

Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah
2012 Berlin Statement on Torah
(July 3, 2012)

The third Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah met in Berlin, Germany June 29 – July 3, 2012. Building on statements formulated in the meetings of the previous two years, Jewish scholars from France, Germany, Israel, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, belonging to Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Messianic traditions, deepened their relationships and advanced in their discussion of crucial issues concerning Jewish life in the Body of Christ.

The theme of this year’s consultation was “Jewish Believers in Yeshua and the Torah.” Papers presented at the conference underlined the paradoxical richness and depth of Torah, and the way its fulfillment in Yeshua reinforces rather than undermines its enduring relevance. Following the conference, members of the consultation met together and developed the following common statement:

We, the members of the Helsinki Consultation, bear living witness to the recent emergence of Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) who affirm their Jewish identity and acknowledge its theological significance. We are increasingly recognizing the intrinsic connection between this identity and Torah, the dynamic reality that has shaped the life of the Jewish people throughout its historical journey. We are also increasingly challenged to understand the continuing significance of the Torah encountered in the light of the gospel within the life of the Body of the Messiah.

The complex nature of Jewish existence reflects the multifaceted and paradoxical character of the Torah. Torah is both the historical revelation of God to Israel, and Israel’s window to the eternity of God; once-for-all transmitted truth, and ever new process of discovery; the fashioner of human institutions, and the secret of the cosmic order; the absoluteness of the Divine Word, and the relativity of its human interpretation; the vulnerable letter of the written text, and its invulnerable spirit; defining mark of Israel’s singular path and destiny, and wisdom for all nations of the earth.

From an early period, many Christians have not fully grasped the Torah’s paradoxical unity. They have limited its relevance to what they deemed “moral precepts” whilst rejecting the so-called “civil” and “ceremonial” practices that are foundational to Jewish life. They have frequently viewed Torah through the dualistic lens of grace and law, contrasting faith and works, and thus overlooking the Torah’s enduring value.

Recent scholarship has shed new light on the Jewish context of Yeshua and the early Yeshua-movement which challenges traditional Christian understanding of the Torah and brings renewed appreciation for its positive significance. Many now recognize that Yeshua, Sha’ul (Paul), and the other early Jewish followers of Yeshua were Torah-observant. This historical reality carries significant theological implications.

We as Jewish believers in Yeshua acknowledge the special bond that unites us with Israel's Torah. This bond with Israel's Torah witnesses in the Church to the irrevocability of God's gifts and call to Israel (Rom 11:29). For Yeshua said, "Think not that I have come to destroy the Torah, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). We believe in the continuing validity of the Torah even as it is fulfilled in Christ. Moreover, we see Christ as the incarnate Torah, the eternal wisdom of the Father in human flesh. He alone lived out the Torah in perfect form, and he calls his disciples to walk in his ways.

As Jewish believers in Yeshua we are in the process of working out the meaning and concrete implications of this bond that we collectively experience. We find ourselves in a variety of different ecclesial and Jewish communal contexts, and we hold different understandings and definitions of Torah observance. Some of us consider the observance of mitzvot such as Shabbat, Jewish holidays, and the dietary laws as an essential component of fidelity to Torah. Yet we all understand that our attempt to live in radical discipleship to Yeshua (in conformity to teaching such as that found in the Sermon on the Mount) is the foundational principle of Torah observance. Furthermore, we all understand our faithfulness to Israel's Torah as a commitment to promote an awareness of the Jewish roots of the Church.

In the midst of our different approaches we have experienced through our deliberations and fellowship the dynamic and unifying power of Christ as Torah. Continuing to reflect on the Torah's role in our lives, we desire to grow together as Jews and as disciples of Yeshua. We hope these insights will resonate with other Jewish believers in Yeshua, and we invite them to join us on our journey.

Consultation Members:

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