people on the earth. In Moses’ day, all other nations served heathen gods. There had to be something that would differentiate God’s people from everyone else. Through the Torah (The Law), God began to give Moses and His people the requirements to create an atmosphere for His presence to dwell in.<sup>7</sup>

Torah-Law speaks to its meaning in its title. The word law is widely used to describe the first five books of the Bible. This implies that these books were also created as a means to establish order amongst the people of God. Within the Torah is where you will find the well known ten commandments (Exodus 20). However, what is not so well known is that also in the Torah is found over six hundred laws outlined and spelled out for the people of God in Leviticus. Not only are the laws detailed but the disastrous consequences of these laws are not followed. Order was set. Boundaries were clear. A covenant was made that if the people of God would follow this order of living then they would be His people and He would be their God.

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<sup>7</sup> Cuny, Paul. *Secrets of the Kingdom Economy: How You Can Flourish in God’s Economy*. Certa Publishing, (2017).

Since the Torah-Law was presented to the people centuries ago it has faced innumerable opposition. Some people reject it simply due to their refusal of abiding by it and/or restricting and altering their life to adhere to it. However, there are others who have a totally different approach to why they oppose it. There are those who vehemently question the Torah's credibility and authenticity. For example, there seems to be this blaring claim from the Torah that has kept this concern of its credibility alive. Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen discusses this concern in his article, A Rational Approach to the Torah's Divine Origin:

The Torah claims that every Jewish man, woman, and child alive in 1312 B.C.E. — about three million people, according to the Torah — heard God speak at Mount Sinai and survived to teach their descendants about the event. Here we have an easily identifiable group — all of Jewry — who could have verified or denied the story any time during the first two or three generations after the alleged mass prophecy transpired.<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to suggest:

Anyone who has studied history will affirm that people are gullible. We consistently find that sufficiently charismatic leaders can persuade people of any lie, even a lie that obligates followers to engage in painful or self-destructive behavior, *as long as followers cannot check the lie.*

In other words, some simply view the Torah-Law as lies and fables. It is even viewed as a manipulative tactic to control a people group.

In addition to credibility issues, the Torah-Law faces questions of its relevance. The relevance of the Torah-Law today is a discussion that scholars continue to argue. Some believe that the Law will be fulfilled at the second-coming of Christ, determining that we must continue to abide by every word of the Torah until, as the passage in Matthew 5:18-20 states:

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<sup>8</sup> Kelemen, Lawrence. "A Rational Approach to the Torah's Divine Origin". [simpletoremember.com](https://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/proof-torah-true/). <https://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/proof-torah-true/>. 1996

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (*Matthew 5:18-20*)<sup>9</sup>

Others believe that the Law was fulfilled with the death of Christ and thus now through faith and obedience only the principles of the Law should be remembered, not the direct laws themselves as scripture states:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (*Galatians 3:23-26*)<sup>10</sup>

From the time of the old Mosaic governing to the time of John the Baptist's teaching, and until the beginning of the teachings of Christ, transitional eras bridged principles that were kept, though the delivery styles and covenants varied. The Law is considered now a respected system of internal conviction and motivation, as does the New Testament.

Furthermore, the Torah-Law has been under attack due to what some may say are contradictions within the Torah-Law. There are those who assert that the Torah has contradictions in it because they believe the Torah-Law was written by various authors. This gives rise to the perceived different traditions and concepts found therein. It is also believed that the Judeans adopted many myths of the ancient Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Persians. These myths were said to have been believed upon and then canonized into the current Torah. Certain questions continue to swirl around in the minds

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<sup>9</sup> *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Thomas Nelson Inc., 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Galatians 3:23-26)

of many critics and scholars alike. For example, why are there two creation accounts? Were birds made of water or earth? How many pairs of animals was Noah told to bring onto the ark? There is even believed to be duplicating material which gives rise to questions of contradictions. Unfortunately, these inquiries into the will persist perpetually. I am of the persuasion that the Torah-Law is, all inclusively authentic, credible, relevant and intriguingly contradicting only if proper interpretation has not been done.

So we come to the central question of this research. Is the Torah-Law still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and if so how? The significance of the Torah-Law in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has yet to diminish. The Law is a living wonder that continues to unfold meanings and a wealth of wisdom with each growing and changing generation. The interpretations, understandings and outlook on the law changes according to the new insight and commentary given within today's political, economical, and even social influence.

First, the political realm. In the Torah, politically, all public institutions were subject to the law. Here in America we have an institutional order stemming from the President of the United States and the trickle-down effect to the governmental orders in their respective places. No matter the ranking, all public institutions are subject to the law. It is believed that the American constitution was founded upon the Torah-Law. Consequently, the laws of the land that govern our world today were birthed and influenced by the Torah-Law.

Second, economically the Torah-Law has held true and relevant to how we fair and live in our world today. Simply put, everything we need to know about how to handle our money and how to behave with money is found in the Torah-Law. It teaches how to conduct business affairs in dealing with goods and services which in turn has influenced the 21st century a great deal. Scriptural teaching such as the borrower being slave to the lender is a direct reflection of banks and mortgage guarantees. Paying your debts, taking care of the priesthood and even tithe giving is all found in the Torah-Law.

Third, the Torah has shaped our social lives. In the Torah, certain classes of people did not mingle with classes that were different from them. It was forbidden or seen as unclean. In the 21st century, unfortunately still after the death and resurrection of Christ who died for all, there are certain classes of people who still do not wish to mingle or coexists with those not like them. The Torah-Law speaks to this in a way that it incites and in a way that it prohibits it. Either way the Torah-Law is yet influencing our social concepts. It teaches the people of God in the Torah-Law how to conduct themselves with their neighbor, their family and those in authority. In other words, the same moral and ethical guideline that was given to the ancient people of Israel still speaks volumes to us today.

In conclusion, I submit a resounding YES to the question: Is the Torah-Law still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When understanding its origin and purpose it helps to understand its relevance. Hopefully, now it is more clear how the Torah-Law was created as the voice of God for God's people to guide them, to create guidelines for distinction for His people amongst the other nations and also to create order for this new nation. Furthermore, It was my intent to show that even through the cloud of opposition regarding the Torah-Law, that we see it is credible, authentic and relevant. Consequently, since it worked then it works now. It is not an ancient document with no relevance. It is breathing, alive and moving work of God for our very life and living today.