

**Association of Hebrew Catholics**

New Zealand Branch

**Mitzvot Office**

of Jesus, the Messiah: Son of David.

Messianic Fellowship Thanksgiving

## Jesus, the Messiah: Son of David.



### Foundation of the Teaching of Jesus

The first Commandment is:

**"Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, is LORD alone!  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your  
soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'.**

**The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'  
There is no other commandment greater than these. The whole law  
and the prophets depend on these two commandments."**

(Deuteronomy 6: 4.) (Leviticus 19: 18.) (Matthew 22: 39 — 41) (Mark 12: 29 — 31)

## Christ Our King

*Jesus, the Messiah, is seated on a chair which is adorned with the Morgan Dovit (Star of David) of the House of David in which He was born This Star, sometimes called the Shield of David, is as certain to be seen on synagogues as the Cross is seen on Christian churches. It is always six-pointed, being made by inverting one triangle upon another. Some ancients held that it represented the signature of King David, as "the three Hebrew letters—Daled, Waw, Daled—by extention compose a double tryangle."*

*Jesus, the Messiah, is draped with a talith (prayer-shawl) containing the fringes called for in the Torah (Num. 15: 38-41). The talith is made either of wool or silk cloth. When worn in the most approved style it is thrown over the head as well as the shoulders, reaching sometime: down to the ankles. It has four corners on which hang the zitzit (fringes) also called for in the Torah (Deut. 22: 12). Each of the tassles on the four corners has a deep blue thread which is symbolical of the heavenly origin of the Commandments. The other threads are white, an emblem of purity such as we read of in Isaiah (chap. 1, v. 18).*

*The Jewish prayer-shawl is intended to inspire awe and reverence of God in prayer. While putting it on, the worshipper says the following prayer:*

*"Praised be you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His Commandments, and commanded us to encircle ourselves with fringes."*

*The head of the Messiah is covered, which is the practice among the Hebrews. Devout Jews or Hebrew Christians do not appear at worship or pray at home bareheaded. They have the tallit over their heads or wear a cap with the prayer-shawl thrown over their shoulders.*

*The arms of Jesus, the Messiah, are outstretched to embrace the lost sheep who choose to answer His call and come to Him as their Messiah. He is appealingly uttering the She'ma (hear), O Israel, the first words of the great Jewish prayer which reach their ultimate fulfilment in Him, the Messiah (Christ) the Word of God made flesh. He is Christ our Torah — He is Shepherd of Israel — He is Christ the King!*

*(From: "Jewish Panorama", by David Goldstein, LL. D. Based on the frontispiece and explanation provided by the author.)*

# Mitzvot Office

of Jesus, the Messiah: Son of David

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

## 1. The Torah: Words of Life.

Many Christians will explain how they grew up with a very patchy religious education in which they were led to believe Jews are obsessed with keeping “the Law” in order to practise their religion and find acceptance by God, whereas Christians were to “be like Jesus” and love everyone. What are we to say about all the misrepresentations packed into just that one sentence!

To begin with, for most of us brought up in the English speaking world, the concept of “Law” is the **minimum** level of compliance required of members of a state. There has been a tendency to transcribe that meaning to the Biblical concept of the Law — and this is quite contrary to the Hebrew understanding of Law, more correctly termed the Torah, the Teaching. A number of teachers of the Christian Faith have carried out their responsibilities with a very distorted view of Jewish terms and concepts — all of which they really needed to be clear about if they were to teach. As we have mentioned, one of the least understood and most maligned concept is that of the Torah: the Teaching. Unless we experience the vibrancy, warmth, love and Divine Presence in the Torah, everything else — **everything** — will become distorted beyond description.

Hebrew Catholics and other Hebrew Christians retain and promote a warm love for the Torah — God’s teaching for His People. The term Torah contains an understanding that it is a **guide** to ensure we arrive where we are meant to be going. Yes, it can mean law, but not in the Roman sense of minimum compliance required: rather as the voice of God expressing very special and unique information (in fact: “formation”) we need in order to reach our potential in the life God has in store for us, as individuals as well as collectively. The Torah is therefore not a straight-jacket restraining every move, but rather, the “Living Word” of God which guides every moment of our day.

From the Torah — the books of Teaching — we understand the meaning of mitzvah and **obedience** to the Divine Word. This is exemplified in the Book of Psalms.

**“Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.”**

(Psalm 119: 105)

When we use the word “obedience” in our literature it is in Biblical sense of **taking to heart or following the way, the path God has established for us**. As opposed to the concept of Roman Law and the minimal level of compliance which would be acceptable, our Biblical use calls for the highest, most generous level of compliance, that we may please God and arrive, spiritually, where He wants us to be. Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathon Sacks suggests the 17<sup>th</sup> Century word “hearken”, though passing out of contemporary use, is the closest translation of the Biblical Hebrew.

We will continue to include the word “obey”, but it must be interpreted in the Biblical sense of **hearken**, to **take to heart**: to be totally committed to what God commands.

That entails the **complete surrender of our own will to God's**. That is the vocation of Jews as it is of Christians.

## 2. **Jesus Christ is our Torah**

In His Sermon on the Mount, our Lord declared to be “blessed”, those disciples who were faithful to the Beatitudes. Thus in Matthew 5: 3 to 9, Jesus proclaims the Seven Beatitudes corresponding (in reverse order) to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit listed by the Prophet Isaiah (11: 2 and 3). He went further and declared that those who follow them faithfully would be privileged to share the fate of the Prophets! But this fate would be an honour, for it would reflect some of what He went through for our salvation.

Jesus was the perfect incarnation, in Himself, of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and of all the Commandments of God. In bidding us to put His Beatitudes into practice, He was therefore writing God's Law in our hearts, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isasiah. He did not proclaim Ten **New** Commandments to replace the old, but rather called on us to live the ancient Commandments as God intended. In fact, Jesus reaffirmed the role of Torah, the Law, in the Church:

**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”**

Jesus bequeathed the Church the Sacraments as channels for the communication of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and thereby the power to live according to the Beatitudes — the Spirit of the Law. In this way we fulfil the Law with Jesus Christ our Messiah who is the Word of God in the flesh.

## 3. **The Principle of the Mitzvah.**

A “mitzvah” is a divinely instituted rule of conduct — a commandment from God given (as they all are) for our good. Each is associated, as it were, with a blessing upon performance. This understanding emerged in the Book of Genesis (26: 5) where God referred to Abraham obeying God's voice, keeping His mandate (commandments, ordinances and instructions). Always God wills that we **Listen – Love – and Live**. In a sense that is the primary generic, over-arching mitzvah. This ever-so simple truth runs throughout the Sacred Scriptures. We see this exemplified clearly in many parts of the Bible. It stands out distinctly, among other contexts, in the Scriptures regarding:—

- **Abraham**:— God's Call, the Sacrifice commanded, and Life in the Land of Promise;
- **Moses**:— God's Saving Action at the Passover;
- **Mary's** heroic faith and obedience at the Annunciation;
- **Jesus Messiah's** own life, teaching, passion, death and resurrection.

The constant message or duty — in fact mitzvah — is: **Listen! — Love! — Live!**

(Read: “[The Gospel To Every Creature](#)” for more detail.)

#### 4. A Jewish Mitzvah

The recitation of the **Shema**, at least twice daily, is absolutely obligatory for all practising Jews. The Shema comprises Deuteronomy 6: 4 — 9; 11: 13 — 21 and Numbers 15: 37 — 41. It forms the core of the morning and evening prayer services, and is said a third time daily, by many before going to sleep each night. For easy reference we have attached as an appendix: [The Shema](#). This could be used in the accompanying Mitzvah Office in which only the first line is recorded.

Our Lord Jesus Messiah, orthodox in the performance of His religious duties, recited the Shema at the appointed times, as did His chosen Apostles. To them He affirmed the Shema for morning and evening prayer (See Mark 12: 28 — 31), to which they were to add His own prayer (the "Our Father"), devised by Him: (See Gospel of St. Matthew 6: 9 — 13 and of St. Luke 11: 1 — 4). Thus our Rabbi Yeshua (Jesus) gave His disciples a new mitzvah to be carried out daily.

#### 5. A Christian Mitzvah

For the Hebrew Catholic and associated Christians, the concept of the mitzvah — the obligations required by God, who graciously associates each with its own blessing — remains a priceless heritage to share with our fellow Christians. A Mitzvah can be very specific and deal with a seemingly humble daily action.

One such specific example is our Lord's command, as mentioned in (4) above:

- Matthew 6: 9      “This is how you are to pray:— **“Our Father..... .”**
- Luke 11: 1      “When you pray, say:— **“Our Father..... .”**

Our Lord is not just inviting or suggesting, He is, in a Biblical manner, commanding. Some writers emphasise that it is more of an invitation than a command, implying that this would bring a response at a higher level. Such an interpretation overlooks the spiritual value of obedience or following God's Way, which is clearly an integral element of the mitzvah intended by the Messiah. **All the way through our discussions of this topic we will be highlighting the “Divine Will: our sanctification,” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).**

Debates also abound over whether Jesus was providing a “set script” or rather a “model approach” for the prayer of his disciples. One could easily miss the point. The Word of God made flesh is passing to them a mitzvah which like every mitzvah, **ALWAYS** provides an opportunity to draw closer to God. Here the Messiah bequeaths to us one of our greatest treasures: the knowledge that **we are one family, and are to pray to God as Father**. So, let us keep this treasure highly polished by frequent and loving obedience. This command goes further still and prepares God's people for their role to bring all humanity into this loving and unique relationship.

As one studies the text of the Lord's Prayer, and all its links with the Hebrew Scriptures which our Lord carefully interwove, we find He is orienting us spiritually towards His Return at the end of time. This prayer is therefore a very special component in the formation of all His disciples, including their role in the in-gathering of all peoples.

In short, the Lord's Prayer is nothing less than a prayer for the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises to Israel and the world, as contained in the Old Testament and inaugurated by the new Exodus of Jesus' own passion, death and resurrection. It is in this light, the light of the Old Testament, that the words of St. Augustine ring true:

Run through all the words of the holy prayers  
[in Scripture], and I do not think that you will find anything in them  
that is not contained and included in the Lord's Prayer.

(St. Augustine, *Letter 130, 12, 22, cited in the Catechism of  
the Catholic Church, no. 2762.*)

From: "The Lord's Prayer And The New Exodus", by Brant Pitre  
(Letter and Spirit 2[2006]: 69 — 96).

**The Shema** can be recited in association with the **Lord's Prayer** with much benefit, though the former is generally considered an affirmation of faith rather than a prayer. It is no surprise that they sit well together since the Lord's Prayer is composed entirely of words and phrases from the Hebrew Scriptures.

A Hebrew Catholic Mitzvot Office (as we have called it — a plural of mitzvah) which accompanies these reflections as an appendix, combines the opening part of the **Shema** together with its affirmation by Jesus Messiah, the **Lord's Prayer** and an adaptation of the **Angelus** to form a single daily prayer for those who wish to punctuate the day with regular prayer. Following the model provided, one can unite all one's prayers and intentions with the whole Body of Christ, the whole Church at prayer. The word in the title, "**Office**" is from an old Latin word (*officium*) meaning several things such as: ceremony, duty, service, privilege. These meanings all have a place in our use of the above and support the traditional significance of 'mitzvah'.

For those who choose to recite them, we offer five more *mitzvot* — pronounced (mitzvort) — plural form of the Hebrew word *mitzvah*. This makes a list of seven to recite. They are the principal commands given by Jesus. The Beatitudes are not included since they are enveloped in the recitation of the Commandments to love God with all our might, and our neighbour as ourself. The reference by Jesus to the "New Commandment" (John 13: 34) is not included as it is an empowerment to love as Jesus loves — but it could be included.

The number of seven is symbolic of a total heart to heart response to our Lord's call to us to be His disciples: in fact, as St. Paul said, to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ".

We now offer a few thoughts on the Angelus and Eastertide hymn, "Queen of Heaven Rejoice".

## 6. The Angelus

The history of the Angelus is not especially straightforward to follow. It grew out of a desire in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century to honour the **Incarnation** of the Lord Jesus. It began as an **evening** prayer, followed later by a similar recitation in the **morning**. A Century later, the **midday** recitation brought it to a three-fold commemoration of the **Incarnation**, **Passion** and **Death**, and thirdly, **Resurrection** and **Ascension** of the Saviour — the evening recitation also echoing the call to **stand ready for the Lord's awaited return**.

The Angelus, named after the reference to the Angel Gabriel (in Latin) from Luke 1: 26 — 38, has a special appeal to Hebrew Catholics. It commemorates one of the greatest moments in God's plan of Salvation — the Incarnation, which signals the time of fulfillment spoken of by the Prophets. The Angelus has grown to become a daily reminder and proclamation of:—

- The coming of the Messiah at the Incarnation and the Nativity;
- His fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy through His suffering, death, Resurrection and Ascension;
- His promised to Return at the end of time, and the perfect establishment of the Kingdom of God, for which He urged us to prepare.

For Hebrew Catholics, the role played by His Holy Mother is fittingly honoured in association with her Divine Son's life, death and resurrection, ascension and promised return. She is indeed Ark of the Covenant and Queen of Heaven (a title based on the Hebrew title of "**gebirah**," Queen-Mother — that is, Mother of the King!) Our fellow members who are from other Christian denominations are sometimes uncomfortable with these titles. We understand that, and try throughout our publications to explain the meaning of some of these. For now, we would like to indicate that they are very Hebrew in their origin and meaning and are not derived from ancient pagan idol worshipping practices, as some of our critics insist.

During the Easter season, the 12th Century "Queen of Heaven Rejoice", prayer is recited instead of the Angelus. This serves to remind us, as does the Angelus, of the three great events mentioned above.

Some Christians from traditions other than Catholic continue the Angelus all year, omitting the Regina Coeli, Queen of Heaven.

## 7. Honouring God

In the following attachment, we present an example of one development in Hebrew Catholic devotional practice used by some — and hope others may find it helpful to punctuate the day at least three times in God's honour. It is offered as a call to push back the boundaries of our atheistic culture and all the encroaching anti-religious pressures in our modern environment to reclaim time and space for our Creator. This is especially important now that Christianity is shunned by the authorities in most Western countries and demeaned in education as something archaic and holding back “progress.”

The practice can be implemented as outlined, or modified (e.g. by changing the order of prayers) to meet one's personal needs or circumstances. It can be recited totally “incognito” when this is appropriate, or more openly when the situation permits. We do, however, commend the practice of setting personal standards of prayer to be upheld as closely as possible throughout the day, and not excusing ourselves with such thoughts as, “Well, honestly, I just didn't have time”.

**Prayer is a privilege for members of God's Household** and on that basis we can build a daily pattern which is realistic for us and at the same time, a fitting response to our having been made members of God's Family. We emphasise this repeatedly: Prayer is a privilege to enter God's Presence and respond to Him however we wish.

Our version is a modification of traditional forms to provide Christians, especially our young, with a simple, distinct, yet beautifully balanced format of prayer which can be easily committed to memory and said privately alone, or in a group, wherever we are. Any issues people may have about repetition in prayer fade as our focus becomes one of honouring God and celebrating our union with Him as a member of His Family, the Church.

### A Note On the Hebrew Rhythm of Daily Prayer

Christians who are familiar with the masterpiece, "The Rule of St. Benedict," will be aware of the early Christian practice of prayer he incorporates in the body of monastic religious culture. The rhythm adopted by the early monks was based on the words of King David:

Psalm 119: 64 "Seven times a **day** have I praised you."

Psalm 119: 62 "At **midnight** I arose to give you praise."

The Christian family model is usually referred to as morning and evening prayer.

The traditional Hebrew practice of praying three times daily was established by the three great Patriarchs:

**Abraham:**      **Morning Prayer** (dawn to noon)  
— God is given first place each day.

**Isaac:**           **Afternoon Prayer** (noon to sunset)  
— prayer is to be seen as appropriate during any stage of our daily routines and is especially appropriate as evening approaches, acting as a bridge to carry us from the busy affairs of the day into the time of relaxation in the evening.

**Jacob:**           **Night Prayer** (sunset to retirement for the night)  
— allowing us to focus on the things of God as we prepare to take our rest.

Our Hebrew Catholic practice of reciting the Angelus, as we here present it, offers the Blessed Trinity our three-fold homage to Father, Son and Holy Spirit every day. How naturally this harmonises with the rhythm of daily prayer established by the great Patriarchs of the Faith.

**Shalom!**

[\*\*Attachment\*\*](#)  
[\*\*Mitzvot Office Prayers\*\*](#)

## The Shema

### Deuteronomy 6: 4 — 9

- 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!  
5 Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.  
6 Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.  
7 Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.  
8 Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead.  
9 Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

### Deuteronomy 11: 13 — 21

- 13 If, then, you truly heed my commandments which I enjoin on you today, loving and serving the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul,  
14 I will give the seasonal rain to your land, the early rain and the late rain, that you may have your grain, wine and oil to gather in;  
15 and I will bring forth grass in your fields for your animals. Thus you may eat your fill.  
16 But be careful lest your heart be so lured away that you serve other gods and worship them.  
17 For then the wrath of the LORD will flare up against you and he will close up the heavens, so that no rain will fall, and the soil will not yield its crops, and you will soon perish from the good land he is giving you.  
18 "Therefore, take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them at your wrist as a sign, and let them be a pendant on your forehead.  
19 Teach them to your children, speaking of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.  
20 And write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates,  
21 so that, as long as the heavens are above the earth, you and your children may live on in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers he would give them.

### Numbers 15: 37 — 41

- 37 The LORD said to Moses,  
38 "Speak to the Israelites and tell them that they and their descendants must put tassels on the corners of their garments, fastening each corner tassel with a violet cord.  
39 When you use these tassels, let the sight of them remind you to keep all the commandments of the LORD, without going wantonly astray after the desires of your hearts and eyes.  
40 Thus you will remember to keep all my commandments and be holy to your God.  
41 I, the LORD, am your God who, as God, brought you out of Egypt that I, the LORD, may be your God".

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