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# Introduction

## Abstract

*THE DIDACHE WAS WRITTEN for a church enduring internal and external social and political stresses. In this environment it sought to establish norms for the individual and the community. Long looked to for insights into the life of the early church, the Didache's reception of the Torah has received significant passing attention, but has never benefitted from an extended systematic analysis. Well received in the early church, it reflects both a first-century and Antiochene provenance.*

*It is specifically in the context of its Two Ways teaching that the Didache adopted an established topos rooted in both the Torah and other traditions, accessible to Jew and gentile alike, to convey its teaching on the Torah. This teaching was established on the basis of the presumed authority of religious teachers and specifically that of Jesus himself.*

*On the basis of this assumed authority, the Didache mandated the Way of Life for Christian disciples, laying the foundations of its approach with the double command to love God and neighbor, reflective of the Decalogue, the two tables of the Torah. Tightly bound structurally and thematically to the following Two Ways, the *sectio evangelica*, a key section comprising known Jesus sayings, shows an affinity to Torah-affirming passages in the Gospels. As a prologue that bears comparison to the Two Ways "yoke of the Lord" epilogue, it places stress on the Torah as mediated by Jesus.*

*Within the Two Ways material itself, there is not only a marked structure revolving around the second table of the*

*Decalogue, but a series of textual markers linking and equating it in some ways to the Torah as a whole. In this context, its endorsement of the “yoke of the Lord” is a striking Torah affirmative statement which reinforces the commitment to the Didache’s teaching that is required of it.*

*It is this commitment to the Torah as applicable to all Christians that is enjoined upon the gentile disciple; the Torah presented in those respects that were deemed to apply to gentiles. Acceptance of this sine qua non formed the basis for induction into the church and participation in its eschatological hope.*

The Didache is one of the oldest non-canonical documents of the early Jesus movement. It addressed a small but rapidly expanding community in an age of socio-political crisis. Composed in Antioch and written from within a Christian-Jewish milieu, its intended audience was primarily gentile. While attention has naturally been paid to the Jewish sources of the Didache, questions remain concerning its underlying presuppositions regarding the enduring validity, applicability, and authority of the Torah, particularly in regards to its gentile Christian recipients.

A constellation of issues remain to be resolved in Didache studies, and an accurate understanding of the role of the Torah in the Didache is a significant, if not the key, factor in many of these. The question as to whether the Didache may have implicitly or overtly sanctioned and advocated conversion to Judaism remains viable for a minority of scholars. Even more, there is the broader issue as to whether the Didache mandates Torah observance for its recipients. While having been partly addressed in a number of papers and short studies, the Didache’s reception of the Torah has not been given sufficient attention nor been sufficiently examined, and this study attempts to address that situation.

Imprecision in our understanding of the role of the Torah in the Didache leaves a critical element in the matrix of nascent Christianity undefined; an unnecessary gap in our understanding. Attention to this matter promises a better understanding of both Christian Judaism and its emerging subset of Christianity,<sup>1</sup> not to mention the relationship between Christian Judaism and

1. This work takes a similar position to Philip Carrington, *Christian Apologetics*, 45. Carrington held that when “the Acts of the Apostles, was written, Christianity was still a sect within the Jewish Church” and proceeded to differentiate “Christianity” from “non-Christian Judaism.” I would agree with David Sim who states that “the term ‘Jewish Christianity’ is completely inappropriate for those followers of Jesus who remained true to their Jewish heritage” Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 25. The point is that the term Jewish Christian signifies that the movement was a Jewish variety of Christianity and somehow

the nascent Judaism out of which it was born. Understanding the Didache's reception of the Torah is thus important in the endeavor to gain a richer and more nuanced picture of the historical relationship of Christian Jews and gentiles to the Torah in their first-century communities.

This study has a personal aspect, as the author is a Jewish member of the Messianic Jewish movement, a socially diverse movement of Jewish believers in Jesus' messiahship, that has many gentile adherents. Insight into how the entwined parties, Jew and gentile, related in the early church may provide some insight into how healthy relations may be fostered, and how the Torah might be received in such communities today. In particular, this enquiry has been stimulated by the proposal set forth by Mark Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology in his book *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*.<sup>2</sup> In Kinzer's view, the church is a united but two-fold community "containing a Jewish sub-community that links it to the national life and history of the people of Israel, and a multinational subcommunity that extends Israel's heritage among the peoples of the earth without annulling their distinctive cultural identities."<sup>3</sup> It is supposed that if this is so, there might be some indication of it in the Didache, the so-called "window" into the early church.

This study proceeds on the basis that Didache serves as a witness to an early Christian community under the direction of teachers whose world view and "Christianity" were entirely within, not an aberration from, their adherence to what for convenience we term "Judaism." It will be seen that in response to the crises and stresses in Antiochian society in the mid to late first century, the Didache sought to regulate individual and communal life based on the Torah consistently with Jesus' interpretation. Going beyond a discussion of the Didache's well documented Jewish sources, this study proceeds to argue regarding the Didache's reception of the Torah; the function of the Torah in the Didache; and the meaning of fidelity to it for his readership. In the framework of a document ostensibly addressed to gentiles, it will examine the nature and meaning of their obligation to the Torah and the subsequent ecclesiological ramifications of that.

Methodologically, this study will investigate the Didache's reception of the Torah incorporating a socio-historical analysis of the text and data from other relevant literature. This study also presumes that Early Christian

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already something other than normatively Jewish, whereas the movement in my view held itself to be the epitome of Judaism, the goal that had been reached in the revelation of Jesus. Thus the term Christian Judaism best portrays this early movement, one that saw itself as within Judaism and having recognized the Messiah of Israel. Mark Kinzer made a similar case for the term Messianic Judaism in *The Nature of Messianic Judaism*.

2. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*.

3. Kinzer, *Epilogue Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 178.

Judaism is, as is increasingly understood and as Samuel Sandmel presciently suggested, part of “a Jewish movement which was in particular ways distinctive from other Judaism.”<sup>4</sup> As a product of its milieu, its teachings reflect both Judaism and what is generally known of Christian Judaism. Taking into account the social situation of the community, the text of the Two Ways will be examined for indications regarding the Didache’s reception of the Torah. This will be apparent both in the redaction of the document, but also via exegesis of key texts within it.

To some degree this work may be suspect of *petitio principii* as it has set out to prove a thesis that I suspected, but did not at the beginning have sufficient evidence to prove. I hope that my research, arguments, and observations herein are sufficient to demonstrate that (with modifications) my original thesis is correct: that as did the Sages,<sup>5</sup> the Didache presumes the universality and ongoing validity of the Torah and applies those precepts that apply to gentiles to the gentile recipients of the Didache. In this is a formula for unity—for the entire community is united, the unmentioned Jew and the gentile, in obedience to God’s Law.

After surveying scholarship on the role of the Torah in the Didache so far, Part One of the study (chapters one and two) will establish the nature and development of the text. A short enquiry into introductory matters, primarily being the sources, provenance, and early reception of the Didache, will provide a basis for our understanding of the Didache’s relationship with its recipients as described in Part Two. Part Two (chapters three to five) begins with a chapter setting out the peculiar stresses for the church in the region of Antioch, following which an argument for the suitability of Two Ways teaching to the community is made. Chapter five then follows indications within the text which in the context of first-century Jewish religion and the Jesus tradition position the Didachist as a teacher exerting influence from an authoritative position.

Part Three (chapters six to eleven) then argues primarily from the Didache itself to show that the Way of Life is an imperative choice versus the Way of Death mandated for the disciple. Chapter seven relates the *sectio evangelica* (the Jesus sayings of Did. 1.3b–6) to Jesus’ teachings on the Torah. Chapter eight demonstrates the close connection between the *sectio* and the Two Ways of the Didache (Did. 2.1–6.2), and Chapter nine demonstrates the emphasis on the Decalogue (and consequently the Torah) in the Two Ways. Chapter ten then studies the conclusion of the Two Ways where the Yoke of the Lord is presented to the disciple as Torah. Finally, in

4. Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 4.

5. Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 267.

retrospect Chapter eleven notes the peculiarity of the Didache's presentation of the Torah—a presentation specifically required for gentiles but with no requirement of conversion to Judaism.

The goal of this study will be to demonstrate that the Didache: a) affirms the authority of the Torah; b) innovatively adapts and applies the Torah to gentiles; and c) aims to unify and prepare one Church for the coming eschaton. Put differently, it answers the questions: Did the Didachist view the Torah as authoritative? Did he view the Torah as applicable to gentiles? If he viewed the Torah as applicable to gentiles, what are the ecclesiological and eschatological ramifications of this?

The research undertaken will substantiate the conclusion that the Didache's teaching is more than halakah. It demonstrates an outworking of its reception of the Torah as properly set in the framework of Christ's teachings and incumbent upon all humanity, thus uniting all who abide by the way of life in obedience to the Torah and reception of its rewards.

This research into the Christian Judaism of the Didache is particularly relevant to the contemporary Messianic Jewish movement as it wrestles with similar questions regarding the co-existence of Jews and gentiles within its own milieu, and the ecclesiological implications of that for its own community and faith today. The historical question as to the role of the Torah in the faith and practice of the gentile convert to the Didachean community is mirrored by the question regarding the role of the Torah in the faith and practice of gentile adherents of contemporary Messianic Judaism.