


Article

An Artificial Review of Jesus's Torah Compliance and What That Might Mean for Jews and Gentile Christians

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Abstract: The Torah is central to Judaism. Jesus's relationship with it sparks conflict with Christianity. Some Jews think that Jesus violated the Torah, while some Christians believe that he sinlessly followed it. This clash escalated on 22 June 2023, when Ultra-Orthodox Jews protested a Messianic convention in Jerusalem. Social media videos and comments highlighted Jesus's purported Torah compliance, placing Matthew 5:17 at the center stage. The comments proved indicative of the gaps within the literature as neither determined all the unique Written and Oral Torahic/legal issues raised within the Gospels nor quantified the extent of Jesus's compliance. To address these gaps, this study employs artificial intelligence (LDA), statistics, and legal analysis and exegesis to determine Jesus's compliance with the Torah, Mishnah, Talmud, and Mishneh Torah. The findings show the Gospels' consensus: Mark, Luke, and John reflect that Jesus was non-Torah-compliant (14.80, 43.80, and 0.00%, respectively); Matthew states otherwise (70.80%). Overall, the study revealed that Jesus kept 79 of 162 Written and Oral Torah laws (48.80%). This study has significant implications for Christian doctrines, the definition(s) of sin, and the missionizing ethnoreligion members and serves as a case study that illustrates AI's impact on religious authority (i.e., clergy, scholarship, and doctrines).

Keywords: Christianity; Gospel; Jesus; Judaism; Oral Torah; Matthew 5:17; Torah; Orthodox; Written Torah; AI



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1. Introduction

1.1. Focusing Event

Did Jesus fulfill the law as detailed in Matthew 5:17? The relationship between Jesus and the law is central to the conflict between Christianity and Judaism. Many Jews do not believe that Jesus was Torah-observant, while many Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled it perfectly. This conflict reached a fever pitch on 22 June 2023, when Ultra-Orthodox Jews violently protested a Messianic Jewish convention in Jerusalem (Berman 2023). Jesus's Torah compliance took center stage by those onsite and commenting on social media. There, pro-Christian narratives cited Matthew 5:17 to evince Jesus's fulfillment, while pro-Orthodox narratives called Jesus non-Torah-compliant (FIRMIsrael 2023a, 2023b). The comments proved indicative of the gaps within the literature as they neither determined all the unique Written and Oral Torahic/legal issues raised within the Gospels nor quantified Jesus's compliance therewith.

Scholars employ a variety of methodologies to analyze Jesus's adherence to the Written Torah. These methodologies include comparative (Bjork 2021; Bernauer 2020; Sunney 2021), historical (Homolka and Shafer 2015; Perrin 1984), legal (Sanders 2016; Viljoen 2006), narrative-critical (Blanton 2013), and exegetical analysis (Allison 2013; Cuvillier 2009; Marcovich 2015; Reese 2022). No singular method predicts scholars' conclusions about Jesus's Torah observance; however, noncompliance determinations seem to correlate with anti-missionizing scholarship (Eisen 1948; Kessler 2022; Reese 2022; Singer 2014).

Complications increase when some Orthodox Jewish exegetes insist that Christianity examine Jesus's behavior through the lens of the Oral Torah (i.e., Mishnah, Talmud, and

Mishneh Torah), suggesting that doing so leads to the conclusion of Jesus's non-Torah compliance (Reese 2022; Singer 2014). However, those exegetes declined to determine the state of the Oral Torah during Jesus's time, electing instead to proceed with ex post facto convictions based upon scant evidence. Torah compliance is more easily determined if we only review the Written Torah because it is probable that first-century Jews adhered to a form of Judaism that developed after the biblical period. However, the precise nature of first-century Judaism cannot be accurately deduced from subsequent texts, such as the Mishnah, Talmud, and Mishneh Torah, because their own eras' circumstances influence these texts.

Therefore, it appears that the greatest limitation within our scholastic assessments is the use of incomplete and anachronistic datasets, not our methodology. It is likely easier to call Jesus Torah-compliant when one's examination is limited to Jesus's propensity to pray and attend synagogue (Bjork 2021), excludes other Gospel accounts and applicable Mishnaic and Talmudic laws (Sanders 2016), or finds Midrashim that harmonize with some of Jesus's deviations (Viljoen 2006). The same limitations also benefit the non-Torah-compliant camp (Eisen 1948; Kessler 2022; Reese 2022; Singer 2014). For centuries, the halakhic volume and sizable gospels have justified narrow datasets; however, AI—Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)—removes that barrier and allows us to comprehensively review Halakha and the Gospels to generate an extensive dataset of relevant law and behavior. Additionally, LDA allows us to identify which Oral Torah laws likely existed during Jesus's time by identifying their jurisprudence within first-century Jewish literature. *This is what this research contributes to the rich discourse.* Moreover, this research builds upon and employs traditional legal and exegetical analysis to expatiate instances of noncompliance/compliance.

This research's thesis holds that the Gospels form a consensus regarding Jesus's Torah compliance: Mark, Luke, and John reflect that, more often, Jesus is not Torah-compliant, where Jesus's compliance is 14.80, 43.80, and 0.00%, respectively. This directly conflicts with Matthew's depiction of Jesus's Torah observance (70.80%) and the "citation" of Jesus's mission to fulfill the Torah (5:17). Additionally, *t*-tests revealed that overall and per redactor, there was no significant difference in Jesus's compliance with the Written and Oral Torah, $t(146) = 1.81, p = 0.248$, although Oral Torah ($M = 0.45, SD = 0.500$) violations were less common than Written Torah violations ($M = 0.59, SD = 0.495$). This confirms Branscomb (1928) theory that Jesus treated the Written and Oral Torah the same, which in this case means that Jesus did not comply with them. Additionally, chi-squared tests revealed that Jesus was significantly likely to respond with the correct legal response when challenged about the law, yet he was likely to teach against the law. The current literature helps explain general redactional Written and Oral Torah compliance but not the manner of compliance. Finally, LDA identified 162 unique Jewish legal issues raised within the Gospels regarding Jesus's behavior. According to AI, statistics, and legal analysis and exegesis, Jesus complied with 79 of the 162 laws (48.80% compliance). This means that at the aggregate level, the Gospels portray Jesus as more often noncompliant with Jewish laws, the least of all, the Torah.

This study has significant implications for Christian definitions of sin, what it means for Jesus to be sinless, and other doctrines such as *Sola Scriptura*. Additionally, this research has the potential to help settle the protracted debate regarding Jesus's Torah compliance and increase Christianity's empathy for and understanding of the impacts of missionizing members of ethnoreligions, which are the changes Americans now require from their Christian praxis (Batchelder 2020). Finally, this research serves as a case study that illustrates AI's impact on religious authority (i.e., clergy, scholarship, and doctrines) by demonstrating how LDA swiftly processes and identifies similarities and contradictions within religious literature, thereby empowering its user to evaluate and challenge established and deeply held beliefs critically.

1.2. Roadmap

This study addresses the above issues and research questions and reviews the literature focusing on Jesus's Torah compliance and highlighting its disjuncture. Next, we discuss

how we operationalized the dataset and used AI LDA—also known as topic modeling—to identify all legal issues from the Torah, Mishnah, Mishneh Torah, and Talmud raised within each gospel and the methodology employed. Afterward, we discuss the results, how the literature confirms or contradicts the findings, and why. Subsequently, we discuss the implications of the findings on both Jews and Gentile Christians and the use of AI in religious studies. Finally, we discuss the research limitations and the need for further research and summarize the findings in the conclusion.

1.3. Research Questions

The main question this study seeks to answer is to what extent Jesus was compliant with the Torah, Mishnah, Talmud, and Mishneh Torah. However, there are prerequisite and implicative questions that must also be answered. Accordingly, the results section is organized to answer the following questions in order:

1. To what extent is the Oral Torah important to redactional narratives?
2. Does the evocation of the Oral Torah significantly differ between gospels? If so, how?
3. What is the redactional portrayal of Jesus's compliance with the Written and Oral Torah (this is the main question)?
4. Are there significant differences between Jesus's Written and Oral Torah compliance overall and among the redactors?
5. Is there a relationship between how Jesus observed the Written and Oral Torah and Gospel narratives?
6. Is there a relationship between the legal category and the redactors' depiction of Jesus's compliance therewith?

We now review the literature regarding Jesus's compliance with the Torah.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Constructing Matthew's Gospel

Insights into the construction and revisions of Matthew's Gospel improve our understanding of the conflict within its text. For example, the Q-hypothesis holds that the narrative differences between Mark versus Matthew and Luke suggest that Matthew and Luke used Mark or Quelle ("Q")—German for "source"—to arrange their accounts (Martin 2012). Bacon (1918) and Kingsbury (1989) argued that the Torah was Matthew's other source, and thus, he rearranged Mark's narrative to place Jesus on a mountain—mirroring Sinai—and reengineered five of Jesus's sermons to parallel the Torah. However, Lachs (1978) and Martin (2012) posit that some of Matthew's Q was the Oral Torah.

Significant scribal edits can also obscure the "original" text's meaning and potential relationship with the Oral Torah. Textual criticism shows that there are significant variations within Matthew's early witnesses, and most of those variations are substitutions (forty-four percent) and omissions (thirty-three percent) that notably change textual meaning (Hill and Kruger 2014, p. 103). Mark's Greek texts have more divergent readings than Matthew's; most Marcan disputes concern Mark's beginning and ending (Aland and Aland 1995; Hill and Kruger 2014). Last, Luke's and John's early texts reflect "good" and "controlled [textual] transmission" (Hill and Kruger 2014, pp. 138, 155). Thus, investigating the various readings of Matthew is imperative for elucidating his meaning.

2.2. Context of Matthew's Gospel and Torah Observance

Käsemann (1969) argued that the New Testament is best understood as a collection of responses to the historical Jesus. Käsemann believed that the Gospel writers were trying to make sense of Jesus's life and death and that this attempt shaped their theological ideas. Maccoby (1995) and Bjork (2021) stress that the Gospels were written after Jesus's time when there was a conflict between the Pharisees and the early Church. Accordingly, the writers of the Gospels may have exaggerated the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees to make Jesus seem more distinct from the Pharisees (Maccoby 1995). The Pharisees were

“scrupulous observers of the Law” (Kohler 2002, p. 661); thus, if a distinction must be made between the Pharisees, then that distinction would involve the Torah.

Kingsbury (1969) and Sumney (2021) believe that Matthew made such a distinction. Kingsbury (1989) holds that Matthew’s redactional purpose was to justify his brand of Jewish faith against the Pharisaic opprobrium, which made Matthew’s redactional intention paraenetic. His Gospel highlights the importance of “listening to Jesus” over emotion, impulsivity, and religious and cultural influences (Cuvillier 2009, p. 159; Kingsbury 1969, p. 11).¹ To Viljoen (2006) and Cuvillier (2009), Matthew’s view of the Torah is Christological in meaning and function because Matthew sees Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the law. Viljoen (2006) and Bornkamm (1963) argue that Jesus is the one who perfectly obeys the law and brings the law to its “full meaning”, where “full meaning” and, thus, fulfillment demonstrate the deeper attitude of one’s heart (Bornkamm 1963, p. 24; Viljoen 2006, p. 138; See also Bernauer 2020). However, Matthew, unlike any other Gospel, emphasizes Jesus’s dedication to the Torah, which creates tension between Matthew’s purpose, intent, function, and execution.

Viljoen (2006) details several views on why Matthew emphasizes Torah observance. Some scholars believe that Matthew tried to combat antinomianism, while others think he tried to demonstrate Jesus’s fulfillment of the Torah. Antinomianism is the belief that Torah laws are not binding to Christians. Matthew likely combated antinomianism by showing Jesus’s dedication to fulfilling the law by quoting the Written and Oral Torah throughout his Gospel and explaining how Jesus’s life and teachings align with the law. However, it is the proximity of Matthew’s Jesus’s declaration to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17) to the subsequent “six antitheses” (Matthew 5:21–47) that confounds scholarship and brings us here today.

2.3. Overview of the Perspectives of Jesus’s Torah Compliance

Academic understanding of Jesus’s treatment of the Written Torah is neither monolithic nor binary. Instead, the *corpus* forms a latitude that ranges from observant—categorized as completely obedient or obedient to Jesus’s reinterpretation—to nonobservant—classified as abrogation or completely disobedient. There are three views within the observant camp: (1) complete obedience to the Torah (Bjork 2021; Douglas et al. 1989; Bernauer 2020; Przybylski 2004), (2) the obedience of Jesus to his reinterpreted but intensified Torah (Allison 2013; Neusner 2017; Sumney 2021), and (3) the obedience of Jesus via pluralistic Judaism (Blanton 2013; Küng and Lapide 1977; Martin 2012; Sadeh 1989; Stahl 2015). There are also three views within the nonobservant camp: (1) complete disobedience (Cuvillier 2009), (2) partial Torah abrogation (Bornkamm 1963; Meier 1976; Verhey 2014), and (3) complete Torah abrogation (Harvey 2017; Marcovich 2015).

2.3.1. Torah-Observant Camp

Only a minority of scholars posit Jesus’s absolute Torah compliance; those advocates either rely on *ipse dixit* arguments (Sumney 2021) or point to Jesus’s teaching in some synagogues and regular prayer as a panacea to accusations of nonobservance (Bjork 2021; Bernauer 2020). Most within the Torah-observant camp conclude Jesus’s compliance by first acknowledging that Jesus’s interpretation of the Torah differed from that of Pharisees but was consistent with other first-century Jewish beliefs. For example, some explore Rabbinic Midrashim to reflect on Jesus’s consonance therewith to evince legitimacy and Torah compliance (Sanders 2016; Viljoen 2013). Others argue that Jesus’s interpretive difference came from his intensifying Torahic standards (Allison 2013; Carter 2005; Davies 1989; Sumney 2021). For example, exegetes such as Sumney (2021) and Allison (2013) believe that Matthew 5:28 signals Jesus’s jurisprudence, wherein he “uses the Scriptures as a point of departure to demand more from his disciples”. In this case, where Moses prohibits the physical act of adultery, Jesus prohibits the mental act (Allison 2013). Allison (2013);

¹ Matthew 17:5.

Carter (2005); Davies (1989); Sumney (2021) suggest that Jesus follows M. Avot 1:1 by “building a fence” around the Torah, intensifying its demands to prevent his disciples’ violation (Neusner 2017, p. 725). Sumney (2021) further states that Jesus is the Torah’s “authoritative interpreter” (Sumney 2021, p. 278). Others, such as Carter (2005) and Verhey (2014), argue that the Torah was deficient in speaking to contemporary issues and the average person’s needs. Thus, Jesus—as a “man of the people”—supplemented the law with new, relevant ethical teaching (Carter 2005, p. 144).

Most scholars argue that Jesus’s interpretive difference came from the pluralistic nature of Judaism, holding that there was no single, normative form of Judaism within the first century and current Judaism, nor can it be easily divided into sects (Blanton 2013; Küng and Lapidé 1977; Martin 2012; Sadeh 1989; Stahl 2015). On this basis, scholars conclude that the Pharisees’ interpretation of the Torah was not the only and, thus, not the per se correct interpretation. For example, drawing from her Jewish heritage and studies, Neta Stahl (2015) analyzes the writings of Uri Zvi Greenberg and Pinchas Sadeh that contrast the views of Jesus and the rabbinic establishment. Stahl contends that Greenberg, a right-wing Zionist, uses a poem to promote his own ideological and political agenda “by adopting Jesus’s stance against the Pharisees” (Stahl 2015, p. 362). Stahl discusses how Sadeh uses the Last Supper to “criticize certain aspects of the Jewish tradition” by adopting the New Testament’s presentation of the sharp contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees and how Sadeh and Greenberg “do not shy away from what their Jewish ancestors read as Christian animosity toward the Jews” (Stahl 2015, p. 364). Stahl suggested that this striking adoption of the Christian narrative was possible because of the Zionist ideology of the “new Jew” whose derision toward the exilic Jews resembled Christian derision toward the mainstream Jewish communities of their time”, namely, the Pharisees (Stahl 2015, pp. 364–65). This view causes some to say that “Christianity should be regarded as one kind of first-century Judaism . . . a kind that believed in a divine Messiah who would abrogate the Torah, substituting his own death as a means of salvation” (Maccoby 1995, p. 56). However, the most crucial limitation in these scholars’ approach is that they do not comprehensively engage the Written or Oral Torah to determine how consonant Jesus’s behavior and teachings were with the law.

Sanders (2016) provides the most in-depth review of Jesus’s behavior through the lens of the Oral and Written Torah. Sanders rightfully argues that “Scholars seem still not to see how determinative of meaning the setting is” and that when we lean into symbolism and imagery to analyze Jesus’s meaning, then “our ability to establish the meaning of [Jesus’s] saying[s] with precision vanishes” (Sanders 2016, p. 2). However, Sanders’s precision is in question. Sanders argues that Jesus did not repudiate or “seriously violate” Sabbath and purity laws, yet within Sanders’s five-volume book, he excludes John’s account and, thus, only discusses three of Jesus’s five Sabbath violations (Sanders 2016, pp. 31, 55). Additionally, while Sanders discusses many Talmudic passages, he does not discuss B. Shabbat 53b, which prohibits healing on the Sabbath, nor the Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Sabbath 21:25, which prohibits making eye salve on the Sabbath that implicates John 9. By excluding John’s accounts and relevant law, Sanders’s conclusions are inconsistent with law and (Gospel) facts.

2.3.2. Non-Torah-Observant Camp

Most scholars in the non-Torah-observant camp acknowledge that Jesus did not observe the entire Torah because he abrogated portions of the Torah (Bornkamm 1963; Meier 1976; Strecker 1966; Verhey 2014). For example, Meier (1976) and Bornkamm (1963) hold that Matthew’s Jesus’s third (Matthew 5:31–32), fifth (Matthew 5:38–42), and last antitheses (Matthew 5:43–47) reflect partial Torah abrogation. Verhey (2014) takes abrogation further by extrapolating Jesus’s teachings within the Gospels and establishing a precedential system/framework that details when an exegete should defer to Jesus’s laws instead of the Torah. Verhey (2014) states that Jesus’s teaching compels Christian exegetes to (1) assume the supremacy of Jesus’s authority over his nonmastery of the

law and tradition, (2) promote good news “to the poor and marginalized”, (3) celebrate contemporary expressions of point one, and (4) “lament and resist” contradictions of Jesus’s supremacy (Verhey 2014, pp. 12, 16, 18). These frameworks function as affirmative defenses for Jesus’s non-Torah observance. Unfortunately, no scholar who has advanced these beliefs has comprehensively applied them to all of Jesus’s Torahic deviations to test their veracity. This underdiscussed area has not received much attention in the twenty-first century.

Another group within the non-Torah-observant camp vitiates Jesus’s liability for non-compliance by holding that Jesus abrogated the entire Torah (Harvey 2017; Honecker 1997; Marcovich 2015). There are two subdivisions of this group: those that argue abrogation through (1) Israel’s forfeiture via disobedience and (2) the supremacy of Jesus’s love commandment. As Holmes (2009) and Pregill (2020) have demonstrated, within the first century A.C.E., the Church Fathers, in contrast to the New Testament, purported, in opposition to the Tanakh, that the worship of the Golden Calf resulted in the forfeiture of the Jewish people’s possessory right to the Tanakh and memorialized covenant(s). The Church Fathers asserted that these rights were transferred to Jesus and that Jesus’s death bequeathed the Tanakh and covenants to Gentile Christians.² This ideology is supersessionist and antisemitic; consequently, those employing it are unlikely to place this framework under halakhic scrutiny.

The second subdivision contains those such as Honecker (1997), who create a more simplistic framework than Verhey (2014) by elevating Jesus’s command to love as the precedential rule. To them, every law not perceived as flowing from or implemented with love is estopped in the case at bar, so long as it can be applied lovingly in a future case; otherwise, it is abrogated. Critics of this approach, such as Wenz (2005), object to making the “love hermeneutic” a “canon in the canon” (Wenz 2005, p. 38). To Wenz (2005), elevating the “love hermeneutic” creates an arbitrary “criterion by which seemingly conflicting biblical passages are criticized or simply eliminated” (Wenz 2005, p. 38).

The last group within the non-Torah-observant camp includes those who argue that Jesus disobeyed the Torah (Cuvillier 2009; Reese 2022). Cuvillier (2009) provides a direct and critical assessment of Matthew’s Gospel. Cuvillier wrote that “Matthew’s Jesus surpasses simple obedience” to the law, where “obedience to [the law’s] commandments” is “no longer . . . primary” or “regulates the life of the disciples”; thus, the required behavior is likely disobedience (Cuvillier 2009, pp. 154, 158–59).

2.3.3. Lack of Consensus and Why That Matters

There is no scholarly consensus regarding Jesus’s Torah compliance; however, the six compliance categories have significant implications for some Jews and Gentiles. Where Jesus is Torah-compliant because of his reinterpretation or consonance with pluralistic Judaism or Jesus’s noncompliance stems from partial Torah abrogation, then both Jews and Gentiles have “work to do”. For some Jews, this implies that God updated his expectations and that they must discover the new requirements. In this case, Gentile Christians can maintain their current understanding of Jesus’s sinless nature and definition(s) of sin; however, some portion of the Torah likely applies to Gentiles—despite their textual exclusion—and they must determine which laws apply. Where Jesus completely obeyed or abrogated the Torah, then Gentiles can maintain their current understanding of Jesus’s sinless nature and their definition(s) of sin. However, Jews must determine God’s updated expectations. Last, where Jesus is more often disobedient, Jews need only maintain their status quo religious beliefs. However, Gentiles must change, inter alia, their understanding of Jesus’s sinless nature and their definition(s) of sin.

This further evinces the need for a comprehensive and dispassionate review of the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus and how those circumstances empirically relate to halakhic expectations. We now discuss how we accomplished that.

² The Epistle of Barnabas 14:4–5.

3. Operationalization

3.1. General Overview

Because Jesus's Torah compliance engenders great emotion, many important Christian doctrines and scriptures hinge on Jesus's sinless nature, and the authors hypothesized that these doctrines and scriptures will hold up to scrutiny; this research sought to implement the *Johnson* probable cause test programmatically (*Johnson v. United States 1948*). There, the Court held that the accused's constitutional protection "requir[es] that [probable cause] inferences be drawn, by a neutral and detached magistrate instead of being judged by the officer engaged in the often competitive enterprise of ferreting out crime" (*Johnson v. United States 1948*, p. 333). To accomplish this, using SQL Server, RStudio, and AI code, we built a unique system that operates similarly to LexisNexis and Casetext, wherein it separately (1) ingested the Torah's 613 commandments, the Babylonian Talmud, Mishnah, and Mishneh Torah (i.e., the bodies of law), (2) classified the various topical groups therein, and (3) ingested each gospel account and used the distinct number of groups per compared body of law to classify topical relationships and relevance between the gospel account and the body of law. Once assignments were completed and all results were imported and joined within the SQL Server, we compared each passage to understand its reasonable relationship and ascertain whether Jesus complied with that body of law. The goal was to make AI the "neutral and detached magistrate" that compared the Gospel witnesses to the law to draw probable cause inferences, where the inference is the topical relationship (*Hong and Davison 2010*).³

3.2. Concept Clarification

LDA is an unsupervised learning topic modeling technique that automatically discovers topics from a collection of documents (*Hong and Davison 2010*). It is based on the idea that each document is a mixture of topics, and each topic is a distribution over words/vocabulary. LDA can be used for various tasks, such as "information retrieval, classification, and *corpus* exploration" (*Kherwa and Bansal 2019*, p. 5). LDA is a generative model, meaning that it can generate new documents like the documents in the training *corpus* (i.e., a bag of words ("BoW") approach). LDA is also a statistical model that can be used to predict the likelihood of a word occurring in a document. Next, LDA is a topic modeling technique that can be used to discover topics in a collection of documents. Thus, LDA is a powerful tool that can be used to extract meaning from large amounts of text data, like the Talmud and Gospels, and it is suitable for serving as a "neutral and detached magistrate" that draws probable cause inferences regarding the likelihood that a law was invoked and kept.

3.3. Supervised Learning Approach

This research used RStudio Build 353, 2022.12.0, to run LDA, one-way ANOVA, *t*-tests, and chi-squared tests to determine the significant relationships between Torah compliance by legal source and topic, Gospel, and compliance. The findings are expressed as chi-squared (χ^2), degrees of freedom (df), and *p*-value (*p*).

4. Methodology

4.1. Data Collection

This research used (1) Zaine Ridling, Ph.D.'s rendition of the NRSV's Gospels (N = 231 pages) (*Ridling 2019*), (2) *The William Davidson Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* from Sefaria.org (N = 3890 pages) (*Sefaria.org 2024*), (3) Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, fourteen volume set published by Yale University (N = 5167 pages) (M. *Maimonides and Danby 1954, 1963*; M. *Maimonides et al. 1961*; M. *Maimonides et al. 1956*; M. *Maimonides and Hershman*

³ Repeated stories within the gospels were only counted once; AI flagged the gospel whose text was closest to the halakhic language as the text related to the legal issue. Please see Section 5.1.2 Luke and Section 5.1.3 Mark for examples. We do not have space to discuss those findings' profundity and implications for redactional criticism.

1977; M. Maimonides and Kellner 2004; M. Maimonides and Klein 1962; M. Maimonides and Klein 1982; M. Maimonides and Klein 1972, 1974, 1979; M. Maimonides and Rabinowitz 1974; M. Maimonides et al. 1965; M.L. Maimonides and Lewittes 1950), (4) Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Book of Knowledge* translated by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger (M. Maimonides and Touger 2010); we used this resource because Yale did not publish a translation of that book (N = 607 pages);⁴ (5) the 613 commandments from Rich (2023) (N = 27 pages), (6) *The Oxford Annotated Mishnah* (N = 1259 pages) (Cohen et al. 2023), and (7) García Martínez and Watson's (1994) Qumran Documents published by Brill (N = 463 pages) (García Martínez and Watson 1994).⁵ All resources were in English. Resources one and three through seven were scanned as OCR PDFs, while the second resource was in .csv format. We used RStudio's *pdftools* function to convert PDFs to .csv files to standardize the data format with Sefaria.org downloads and ran .bat scripts to combine .csv files and create source, page, and line number columns to provide pincites for LDA assignments. All .csv files were imported into Microsoft SQL Server version 15.0.18424.0 to be formatted for analysis within RStudio.

4.2. Data Processing

4.2.1. Data Cleaning

To prevent anachronistic associations from medieval glosses within Sefaria.org's Babylonian Talmud, we only used its "bold" text. Sefaria.org's .csv files delimitate the bold text by using the HTML tags "", which indicates the beginning of the bold text, and "", which indicates the end of the bold text. We used transactional structured query language ("SQL") within Microsoft SQL Server to (1) identify each tag's position within every line, (2) extract the words between the tags, and (3) combine the extracted words to form the translation of the Talmud's language.

All footnotes and endnotes were removed from all documents to prevent relationships from forming from the source author(s)' analysis. Additionally, RStudio's *stopwords* function was used to remove common stop words, while custom scripts within RStudio removed numbers and punctuation from the text, and the *textstem* function lemmatized words to improve relationship clarity.

4.2.2. Weight Calculation

The *textstem* function in RStudio was used to calculate the weights using term frequency-inverse document frequency (TF-IDF). TF-IDF transforms unstructured documents into structured numerical vectors and is based on BoW theory, wherein documents are represented by word collections within the document because a word's frequency is a proxy variable for the word's importance within a document, making it unique from other documents. Here, we eliminated words appearing fewer than two times or in more than half of the documents.

4.3. Executing LDA

Because LDA requires one to specify the requisite number of topic groups (K's) one believes comprise a *corpus*, and no one has done so with the Mishnah, Talmud, Mishneh Torah, the 613 commandments, and Qumran documents, we relied on RStudio's K coherence scoring to determine the optimum number of K's within each body of law. The general rule is to select the number of K's with the highest coherence score; the coherence score depends on the data; thus, its values cannot be compared to scores from other datasets or interpreted using a scale like one would with Pearson's correlation. Because the dataset is large (N = 11,707 pages), the largest corpus is N = 5167 pages, and our processors could not handle more than 100 K's of testing with 100 iterations, we processed each source individually except for the Talmud and the Mishneh Torah. For the Talmud, we processed the

⁴ Citations from Yale's Mishneh Torah retain its Roman numeral codification; citations from Touger retain his standard Arabic numerals.

⁵ The number of pages reflects the total pages used excluding citations and annotations.

following sections individually: Agriculture, Holidays, Family Law, Damages, Sacrifices, and Purity. We processed each volume of Mishneh Torah individually. Although this is a limitation, the results suggest that 100 iterations were sufficient. The number of K’s based on the highest coherence score is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. K’s by source.

Source	Coherence Score	K’s
Talmud	0.22	94
613	0.35	72
Mishneh Torah	0.33	365
Mishnah	0.13	63
Qumran Documents	0.1	95

Conceptually, each K represents a unique legal topic for halakhic sources, while for the Qumran Documents, each K represents a unique subject discussed. The immediate deduction from the differences in the number of K’s between the Torah (613) and the Mishnah, Talmud, and Mishneh Torah is that while the Oral Torah is a “repetition” of Mosaic law, many legal topics within the Oral Torah go beyond those discussed in the Written Torah (Cohen et al. 2023, pp. 2–4).

Next, to increase accessibility for those unfamiliar with this approach, we now provide an example of how this approach works with the Mishneh Torah’s Book of Cleanness, the Qumran Documents, the 613 Commandments, and the Gospel of John. The Book of Cleanness contains twenty-six unique legal topics; please see Table A1 in Appendix A for a review of those topics. Figure 1, below, reflects four of the twenty-six legal topics; the words underneath each topic are the statistically unique combinations of the most frequent words that comprise the topic. The citations of the relevant law reflect which laws within The Book of Cleanness are associated with the topic. As seen below, some laws are interrelated (i.e., they share multiple topics). Topic-11 and Topic-20 are interrelated by Other Fathers of Uncleanness XIV.1–12 and XVII.1–9; Topic-20 and Topic-10 are interrelated by Immersion Pools VIII; and Topic-20 and Topic-16 are interrelated by Red Heifer VIII.8.

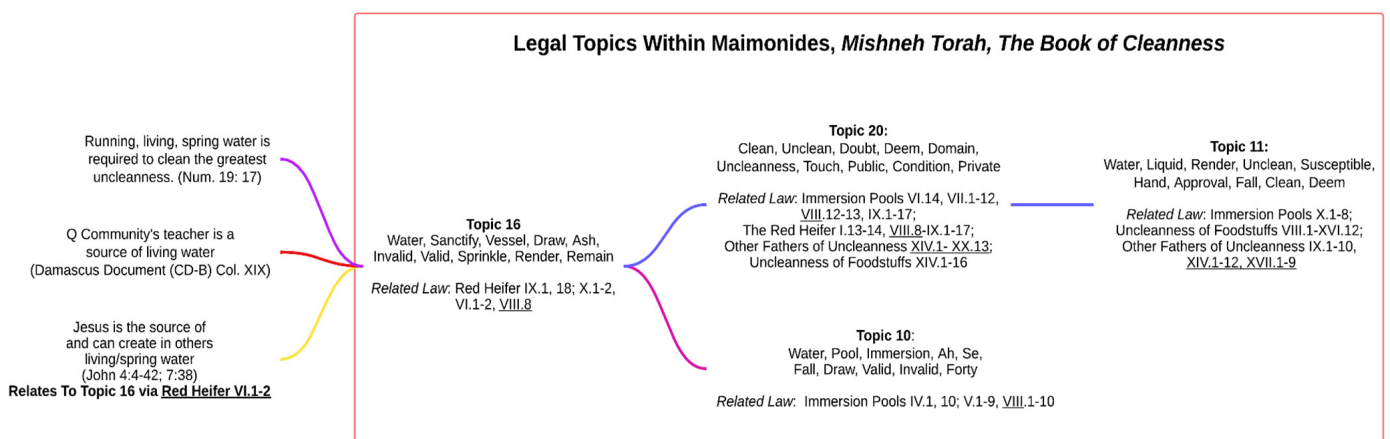


Figure 1. Example of legal topic modeling with the Book of Cleanness, Torah, Qumran Documents, and Gospel of John.

When AI compared the 613 commandments to the legal topics within The Book of Cleanness, it associated commandment 113 (Numbers 19:9) with Topic-16 and specifically Red Heifer VI.1–2, which is the association also made within the Mishneh Torah. Red Heifer VI.1–2 states the following:

The water onto which the red heifer’s ashes are cast may be drawn only in a vessel and from welling springs or flowing rivers, for it is said, And running water shall

be put thereto in a vessel (Num. 19: 17). The casting of the red heifer's ashes onto the water that has been drawn is called "sanctifying" the water; and the water on which the ashes are cast is called "water of purification" or "sanctified water", and this it is which Scripture calls water of sprinkling (Num. 19:9). Anyone is eligible to draw the water except a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor; also anyone is eligible to sanctify the water except a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. No one may draw or sanctify except in a vessel and no one may sprinkle except from a vessel. Drawing and sanctifying are valid by night, but no one may sprinkle or immerse himself except by day; and the whole day is valid for sprinkling and immersion.

Next, AI compared the Qumran Documents to The Book of Cleanness; AI associated the Damascus Document (CD-B) Col. XIX with Topic-16 (i.e., Red Heifer VI.1–2). CD-B Col. XIX, 33b–34 states the following:

And thus, all the men who entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus and turned and betrayed and departed from the well of living waters, shall not be counted in the assembly of the people and shall not be inscribed in their lists, from the day of the session of him who teaches/of the teacher.

Finally, AI compared the Gospel of John to The Book of Cleanness, and it associated John 4:4–42 and 7:38 with Topic-16 (i.e., Red Heifer VI.1–2). There, Jesus offers a wayward Samaritan woman "living water" (4:10) that would create a "spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14). In John 7:28, Jesus states that from within his believers would "flow rivers of living water". While Jesus's statement did not break the law, the law elucidates John's Jesus's meaning. Since living water is required to clean the foulest of uncleanness (i.e., corpse uncleanness) and the source of living or spring water cannot be defiled, Jesus, as the source of living water, cannot be defiled, neither can his believers that contain that spring, and there is no uncleanness to which Jesus is not the solution. AI associated many scriptures from John with laws concerning the red heifer and immersion pools, which suggests that John used a water motif to express his understanding of Jesus. The data confirm [Brown \(2015\)](#) and [Jones \(1997\)](#), who also identified John's water motif. Finally, the relatedness to the Damascus Document suggested that some Jewish sects believed that their teacher was a source of living water; thus, Jesus's statement was not unique. The LDA results appear to support [Stuckenbruck \(2010\)](#) statement regarding the parallels between the New Testament and the Qumran Documents:

Thus, we have to reckon with the increasing possibility that some, if not much, of the diversity of early Christian ideas can be traced back to a diversity—whether well-developed or in embryonic stages—that already existed in some measure among Jewish circles during the Second Temple period. ([Stuckenbruck 2010](#), p. 169)

AI has and can help trace Christian ideas to the Second Temple period and prior.

4.3.1. Determining Compliance

While LDA brings us very close to determining whether Jesus violated a particular law, the context of the Gospels and the highlighted law had to be reviewed to validate whether Jesus violated or kept the law, coding "1" for violation and "0" for observance. When the legal context was ambiguous, we adopted the rule of lenity from *Bell v. United States*; there, the Court held that "When Congress leaves to the Judiciary the task of imputing to Congress an undeclared will, the ambiguity should be resolved in favor of lenity" ([Bell v. United States 1955](#), p. 81). Table 2 below provides an example of the process from LDA to validation.

Table 2. Determining compliance.

LDA		Validation			
Mark 2:23–24	Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Repentance 4:1, (c)	Nexus (BoW)	Duty	Actus Reus	Violation
One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “ Look , why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”	There are 24 deeds which hold back Teshuvah . . . One who sees his son becoming associated with evil influences and refrains from rebuking him. Since his son is under his authority , were he to rebuke him, he would have separated himself [from these influences]. Hence, [by refraining from admonishing him , it is considered] as if he caused him to sin. Included in this sin are also all those who have the potential to rebuke others, whether an individual or a group, and refrain from doing so, leaving them to their shortcomings.	Mark 2:23–24: Look, Not Lawful, Disciples = Repentance 4:1, (c): Sees, Associate With Evil, Under His Authority, Rebuke	Who Owned the Duty to Rebuke: Jesus	Did Not Rebuke	1

4.3.2. Compiling the Dataset

The dataset consists of fourteen variables; those variables’ names, descriptions, data types, measurements, and values are detailed below in Table 3, along with a sample record.

Table 3. Dataset.

Variable Name	Description	Data Type	Measure	Values/Source	Sample Record
Category	Halakhic Legal Category	Numeric	Nominal	1: Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, 2: Dietary Laws, 3: Employees, Servants, and Slaves, 4: Eschatology, 5: Forbidden Sexual Relations, 6: God, 7: Leprosy, 8: Love and Brotherhood, 9: Marriage, Divorce, and Family, 10: Personal Development, 11: Prayer and Blessings, 12: Prophecy, 13: Punishment and Restitution, 14: Repentance, 15: Ritual Im/Purity, 16: Sanhedrin, 17: Signs and Symbols, 18: Teacher-Student, 19: The Dead, 20: The Poor and Unfortunate, 21: Times and Seasons, 22: Torah, 23: T’rumah, Tithes, and Taxes, 24: Vows, Oaths, and Swearing. (Source: (Rich 2023)) ⁶	15
SourceID	Halakhic Source	Numeric	Nominal	1: Torah, 2: Mishneh Torah, 3: Talmud, 4: Mishnah	4
Oral_Torah	Whether The Source is The Oral Torah	Binary	Nominal	0: Torah; 1: Mishneh Torah, Talmud, Mishnah	1
Halakhic_Reference	Halakhic Citation	String	Nominal	Identified by LDA	M. Eduyyot 3:1–2

Table 3. Cont.

Variable Name	Description	Data Type	Measure	Values/Source	Sample Record
Halakhic_Quote	Text of Halakhic Citation	String	Nominal	Identified by LDA	Omitted For Word Count
NTBOOKID	New Testament ("NT") Gospel Book Name	Numeric	Nominal	1: Luke, 2: Matthew, 3: John, 4: Mark,	1
NTSCRIPT	NT Citation	String	Nominal	Identified by LDA	Luke 8:49–56
NT_Quote	Text of NT Citation	String	Nominal	Identified by LDA	Omitted For Word Count
Action_TypeID	Type of Action Discussed within NT Scripture	Numeric	Nominal	1: Act, 2: Responding, 3: Teaching,	1
Violates	Whether Jesus Violated Halakha	Binary	Nominal	1: Violated, 0: Kept	1
FirstCenEvidence	First-Century Evidence of Commandment	String	Nominal	Identified by LDA or Researcher	11QTemple Scroll (11Q19) Col. XLIX (Purify everything that is in a house where someone dies).
FirstCenEvidenceID	Whether There Is First Century Evidence of Commandment	Binary	Nominal	1: Yes, 0: No	1
QD	Whether the Qumran Document Evince Commandment	Binary	Nominal	1: Yes, 0: No	1
Nexus	Connection between Gospel and Halakha	String	Nominal	Identified by Researcher	Entering the house and touching the dead girl made Jesus impure, and nothing within the text suggests that Jesus sought to become ritually pure.

Now, we discuss the findings.

5. Findings

5.1. Overview

LDA identified 174 legal issues raised within the Gospels; however, only 162 of those issues' laws could be verified as existing within the first century. Consequently, our analysis is limited to the 162 issues that arise from 122 unique Written (N = 52) and Oral Torah (N = 70) laws, see Table 4. When segregated by source, most legal issues arise from the Written Torah; Mark and Matthew raised the most issues from the Torah. Regardless of legal source, Matthew raised more legal issues than any other redactor, while John raised the fewest legal issues. Moreover, while knowing the Oral Torah by its current halakhic name is irrelevant to the Gospel Redactors, it is relevant to Christians' study of the Gospels

⁶ This research used Rich's (2023) legal categories because neither Sefaria.org, scholarship, nor the Oral Torah classified the 613 commandments (e.g., Friedberg (2014)).

because it helps direct the exegete to the body of law needed to better appreciate the context of Jesus. Now, we must understand the extent to which the Oral Torah is important to redactional narratives.

Table 4. Summary of legal issues within the Gospels.

Gospel		Legal Source				Total
		Written Torah	Oral Torah			
			M.T.	Talmud	Mishnah	
Luke	N	16	20	6	4	46
	% of Legal Source	23.20%	35.70%	30.00%	23.50%	28.40%
Matthew	N	24	20	10	6	60
	% of Legal Source	34.80%	35.70%	50.00%	35.30%	37.00%
John	N	2	5	1	4	12
	% of Legal Source	2.90%	8.90%	5.00%	23.50%	7.40%
Mark	N	27	11	3	3	44
	% of Legal Source	39.10%	19.60%	15.00%	17.60%	27.20%
Total	N	69	56	20	17	162
	% of Legal Source	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the presence of the Oral Torah within Gospel Redactors’ narratives. The presence of the Oral Torah is measured by the OT variable, which determines whether the legal issue raised within the Gospels arose from the Oral Torah (i.e., coded “1” if so and “0” if not). Here, the closer a Gospel’s OT-mean is to one, the more present—and, thus, more important—the Oral Torah is within that Gospel, and vice versa. There was a significant presence of the Oral Torah within redactional narratives at the $p < 0.05$ level for the four gospels [$F(3, 158) = 3.819, p = 0.011$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for the presence of Oral Torah within Luke ($M = 0.65, SD = 0.482$) and John ($M = 0.83, SD = 0.389$) were significantly different from those in Mark ($M = 0.39, SD = 0.493$). However, the presence of the Oral Torah in Luke ($M = 0.65, SD = 0.482$), Matthew ($M = 0.60, SD = 0.494$), and John ($M = 0.83, SD = 0.389$) did not significantly differ from one another. The high presence of the Oral Torah within Luke and Matthew might support [Lachs \(1978\)](#) and [Martin \(2012\)](#) hypotheses that some of Matthew’s—and possibly Luke’s—Q was the Oral Torah. We now explore the differences in the OT-mean among the gospels.

5.1.1. John

John’s Gospel raises the fewest legal issues yet contains the highest concentration of Oral Torah issues, resulting in an OT-mean of 0.83. John 5:17–18 includes the only two identified Written Torah conflicts: Jesus’s sabbath violation (Exodus 20:8) and equating himself to God (Exodus 20:3). Fifty percent of John’s Oral Torah issues involve Jesus’s treatment of the Sabbath; no other issue occupies a similar percentage. First, John 5:10–17 details that on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a paralytic, and when some Jews rebuked Jesus for this violation, Jesus responded that when he healed, he was working because God was also working on the Sabbath. This violates B. Shabbat 53b and M. Shabbat 7:1–2. Second, in John 7:21–24, Jesus justifies his healing work on the Sabbath by comparing it to the *excepted* Sabbath circumcision, which was later codified in M. Shabbat 18:3.⁷ Third, John 9:14 involved another Sabbath violation wherein Jesus healed a blind man by using an eye salve; this violates M. Shabbat 7:1 (again) and Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning

⁷ First, Jesus acknowledges that the exception was oral law from the patriarchs (εκ των πατερων); second, John’s early manuscripts \mathfrak{P}^{66} preserves that oral tradition.

Sabbath XXI.25, which forbids making an eye salve on the Sabbath.⁸ This suggests that while John's OT-mean is high and significantly different from that of Mark, John's evocation of the Oral Torah predominantly highlights Jesus's Sabbath violations.

5.1.2. Luke

While both Luke and Mark raise a similar number of legal issues, Luke's significant legal compositional differences appear to be because Luke raises eleven fewer issues from the Written Torah but thirteen more issues from the Oral Torah. Sixty-seven percent of Luke's and sixty-five percent of Mark's Oral Torah issues arise from the now-called Mishneh Torah. However, Luke raises nine more issues from the Mishneh Torah than does Mark. This likely suggests that if we are to better understand why Luke's OT-mean ($M = 0.65$, $SD = 0.482$) is significantly different from that of Mark ($M = 0.39$, $SD = 0.493$), then we should review Luke's Mishneh Torah issues.

Forty-five percent of the issues Luke raises from the Mishneh Torah concern laws regarding personal development (30%) and ritual purity (15%); no other topic occupies a similar percentage. Mark's Gospel does not discuss personal development laws but addresses ritual purity; therefore, we will focus on personal development laws. Luke's Jesus addresses living a balanced financial life in Luke 12:15 and Luke 18:18–27; each instance addresses the same laws: Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Human Dispositions 1:1, 3–4, 6–7.⁹ Luke 12:15 accords with the aforementioned laws; however, Luke 18:18–27 violates Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Human Dispositions 1:3–4, 6–7 because Luke's Jesus calls for extreme behavior: "Sell all that you own". Mark 10:17–21 tells a similar story, but AI did not flag that scripture because Luke's rendition more closely aligns with the language of the Mishneh Torah. Luke's Jesus tells the ruler to "Sell all [(παντα)] that you own and distribute to the poor" (18:22); Mark's Jesus says "υπαγε (you go) οσα (as much) εχεις (as you, yourself, have ready) πωλησον (sell) και (and) δοσ (give to) πτωχοις (the poor)" (10:21). Mark's Jesus does not require the man to sell all his property and interests; however, Luke's Jesus does. Thus, we may conclude that Luke's evocation of the Oral Torah's personal development laws differentiates Luke from Mark's evocation of Oral Torah laws.

5.1.3. Mark

Mark's OT-mean (i.e., 0.39) is low because he raised more Written than Oral Torah issues; however, Mark's evocation of the Oral Torah is very distinct: they are divided almost evenly among ritual purity laws (23.5%) found in Mark 2:16, 6:41–45, and 9:43–48; punishment and restitution (23.5%) found in Mark 5:1–20, 8:34–37, 10:39, and 13:9, 11; and times and seasons (29.4%) found in Mark 2:23–26 and 3:1–5.

Ritual Purity

In Mark 2:16, Jesus—a known rabbi at the time—ate with tax collectors and sinners; this violated B. Ḥagigah 26a ("collectors entered a house, the entire house is impure") and Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Foundations of the Torah 5:11:¹⁰

[D]eeds which . . . desecrat[e] . . . [God's] name if performed by a person of great Torah stature who is renowned for his piety, i.e., deeds which although they are not transgressions [will cause] people to speak disparagingly of him. This also constitutes the desecration of [God's] name. For example, a person who . . . who eats and drinks near or among the common people.

⁸ These oral laws were preserved in texts that predated the Mishnah (Exodus 20:8; 1 Maccabees 1:41–50; 2 Maccabees 6:4–6; Ant. 12.272–277; P^{66} ; See Also Borchardt (2015)).

⁹ This jurisprudence was preserved within Sirach 14:3–19; Labendz (2006) (Sirach as enunciation of Oral Torah precepts).

¹⁰ The Oral Torah's jurisprudence is preserved in the Qumran documents: 1 Halakhic Letter (4QMMT), 91–96; 4QHalakhic Letter (4Q397), Frags. 7–8.

Next, Mark 6:41–45 describes an almost irreproachable miracle: feeding over 5000 people at the shore (v. 34). AI's understanding of Jewish law revealed that although Jesus blessed the bread distributed to the multitudes, Mark did not enunciate that Jesus, his disciples, or those fed, washed their hands before eating bread, which broke Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Immersion Pools XI.1, 8.¹¹ Finally, Mark 9:43–48, which calls for the removal of the "hand" that causes one to sin, is likely the oral law prohibiting masturbation because its words echo B. Niddah 13b:

Elazar says what which is written your hands are full of blood. These are who commit adultery with the hand. The school of Yishmael taught You shall not commit adultery there shall not be adultery among you whether by hand whether with foot. Come hear as it is taught Rabbi Tarfon says hand to penis his hand should be severed upon his navel. Said to him a thorn was stuck in belly should he not remove it? Said to them not. But won't his belly be split open? Said to them it is preferable that the belly of should be split open, and he should not descend into the pit of destruction. [Sic].

The "hand" in Isaiah 57:8 is the punished "hand" in B. Niddah 13b and the 1QRule of the Community (1QS), Col. VII,14–16, because the "hand" is one of the Jewish euphemisms for male genitalia (Gilad 2015).

Times and Seasons

Regarding times and seasons, Mark 2:23–26 and 3:1–5 detail Jesus's sabbath violations; there, his disciples harvested wheat on Sabbath. Mark 2:23–26 highlights three violations: M. Shabbat 7:1 (prohibiting harvesting); Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Repentance 4:1(c) (duty to rebuke or prevent your Jewish brother from breaking the law); and M. Berakhot 7:3 (failure to bless the food when three or more people are eating).¹² While Mark's Jesus proffers David's exigency as the legal exception, nothing within Mark's text suggests exigency or that the disciples' hunger could not be satisfied later from food prepared for the Sabbath. Next was Jesus's Sabbath healing of a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1–5). As in John's account, this behavior violated B. Shabbat 53b and M. Shabbat 7:1.¹³

Punishment and Restitution

Third, Mark evokes punishment and restitution laws within Mark 5:1–20, 8:34–37, 10:39, and 13:9, 11. According to the AI models, Mark 5:1–20 testifies to Jesus's guilt for theft of property under the Mishneh Torah's accomplice liability law (i.e., Laws Concerning Theft I.18, III.17, IV.1). There, Jesus shows compassion to a legion of demons who prefer not to leave the region; instead, they ask Jesus to let them go into a herd of pigs. Jesus permits it; the demons possessed 2000 pigs and drowned them in the sea. The swineherds and other witnesses reported it, while others begged Jesus to leave, and Jesus left without making restitution. Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Theft III.17 states:

If partners steal together, the liability must be divided among them and each may be sold for his share of the original theft. If the value of any one of them is greater than the part of the theft for which he is liable, he may not be sold.

Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Theft I.18 and IV.1 are too lengthy to quote; however, they deal with the need for witnesses to corroborate the theft of animals, accomplice liability for such theft, and what happens when the taken animal is subsequently killed. The Oral Torah's jurisprudence is seen in Exodus 22:1–14, Proverbs 29:24, and 4QBlessings (4Q280) within the Qumran Documents, which suggests that this law was in effect during Jesus's

¹¹ See 4QPurification rules (4Q514), Frag. 1 Col. 1 (Establishes that one with impurities must wash before they eat).

¹² The Oral Torah's jurisprudence is preserved in the following texts: Leviticus 19:17, 25:5; 4QDecrees (4Q477); 1QRule of the Community (1QS), Col. VI,1–6.

¹³ These oral laws were preserved in texts that predated the Mishnah (Exodus 20:8; 1 Maccabees 1:41–50; 2 Maccabees 6:4–6; Ant. 12.272–277; see also Borchardt (2015).

life. Finally, while Matthew 8:28–34 and Luke 8:26–37 discuss this event, their narratives were not flagged because they omitted the facts necessary to bring a theft claim under accomplice liability: the owner’s and other witnesses’ testimonies.¹⁴

Mark 8:34–37, 10:39, and 13:9, 11 detail the cost of discipleship, where Jesus warns his disciples that they will suffer similar punishment and persecution as he would. While this is typically seen as prophecy, it may also be legal advice. Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Murder and Preservation of Life VII.1 states in relevant parts, “[I]f a teacher goes into exile, his school must be exiled with him”. The Oral Torah’s punishment of a teacher and disciples is preserved within the 4QDamascus Document (4Q267), Frag. 18 col. V, 14–16. Additionally, this law helps explain why the high priest empowered Saul to persecute the Christian Church (Acts 8:1–3, 9:1–9; Murder and Preservation of Life V.1, VII.1).

In short, Mark’s evocation of the Oral Torah is significantly different than that of Luke and John; Mark evokes different aspects of purity and times and seasons laws and introduces various punishment and restitution laws.

Next, we focus on the redactional portrayal of Jesus’s compliance with the Written and Oral Torah.

5.2. Reviewing Compliance

As detailed in Table 5, a chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the Gospels and their depiction of Jesus’s compliance with the Written and Oral Torah. A significant relationship existed between the Gospel Redactors’ portrayal of Jesus’s Written Torah compliance but not his Oral Torah compliance, $\chi^2(3, N = 162) = 23.94, p < 0.000$. The Gospels form a consensus regarding Jesus’s Written Torah compliance: Mark, Luke, and John reflect that, more often, Jesus is not Torah-compliant, where Jesus’s compliance is 14.80, 43.80, and 0.00 percent, respectively. This directly conflicts with Matthew’s depiction of Jesus’s Torah observance (70.83%) and the “citation” of Jesus’s mission to fulfill the Torah (5:17). Next, it seems counterintuitive to find no significant relationship between Gospel Redactors’ portrayal of Jesus’s compliance with the Oral Torah when fifty-seven percent of the legal issues raised within the Gospels come from the Oral Torah. The relationship that exists is only significant at the $p < 0.10$ level. To the extent to which that relationship is notable, Luke and Matthew suggest that Jesus is more often compliant with the Oral Torah.

The literature helps explain general redactional Written and Oral Torah compliance. The data corroborate Saldarini’s findings that Mark’s depiction of Jesus’s non-Torah observance and an explanation of some Oral Torah concepts signal that Mark wrote to Gentiles, who would appreciate knowing that Jesus was not Torah-compliant (Saldarini 2001, p. 146). Next, the data support Viljoen (2006) conclusion that Matthew emphasized Torah observance more than his redactional cohorts, possibly as a means to combat antinomianism. Third, Maccoby (1995), reviewing both the Written and Oral Torah, stated that John does not provide evidence of an affinity between Jesus and the Pharisees; notice that Table 5 shows that John raises the fewest legal issues. Consonance with the Pharisees is seen in two ways: (1) stated agreement (e.g., Mark 12:28–34) or (2) Jesus’s halakhic obedience. Since John raises fewer halakhic issues, we can conclude—as did Maccoby (1995)—that John does not want to show an affinity between Jesus and the Pharisees.

However, John’s evidence cuts both ways: the Pharisees believe that Jesus broke the Sabbath, and John admitted that Jesus broke the Sabbath (John 5:18). Throughout his Gospel, John provided all the attendant circumstances for those who knew the law to understand which laws Jesus broke. John—unlike any other redactor—records that Jesus

¹⁴ Some may argue that the region where this action occurred—Gerasa—was not within halakhic jurisdiction. In that case, Rome did have jurisdiction and Jesus’s actions would have violated Roman law, Twelve Tables: Table VIII.6, 12–14, 16 (laws against all types of theft and damaged property). Alternatively, because the event was supernatural, the owners could have charged Jesus with theft through sorcery, Table VIII.1a–1b, 8a, 14. See also Pharr (1932). Nevertheless, the personal jurisdictional argument creates further complications for Gentile Christians because it implies that Torah observance is only required where the natural government specifically invokes and enforces Jewish law.

classified his healing miracles as work, which is prohibited on the Sabbath (John 9:14). John’s Gospel reflects that Jesus is not compliant with the Written Torah, and John concludes that those who wanted Jesus crucified enunciated that their Jewish laws require that Jesus be put to death (John 19:7). John’s Gospel in §⁶⁶, which predates the Talmud, preserves the Sanhedrin’s court record in B. Sanhedrin 43a. There, the Jesus of Nazareth in B. Sanhedrin 43a was hung on Passover Eve, just like Jesus in John 19:14–16 was hung on Passover Eve. These statements agree with the Pharisees, contradicting Maccoby (1995).

Table 5. Jesus’s level of Torah compliance by Gospel and source.

Legal Source	Gospel	Kept	Violated	Total	
Written Torah	Luke	N Compliance %	7 43.80%	9 56.30%	16 100.00%
	Matthew	N	17	7	24
		Compliance %	70.80%	29.20%	100.00%
	John	N	0	2	2
		Compliance %	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	Mark	N	4	23	27
		Compliance %	14.80%	85.20%	100.00%
	Total	N	28	41	69
		Compliance %	40.60%	59.40%	100.00%
	Oral Torah	Luke	N Compliance %	16 53.30%	14 46.70%
Matthew		N	25	11	36
		Compliance %	69.40%	30.60%	100.00%
John		N	4	6	10
		Compliance %	40.00%	60.00%	100.00%
Mark		N	6	11	17
		Compliance %	35.30%	64.70%	100.00%
Total		N	51	42	93
		Compliance %	54.80%	45.20%	100.00%
Total		N	79	83	162
	Compliance %	48.80%	51.20%	100.00%	

Notes: $\chi^2 = 17.98$, $df = 3$, p -value < 0.000 (Written Torah); $\chi^2 = 6.64$, $df = 3$, p -value = 0.084 (Oral Torah); $\chi^2 = 23.94$, $df = 3$, p -value < 0.000 (overall).

Because the data show that Jesus is more compliant with the Oral Torah (54.80%) than with the Written Torah (40.60%), we needed to understand whether there were significant differences between Jesus’s compliance with the Written and Oral Torah overall and among the redactors. To answer this question, we completed five independent *t*-tests that assume unequal variances; see Table 6 below.

Table 6. *t*-test of redactional compliance by legal source.

	Legal Source	Violation Mean *	SD	
Overall	Written Torah	0.59	0.495	$t(146) = 1.81, p = 0.248$
	Oral Torah	0.45	0.500	
Luke	Written Torah	0.56	0.512	$t(30) = 0.606, p = 0.699$
	Oral Torah	0.47	0.507	
Matthew	Written Torah	0.29	0.464	$t(50) = 0.113, p = 0.821$
	Oral Torah	0.31	0.467	
John	Written Torah	1	0.000	$t(9) = 2.449, p < 0.000$
	Oral Torah	0.6	0.516	
Mark	Written Torah	0.85	0.362	$t(27) = 1.481, p = 0.004$
	Oral Torah	0.65	0.493	

Notes: * A violation is coded “1” where it exists, else “0”.

Overall, there was no significant difference in Jesus's compliance with the Oral or Written Torah, $t(146) = 1.81, p = 0.248$, although Oral Torah ($M = 0.45, SD = 0.500$) violations were less common than Written Torah violations ($M = 0.59, SD = 0.495$). The data suggest that while Luke is likely to portray Jesus as more often noncompliant with the Written Torah, notwithstanding Jesus's greater compliance with the Oral Torah, his Oral Torah compliance is not significantly different from his Written Torah compliance. Thus, according to Luke, Jesus is likely to be noncompliant with the Written Torah and to treat the Oral Torah similarly. Conversely, the data suggest that Matthew is likely to portray Jesus as more often compliant with the Written Torah; however, Jesus's Oral Torah compliance is not significantly different from his Written Torah compliance. Thus, according to Matthew, Jesus is likely to be compliant with the Written Torah and treat the Oral Torah similarly. According to John, Jesus is significantly likely to be noncompliant with the Written and Oral Torah; however, Jesus's compliance with the Oral Torah is significantly different from his treatment of the Written Torah in that Jesus is likely to obey some of the oral law. Mark reflects a similar trend.

The data concur and disagree with the current compliance literature. For example, the overall data agree with Branscomb (1928), who argued that Jesus did not reject the Oral Torah but treated it with the same "fearless freedom" he applied to the written law (Branscomb 1928, p. 37). However, the data disagreed with Sanders (2016), who claimed that Jesus complied with the Written and Oral Torah. Additionally, the findings push back to Maccoby (1995) assessment that Gospel writers' intent to show the difference between the Pharisees and Jesus was subverted by the "Pharisaic nature of Jesus's thought" (Maccoby 1995, p. 58). Maccoby defines Pharisaic thought as anything that agrees with the Oral Torah. However, Maccoby's definition is too narrow because the Pharisees followed the Written and Oral Torah. Thus, to determine one's Pharisaic nature is to look at one's obedience to both Torahs, which for Jesus is 48.80 percent (i.e., more often not Pharisaic). Even if we assume arguendo that the extent of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was a redactional contrivance, their portrayal demonstrates Jesus's consistent opposition to both Torahs. Therefore, there is no evidence of subversion.

We now explore whether there is a relationship between how Jesus observed the Written and Oral Torah and Gospel narratives.

5.3. The Manner of Compliance

As detailed in Table 7 below, a chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the Gospels and their depiction of how Jesus complied with the Written and Oral Torah. A significant relationship existed between the Gospel Redactors' portrayal of Jesus's Written Torah compliance but not his Oral Torah compliance, $\chi^2(3, N = 162) = 23.94, p < 0.000$. No relationship was found between how the Gospels portray Jesus's physical acts of Written Torah compliance (i.e., Jesus's nonteaching and nonresponding actions); those compliance depictions are split evenly. There is a significant relationship between how the Gospels portray Jesus's Written Torah compliance when he is either teaching or responding ($\chi^2 = 16.18, df = 2, p\text{-value} < 0.000$ (Teaching); $\chi^2 = 7, df = 2, p\text{-value} = 0.030$ (Responding)). Matthew and Mark show that when Jesus responds to a legal challenge, Jesus's response accords with the law; John reflects the opposite. Luke and Mark reflect that when Jesus teaches, he teaches in opposition to the Written Torah, while Matthew demonstrates the opposite.

When one responds correctly to the law but teaches against it, this behavior suggests that one knows the law but does not agree with it. The data contradict Neusner (2017), Sumney (2021), and Allison (2013), who deduced that Jesus follows M. Avot 1:1 by "building a fence" around the Torah to prevent its violation and demand more from his followers. Next, the data are in discord with Branscomb, who posits that Jesus "felt that he knew what God wanted of men, that he was teaching the true Torah, and that the scribes in many cases had not interpreted it aright" (Branscomb 1928, p. 37). The data reflect that when Jesus teaches in agreement with the Torah, Jesus merely repeats its plain meaning; however, when

Jesus teaches in opposition with the Torah, he does not form a new interpretation from its text; rather, he teaches one to take the opposite action than dictated by the Written Torah. For example, (1) Mark 3:31–35, Matthew 10:34–36, and Luke 14:26 versus Exodus 20:12 and Leviticus 19:3; (2) Mark 7:14–15, 19 versus Deuteronomy 12:23, 32¹⁵, 14:11, 19, 21; Exodus 21:28, 22:30, 23:19, Leviticus 7:23, 26, 11:4, 9, 11, 13, 21, 41–44, 46; and (3) Luke 11:45 and Matthew 23:13–39 versus Leviticus 19:17. The data points to Jesus knowing the law but disagreeing with it, not reinterpreting it.

Table 7. Compliance by action type and Gospel.

Action Type	Gospel	Written Torah			Oral Torah			
		Kept	Violated	Total	Kept	Violated	Total	
Act	Luke	N	4	3	7	3	8	11
		Compliance %	57.10%	42.90%	100.00%	27.30%	72.70%	100.00%
	Matthew	N	1	1	2	1	3	4
		Compliance %	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%	25.00%	75.00%	100.00%
	John	N	0	1	1	1	4	5
		Compliance %	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	20.00%	80.00%	100.00%
	Mark	N	2	2	4	1	9	10
		Compliance %	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%	10.00%	90.00%	100.00%
Total	N	7	7	14	6	24	30	
	Compliance %	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%	20.00%	80.00%	100.00%	
Responding	Luke	N	0	0	0	0	3	3
		Compliance %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	Matthew	N	5	0	5	5	0	5
		Compliance %	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	John	N	0	1	1	3	0	3
		Compliance %	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	Mark	N	1	0	1	2	0	2
		Compliance %	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	N	6	1	7	10	3	13	
	Compliance %	85.70%	14.30%	100.00%	76.90%	23.10%	100.00%	
Teaching	Luke	N	3	6	9	13	3	16
		Compliance %	33.30%	66.70%	100.00%	81.30%	18.80%	100.00%
	Matthew	N	11	6	17	19	8	27
		Compliance %	64.70%	35.30%	100.00%	70.40%	29.60%	100.00%
	John	N	0	0	0	0	2	2
		Compliance %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	Mark	N	1	21	22	3	2	5
		Compliance %	4.50%	95.50%	100.00%	60.00%	40.00%	100.00%
Total	N	15	33	48	35	15	50	

Notes: $\chi^2 = 17.98$, $df = 3$, p -value < 0.000 (Written Torah); $\chi^2 = 6.64$, $df = 3$, p -value = 0.084 (Oral Torah); $\chi^2 = 23.94$, $df = 3$, p -value < 0.000 (overall).

Next, we seek to determine whether there is a relationship between the legal category and the redactors’ depiction of Jesus’s compliance therewith.

5.4. The Legal Categories with Which Jesus Complied

Out of twenty-four legal categories, only one significant relationship exists between the legal category and Gospel Redactors’ portrayal of Jesus’s Written Torah compliance; that category is laws concerning God, $\chi^2 = 8.00$, $df = 2$, p -value = 0.018.¹⁶ Luke and Matthew reflect Jesus’s obedience to such laws, while John demonstrates the opposite. For exam-

¹⁵ Within a Christian Bible.

¹⁶ The table is too large to include in this research.

ple, (1) Matthew 6:9 fulfills Leviticus 22:32 and Exodus 20:2, (2) Matthew 4:7b, 10 fulfills Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 6:16, (3) Matthew 5:48 fulfills Deuteronomy 28:9b, and (4) Luke 10:27–28 fulfills Deuteronomy 6:5. However when John said that Jesus was “making himself equal to God” (John 5:18b), Jesus’s behavior violated the commandment in Exodus 20:3. This represents the only consistent and significant jurisprudential policy detailed within the Gospels. The data likely support Phillips’ and Crossan’s points: “The inherent paradoxical nature of Jesus’s [teachings] prohibit[] us from easily constructing a ‘practical morality’” (Crossan 2008, p. 77; Phillips 1981, p. 648).

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1. Revisiting the Compliance Camps

The six views within the observance camps are (1) complete obedience to the Torah, (2) the obedience of Jesus to his reinterpreted but intensified Torah, (3) the obedience of Jesus via pluralistic Judaism, (4) complete disobedience, (5) partial abrogation of the Torah, and (6) complete abrogation of the Torah. Because no gospel reflects complete observance, there is no scriptural support for the first view. Next, the data show that Jesus neither intensified nor protected the Torah from violations. Additionally, Jesus’s behavior showed that Jesus knew the law but taught and acted in opposition to the Torah, not that he provided a new interpretation. Consequently, there remains no scriptural grounds for the second view. Because three out of four Gospels reflect that Jesus kept some of the Written Torah laws, the data do not support the fourth and sixth views. This leaves us with the third and fifth views.

Regarding pluralistic Judaism, because we cannot make out Jesus’s jurisprudence on any issue but God and Jesus did not accord with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes or meet the behavioral requirements within the Qumran community, it is difficult to appreciate that pluralistic Judaism covers what Jesus preached and lived. Thus, the burden falls upon the pluralistic Judaism camp to marshal comprehensive evidence that places Jesus’s teachings and behavior within the penumbra of first-century pluralistic Judaism. The conundrum we must now answer is whether the Gospels’ shared Jewish narratives suggest that Jesus—and, thus, Christianity—is a continuation of pluralist Judaism or that the redactors wrote about Jesus in first-century Jewish terms.

Finally, the partial Torah abrogation camp’s evidence of Torah abrogation is Matthew’s third (Matthew 5:31–32), fifth (Matthew 5:38–42), and last antitheses (Matthew 5:43–47). However, only the third antithesis appears to impact observance. Nothing within the fifth antithesis precludes a person from obtaining the restitution provided by Exodus 21:23–27; therefore, this is not abrogation. The sixth antithesis does not refute a Torah commandment because the Torah does not command one to hate their enemy; however, the 1QRule of the Community (1QS), Col. I, 1–11 instructs one to “love all the sons of light” and “hate everything that he rejects”, that is, to say, “to detest all the sons of darkness”. Given that Luke’s rendition omits the “hate your enemy” portion, the Torah does not command hating one’s enemies, but the Qumran rules do; then, Matthew’s edit may be parapraxis wherein he lets slip that part of his Q were similar to those found within the Qumran community.

6.2. Implications for Gentile Christian Doctrines and Theology

The findings of this study hold significant implications for Gentile Christians, necessitating a reevaluation of our foundational understanding of sin, doctrinal Christology, *Sola Scriptura*, and the effects of missionizing ethnoreligious members. These findings prompt the following queries: If Jesus did not adhere to the Torah.

- Why should his Gentile followers comply with the Torah?
- Why would his Gentile followers and their denominations rely upon the Torah/Tanakh or its New Testament exposition to (a) define sin or sinful acts and (b) make it the standard to judge sound Christian doctrine, revelation, and behavior?
- Why do we consider Jesus to be sinless but consider those who violate Halakha to be sinful?

- What does it mean to act like Jesus, and what are the impacts of emulation on the lives of members of ethnoreligions?

In the following sections, we will delve into these questions and their implications on our definitions and doctrines.

6.2.1. Sola Scriptura

Recent scholarship, including the findings of this study, raises significant questions about the sufficiency of the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. This doctrine, adopted since the Protestant Reformation, elevates the Protestant Bible as the paramount law that constrains all doctrines, much like Justice Marshall's approach to the Constitution in (*Marbury v. Madison* 1803; Douglas et al. 1989, p. 354; MacCulloch 2010, p. 608; Thorsen 2020). However, recent scholarship and this study's findings challenge the validity of using texts and laws that Jesus did not adhere to and that excluded his Gentile followers (J.D. Brackens 2024¹⁷) as the standard for Christian doctrines, traditions, and behaviors. This begs the following question: Why should Christians conform if Jesus does not? Emerging research suggests that Protestants are willing to leave full dependence on the text.

Current scholarship and survey results suggest that *Sola Scriptura* is losing its grip on Protestants. O'Collins (2018), a Catholic scholar, argues against *Sola Scriptura* by advancing that there is no difference between revealed truth within scriptures and tradition because scriptures were once unwritten traditions. Zachhuber (2015), a proponent of *Sola Scriptura*, states that the Bible is the "ultimate authority and the most fundamental source of Christian beliefs and practices" (p. 250). However, Zachhuber admitted that executing its strict meaning is not plausible and is "untenable with the advent of historical criticism" (2015, p. 250). D. Brackens (2008), a Protestant scholar, argues against *Sola Scriptura* from a Johannine perspective, advancing that "God never intended that a set of rules would take [His]. . . place" (2008, p. 141). To D. Brackens, God always provides new revelation, but when exegetes take a textualist instead of a living constitutionalist approach to the scriptures, they "grapple with new concepts, ideas, and methods", causing them to reject revealed truth and valence it as heresy (2008, p. 25). Supporting O'Collins (2018) and D. Brackens (2008), Pew Research Center (2017) survey of Protestant beliefs shows that fifty-two percent of Protestants now reject *Sola Scriptura*.

It seems nonsensical to make Christians comport with that which Jesus did not, and Pew's (Pew Research Center 2017) survey indicates that the majority of Protestants are ready to move beyond the text. However, we must understand where they wish to move. This could mean limiting *Sola Scriptura* to New Testament portions applicable to Gentile Christians or embracing a modified Catholic approach: seeking enlightenment from pertinent scriptures and divine revelation. More research is needed to better understand this phenomenon.

6.2.2. Definition(s) of Sin

Scroggs (1983) highlighted the pressing need to revisit our doctrines and definitions of sin. He wrestled with the Christian Canon, pointing out biblical contradictions, the lack of a "single [and] unified notion of the meaning of sin", and the need for Christian jurisprudential grounds "which might overrule some specific sections of Scripture not seen to be consonant" (p. 104). This research aligns with his concerns, as our findings indicate the necessity of revisiting our foundational definition(s) of sin and suggest that Jesus's non-Torah observance, coupled with Halakha's lack of personal jurisdiction over Jesus's Gentile followers, may provide those such as Scroggs with the jurisprudential grounds to

¹⁷ Exodus 19:3, 7; Leviticus 4:2, 18:2, 26, 20:2; Numbers 15:38, Deuteronomy 1:1, 4:1, 5:1–3, 10:12, 13:6–18, 27:1, 33:4. See Also Judges 1:1; 1 Kings 14:7, 10, 13; 2 Kings 23:2, 21; Proverbs 1:1; Jeremiah 3:11; Ezekiel 16:2; Hosea 1:4, 5, 11; 2:1; 3:1, 4–5; 4:1; Micah 6:3–4; Zechariah 8:2, 4, 14, 15; B. Sanhedrin 59a; B. Avodah Zarah 2b, 3a; B. Bava Kamma 38b; M. Avodah Zarah 1:3; Mishneh Torah, Avodat Kochavim 9:4; Acts 10, 15:28–29, and 21:12–26.

“overrule” the “dissonant”. The implications for our doctrines, morality, and ethics are profound, underscoring the importance of this task.

While the New Testament uses the word “sin” 400 times, only 1 John 3:4 attempts to define it; however, its definition is circular: “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness”. Christian doctrine attempts to clarify this definition. To Protestants, doctrinal definitional sin is an “act or state of life that is contrary to the will of God, and that breaks the fellowship or communion of God and man” (Douglas et al. 1989, p. 350). To Catholics, doctrinal definitional sin is “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law” (Catholic Church 2018, para. 1849). Neither defines God’s will nor eternal law, which could be why U.S. Christians base their definitions of sin on the Bible (23.30%), broader religious beliefs (30%), and nonreligious sources (46.7%) (Pew Research Center 2013). When Gentile Christians and denominations base their definitions of sin and religious beliefs on the “Old Testament”/Tanakh, then they base behavioral standards on laws (1) that preclude them (J.D. Brackens 2024) and (2) that Jesus did not comply with. In this case, Gentile Christians’ legitimate use of the Torah—and its New Testament exposition—to determine sinful acts is in question. More research is required to determine denominational responsiveness and receptiveness to these findings and the extent and impact of definitional changes.

6.2.3. Jesus’s Sinlessness

The definition of sin must clarify whether any Torah observance is needed, adequately account for Jesus’s Torah observance, and address what is causing a significant portion of biblically engaged Americans to believe that Jesus sinned. The New Testament and Catholic and Protestant doctrines state that Jesus is sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 John 3:5; Catholic Church 2018, para. 467; Douglas et al. 1989, p. 350). Nevertheless, a 2022 survey revealed that thirty-three percent of Americans who moderately engage and thirteen percent who habitually engage in the Bible believe that Jesus sinned (American Bible Society 2022, p. 46). Unfortunately, the American Bible Society did not ask respondents which sins they believed Jesus committed. Nonetheless, this research may provide insight into how some Americans who read the Gospels and the Torah could conclude that Jesus sinned.

AI flagged Mark 3:31–35, Matthew 10:34–36, and Luke 14:26 as violating Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and your mother”. Sanders (2016) and Neusner (2017) acknowledge that these scriptures represent “antifamily material” (Sanders 2016, p. 6). Neusner (2017) views it as a Torah violation, while Sanders (2016) argues that Jesus is ignorant of family law. However, the data suggest that Jesus knows the law but does not agree with it. Additionally, because these scriptures represent Jesus’s teaching, when the redactor is Luke or Mark, Jesus is significantly likely to teach in opposition to the Written Torah. Consequently, the data agree with Neusner (2017) and Americans who read the Torah and the Gospels and view Jesus’s behavior as violating Exodus 20:12. However, for one to believe that an Exodus 20:12 violation amounts to sin, this means that one views some Torah violations as sin.

Reiterating Scroggs (1983), this requires a definitive statement regarding whether Gentile Christians’ non-Torah observance is a sin. Given that Jesus did not comply with the Torah and that halakha’s personal jurisdiction excludes the nonproselyte Gentile (J.D. Brackens 2024), Gentile Christian non-Torah observance is not a sin. However, would the Christian Church state that? Alternatively, we could argue that Jesus’s treatment of the Torah was not violative and, thus, not sin, which is traditionally performed within Christological doctrines. However, this research suggests that status quo Christological doctrines insufficiently account for Jesus’s Torah observance and its implications for his followers.

6.2.4. Impacts on Christological Doctrines

From Above

There are three branches of Christology: (1) from above (emphasizing a sinless Jesus who is fully God and man (Catholic Church 2018, para. 467)), (2) from below (analyzes the

historical or human Jesus of Nazareth (Douglas et al. 1989)), and (3) from above and below (emphasizes Jesus's humanity but reconciles discrepancies by appealing to his divinity (Sanders 2016; Wright 2015)). "Christology from above" is the traditional approach that unconditionally declares that Jesus's behavior is sinless and forgoes detailing the rationale for this decision. This prevents followers from ascertaining the reasons behind Jesus's non-observance. Consequently, modern scholarship introduced "Christology from below".

From Below

"Christology from below" posits that understanding Jesus's humanity enlightens his message but rarely affirms Jesus's divinity (Douglas et al. 1989). Given this theology's premise, it seems necessary that assessments of Jesus's Jewish humanity delve deeply into what characterizes a religious first-century Jew: Torah compliance. It does not. Instead, this framework broadly places Jesus among pre- and first-century A.C.E. Rabbis and Midrashim to reflect a "normal", devout, Torah-observant Jewish Jesus used of God (Maccoby 1995; Sanders 2016; Viljoen 2006; Wright 2015). However, would we reaffirm the status quo by applying the current "Christology from below" method to this study's dataset? Recent hybrid Christological scholarship appears to respond to the growing discrepancy in Jesus's Torah observance.

Hybrid Above–Below

Hybrid Above–Below Christology responds to the legal implications of Jesus's human behavior by (1) indirectly defending Jesus's noncompliance and (2) privileging Jesus's behavior by appealing to his divinity. For example, before appealing to Jesus's divinity, Above–Below Christologists heavily emphasize the vast diversity of Pluralistic Judaism (Blanton 2013; Wright 2015) and Jesus's humanity (Homolka and Shafer 2015; Verhey 2014; Wright 2015), carpentry (Bjork 2021; Sumney 2021; Wright 2015), common temptations (Wright 2015), need to learn obedience (Wright 2015, p. 52, Hebrews 5:8), imperfections (Sanders 2016; Wright 2015), and lack of Halakhic training (Branscomb 1928; Sanders 2016; Verhey 2014; Wright 2015).

Most emphasize Jesus's lack of Halakhic training; however, no historical or biblical texts confirm or deny the extent or source of Jesus's legal training. When history and the Bible are silent on Jesus's Halakhic education, the conclusion that Jesus lacks Halakhic training is a deduction from a premise Christologists do not state. The premise is likely that some Christologists saw a significant act or a pattern of behavior so contrary to the Torah that they reasoned that it must be from a lack of halakhic training. The pattern of behavior may be what causes a significant number of biblically engaged respondents to believe that Jesus committed sin, which again highlights the need to re/define sin (American Bible Society 2022). Nevertheless, this research reflects that Jesus knows the Written and Oral Torah well but disagrees with it.

Accordingly, doctrinal Christology, whether from above or below, is no longer a panacea for Jesus's halakhic deviations because it provides no jurisprudential grounds for the eighty-three deviations or the seventy-nine laws that Jesus kept. We must closely examine each violation and its possible first-century halakhic defense and update our Christological doctrines; otherwise, Christology will amount to an ipse dixit argument.

6.2.5. Evangelizing Ethnoreligion Members

Next, as a practical matter, before evangelizing ethnoreligion members, we need to better understand what living like Christ means and its impacts on those members (i.e., Abrahamic, Dharmic, East Asian, Afro-American Ethno, Circumpolar; African traditional religions, Australian aboriginal ethnoreligions, etc.). As demonstrated here, leveraging AI can help us better understand the extent to which some Christian beliefs violate ethnoreligious laws and culture. This will increase our global understanding and empathy.

6.3. Implications for Jews

The study used AI to create the first-century state of the Oral Torah for the laws evoked in Gospel narratives. However, we can broaden the scope to include all first-century and prior Jewish literature to examine the state, history, and evolution of the Oral Torah. Additionally, this approach helps identify “natural” legal topics missing from primary and secondary sources, facilitating a more comprehensive review of legal matters. For instance, it identifies Jesus’s food declaration in Mark 7:14–15, 19 as violating the Mishneh Torah, Laws Concerning Things Prohibited for the Altar V.6, which forbids offering prohibited animals on the altar. This law was captured in 2 Maccabees 6:5, which suggests that it existed in some form in at least 150 B.C.E. Currently, the literature does not address this legal issue, highlighting how AI-derived categories can alert us to potential gaps in our understanding of Jewish law.

6.4. The Role of AI in Religious Studies and the Gutenberg Precedent

This research is a case study of how religious leaders and scholars can leverage AI to address plaguing and contentious religious matters and contradictions. As such, we discuss AI’s role in religious studies and its likely effect on religious leaders, scholars, and communities, specifically Christian communities.

The Problem: Deeply held religious beliefs, often tied to identity and community, can be incredibly resistant to change, even in the face of potential contradictions (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Spilka et al. 2019). Centuries of debate and study created vast volumes of religious texts, commentaries, and doctrines, making it difficult for scholars and clergy to analyze and address potential inconsistencies comprehensively. This potential isolation, emotional investment, and sheer resource volume can disincentivize the pursuit of objective understanding and conflict resolution within and across faiths (D. Brackens 2008; J.D. Brackens 2012; Thaler and Sunstein 2021). However, AI is a potential solution to some of these issues.

- **AI’s Potential:** We can leverage AI to revolutionize the study of religious and historical documents to mitigate these challenges. AI offers advantages, including the following:
- **Overcoming Barriers:** AI’s ability to process massive volumes of text could address the disincentive posed by the overwhelming amounts of material while uncovering patterns that humans might miss.
- **Multilingual Analysis:** AI-powered translation and language comparison can illuminate connections and divergences between religious traditions and commentaries.
- **Understanding Context:** AI can help place religious texts within their historical context, revealing the influences of time upon meaning.
- **Mitigating Bias:** While not entirely neutral, AI can offer a more dispassionate analysis than can some clergy and scholars who may be steeped in their tradition.

Important Considerations: While AI is a powerful tool, it must be used thoughtfully. Scholars and clergy must ensure that the data used to train AI are comprehensive and bias-free or at least provide the context of the bias. Such transparency is needed to improve AI’s understanding and outcomes. However, the laity’s use of AI to address their questions will likely diminish their confidence and reliance on the exegetical competence of their clergy. A survey conducted by the [Pew Research Center \(2020\)](#) revealed that sixty percent of U.S. laities have a significant level of trust in the ability of their clergy to offer useful scriptural guidance. However, AI’s ability to swiftly provide substantial evidence that may contradict traditional exegesis and denominational doctrines could undermine the fundamental reasons for relying on clergy. Finally, where Gen Z and Millennials are the most dissatisfied with current Christian doctrines and exegesis yet are the most excited to use AI habitually ([Batchelder 2020](#); [MITRE 2023](#)), AI presents a significant generational market challenge for clergy. Economics suggests that long-term demand for clergy requires them to guide AI or provide what AI cannot; otherwise, many clergies could be priced out

of the market and replaced by “more desirable” artificial spiritual guides (J.D. Brackens 2013; Krugman and Wells 2009).

The Gutenberg Precedent: After studying Protestant reformations, J.D. Brackens (2011) concluded that “the history of Christianity outlines precedent which supports the assertion that once the church becomes more concerned with (a) laity understanding and (b) more accuracy in interpretations of the scripture, reformation [has and] should of necessity follow” (J.D. Brackens 2011, p. 3). J.D. Brackens (2011) did not mention within his research the indicators of his two conditions and the vehicle that drove the reformation to its success: the Gutenberg Press (i.e., technology). The printing press helped standardize meaning and accuracy, which increased laity understanding and information accessibility (Holborn 1942). Without the press, there would likely be no reformational success (Holborn 1942).

Gen Z and Millennials are the new disgruntled Martin Luther; AI is the printing press that can generate, mass produce, and standardize the laity’s understanding of the new *Ninety-Five Theses*, and social media is the Wittenberg Church’s door. The above, coupled with the rise in Christian deconstruction and the decline in Christian affiliation, signals that radical reformation(s) are likely to follow and be sustained by AI’s use (J.D. Brackens 2011; McLaren 2021; Pew Research Center 2020). Religious leaders, organizations, and communities are well served to invest in understanding, training, and utilizing AI technology to do, inter alia, self-audits of our beliefs, sermons, doctrines, and exegesis. This will prepare and make us more responsive to what is coming (2 Timothy 2:15; 4:2). More research is required to comprehend the full extent of the above.

7. Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations. Because the dataset is large (N = 11,707 pages), our processors could not test more than 100 K’s with 100 iterations. Following Hong and Davison’s (2010) method would require us to test substantially more iterations to determine improved topic consistency. Next, *Daf Yomi* and *Mishnah Yomis* suggested that studying the Mishnah and Talmud take six and seven years, respectively. Thus, the current AI models do not consider anything taught outside of what is written, such as Rashi’s commentary. Furthermore, AI may not be able to appreciate nuances within religious laws. Third, word constraints did not allow us to scratch the surface of the laws Jesus kept or violated or their implications for Christian doctrine; a book is likely needed to accomplish this. Accordingly, we hope to provide the dataset in a public repository detailing the scriptural citations and their corresponding halakhic references or provide the application so that, with the field’s help, we can further push the analysis of Jesus’s Torah compliance and related research. Fourth, the study only uses data from the Gospels, meaning it does not consider other sources of information about Jesus, such as Acts and the Epistles. Another study is required to analyze the legal issues the remainder of the New Testament raises and how it treats their and Jesus’s Torah compliance. Fifth, the study’s findings assume that the Gospel writers accurately portrayed Jesus’s life and teachings. Sixth, the study’s findings may not be generalizable to all Jewish and Christian populations. Finally, the study uses a legal analysis to determine whether Jesus was Torah-observant, but this approach does not consider the theological significance of Jesus’s actions dictated by doctrine and hermeneutics, nor does it attempt to speak to compliance with the so-called “spirit of the law”.

8. Conclusions

In the present study, we employed a rigorous methodology that combined AI, statistics, and legal analysis and exegesis. This approach allowed us to investigate whether and to what extent Jesus was compliant with the Written and Oral Torah. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the Gospels and halakha, our results indicate that Jesus was more often noncompliant with Jewish law, the least of all the Torah. The Gospels do not present a uniform view of Jesus’s Torah compliance, but they do form a consensus: Mark, Luke, and

John reflect that Jesus was not Torah-compliant (14.80, 43.80, and 0.00 percent, respectively), while Matthew depicts Jesus as more Torah-observant (70.80%). However, even Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus is inconsistent. The study revealed that Jesus violated 83 of the 162 Jewish laws identified in the Gospels, suggesting that he was not compliant with Jewish laws.

We are acutely aware of the potential discomfort these findings may cause and the future work we must do within Christian doctrines, teaching, and evangelism. In addition, if we are to make a dent in the theological backlog, we must use AI. While using AI in religious studies is a relatively new and evolving field, it offers unique opportunities for data-driven insights and interpretations. For many Christians, these findings are not good news. We must redirect our dissonant and visceral reactions to these findings into compassion, empathy, and productive research to improve Christianity, its delivery, and our understanding of the people and cultures with whom we interact.

The violent protest at the Messianic Jewish convention in Jerusalem on 22 June 2023 and its subsequent news coverage, social media comments, and the current state of Torah-compliance literature serve as stark reminders of our tendency to reinforce our views and confront those with differing beliefs before testing our beliefs. However, anything worth fighting for is first worth investigating (1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:6). This underscores the importance of truly listening to our dissenters, understanding their positions and beliefs, and critically examining our own. It is in fostering respectful dialogue and understanding that we grow and evolve.

Our research findings, which challenge prevailing assumptions about Jesus’s Torah compliance, have profound implications for understanding his teachings and role in Judaism. This study serves as a compelling case study for the potential of AI to revolutionize religious studies, offering new avenues for understanding and interpreting sacred texts. For Gentile Christians, this necessitates a reexamination of our foundational definition of sin, doctrinal Christology, and how we interpret Jesus’s preaching and praxis. This also prompts us to consider the effects of missionizing members of ethnoreligions. This could lead to a more respectful and empathetic approach to ethnoreligious beliefs and practices, aligning with the social responsibility now demanded by the new Christian majority.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Twenty-six topics from the Mishneh Torah, The Book of Cleanness.

Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
1	uncleanness	5.65%	2	leprosy	8.92%	3	uncleanness	5.66%
1	susceptible	5.51%	2	sign	8.71%	3	flesh	3.70%
1	pot	4.85%	2	house	4.02%	3	clean	3.55%
1	oven	4.59%	2	priest	3.02%	3	unclean	3.40%
1	unclean	4.57%	2	inspect	2.96%	3	convey	3.28%
1	range	3.39%	2	garment	2.77%	3	carrion	2.94%
1	vessel	3.12%	2	shut	2.60%	3	bulk	2.04%
1	clean	2.47%	2	unclean	2.02%	3	slaughter	2.02%
1	stone	2.40%	2	day	1.96%	3	food	1.51%
1	remain	1.64%	2	dean	1.39%	3	touch	1.49%

Table A1. Cont.

Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
4	grave	4.26%	5	touch	5.43%	6	uncleanness	6.25%
4	unclean	3.15%	5	yom	3.59%	6	connective	3.16%
4	uncleanness	2.80%	5	tebul	3.59%	6	susceptible	3.07%
4	susceptible	2.80%	5	offer	2.73%	6	bed	2.38%
4	render	2.70%	5	connective	1.98%	6	piece	2.37%
4	clean	2.43%	5	heave	1.97%	6	serve	2.05%
4	field	2.26%	5	render	1.92%	6	cloth	1.88%
4	soil	2.13%	5	invalid	1.91%	6	count	1.83%
4	intention	2.05%	5	clean	1.77%	6	square	1.77%
4	set	1.70%	5	serve	1.77%	6	suffer	1.75%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
7	hair	4.76%	8	unclean	5.94%	9	vessel	8.53%
7	flesh	4.41%	8	flux	5.19%	9	unclean	6.20%
7	unclean	4.25%	8	clean	4.23%	9	clean	3.40%
7	bright	4.21%	8	uncleanness	3.99%	9	afford	3.19%
7	spread	3.98%	8	lie	2.56%	9	protection	2.99%
7	spot	3.86%	8	render	2.43%	9	earthenware	2.94%
7	white	2.96%	8	couch	2.24%	9	cover	2.68%
7	token	2.89%	8	shift	2.04%	9	liquid	2.56%
7	quick	2.48%	8	person	1.88%	9	space	2.44%
7	uncleanness	2.29%	8	sit	1.79%	9	oven	2.25%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
10	water	10.81%	11	water	7.61%	12	interpose	3.48%
10	pool	6.65%	11	liquid	4.17%	12	water	2.15%
10	immersion	4.61%	11	render	3.62%	12	immerse	2.04%
10	ah	3.46%	11	unclean	3.36%	12	hair	1.97%
10	se	3.43%	11	susceptible	3.11%	12	clean	1.89%
10	fall	3.16%	11	hand	2.91%	12	unclean	1.79%
10	draw	2.98%	11	approval	2.87%	12	leper	1.74%
10	valid	2.97%	11	fall	2.35%	12	bird	1.66%
10	invalid	2.56%	11	clean	2.26%	12	immersion	1.14%
10	forty	2.35%	11	deem	2.24%	12	time	1.13%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
13	vessel	5.64%	14	susceptible	11.40%	15	uncleanness	5.51%
13	plaster	3.96%	14	uncleanness	7.90%	15	corpse	4.47%
13	hole	3.21%	14	utensil	3.82%	15	convey	4.33%
13	count	2.66%	14	metal	2.98%	15	bone	3.24%
13	unclean	2.61%	14	nail	1.91%	15	flesh	2.53%
13	uncleanness	2.22%	14	break	1.24%	15	overshadow	1.86%
13	pitch	2.21%	14	shape	1.07%	15	bulk	1.57%
13	connective	2.12%	14	unclean	0.95%	15	contact	1.41%
13	touch	2.09%	14	clean	0.94%	15	live	1.34%
13	size	2.07%	14	wooden	0.91%	15	carriage	1.34%

Table A1. Cont.

Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
16	water	14.41%	17	sprinkle	6.94%	18	susceptible	7.53%
16	sanctify	5.62%	17	day	5.68%	18	uncleanness	6.40%
16	vessel	4.59%	17	uncleanness	3.98%	18	midras	2.59%
16	draw	4.38%	17	hyssop	3.27%	18	hide	2.08%
16	ash	3.54%	17	scall	2.38%	18	utensil	1.83%
16	invalid	3.47%	17	dip	2.21%	18	serve	1.58%
16	valid	3.43%	17	fruit	1.87%	18	object	1.52%
16	sprinkle	3.13%	17	include	1.71%	18	bed	1.35%
16	render	2.20%	17	yellow	1.43%	18	sit	1.31%
16	remain	1.86%	17	unclean	1.28%	18	wooden	1.27%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
19	uncleanness	10.00%	20	clean	6.72%	21	unclean	8.77%
19	grade	6.95%	20	unclean	6.23%	21	uncleanness	4.86%
19	unclean	6.60%	20	doubt	5.94%	21	clean	3.83%
19	liquid	3.77%	20	deem	4.63%	21	handbreadth	3.77%
19	suffer	3.64%	20	domain	3.84%	21	lie	3.00%
19	touch	3.47%	20	uncleanness	2.89%	21	remain	2.82%
19	foodstuff	2.98%	20	touch	2.40%	21	house	2.52%
19	render	2.91%	20	public	2.20%	21	directly	2.32%
19	offer	1.81%	20	condition	2.15%	21	wall	2.24%
19	convey	1.71%	20	private	1.70%	21	tent	2.16%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta
22	heifer	4.17%	23	uncleanness	7.94%	24	unclean	5.79%
22	red	3.95%	23	corpse	4.39%	24	clean	4.28%
22	burn	3.36%	23	touch	3.36%	24	uncleanness	3.27%
22	invalid	2.26%	23	unclean	3.14%	24	offer	3.21%
22	sprinkle	1.94%	23	person	2.31%	24	heave	2.76%
22	priest	1.90%	23	susceptible	2.22%	24	hallow	2.69%
22	ash	1.89%	23	utensil	2.13%	24	immerse	2.68%
22	temple	1.77%	23	leather	1.85%	24	touch	2.61%
22	remain	1.74%	23	convey	1.77%	24	vessel	2.47%
22	mount	1.69%	23	overshadow	1.70%	24	purification	2.43%
Topic	Term	Beta	Topic	Term	Beta			
25	unclean	4.40%	26	common	4.27%			
25	house	3.37%	26	person	3.47%			
25	uncleanness	3.12%	26	unclean	3.24%			
25	time	2.77%	26	clean	2.96%			
25	suffer	2.48%	26	uncleanness	2.30%			
25	flow	2.39%	26	vessel	1.85%			
25	woman	2.04%	26	deem	1.85%			
25	convey	1.72%	26	cleanness	1.79%			
25	clean	1.70%	26	associate	1.79%			
25	leprous	1.61%	26	presume	1.41%			

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