

THE BOOK OF HOSEA
Lesson 14, Chapter 8

I wonder what any of us might do if God clearly and unequivocally told us that our worship of Him was not acceptable? It's not that we need to improve upon what we do; rather He rejects our entire premise for it. In fact, our worship is so offensive to Him that it would be better if we offered none at all. I dare say that today such a thought is unheard of. Modern Christianity seems to have settled on the notion that any form of worship of God is good enough, however meager or in whatever form pleases us. So, is worship primarily a matter of how we conduct our rituals and what we do at our religious services? Or is it perhaps the quantity or intensity of our worship? In Hosea the Lord says "no!" to all these things. The issue is trust in Him; a correct trust guided by both knowledge and evidence. Trust in Him is measured not the by the degree of warmth in our hearts, but rather by sincere obedience to His commandments together with doing those commandments in the proper, God-defined spirit of love and devotion.

Hosea shows us that worship in some other way than within the paradigm of what was biblically established at Mt. Sinai is to reject God. Thus, in Hosea 8 verse 5 we find that because this is God's view, then the worship of the Calf gods that Israel created... still insisting upon calling them Yehoveh... caused Him to reject Ephraim/Israel in return. The cause of improper worship? Lack of understanding and knowledge. The Prophet Isaiah writes a particularly poignant passage that gets right to the point about improper worship, which by its very nature is insulting to God and is downright idol worship.

CJB Isaiah 44: 13-20 ***¹³ A carpenter takes his measurements, sketches the shape with a stylus, planes the wood, checks it with calipers, and carves it into the shape of a man; and, since it is honored like a man, of course it has to live in a house. ¹⁴ He goes to chop down cedars; he takes an evergreen and an oak; he especially tends one tree in the forest, plants a pine for the rain to nourish. ¹⁵ In time, when it's ready for use as fuel, he takes some of it to keep himself warm and burns some more to bake bread. Then he makes a god and worships it, carves it into an idol and falls down before it. ¹⁶ So half of it he burns in the fire; with that half he roasts meat and eats his fill; he warms himself; says, "It feels so good, getting warm while watching the flames!" ¹⁷ With the rest of the log he***

fashions a god, a carved image, then falls down before it; he worships it and prays to it. "Save me," he says, "for you are my god!"¹⁸ Such people know nothing, understand nothing. Their eyes are sealed shut, so that they can't see; their hearts too, so they can't understand.¹⁹ Not one thinks to himself or has the knowledge or the discernment to say, "I burned half of it in the fire, baked bread on its coals, roasted meat and ate it. Should I now make the rest an abomination? Should I prostrate myself to a tree trunk?"²⁰ He is relying on ashes! A deceived heart has led him astray; so that now he won't save himself, just won't say, "This thing in my hand is a fraud!"

What is so striking about this passage is how Isaiah points out the absurdity of fashioning images of God and worshipping them. Believers, carving idols out of wood and stone isn't the only way to worship other gods. Simply by refusing to worship God in the only ways He finds acceptable, then we MUST be worshipping a different god.

Let's re-read Hosea chapter 8.

RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 8 all

Verse 6 mirrors the theme we find in Isaiah 44 of the irrational thought of a human craftsman fashioning a god out of common materials. The logic is: how can a human make a god? From Genesis 1:1 onward the entire premise is that God makes humans. So, let's take that logic a little farther. Since God makes humans, then who decides by what rules humans are to live? Throughout Israel's history... and I would argue throughout Church history... this has been perhaps our biggest stumbling block. Traditions and doctrines that dominated Ephraim/Israel, and now the Church and Synagogue, are manmade rules that theoretically establish the directives we are to live by. I love the metaphor that Yehoveh uses to describe this folly. He says: "Indeed they sow wind, and they will reap the whirlwind".

In ancient times, farmers used the wind to help sow seed. They would toss the seed into a gentle breeze, which had the effect of scattering it more broadly, evenly, and quickly. However, biblically, often the term "wind", *ruach* in Hebrew, was used to speak of a foolish or worthless mindset or behavior. So, this clause

employs both meanings. Israel uses the typical seeding process, but what they sow is nonsense. Since nonsense is what is sowed, then what else can the product be when the seeds sprout and grow but a whirlwind? We tend to think of whirlwinds as these interesting but harmless phenomena that occur usually in deserts (dust devils), which are like mini-tornadoes that suddenly spring up and do little more than spin some dust and tumbleweeds around, and then vanish as quickly as they appeared. That's not the true sense of this Hebrew word, however. **Suphah** speaks of a storm wind; something that farmers feared. It was destructive. So, since Israel sows folly, then the produce that springs from it will be destruction.

The verse concludes with:

CJB Hosea 8:7 *...the standing grain has no ears, so it will yield no flour; and if it does yield any, foreigners will swallow it up.*

Very simply, this is referring to famine. If Yehoveh causes the grain stalks to bear no grain heads, then there's nothing from which Israel can make their staple food, bread. This curse is followed by yet another; that whatever little might be produced in the fields will be confiscated by foreigners. In other words, just as when Israel entered into the Promised Land and profited from what their enemy (the Canaanites) had produced, so now Israel's enemy (Assyria) will profit from what Israel produced. This entire scenario of a series of curses on Israel... that are exactly what the Covenant of Moses says will occur should Israel break the terms of the Covenant... is like a reversal of their Redemption History. Israel's collective bad behavior had begun long ago; only now have the consequences borne their bad fruit. One other point I'd like to make. This is as a consequence NOT of Israel being mean or violent people; it is because for worshippers of God to participate in moral and religious turpitude brings with it a terrible price. We need to ponder this carefully and soberly. To vow to be a God follower, but to live an immoral life, brings on calamity. Yet what happens when Church leadership changes the very definitions of immoral behaviors? What of a Believer in Yeshua cheating on their spouse? How about a Believer denying their God-given gender? Or, practicing homosexuality? Conspiring to cheat others out of what is rightly due to them? Will our personal, individual redemption be reversed, as is happening to Israel, if we behave in such a way? Yes, obviously it can.

CJB Hebrews 6:4-6 ***⁴ For when people have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become sharers in the Ruach HaKodesh, ⁵ and tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the 'olam haba- ⁶ and then have fallen away- it is impossible to renew them so that they turn from their sin, as long as for themselves they keep executing the Son of God on the stake all over again and keep holding him up to public contempt.***

God puts up with a lot from us; He doesn't easily or quickly discard us. Instead, He chides us to be better people, and more obedient, and He tries to guide us down a path to a more consistent faithfulness, often allowing us to suffer the inevitable results of our foolishness...hopefully without ending in self-destruction... but also without Him withdrawing from us. Yet, at some point, in His eyes we can be judged a lost cause. Our claim of relationship with Him and faith in Him is proved false by our deeds, our perverted worship, or our deceived minds. This is how Ephraim/Israel is being described and no Believer in Yeshua is above this same thing.

Verse 8 declares that Ephraim/Israel has turned itself into an unwanted vessel among the nations (meaning gentile nations). What is an "unwanted vessel"? To understand the meaning through the eyes of an 8th century B.C. Israelite, what Jeremiah has to say using the same term can be helpful.

CJB Jeremiah 22:28-30 ***²⁸ Is this man Koniyahu a despised, broken pot, an instrument nobody wants? Why are they being thrown out? Why are he and his offspring thrown out into a country they do not know? ²⁹ Oh, land, land, land! Hear the word of ADONAI! ³⁰ This what ADONAI says: "List this man as childless; he is a lifetime failure- none of his offspring will succeed, none will sit on David's throne or rule again in Y'hudah."***

Although the CJB says broken "pot", the Hebrew word is the same as for "vessel". So, a broken vessel is synonymous with an unwanted vessel, and it is something that is suitable for nothing but to be thrown out. Another way to get a fuller picture of the sense of this (and it is a pretty serious condition being spoken of), is that it is a term likely created as the **opposite** of the Hebrew expression **keli hemdah** that means "a desirable or costly possession". Something you value and

keep at all costs. So, a good rendering in modern English might be: "Israel has now become among the gentile nations something that is broken and thrown away". What a truly awful pronouncement of judgment.

What is the most recent cause...perhaps the final straw... for God to view Israel as worth nothing but to be thrown away? Verse 9 begins: "For they have gone up to Ashur". Ashur is a synonym for Assyria. Ashur is the god whose nation is Assyria, and calling a nation according to its national god was common in the ancient Middle East. Israel approached Assyria and asked for their help to fight against Judah. This help was, of course, an alliance and brought with it cost on a number of levels. One cost was in Israel's treasure; money. Another was with a level of subservience to Assyria. And a third was that such an alliance automatically brings with it the requirement of worshipping their gods. It is a total sell-out against Yehoveh no matter Israel's excuse for doing it. Just so as to illustrate the abominable thing Israel did, I want to offer a modern-day example.

While it is unknown to most Believers, large well-known Christian missionary organizations, as well as denominational missions' groups, have poured major resources of money and people into an ongoing attempt to approach Muslims to convert them to Christianity. It has been slow-going to say the least. As a result, like many good intentions, this attempt has at times gone off the rails. It is now common (although I fear it is very nearly the norm), to anoint a Muslim as a near-Christian if they simply acknowledge the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Which, by the way, is no great accomplishment since Islam, in general, has always acknowledged Jesus but only as a great prophet. Many years ago, I was asked by a substantial missionary group to read a pamphlet that they wanted to distribute by the scores of thousands to Believers within their particular denomination. I came to a section that made me almost nauseous. It explained that Christians should undertake to pray with Muslims because we all worship the same god. Further that although the Muslims call their god Allah, in fact they just didn't know they were already worshipping Jesus. Salvation became watered down such that a Muslim was counted as a Christian if they but agreed that Jesus lived and was a good man. This is a complete sell-out to Yeshua and to His Father. It is the very definition of syncretism, whereby pagan beliefs are remolded and reshaped and added to biblical truth. Certainly, this missionary group didn't think they were doing anything wrong by printing that pamphlet; they saw it as the

Great Commission and loving their neighbor. Through lack of knowledge their true relationship with God was exposed. I have just described the Ephraim/Israel of Hosea, and this missionary group (and perhaps the denomination they represented) was in the same danger of becoming a broken and unwanted vessel. This is only an example of where compromise and lack of knowledge can lead and we need to vow to avoid this at all cost.

As verse 9 continues Hosea employs yet another metaphor. Israel is likened to a wild donkey (a wild ass) as it relates to their alliance with Assyria. Earlier (chapter 5) Hosea likened Israel to a silly dove with no mind. So, in both metaphors the operative term definition must be "foolishness". Most Bible versions will say that Israel has gone up to Assyria to hire or to court "lovers". The Tanakh version says they went up to court friendship. The Hebrew word that is usually translated to lovers, or in the Tanakh as friendship, is **ahabim**. Indeed, it involves the idea of love; yet here of course this doesn't mean it in the romantic or erotic sense that Israel actually loved Assyria. Here's what translators are struggling with. In Hebrew even though the root word **ahav** (or **ahab**) means love, it means it in a different sense than we moderns take it. In the ancient Hebrew it is meant more often than not in the political sense. To love also inherently carries with it the idea of alliance and allegiance. So, for instance, to "love" a king doesn't mean warm feelings towards him. Therefore, to love Assyria means a devotion of allegiance to them and nothing more. We can also see how this same word can be used in a more personal, relational sense as in how we might use it towards a spouse. Because in God's eyes love towards a spouse while full of warm feelings is supposed to be only the tip of the iceberg. The real connection happens when a full devotion of allegiance to that person results. In a personal relational motif, then, we might call this faithfulness to a marriage partner. It's the context that tells us how to understand how to apply meaning to **ahabim**.

Verse 10, then, speaking in Yehoveh's name, Hosea relates the inevitable consequences of Ephraim's foolish attempt to contrive an alliance with the king of Assyria.

CJB Hosea 8:10 *But even if they bargain among the Goyim, now I will round them up. Soon they will start to feel the burden of these kings and leaders.*

The CJB leaves out a phrase, however, that I think is important to be there. The NAS includes it.

^{NAS} **Hosea 8:10** *Even though they hire allies among the nations, Now I will gather them up; And they will begin to diminish Because of the burden of the king of princes.*

What was left out was "they will begin to diminish". Although some translators think that the meaning of "gathering them up" is an End Times prophecy of return to the Promised Land, I see that view as taking something out of context. Clearly the "gathering up" is to assemble for judgment. Even in the End Times the idea of gathering up is used in 2 senses. The first is to gather Believers for a harvest of a lifetime relationship with God. The second is to gather non-Believers for a judgment of eternal death. While eternal death is not the use here in Hosea, it is most definitely speaking of a collective judgment against Israel. This gathering-up is explained in the next phrase that says as a result Israel will diminish. This means they will diminish as a set apart and identifiable people group, but also numerically. In Egypt, even under the burden of kings and princes, the Israelites' numbers grew because God was with them. But in exile as a punishment, God is *not* with them so their tribal populations will *decrease* into insignificance due to a number of reasons... all the reasons caused by God.

Verse 11 returns to Yehoveh criticizing Israel's worship practices. This verse is a study of Hebrew poetry structure. Since our goal is not to become Hebrew literary experts, I'll merely say that the technique of repeating a word or short phrase at two different points in a verse is recognized and given the lofty academic name "epiphora". In this case it repeats the phrase "incur guilt". In some ways this verse presents us with an irony. From the Hebrew biblical perspective, an altar was built for burnt offerings to Yehoveh to atone for the guilt caused by sins. However, Ephraim, using that same principle, and no doubt attempting to accomplish the same thing, instead incurred guilt because they built multiple altars everywhere they chose to (instead of using the one and only approved altar at the Temple in Jerusalem). Further instead of being supervised by Levite priests, they were officiated (if at all) by what was (in biblical standard) laymen. And to cap it off, they used the same altars to sacrifice to Yehoveh as they did to sacrifice to the Baal gods. A poisonous mix to be sure.

Verse 12 God says:

CJB Hosea 8:12 *I write him so many things from my Torah, yet he considers them foreign.*

There's an entire sermon (maybe two) within this one passage. The first thing to recognize is the phrase "I write", which is better translated as "I wrote". What did He write to the Israelites? The Torah. Your Bible might say "Law", which isn't entirely incorrect. However, the original Hebrew is torah. The Torah indeed contains "The Law"; but that's not all that is there. Nonetheless, torah and law can be said to be interchangeable if we don't take it too far. The reality is that this is speaking of The Law of Moses because it is there that the laws and commandments are contained. So, the Israelites indeed had the Law of Moses at their disposal, and yet they chose to see them as not for them (it was foreign to them), or they had lost all memory of them.

I am going to detour here to inject something from a talk I gave to a Seminary not too long ago, because the importance and effect of this short verse upon modern Believers can be so easily overlooked or dismissed as not for us. The subject is the Law of Moses and how Christians should relate to it. I think a good way to approach this delicate subject is by asking what seems like a simple question: who determines what is evil?

I want to approach this matter with logic as much as with biblical understanding. So, when we say that there is such a thing as evil, it is an admission that there is necessarily such a thing as good. And when we accept that there is good apart from evil, we also must necessarily agree that good is based on a moral law system coming from some source of authority, otherwise there is no way to define good and evil, and therefore to discern and differentiate between good and evil. It follows, then, that since there exists a moral law of good and evil, there must be a moral lawgiver. But whom might this be? The Christian world claims to operate on the belief that the moral lawgiver is God and that He has given all mankind a common code of morality. But, in actuality, does Christianity base its doctrines and conduct itself on this belief?

Another critical element of the moral law code we must wrestle with is this: is it an objective or a subjective law code? The atheist philosopher Louise Anthony writes:

“I take it that theists and atheists will agree about what it means to say that our morality is objective; first whether something is right or wrong does not depend on any human being’s attitudes toward it, and second, moral facts are independent of the human will”.

Therefore, as followers of Jesus, if we agree that by its very nature moral law is objective, and its source is an eternal and unchanging God, then the laws of morality out of sheer necessity must be presented to humans coming from outside the sphere of humanity; and in a way that we can apprehend, apply because it is rational for this physical Universe we live in, and we have the capacity to sort through it in order to make decisions revolving around this objective non-human originated moral law code. Even the question of what is a matter of morality (things we are obligated to do or not do) versus what is a decision of our preference (something in which we have choice to use our individual human wills, and without consequence) can only be determined by the lawgiver.

So then, as humans, how *do* we apprehend that moral law code from God the lawgiver so that we might follow it in obedience? God seems to have imparted the knowledge of it in two steps. The first step, after the Garden of Eden disgrace of Adam and Eve, was to give all humans an intrinsic sense within our souls that there exists a mysterious thing called morality; that is, there is a universal right and wrong. Paul wrote about this mystery in Romans 2:14, 15.

NAS **Romans 2:14-15** ***¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them...***

This is a statement that says that all humanity has a natural God-given sense of right and wrong. However, this sense of right and wrong proved much too

ethereal and theoretical to humanity and something more concrete was needed. Enter step two when the only written moral law code in the Holy Scriptures... the moral law code given to mankind by the divine lawgiver, Yehoveh... was brought into existence: The Law of Moses.

Here is where this line of thinking leads us for the remainder of our time together today; that dangerous and pesky elephant in the room. Does the moral law code that God gave to Moses still matter? Does it have relevance? Even more pointedly, should it have any effect on the life of a Christian... especially a modern one?

Outside of salvation itself, I contend that there is no more important question for the Church... and for individual Believers... to answer. I'm going to tell you the story truthfully, and truth is rarely comfortable. I want this to be personal for you... because it is.

In order to get anywhere with what I want to tell you I'm necessarily going to have to make a few generalizations that while they apply broadly, they don't apply universally (much the way a proverb works). So, if I could oversimplify the mainstream Christian views on the Law into a single general one it would be this: God's moral law code given to us through the Law of Moses is not for any who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is their Savior. This is spoken of in a few ways in Churches and Messianic Synagogues, with perhaps the most familiar being that Believers are no longer "under the Law" (a statement that has been ascribed to Paul).

Some of the more familiar ways this "no longer under the Law" doctrine is explained is that the Law was 100% abolished, demolished and discarded by Christ, with it regularly said to have been nailed to the Cross. Or that the Law was only a particular dispensation (one among several) that was meant to last only between the times of Moses and Messiah. Another thought that more reflects the troubling but intellectually honest result about what such a philosophy about the Law necessarily leads us to is that essentially the New Testament revelation of Christ must have redefined sin and obedience to no longer be tied to an intrinsic and universal moral law, nor to the written moral law code we find in the Bible that was said to have been given to humans by God on a permanent basis. So,

sin can no longer have a universal meaning, effect or standard; therefore, sin and morality can be somewhat different for each individual and it depends on how “we feel in our hearts or consciences”, and usually ascribing this to the unique and highly individualistic workings of the Holy Spirit within us. That is, upon Yeshua’s death, the moral law changed from being objective to subjective. According to Christianity where do we look in the Bible to understand, then, how Christians are to relate to the Law? Primarily to the various epistles of Paul.

It is no secret that Paul presents a frustrating challenge on the issue of the Law as he seems to hold an utterly schizophrenic assessment of its place for Believers by one time seeming to say that the Law has no bearing on the life of a Believer (Believers are not “under the law”) and at another time he venerates the Law and says that a Believer should uphold the Law (“Therefore the Law is holy, just and good”). We even find in chapter 21 of Acts that, well after meeting Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul went to the Temple, and participated in a vow ritual required by the Law of Moses specifically to publicly prove that he personally remained devoted to the Law, so that people would STOP accusing him of instructing Jews and gentiles that with faith in Christ they didn’t have to obey the Law of Moses any longer. Was Paul being hypocritical in his actions and merely succumbing to peer pressure in doing this?

While Paul has always been controversial and challenging to decipher yet there is much he says that is straightforward and consistent enough that it can help set the context for understanding where he is coming from in his dissertations that, in time, became the core of the NT and of Church doctrine. For instance: I can say with confidence that Paul believes that God sent Yeshua to bring salvation from sin to Jews and gentiles alike; that salvation is available to all on the same basis (faith in God); that the Messiah is coming back sooner than later; that Paul felt specially anointed by God to take the Gospel of Salvation to gentiles; and that followers of Christ should live according to The Father’s will and moral law. Yet, we need to keep in mind something so many otherwise good Bible teachers and scholars seem to minimize: Paul AND Christ **were** Jews. The society they lived in, their upbringing, the religion they were taught, and the terms they thought and spoke in were Jewish.

There are a handful of Christian academics who have made valiant attempts to deal with Paul and the Law while trying to overcome long held Christian doctrinal barriers and the most recent academic that I believe offers a more balanced view is the venerable E.P. Sanders.

E.P. Sanders concludes that the real stumbling block is that Paul is actually speaking on several DIFFERENT aspects of the role of the Law in the life of a Believer, and they can't be all lumped together. That is, Paul did not usually speak about the Law in broad terms, but rather he would address specific issues about the Law one time, and another but different specific issue about the Law the next time. I couldn't agree more with Dr. Sanders and what we find is that Paul separated the issue of the Law down to two fundamental aspects as concerns Believers: **the first** issue is how the Law relates to justification (salvation), and **the second** issue is how the Law relates to our morality, which in turn dictates our behavior and choices (that is, the Law as the expected expression of God's will for His worshippers). The first issue, salvation (justification) Paul presents as a spiritual matter expressed by our proper relationship with God while the second issue, behavior, is more of a practical everyday life matter expressed by our proper actions and relations with people that indeed are governed by a moral law code.

There exists a New Testament passage that definitively answers the 2 most basic questions Believers have concerning the Law: first, does it still exist for us and second, if it does are we obligated to obey it? My position on this crucial matter is based on a clear, plainly stated instruction that appears around the midway point through Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. Besides its powerful and jarring clarity what makes it so impactful is that the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's seminal speech to ALL of His followers (Jews and gentiles), and it is a speech that Christianity has held up as essential to proper understanding of our faith.

CJB Matt. 5:17-20 ¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so

teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Because Christ's statement on the uninterrupted continuation of the Law for those who believe in Him directly contradicts most standard Church doctrines on the Law, I've had some students, teachers and Pastors try to solve the problem of Christ's statement by pointing towards His comment that it will pass away when the heavens and earth pass away; insisting that the heavens and earth DID pass away at the foot of the cross, and therefore so did the Law. Of course, they say they mean that from a "spiritualized" or allegorized view point. But far more often their response to what Christ said is to argue that "yeah but here's what **Paul** said" in Galatians or Romans or Corinthians or some other of his epistles. I am then presented with a well-known statement or two of Paul's that indeed does seem to be quite negative about the Law. When I respond with a statement of Paul that seems to be quite positive about the Law, then once again I'm opposed with yet another one that seems negative. On and on it goes until we reach a stalemate. I've searched for a long time for a new approach to this challenge and I have one that I'd like to share with you that I think gets straight to the heart of the matter.

We have at least one rather long, detailed statement by Christ about the Law as concerns His followers (Matthew 5:17-20) that is more than merely positive; it is unequivocal and a forcefully stated instruction to NEVER think or persuade anyone that He came to abolish the Law. So, if one accepts the standard Church doctrine that is ascribed to Paul that Christ DID abolish the Law, then we are confronted with the obvious: Paul and Christ disagree. That is, a dynamic is created, which has Paul saying Christ terminated the Law and Christ saying "no I didn't".

What are we to do? The mainstream institutional Church long ago decided; more weight is to be given to Paul than to Christ on this matter. Thus, we are left with a serious personal dilemma: are we to set Paul against Christ as regards the Law for Believers? And if that is the situation, do we follow Christ or do we follow Paul? Do we believe the Master or do we believe the Disciple? Do we accept the inspired

words of God in the flesh, or do we accept the inspired words of a common fleshly human (Paul)?

That said, I'm going to show you that Paul's occasional negativity was not an anti-Law view at all, but rather he was instructing against misuse of the purpose of the Law. Paul was not anti-Law and did not teach Believers to ignore the Law, and especially did not teach that the Law was dead and gone. Among his several statements to this effect one of the most plainly spoken that remains definitive across all Bible versions is found in Romans 3.

CJB Romans 3:29-31 ***²⁹ Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is indeed the God of the Gentiles; ³⁰ because, as you will admit, God is one. Therefore, he will consider righteous the circumcised on the ground of trusting and the uncircumcised through that same trusting. ³¹ Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah.***

Whatever else Paul might have to say about the Law, what we find in Romans 3 is a key principle in Paul's understanding: it is that even though salvation comes ONLY through faith, our faith in no way cancels the Torah (the Law), which is God's moral law code. One doesn't nullify the other, nor does one oppose the other. Paul emphasizes his contention using the strong Jewish expression "Heaven forbid" that such a thing might be, and goes on further to say that in fact our faith (in Christ) affirms and upholds the Law (the Torah).

So, how should we, as Jewish and gentile Believers, go forward in our lives and relate to the Law of Moses? The Law was given to Moses less as a strict rule book and more as the written-down structure of a paradigm of how to be an obedient worshipper of God Almighty and to walk in His ways. What's a paradigm, you might ask? It's a model and a pattern explaining the underlying spirit, while outlining the shape, of something. The American Constitution created a paradigm for our particular system of government, specifying national liberties and laws within which our society must operate. Principles are established and boundaries created.

By taking the time to study the Torah and the Law of Moses contained within it, and to then draw a mental picture of it as more or less the Believer's Constitution, then we can (with some effort and prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit within us) transcend time and culture and bring obedience to the Law of Moses into the 21st century and beyond, thereby obeying Christ as He instructed. Only then will we have a true moral code to go by. Ephraim/Israel had set aside God's written moral code and created their own, and they were in process of paying a terrifying consequence. I would argue that beginning as early as the 3rd century, Christianity began to walk down this same path.

We'll leave it there for today.