

Torah Observant  
"SHOMER MITZVOT"

שומר מצוות

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)  
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***Exegeting Galatians***

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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Historically, the book of Galatians has misled Christian commentators due largely to the technical discussions of biblical topics ranging from circumcision, to the Torah, to freedom in Christ. A contextual study of Galatians will help to unravel the letter for both Christians and Jews. To be sure, without a proper background to the book we will forever misread Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles. For this particular study, allow me to start in B'reshet (Genesis) with Avraham and circumcision. If we begin to peel back the mysteries surrounding this simple biblical command we stand a better chance at understanding Rav Sha'ul (Apostle Paul) and his enigmatic instructions.

The following topics will be discussed:

1. B'rit Milah
2. Ouch Factor: "Why the Male Reproductive Organ?"
3. Proselyte Conversion: "Works of Law" - Part One (Understanding the Background)
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## 1. B'rit Milah

The Torah says in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1-3,

**Now ADONAI said to Avram, “Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

The opening monologue from HaShem (God), containing both directives and promises, is packed with some very important facts that affect every man, woman, and child who will be born from here on out! To be sure, it still affects everyone today!

Later on in Genesis chapter 17 we find God instructing Avraham (Abraham) concerning circumcision. Amazing that God would select that part of the body to demonstrate a most wonderful spiritual truth to both Avraham and the entire world! Equally amazing to me is that even at such an old age, Avraham did not question God’s reasons behind this somewhat strange covenantal sign! However, important by way of theology and chronology is the fact that Avraham was pronounced as being “righteous” in B'resheet chapter 15. Rav Sha'ul makes no small mention of the Genesis 15 incident in his letters,

**For what does the Tanakh say? "Avraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness (Romans 4:3).**

Given its location within Paul’s arguments, both from Romans and Galatians, it is clear that the phrase is referring to imputed righteousness, that is, positional (forensic) right standing with HaShem. For Paul, it is axiomatic that Moshe describes this quality chronologically before Avraham receives the covenant of circumcision in B'resheet chapter 17. This bespeaks of the correct order in which to appropriate the covenant responsibilities of God. On the micro, saving faith in God, symbolized by God accrediting his account as righteous (Hebrew צַדִּיקָהּ tz'dakah), precedes the patriarch’s obedience to the sign of circumcision. On the macro, the covenant of Avraham precedes the covenant with Moshe.<sup>1</sup>

Thinking from a 21<sup>st</sup> century Western mindset, one might presume that since God declared him righteous already, any added covenantal sign might prove to be superfluous. Avraham—and apparently God—thought otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Excursus - Genesis 15: Credited to Him as Righteousness* (HaNaviy Internet Ministries [HIM], 2006), p. 1.

**To neglect circumcision (b'rit milah) is to neglect the chosen sign of the covenant, and consequently, it is rejection of the covenant itself.**

Avraham did not hesitate to both circumcise himself and the males of his household. Looking forward at its effect in the biblical narratives, we learn that it was to become a unique marker, outwardly identifying those males of the offspring of Avraham, as inheritors of the magnificent promises that HaShem was making with this man. It did not, nor does it now serve to secure those promises through personal effort. What is more, the sign of circumcision was to be an indicator that all subsequent male covenant participants were adopting the same faith that Avraham possessed! Obviously it was incumbent upon the faithful father to pass this sign onto his son; 8-day old baby boys do not circumcise themselves. The promises were of faith (read Romans chapter 4 carefully). To be 100% sure, the Torah says that the promises were given to him before he was circumcised (Ibid. 10, 11)! This is why, after HaShem promised that his seed would be as numerous as the stars (15:5, 6), Avraham was credited with being righteous—because he believed the unbelievable!

The implied meaning of the term “b'rit milah” is “covenant [of] circumcision.” Why does Judaism refer to circumcision as a covenant? I believe that this act betrays the Torah’s intentions to speak to the circumcised male about his responsibilities in helping to bring about the truth that HaShem and HaShem alone can bring the previously mentioned promises of Avraham to come to pass. Let us examine the details.

## **2. Ouch Factor: “Why the Male Reproductive Organ?”**

Covenants usually involved at least two parties. Likewise, there was usually a sign of the covenant being established. This sign, according to ancient Middle Eastern writings, was usually something that either party could carry on their person, such as a stone or other object. This sign, when viewed by either individual, served as a reminder that the person was under obligation to fulfill his part of the covenant. It also assured him that the other party was under the same obligations. Removal of the foreskin of the male sex organ, was not exclusively Hebrew. The ancient Egyptians had been doing it for some time as well.

But when HaShem asked Avraham to participate in this rather “lopsided” covenant (remember Avraham did not earn his position before God, it was graciously granted unto him; read Romans 11:6), our father Avraham did not hesitate to become obedient to the command.

Why did God have Avraham circumcised (remove the foreskin of his penis) in the first place? Have you ever stopped to ponder this enigmatic question? After all, God is not capricious. He could have easily had our father remove skin from his ear, or his finger, or other part of his body. Why the male sex organ?

Tim Hegg of FFOZ notoriety has been, in my opinion, spearheading the movement to bring about a more accurate view of Paul and the Judaisms that he had to confront in the 1st century by publishing essential books and papers for Christians to carefully examine. I wish to quote from one of his works to show the messianic implications of God asking him to circumcise himself exactly where he eventually ended up circumcising himself.

As of 11-15-05 Hegg's entire online article was available at his web site here (<http://www.torahresource.com/English%20Articles/CircumcisionETS.pdf>)

Referring to our Genesis text Tim Hegg writes:

Chapter sixteen opens with an exposition and complication: Sarai, Abram's wife, is barren. If the former narrative settled the question of God's full intention to give offspring, this unit questions the method by which the promise would be fulfilled. Abram follows the advice of his wife and takes Hagar as a second wife. The reader is aware immediately, however, that rather than solving the problem, the action of Abram and Sarai has introduced complication into the story...

The story continues with the appearance of YHWH to Abram (signaling resolution) reassuring him of the continuation and maintenance of the covenant. The issue of the promised offspring, the main subject of chapters fifteen and sixteen, continues in this section. Regardless of the etymological meaning of the change from Abram to Abraham, the narrative is clear that YHWH has installed Abraham as a father of the nations. Thus, chapter seventeen gives the Divine solution to the problem addressed in chapter sixteen, namely, the realization of the promise regarding the seed. The Divine speech to Abraham in 17:1-5 is taken up exclusively with the promise of offspring.

The introduction of circumcision continues this theme. The promise of offspring has been established, but the method or manner by which the offspring would be realized is now made clear. In the same way that the complications surrounding the promise of land and blessing were resolved by direct, Divine intervention, so too the promised offspring would come by Divine fiat. Human enterprise and strength would not be the means by which God would fulfill His promise to Abraham regarding the seed. Circumcision, the cutting away of the foreskin, revealed this explicitly. Coming on the heels of God's renewed promise to Abraham regarding his progeny and his installation as a father of a multitude of nations, the sign of circumcision upon the organ of procreation must be interpreted within the narrative flow as relating to the method by which the complication (absence of children and age of both Abraham and Sarah) would be resolved. The promise would come, not by the strength of the flesh (which the "Hagar plan" represented) but rather by above-human means.

If circumcision were a sign given to Abraham which pointed specifically to the need for faith in regard to the coming Seed, it is valid to ask whether or not the other OT authors also attached this meaning to the ritual.

Interestingly, the two times circumcision is used in a metaphorical sense in the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6), the immediate context is that of the Abrahamic covenant. In Deuteronomy 10:12, the unit begins by an exhortation to "revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths" which is very close to Genesis 17:1, "Walk before me and be blameless." Further, in Deuteronomy 10:15 the covenant love of YHWH for "the fathers" becomes the basis for the exhortation to "cut away the thickening about your hearts." That is, if the promises made to the fathers should be realized, it will be so only as each Israelite relates to YHWH on the basis of faith. The heart which relies on the flesh (foreign powers, self strength, etc.) will fail. Rather, the fleshly heart must be cut away and discarded.

In reference to the circumcision in the Apostolic Scriptures, Hegg makes these pertinent remarks:

What brings Paul to use Abraham in his exposition here is the central promise of the covenant that "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." Paul's argument is that this promise was given to Abraham before circumcision and that therefore Abraham may rightly be considered the father of all who participate in the same faith, whether circumcised or not. In fact, the promise that Abraham would be "a father of nations" is applied more precisely by the Apostle in the phrase "father of all who believe."

Paul's argument, while given to prove another point, still confirms what I have previously maintained about circumcision. The ritual did not bring something new to the covenant, but rather reinforced righteousness on the basis of faith, the very hallmark of the covenant from the beginning. Circumcision required Abraham to continue in the faith that had brought him from Ur and to direct this faith toward the God Who had promised to bring a son by Divine intervention. It is on this basis that Paul, in Galatians 4:23, refers to Ishmael as "according to flesh" [...] and Isaac as "through promise" [...].

Paul has shown that a primary function of the law was to point to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and it therefore stands to reason that circumcision has fulfilled its function, for Christ, the promised Seed, has come. Israel, worshiping the sign rather than the Seed to which it pointed, had attributed to circumcision what only God's Son could accomplish. This Paul plainly asserts in his statement that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."

### 3. Proselyte Conversion: "Works of Law" - Part One (Understanding the Background)

Today (as well as 2000 years ago), Christianity has developed an unnecessary amount of paranoia surrounding circumcision. In some ways I cannot blame them for taking this stance. The rabbinic literature is replete with the significance of this ostensibly simple act. Observe the comments made by Wikipedia:

During the Babylonian exile the Sabbath and circumcision became the characteristic symbols of Judaism. This seems to be the underlying idea of Isa. lvi. 4: "The eunuchs that keep my Sabbath" still "hold fast by my covenant," though not having "the sign of the covenant" (Gen. xvii. 11.) upon their flesh.

Contact with Greek polytheistic culture, especially at the games of the arena, made this distinction obnoxious to Jewish-Hellenists seeking to assimilate into Greek culture. The consequence was their attempt to appear like the Greeks by epispasm ("making themselves foreskins"; I Macc. i. 15; Josephus, "Ant." xii. 5, § 1; Assumptio Mosis, viii.; I Cor. vii. 18; Tosef.; Talmud tractes Shabbat xv. 9; Yevamot 72a, b; Yerushalmi Peah i. 16b; Yevamot viii. 9a). Also, some Jews at this time stopped circumcising their children. Maccabees 2:46 records that the Maccabean zealots forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys they found within the borders of Israel.

The Rabbis also took action to ensure that the practice of circumcision did not die out. In order to prevent the obliteration of the "seal of the covenant" on the flesh, as circumcision was henceforth called, the Rabbis, probably after Bar Kokhba's revolt, instituted the "peri'ah" (the laying bare of the glans), without which circumcision was declared to be of no value (Shab. xxx. 6).

To be born circumcised was regarded as the privilege of the most saintly of people, from Adam, "who was made in the image of God," and Moses to Zerubbabel (see Midrash Ab. R. N., ed. Schechter, p. 153; and Talmud, Sotah 12a).

Uncircumcision being considered a blemish, circumcision was to remove it, and to render Abraham and his descendants "perfect" (Talmud Ned. 31b; Midrash Genesis Rabbah xlvi.)

Rabbinic literature holds that one who removes his circumcision has no portion in the world to come (Mishnah Ab. iii. 17; Midrash Sifre, Num. xv. 31; Talmud Sanhedrin 99).

According to the Midrash Pirke R. El. xxix., it was Shem who circumcised Abraham and Ishmael on the Day of Atonement; and the blood of the

covenant then shed is ever before God on that day to serve as an atoning power. According to the same midrash, Pharaoh prevented the Hebrew slaves from performing the rite, but when the Passover time came and brought them deliverance, they underwent circumcision, and mingled the blood of the paschal lamb with that of the Abrahamic covenant, wherefore (Ezek. xvi. 6) God repeats the words: "In thy blood live!"<sup>2</sup>

Mark Nanos has demonstrated most creditably that the Judaisms of the 1<sup>st</sup> century functioned with a serious theological flaw in regards to their view of circumcision. Let us pick up his discussion from a paper he wrote entitled "*The Local Contexts of the Galatians: Toward Resolving a Catch-22*," which, at the time I downloaded it on 5-15-05, was available for reading at his site here (<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/index.html>)

Paul was an outsider to Galatia (4:12-20); in fact, he is the only one from elsewhere of whom we can be certain. And Paul's message—to the degree that it offered inclusion of gentiles as full and equal members while opposing their participation in proselyte conversion—ran counter to prevailing Jewish communal norms for the re-identification of pagans seeking full-membership, at least according to all the evidence now available to us. Pursuit of this nonproselyte approach to the inclusion of pagans confessing belief in the message of Christ resulted in painful disciplinary measures against Paul from the hands of Jewish communal agents to whom he remained subordinate, but in ways that he considers mistaken, for he refers to this as "persecution" (5:11; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24). It is not difficult to imagine that pagans convinced by Paul's gospel that they were entitled to understand themselves as righteous and full members of Jewish communities apart from proselyte conversion, but rather on the basis of faith in a Judean martyr of the Roman regime, would also, in due time, meet with resistance from Jewish communal social control agents. Might not the resultant identity crises of those non-proselyte associates develop along the lines of the situation implied for the addressees of Paul's letter?

I suggest that Paul's gospel—or, more accurately in this case, the resultant expectations of the non-Jewish addressees who believed in it—provoked the initial conflict, not the good news of the influencers that Paul's converts can eliminate their present disputable standing as merely "pagans," however welcome as guests, by embarking on the path that will offer them inclusion as proselytes. That offer, on the part of the influencers in Galatia, rather represents the redressing of a social disruption of the traditional communal norms resulting from the claims of "pagans" who have come under Paul's influence. Thus the ostensible singularity of the exigence arises not because of a new element introduced by the influencers, and does not suggest that they represent a single group

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumcision\\_in\\_the\\_Bible#In\\_rabbinic\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumcision_in_the_Bible#In_rabbinic_literature)

moving among the addressees' several congregations. Instead, the influencers may be understood to be similarly appealing to a long-standing norm, however independent of each other's communities they may be acting, when faced with the same disruptive claim on the part of the new Christbelieving subgroups within their communities. The conflict arises because of the claim that their gentile members are to be regarded as full-members of these Jewish groups apart from proselyte conversion.

#### 4. Covenantal Nomism

What Nanos and other recent scholars (E.P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, et al) are describing, as pertaining to Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism and how it reportedly defined itself, has been carefully labeled as Covenantal Nomism.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a "new perspective on Paul" (NPP) is on the rise.<sup>4</sup> What is Covenantal Nomism? Theopedia.com provides a brief description for us to examine:

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<sup>3</sup> E.P. Sanders is known for coining the term "covenantal nomism." This term is essential to the NPP view, as Sanders argues that this is the "pattern of religion" found in Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. The term is used as "shorthand," that is, a shortened term used to describe a larger idea. Sanders defines this idea as such:

"Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression." (E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 75)

This is important because it has huge implications for one's understanding of first-century Judaism and thus for one's interpretation of how Paul interacted with it. If covenantal nomism is true, then when Jews spoke of obeying commandments, or when they required strict obedience of themselves and fellow Jews, it was because they were "keeping the covenant" - it was not out of legalism.

Sanders says that, "one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant." Therefore, as long as a Jew kept their covenant with God, he remained part of God's people. How does one keep the covenant? Sanders tells us "the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments." All of Judaism's talk about "obedience" is thus in the context of "covenantal nomism" and not legalism. As a result, Judaism is then not concerned with "how to have a right relationship with God" but with "how to remain his covenant people." This has sometimes been compared to the issue of "keeping" or "losing one's salvation."

<sup>4</sup> The New Perspective on Paul, also called New Perspectivism (hereafter NPP) is a system of thought in New Testament scholarship that seeks to reinterpret the

Covenantal Nomism is the belief that first century Palestinian Jews did not believe in works righteousness. Essentially, it is the belief that one is brought into the Abrahamic covenant through birth and one stays in the covenant through works. Suggests that the Jewish view of relationship with God is that keeping the law is based only on a prior understanding of relationship with God.<sup>5</sup>

Quoting from Sanders and Wright in the same article they go on to include a brief discussion about the problems with the traditional "Lutheran" view of Paul and suggest that the new perspective on Paul (NPP) actually exonerates 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism from the centuries-long charge of being a works-based religion:

A fundamental premise in the NPP is that Judaism was actually a religion of grace. Sander's puts it clearly:

"On the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism - grace and works - Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism... Salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works'...God saves by grace, but... within the framework established by grace he rewards good deeds and punishes transgression." (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 543)

N.T. Wright adds that, "we have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism," (Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 32). However, Stephen Westerholm adds caution to such a quickly drawn conclusion:

"While one may enthusiastically endorse the 'new perspective' dictum that first-century Judaism was a religion of grace and acknowledge that it represents an important corrective of earlier caricatures, it is hardly pedantic to point out that more precision is needed before such a statement can illuminate a discussion of the

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Apostle Paul and his letters. In brief, the NPP is a reaction to the Lutheran Paul (i.e. the traditional interpretation of him). Proponents of the "Lutheran Paul" understand him to be arguing against a legalistic Jewish culture that seeks to earn their salvation through works. However, supporters of the NPP argue that Paul has been misread. He was actually combating Jews who were boasting because they were God's people, the "elect" or the "chosen ones." Their "works," so to speak, were done to show they were God's covenant people and not to earn their salvation. The result is a Judaism that supposedly affirmed sola gratia (grace alone). Presently, its effects are seen in the academic world of New Testament scholars, particularly those who focus their attention on Pauline studies and the study of first century Judaism.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.theopedia.com/New\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Paul](http://www.theopedia.com/New_Perspective_on_Paul)

'Lutheran' Paul. Pelagius and Augustine - to take but the most obvious examples - both believed in human dependence on divine grace, but they construed that dependence very differently" (Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul, pp. 261-262).

Thus, as Westerholm points out, although first century Judaism may have believed in grace, it becomes even more important to establish why they believed in grace and how this effected [sic] their view of salvation. Those from the NPP seem quick to jump to the conclusion that first-century Judaism was in agreement with the same understanding of grace found within the NT and Paul's theology. Again, as Westerholm notes above, this "grace" can be understood very differently.<sup>6</sup>

I understand that the prevailing Judaisms that existed in the first century initially upset the biblical balance by teaching that circumcision was the vehicle by which a non-Jew could and must enter the covenant made with Isra'el. Shame on them! To be sure, a whole theological council was formulated to deal with the problem in the first century. Both in Acts 15:1-35, as well as 21:17-26, the Yerushalayim Council had to address the issue of "returning to the works of the law" as opposed to "living in the freedom of Messiah." And what is the meaning of "works of the law"? Surely it does NOT refer "correct and true faith-driven observance of written Torah commands!" No, what this technical phrase is referring to is a set of halakhic rules that an individual must ally himself with in order to be received into a specific and exclusive community. More on "works of law" below.

At this turn, I want to use, most extensively, some material from a Messianic Jewish commentary on the book of Galatians, written by David Stern, translator of the Complete Jewish Bible. I will launch from his comments—at times within his comments—into my own bracketed wording [ ].

I want to launch from chapter 2 verse 15 to explain the crucial verse 16. "We to nature Judeans and not out of nations sinners," This is a literal rendering of verse 15 from the Greek. It is simply an identifying opening for what is to follow. Sha'ul is not degrading Gentiles in any way; he is simply using the same language and identifiers that the Legalizers/Judaizers/Influencers (the villains of the book) use in order to speak of the Gentiles. Also the Torah itself recognized that before the giving of the Messiah and the revelation of the Torah, Gentiles were sinners (Gal. 2:11-12; compare Luke 18:31-33 with Luke 24:7). However, it should be noted that he also went out his way to emphasize the equality of Jews and Gentiles before HaShem.

## 5. "Works of Law" - Part Two

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

*"But knowing that a person is not justified from works of law, but through trust of Messiah Yeshua, even we unto Messiah Yeshua trusted, in order that we might be justified from trust of Messiah and not from works of law, because from works of law not will be justified all flesh."* [This is a literal rendering of verse 16 from the Greek. Being declared righteous by HaShem is the goal of all men who seek HaShem. Righteousness can be defined in two ways:] "behavioral righteousness," actually doing what is right, and "forensic righteousness," being regarded as righteous in the sense (a) that God has cleared him of guilt for past sins, and (b) that God has given him a new human nature inclined to obey HaShem rather than rebel against him as before.

Yeshua has made forensic righteousness available to everyone by paying on everyone's behalf the penalty for sins which HaShem's justice demands, death. Forensic righteousness is appropriated by an individual for himself the moment he unreservedly puts his trust in HaShem, which at this point in history, entails also trusting in Yeshua the Messiah upon learning of him and understanding what he has done. The task of becoming behaviorally righteous begins with appropriating forensic righteousness (through Yeshua); it occupies the rest of a believer's life, being completed only at the moment of his own death, when he goes to be with Yeshua. What is important to keep in mind here is the difference between these two kinds of righteousness. Each time the Greek word "dikaioo" ("righteousness") or a cognate is encountered, it must be decided which of these two meanings of the word is meant. In the present verse and the next, all four instances of "dikaioo" refer to forensic righteousness. But in verse 21, the related word "dikaiosune" refers to behavioral righteousness.<sup>7</sup>

"Works of law," translates the Greek phrase "ergon nomos" ἔργον νόμος. Since the word "nomos" means "law"<sup>8</sup>, and is usually referring (from the Septuagint) to the Mosaic Law, i.e. Torah, most Christians usually understand "works of law" to mean "actions done in obedience to the Torah." But this is wrong. One of the best-kept secrets about the New Testament is that when Sha'ul writes "nomos" he frequently does not mean "divine law" but "a man-made system of law." This phrase ("ergon nomos"), Scripturally found ONLY in Sha'ul's writings, occurs eight times, and always in technical discussion of the Torah: Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10; Rom. 3:20, 28. Two other uses of "ergon" ("works") are closely associated with the word "nomos" ("law") in Rom. 3:27; 9:32. Even when he uses "ergon" by itself, the implied meaning is frequently "a man-made system of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 535.

<sup>8</sup> Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD), νόμος.

law-related works,” see Gal. 5:19; Rom. 4:2, 6; 9:11; 11:6; Eph. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5. There are 17 other instances when it is neutral.<sup>9</sup>

In order to interpret Sha'ul correctly one needs to understand that the phrase "ergon nomos" does not mean deeds done in virtue of following the Torah the way HaShem intended, but deeds done in consequence of perverting the Torah into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, legalistically, without having faith, without having trust in HaShem, without having love for HaShem or man, and without being empowered by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). To be sure, in the case of the Galatian congregation, the specific perversion that was taking place sought to transform Gentiles into Jews via a man-made ceremony of conversion, performed under the guise of "covenant inclusion." To appreciate the consternation that this halakhah caused Rav Sha'ul, one has to understand that within the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms, the prevailing view was that all Isra'el shared a place in the World to Come. What is more, since Isra'el and Isra'el alone were granted this gift from HaShem it was necessary in the minds of the proto-rabbis to convert Gentiles into Jews before they could enjoy the status of "full-fledged covenant member." In order to accomplish this task, a ceremony had been invented—a ceremony not found in the Torah itself. The ceremony included circumcision for the males. Because of this feature, the entire sociological situation was subsumed under the label "circumcision." Thus, "works of law" becomes a sort of "short-hand" way for Sha'ul to describe this phenomenon.

## 6. Lesson From Acts 10

The poison of Ethnocentric Jewish Exclusivism permeated the first century Jewish society. A careful reading of the Greek of Acts chapter 10 and Kefa's conversation with HaShem will show that this simple fisherman was also blinded by the prevailing halakhah that sought to avoid Gentiles at all costs. Firstly, allow me to define the important Greek words we will encounter during this section:

- 5399-Phobeo φοβέω (V)+2316-theos θεόν (N, M)=feared+God (i.e., God-fearer).
- 2840-Koinoo κοινώω (V)=to make common, to make (Leviticallly) unclean, render unhallowed, defile, profane.
- 2839-Koinos κοινός (A)=common, i.e., ordinary, belonging to generality, by the Jews, unhallowed, profane.
- 2511-Katharizo καθαρίζω (V)=to make clean, cleanse, consecrate, dedicate, purify (morally or ritually).
- 111-Athemitos ἀθέμιτος (A)=contrary to law and justice, illicit, (i.e., taboo).

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<sup>9</sup> David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 525.

- 169-Akathartos ἀκάθαρτος (A)=unclean, ceremonially, that which must be abstained from according to Levitical Law, foul.

Having made us aware of the language of Luke's narrative, let us pick up the study from my previous commentary to Acts 10:

Q: While the vision of the food is clearly in view, when HaShem responds to Kefa's refusal, he only instructs Kefa not to call common (koinoo κοινόω) that which he (God) has cleansed katharizo καθαρίζω. Why doesn't HaShem also teach Kefa not to call unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) that which God has ostensibly cleansed katharizo καθαρίζω?

A: Obviously God has not cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) those animals that he created to be intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος!) If I, Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, the author of this commentary, could convey this single, important point to your average Christian pastor, then we would not be having this conversation at all! The vision is just that—a vision! The proof that God is not truly altering Kefa's paradigm in regards to food but rather to non-Jews is born out by the careful attention to not mention akathartos ἀκάθαρτος in verse 15, yet by his Ruach HaKodesh impress Kefa to utilize the word akathartos ἀκάθαρτος in regards to non-Jews in verse 28. The Levitical definition of permitted and forbidden animals, as outlined in chapter 11, cannot change! God remains the same both yesterday, today, and forever! Why would he need to change the rules governing the definition of food with the arrival of his Son? It makes nonsense to suppose such a reading of Acts chapter 10! To be sure, if God were supposedly changing the rules, giving the information to a "country bumpkin" like Kefa—and in a vision no less—is the wrong way to go about doing it, wouldn't you agree? We should not suppose that this is a mystery hidden from the Jewish people only now to be revealed after his Son has gone to the execution stake (on the same level as the mystery of the gospel that the Gentiles are now to be welcomed into Isra'el as full-fledged covenant members if they place their trust in Yeshua).

Q: If HaShem is not cleansing (katharizo καθαρίζω) unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) animals then what is he cleansing? How are we to understand the vision?

A: I personally believe that Kefa's interpretation of his own vision is the best and most important interpretation offered. Namely this: what HaShem has designated as *kosher* (fit for consumption) and *treif* (not fit for consumption) in the Torah of Moshe, concerning food, still remains clean (tahor טָהוֹר) and unclean (tamei טָמֵא) respectively. Although the sheet contained all manner of animals, I believe what HaShem is trying to

get Kefa to understand is that the animals represent all manner of peoples, not the literal animals themselves. This interpretation is in accord with the unchangeable nature of HaShem. To be sure, is this not how Kefa interprets the vision himself in verses 28, 34 and 35?

**28 He said to them, "You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean.**

**34 Then Kefa addressed them: "I now understand that God does not play favorites, 35 but that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what people he belongs to (Emphasis, mine).**

Q: But I thought that the Torah forbade Jews from having contact with Gentiles. Isn't that what Kefa explicitly tells his Gentile associates in verse 28, which you quoted above?

A: Observe Acts 10:28 in 10 various, yet common English translations (the original Greek word athemitos ἀθέμιτος has been identified and underlined in each version):

**NASB (New American Standard Bible): And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.**

**GWT (God's Word Translation): He said to them, "You understand how wrong it is for a Jewish man to associate or visit with anyone of another race. But God has shown me that I should no longer call anyone impure or unclean.**

**KJV (King James Version): And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.**

**ASV (American Standard Version): and he said unto them, Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another nation; and yet unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean:**

**BBE (Bible in Basic English):** And he said to them, You yourselves have knowledge that it is against the law for a man who is a Jew to be in the company of one who is of another nation; but God has made it clear to me that no man may be named common or unclean:

**DBY (Darby Bible Translation):** And he said to them, Ye know how it is unlawful for a Jew to be joined or come to one of a strange race, and to me God has shewn to call no man common or unclean.

**WEY (Weymouth New Testament):** He said to them, "You know better than most that a Jew is strictly forbidden to associate with a Gentile or visit him; but God has taught me to call no one unholy or unclean.

**WBS (Webster Bible Translation):** And he said to them, Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come to one of another nation; but God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

**WEB (World English Bible):** He said to them, "You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man who is a Jew to join himself or come to one of another nation, but God has shown me that I shouldn't call any man unholy or unclean.

**YLT (Young's Literal Translation):** And he said unto them, 'Ye know how it is unlawful for a man, a Jew, to keep company with, or to come unto, one of another race, but to me God did shew to call no man common or unclean.

Isn't it interesting that from 10 English translations all but 3 render our Greek word as "unlawful?" The GWT, the BBE, and the WEY, however, attempt to supply a slightly different nuance than unlawful to this word, an attempt I call commendable. Even The Scriptures, a version popular among Messianics, leaves room for questioning the real intent of the translators:

**And he said to them, "You know that a Yehudite man is not allowed to associate with, or go to one of another race. But Elohim has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.**

The Greek word athemitos ἀθέμιτος, found in only two places in the Apostolic Scriptures,<sup>10</sup> is a composite of two Greek words: the word tithemi τίθημι meaning “to set, put, place, set forth, establish,” and again, the article “a” rendering the word tithemi τίθημι into its negative value.<sup>11</sup> Thus athemitos ἀθέμιτος does convey the notion of “unlawful,” but we should carefully note that if Kefa were wanting us to understand that such a prohibition were rooted in the written word of God, the Torah, then he would have used a conjugation of the Greek word nomos νόμου which normally refers to God’s Torah. To be sure, our writer Luke uses anomos ἄνομος at Acts 2:28 (rendered “wicked” in KJV and “godless” in the NASB) when referring to those men who crucified Yeshua. The TSBD defines the adjective anomos ἄνομος as “destitute of the Mosaic law, departing from the law, a violator of the law, lawless, wicked.”<sup>12</sup> By comparison, the adjective athemitos ἀθέμιτος refers to that which, although not written down, is simply socially unacceptable, viz, taboo, but certainly not proscribed by Mosaic Law. David Sterns CJB is a better translation of this pasuk:

**He said to them, "You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean (Emphasis, mine).<sup>13</sup>**

The Torah of Moshe never prohibits Jews from “keeping company” or “coming unto one of another nation.” This statement of Kefa’s reflects the “ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism” baggage that the Torah communities of his day had engineered, baggage not uncommon among people groups who are marginalized. In other words, Kefa was just regurgitating the standard mantra of his day. This did not excuse his error, which is why HaShem went through all the trouble to send him the vision in the first place.

In the end, the message of the Acts 10 vision is crystal clear: Gentiles in Yeshua are not intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος), as the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms were professing. They, like all men, have been created in God’s image, and as such, can be viewed as defiled (koinos κοινός) by the stain of sin, in need of cleansing (katharizo καθαρίζω). Man, created clean (katharos καθαρός), fell to a state of unclean (koinos κοινός), later

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 10:28; 1 Peter 4:3

<sup>11</sup> TSBD, ἀκάθαρτος.

<sup>12</sup> TSBD, ἄνομος.

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough treatment of Stern’s reasoning behind his translation of this verse see his Jewish New Testament Commentary, pp. 258-259.

to be declared cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) by the blood of the Sacrificial Lamb of God if he accepted such an offer. To use the language of the vision: Jews are not lambs while Gentiles are pigs. Rather, Jews and Gentiles are both lambs! Both have become unclean (koinos κοινός), by sin; both have been cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) by Yeshua! No one is intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος)! No one was created sinful! Born into sin, yes; created sinners, no!<sup>14</sup>

## 7. “Under the Law”

The Greek term "hupo nomos" ὑπό νόμος interpreted as "under the law" or more literally “under law” appears five times in the letter to Galatia. It never means simply “under the Torah,” in the sense of “subjection to its provisions,” “living within its framework.” Rather, with one easily explainable variation, it is Sha'ul's shorthand<sup>15</sup> for “under the condemnation of the Torah; condemnation caused by being enslaved to one’s personal sin as opposed to being set free by Yeshua the Messiah.” To be under the Law is to be under the condemnation of the wrath of God, condemnation reserved for those who have not surrendered their lives to his Saving Power.

John K. McKee of TNN Online agrees with this definition. Addressing Galatians 5:18 in his article *What Does Under the Law Really Mean* (<http://www.tnnonline.net/two-housenews/torah/under-the-law/index.html>) he writes:

Knowing that “under the Law” means being subject to the Torah’s penalties allows this verse to make much more sense to us as Messianics. If you are truly led by God’s Holy Spirit, then you are not subject to the Torah’s penalties. If you are truly led by the Spirit, then you will not be led to disobey the Lord and be cursed. Rather, if you are truly led by the Spirit, you will naturally obey our Heavenly Father and obey the commandments of Torah and be blessed—just as the Torah tells us.

Every genuine follower of Yeshua has been redeemed from the ultimate curse pronounced in the Torah! Such a curse is reserved for those who are “under the law.” If you are in Messiah then you are not under condemnation. You are in fact the righteousness of God in Messiah! What is more, the real change that takes place in a person’s life is effected by the Ruach HaKodesh when, because of Yeshua’s bloody, sacrificial death, the sinner takes on the status of righteous! Man cannot add to that which God perfects. A conversion to Judaism (a.k.a. circumcision), in Sha'ul’s mind, added nothing to those wishing to be counted as

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<sup>14</sup> Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Acts 10* (HaNaviy Internet Ministries [HIM], 2007), pp. 4-7.

<sup>15</sup> David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 537.

true Israelites in the Torah Community. To Sha'ul, their genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem, as evidenced by the genuine working of the Spirit among them, was all the “identity” they would ever need! Once counted as righteous by the Righteous One Himself, all the new [Gentile] believer needed to do was begin to walk in that righteousness, a walk already described in the pages of the Written Torah, a walk formerly impossible due to the deadness of flesh and bondage to sin.

We are not under the law, we are under grace. We are under freedom.

Biblical “freedom,” however, is not a license to walk away from Torah! Biblical “freedom” is liberation to walk into Torah and into the righteous that HaShem envisioned for us all along! Thus, positional righteousness always results in behavioral righteousness. Put plainly, Torah submissiveness is the natural result of being set free from sin and condemnation and set free unto Yeshua! Stern notes, with my inserted comments in accent,

Christian scholars have discoursed at length about Sha'ul's supposedly ambivalent view of the Torah. Their burden has been to show that somehow he could abrogate the Torah and still respect it. Non-Messianic Jewish scholars, building on the supposedly reliable conclusion, gratuitously supplied by their Christian colleagues, that Sha'ul did in fact abrogate the Torah, have made it their burden to show that the logical implication of Sha'ul's abrogating the Torah is that he did not respect it either and thereby removed himself and all future Jewish believers in Yeshua from the camp of Judaism (the so-called "parting of the ways"). In this fashion liberally oriented non-Messianic Jews in the modern era have been able to have their cake and eat it too, to claim Jesus for themselves as a wonderful Jewish teacher while making Paul the villain of the piece.

But Sha'ul had no such ambivalence. For him the Torah of Moshe was unequivocally "holy" and its commands "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12). And so were works done in true obedience to the Torah. But in order to be regarded by HaShem as good, works done in obedience to the Torah had to be grounded in trust, [never in one's submission to a man-made ceremony, viz, in one's Jewish status (Romans 9:30-10:10).] If one keeps in mind that Sha'ul had nothing but bad to say for the sin of perverting [circumcision (read here as conversion) into ethnic-driven righteousness] and nothing but good to say for the Torah itself, then the supposed contradictions in his view of the Torah vanish. Instead of being the villain who destroyed the backbone of Judaism and led Jews astray, he is the most authentic expositor of the Torah that the Jewish people have ever had, apart from the Messiah Yeshua himself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 537, 538.

## **8. Galatians 3:19 - Prevailing Christian and Messianic Jewish Perspectives**

**Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. (King James Version, KJV)**

**What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. (Authorized Standard Version, ASV)**

**Why, then, the law? on account of the transgressions it was added, till the seed might come to which the promise hath been made, having been set in order through messengers in the hand of a mediator. (Young's Literal Translation, YLT)**

**Why then was the Law given? It was imposed later on for the sake of defining sin, until the seed should come to whom God had made the promise; and its details were laid down by a mediator with the help of angels. (Weymouth New Testament, WEY)**

**Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. (English Standard Version, ESV)**

**So then, why the legal part of the Torah? It was added in order to create transgressions, until the coming of the seed about whom the promise had been made. Moreover, it was handed down through angels and a mediator. (Complete Jewish Bible, CJB)**

1. According to Paul, the law has a negative purpose: It was added because of transgressions (v. 19). Paul has already demonstrated what the law does not do: it does not make anyone righteous before God (v. 11); it is not based on faith (v. 12); it is not the basis of inheritance (v. 18). So if the law is divorced from righteousness, faith and inheritance of the blessing, to what is law related? Paul says that the law is related to transgressions. A transgression is the violation of a standard. The law provides the objective standard by which the violations are measured. In order for sinners to know how sinful they really are, how far they deviate from God's standards, God gave the law. Before the law was given, there was sin (see Rom 5:13). But after the law was given, sin could be clearly specified and measured (see Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7). Each act or attitude

could then be labeled as a transgression of this or that commandment of the law.

Imagine a state in which there are many traffic accidents but no traffic laws. Although people are driving in dangerous, harmful ways, it is difficult to designate which acts are harmful until the legislature issues a book of traffic laws. Then it is possible for the police to cite drivers for transgressions of the traffic laws. The laws define harmful ways of driving as violations of standards set by the legislature. The function of traffic laws is to allow bad drivers to be identified and prosecuted.

2. The temporal framework for the law is clearly established by the words added . . . until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come (v. 19). Paul has already emphasized that the Mosaic law was given 430 years after the Abrahamic promise (v. 17). The word added implies that the law was not a central theme in God's redemptive plan; it was supplementary and secondary to the enduring covenant made with Abraham. As the word added marks the beginning point for the Mosaic law, the word until marks its end point. The Mosaic law came into effect at a certain point in history and was in effect only until the promised Seed, Christ, appeared. There is a contrast here between the permanent validity of the promise and the temporary nature of the law. On the one hand, the promise was made long before the law and will be in effect long after the period of the law; on the other hand, the law was in effect for a relatively short period of time limited in both directions by the words added and until.

As we shall see in our study of the next few sections of the letter (see 3:23-25; 4:1-4), Paul's presentation of the temporal framework for the law is a major theme of his argument for the superiority of the promise fulfilled in Christ over the law. This theme differs radically from the common Jewish perspective of his day, which emphasized the eternal, immutable nature of the law. But Paul's Christocentric perspective led him to see that Christ (the promised Seed), not the law, was the eternal one.<sup>17</sup>

Concerning this verse (3:19) Stern seems, in some ways, to take the popular Christian view as noted above just a step further. While not casting the Torah in a negative light, he nonetheless seems to not fully capture the intended meaning of Paul's point there in verse 19. Because of his widespread acceptance among many messianic believers, his view is worth critiquing. Moreover, his popularity in the Messianic Community has far-reaching influence in the way the Movement forms their view of the Torah. Writing in his Jewish New Testament Commentary we read (all emphasis, his):

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<sup>17</sup><http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=7&source=1&seq=i.55.3.6>

**So then, why the legal part of the *Torah*** (see v. 17N)? Why was it needed at all, if the promise (v. 18) is independent of it? **It was added** to the promise—and to the environment of Jewish history in particular and human history in general—in order to create transgressions, literally, “because of transgressions.” The latter could mean, “in order to contain and limit transgressions,” in order to keep the Jewish people from becoming so intolerably sinful that they would become irredeemable. But instead of this, I think it means, as Sha'ul explains in Romans 7, that a key purpose of the commandments was to make Jewish people ever aware of their sin—not that Jews were more sinful than Gentiles, but that, like Gentiles, Jews too “fall short of earning God’s praise” (Ro 3:23). The *Torah* “creates” transgressions by containing commandments which people break, indeed, which rebellious human nature perversely wants to break (Ro 7:7-12&NN). But at least in some cases the guilt they feel causes them to despair of ever earning God’s praise by their own works, so that they come to God in all humility to repent, seek his forgiveness, and trust in him (see Ro 3:19-20&NN, 4:13-15&NN, 5:12-21&N, 7:5-25&NN).

**Until the coming of the “seed,”** Yeshua (verse 16), **about whom the promise had been made.** From the time of Moshe until the coming of Yeshua, the *Torah* had a “conscious-raising” role towards sin. The *Torah* still exists, is still in this force (see Gal. 6:2), and for those who have not yet come to trust in Yeshua it still has this function. But for those who do trust in Yeshua and are faithful to him, the *Torah* need no longer serve in this capacity. Sha'ul explains why in verses 21-25.

**It, the *Torah*, was handed down** to Moshe on Mount Sinai **through angels**, a point made three times in the New Testament (see Acts 7:53) **and through a human mediator**, Moshe. An often-heard Jewish objection to the New Testament’s teaching is that Jews don’t need Yeshua because they don’t need a mediator between themselves and God. This verse refutes the claim with its reminder that Moshe himself served as such a mediator—as, for that matter, did the *cohanim* and the prophets. See Hebrews 8:6, 10:19-21; 1 Tim. 2:5; Exodus 20:19; Deut. 5:2, 5; and this citation form a Pseudepigraphic work dating from the first or second century B.C.E:

“Draw near to God and to the angel that intercedes for you, for he is a mediator between God and man...” (Testament of Dan 6:2)<sup>18</sup>

I believe that as important a contribution as Stern has made to the Messianic Movement (I currently endorse his Bible translation), with regards to his commentary on this particular verse, this “neutral” view—as opposed to the blatant “negative” one that Christianity holds—that the *Torah* was given to Isra'el

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<sup>18</sup> David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 550.

to make her ever aware of her transgressions misses the point of Paul's argument at this point in his letter.

In a sort of combination of both BibleGateway and Stern, David Guzik, Christian commentator, adds his contribution to the Galatian dilemma:

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions: Part of the reason the law was given was to restrain the transgression of men through clearly revealing God's holy standard. God had to give us His standard so we would not destroy ourselves before the Messiah came. But the law is also added because of transgressions in another way; the law also excites man's innate rebellion through revealing a standard, showing us more clearly our need for salvation in Jesus (Romans 7:5-8).<sup>19</sup>

True, the Torah does possess a sort of "conscious-raising" role with regard to sin, as correctly stated by Guzik and as correctly noted by Stern in Romans chapter 7, but, given the immediate context of the following complimentary verses<sup>20</sup>, it seems more likely that this is not the Apostle's intended meaning here. Instead, Tim Hegg seems to uncover Sha'ul's true, "positive" intentions with his well-written comment to his Galatians study, quoted at length here:

The language of our present verse would indicate that we should read it positively, not negatively. "Why the Torah? It was given (added to the revelation already given in the Abrahamic covenant) to reveal the divine method of dealing with transgressions," i.e., "for the sake of transgressions." Already prejudiced against the Torah, the typical Christian exegesis misses the fact that a great deal of the Torah centers upon the Tabernacle/Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. How were the covenant members to deal with the inevitable presence of sin in their personal and corporate lives? The Torah gives the answer: by repentance and acceptance of God's gracious gift of forgiveness through the payment of a just penalty exemplified in the sacrifice. It was the Torah that revealed in clear detail the method which God had provided for transgression, and it was this method—the sacrificial system and priesthood that pointed to Messiah, the ultimate sacrifice and means of eternal forgiveness.

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<sup>19</sup> David Guzik, *Galatians 3-The Christian, Law, and Living by Faith* (David Guzik, 2001) <http://enduringword.com/commentaries/4803.htm>

<sup>20</sup> The presence of angels and a mediator are not pejorative marks against the Torah, as many Christian teachers presume. Rather, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish worldview, these elements are signs that God regarded his Torah as high and lofty enough to warrant accompaniment by angels, and to be safeguarded by the great Moshe, the one who delivered our people from Egypt.

Thus Paul adds: "until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made." In the Greek, this clause follows second, immediately after "it was added because of transgressions." The ESV has the order correct: "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary." The Torah was given in order to reveal God's gracious manner of dealing with transgressions, i.e., through the death of an innocent substitute. Paul therefore immediately makes this point by adding, "until the seed would come..." Here, as often, the word "until" (ἄχρι, *achri*; Hebrew אֲד, *'ad*) has the primary meaning of "marker of continuous extent of time up to a point, until."<sup>21</sup> The point is that the revelation of the Torah regarding how God provides redemption in the face of transgressions has its focal point in Yeshua. Once Yeshua had come and offered Himself as God's eternal sacrifice, the ultimate revelation to which the sacrifices pointed had been given. This is Paul's consistent perspective: the Torah leads to Yeshua (cf. Ro 10:4 and the continuing context of Gal 3).<sup>22</sup>

## 9. Excursus: Additional "Tough Phrasing"

\*This extended excursus to the "Tough Phrasing" section is a work in progress, with verses added as time permits. Please excuse my construction.

In this extended excursus to Exegeting Galatians and its tough phrasing I wish to draw the student's attention to various p'sukim (verses) that have traditionally led Christianity towards a passive or negative view of Judaism, Torah, or both. Such verses, when removed from the larger context of either Paul or the situation facing the new believers in Galatia, will usually make Paul out to be the inventor of a new religion called Christianity, a religion viewed as superior to Judaism and the Torah that upholds it.

However, since we have indeed shared the proper historical and theological background to the Apostle and his circumstances, we are now ready to read these verses—indeed the whole letter—afresh with new understanding. To be sure, the context will reveal that in the end Rav Sha'ul personally championed the cause of biblical Judaism and Torah-true obedience to God and his Messiah. What is more, when properly interpreted along their 1<sup>st</sup> century theological and sociological lines, these p'sukim clearly envision a closely-knit Torah community unified under one Messiah and one Torah for both Jew and Gentile alike.

I will spend only enough time on each verse so as to unlock the meaning for the student. If a verse contains multiple issues and warrants more attention then I will allow more information to be subpoenaed. For this exercise differing versions of the Bible may be utilized, but the New International Version (NIV) will

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<sup>21</sup> BDAG, ἄχρι.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 121.

be my primary source. My own comments, and when necessary, paraphrasing, will follow immediately after each passage.

## Chapter One

*1:6, 7 - I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

Comments: By his “astonishment,” taken to be rhetorical, we learn that Sha'ul has invested previous time and effort in these Gentile believers, perhaps having visited them twice before finally penning this letter around A.D. 55 or 56.<sup>23</sup> The villains of the piece, identified variously as “Judaizers,”<sup>24</sup> “Legalizers,” or “Influencers”<sup>25</sup> have succeeded in persuading the new Gentiles that covenant-standing (read in Christian parlance as “saved”) was not granted via faith in Yeshua alone, but rather, conversion to Judaism was needed to finalize the membership. Sha'ul saw this persuasion and its apparent successful campaign as a “deserting of the one who called you,” namely, the Mashiach. Because this new, errant theology (that Gentiles must become Jews before they can achieve full and lasting covenant status by God, viz, be saved) ran counter to the genuine Good News (that in Messiah both Jew and Greek are on equal covenant footing) Sha'ul refers to this as “another Gospel” (Greek εὐαγγέλιον, yoo-angelion=news of good), which is really not good news when compared to the Truth. Pertinent for our study is the historical fact that the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms were not teaching salvation by following Torah (as the later emerging Church might assume). The “other gospel” that gave Sha'ul such consternation was the prevailing proto-rabbinic view that only Isra'el alone shared a place in the World to Come, that is, only Jews were granted covenant membership. In this view Gentles must convert before they were considered full-fledged members. In this view Torah was not the means of salvation; “works of the Torah” (defined elsewhere in this commentary) were the prerequisite to “salvation.” In this view Torah simply helped to maintain membership granted to native born and proselyte alike. I, Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, personally disagree with the central tenets of this view.

*1:13 - For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.*

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<sup>23</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament, Commentary to the Book of Galatians* (AMG Publishers, 1991), p. 613.

<sup>24</sup> Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD): Ἰουδαΐζειν, ee-oo-daizein=to adopt Jewish customs and rites, imitate the Jews, Judaize.

<sup>25</sup> “Influencers” is a term coined by Mark Nanos, and popularized by Tim Hegg.

Comments: It is critical to a proper understanding of Sha'ul that we recognize the syntax of the Greek of this verse. The word order shows that “previous” modifies the phrase “way of life” and not “previous Jewish life” as some might presume. The careful observation is made to show a shift within the paradigms of Judaism and not outside of them. Paul did not leave Judaism for a new religion called Christianity. What he did do was switch party lines, from a non-believing Jewish Pharisee, to a believing (in Yeshua) Pharisee, all within the confines of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism. Tim Hegg states it well,

We should note carefully that that word “former” (ποτέ, *pote*, which, when functioning as a particle means “once, formerly) functions to modify the word “manner of life” (ἀναστροφή, *anastrophe*, “lifestyle”). It does not imply that Paul formerly lived within Judaism but that as of the time he wrote the Galatians, he was no longer living within Judaism. What he is contrasting is his personal “halachah” before and after his faith in Yeshua as Messiah, not his former life in Judaism as opposed to his present life apart from Judaism.<sup>26</sup>

## Chapter Two

*2:3 - Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.*

Comments: The key to understanding this verse is the “force” of the Greek word translated as “compelled.” (Pun intended) Greek “compel” (ἀναγκάζω, *anagkadzo*, to necessitate, compel, drive to, by force, threats, etc.)<sup>27</sup>, suggests that Titus, a Gentile believer did not even wish to be circumcised at that time, even though it is a clear command of Torah. And why would he not wish to exercise his right to Torah as a full-fledged member of the community? Perhaps he was a “green” believer. Perhaps he was a seasoned believer with proper motives. Remember, being with Sha'ul, he surely was aware of the prevailing rabbinic halakhah that Gentiles were not considered covenant members until after conversion. Thus, his motives for accepting or refusing circumcision at that time were a reflection of his taking a stand with Paul to send the right signal to the newly formed Gentile faction within Apostolic Judaism. See additional thoughts involving Peter on 2:14 below. I think it is safe to assume that once the heat was off, circumcision would not present any problem for him personally. That Sha'ul had Timothy, also considered a Greek by 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish standards, circumcised in Acts chapter 16 is proof that Sha'ul himself did not consider this mitzvah unimportant for followers of Yeshua. What is more, that Sha'ul did not view circumcision as equal to conversion can be deduced by his comments in Galatians chapter 5 coming up later. In sum, this Greek word

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<sup>26</sup> Tim Hegg, A Study of Galatians (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD), ἀναγκάζω.

shows up a total of nine times in the Apostolic Scriptures.<sup>28</sup> For our immediate interest it is used twice more in this letter from Paul (2:14; 6:12) and once in his second letter to the Corinthians. Interesting by association is how Paul uses this word in Acts 26:11 describing his former zeal to “compel” Followers of the Way to blaspheme!

*2:14 - When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*

Comments: “Acting in line with the truth of the gospel.” The phrase suggests that Sha’ul is contending for defined and exclusive truths (note the definite article in the Greek: *ho alethia=the* truth, and *ho euagellion=the* gospel), of which the subjects of verses 11-13 (to include Peter) are not upholding, a gospel truth central to his effective evangelization among the Gentiles. Compromise has been taking place on a public level so Sha’ul makes his rebuke public as well.

“*You are a Jew (a Jew by birth and not a convert), yet you live like a Gentle and not like a Jew.*” In what way is Sha’ul accusing Peter of living like a Gentile? From the inner circle perspective of those who apply Torah to their lives on a daily basis, to “live like a Gentile” would mean to invite non-Jews into close quarters where table fellowship is likely to take place. To be sure, verse 11 and 12 show that Peter was in fact eating with Gentile believers prior to the arrival of the “men from James.” From a sectarian point of view, like the one obviously held to by those in opposition to Gentile inclusion, to eat with Gentiles was simply taboo—not acceptable if one wished to tow the Jewish party line accurately. To “live like a Gentile” most certainly does not mean that Peter ate food that was clearly proscribed by the Torah (recall Peter’s confession to God in Acts 10:14). For a Jew to be labeled by another Jew as “living like a Gentile” was simply to accuse him of having close relations with Gentiles. Because Sha’ul stressed the equality of Jewish and Gentile covenant membership via Messiah Yeshua, for Peter to waffle in his relations with Gentile believers simply because they were Gentiles was to “live as a good Jew should” only from the perspective of the prevailing Jewish thinking of his day. In other words, in the mind of Sha’ul, to live within the boundaries of the halakhah of a normative Judaism who defined herself as exclusively Jewish was unacceptable for a Messianic Jew the likes of Peter. “*To live like a Jew*” (Greek=*loudaizo* Ἰουδαῖζω “Judaize”) may even suggest that Peter unknowingly supported the halakhah that favored circumcising Gentiles before they could enjoy unlimited Jewish community access. “*How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*” seems to reinforce the notion that from Sha’ul’s point of view, whether knowingly or unknowingly, Peter was guilty of undermining the central truth of the equality of the Gospel for both

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<sup>28</sup> Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45; Luke 14:23; Acts 26:11; 28:19; 2 Cor. 12:11; Gal. 2:3, 14; 6:12.

Jews and Gentiles without either one having to be converted by coercion. The English word rendered “force” is our already familiar Greek word *anagkazo* ἀναγκάζω “compel,” “constrain.” The “*Jewish customs*” in question by Sha’ul were the specific group requirements that excluded Gentiles from full covenant membership and thus full Torah participation.

*2:15 - "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

Comments: “*We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners'...*” The key to understanding this cryptic phrase is in knowing that it is not coming from the mouth of Sha’ul! Rather, he is simply restating the popular views of the Influencers he is arguing against. To call a Gentile a “sinner” was, from a Jewish point of view, derogatory, something Sha’ul would not have endorsed. However, the established Judaic view of Gentiles allowed for them to be labeled by “authentic covenant members” as such. For Paul to insert this quote into his argument (the syntax of the Greek phrasing is crucial here) only makes sense if we understand the rhetoric by which Paul is desperately trying to shake Peter loose from his current, deficient halakhic actions. Peter has indeed confessed faith in Yeshua, so that to hold to the view that Gentiles are “unclean” would be frustrating to the genuine Gospel that Sha’ul has been commissioned to take to the Gentiles.

Continuing with his sharp rebuke, Sha’ul categorically embraces the notion that true, biblical Judaism holds to the correct view that *a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.*” Contrary to the popular belief that one must either be born Jewish or convert to becoming a Jew, Paul’s gospel extended lasting covenant membership to all who would freely embrace the message of the Cross Event. The word translated here as “justified” clearly invokes a positional-righteousness as determined by HaShem. Given the current contextual argument, the phrase “*by observing the law*” must mean “by conformity to a man-made ritual” for the Gentile, or “*by being born Jewish*” for the native born. We could translate the whole phrase thusly: “...*a man is not justified by his ethnic-driven identity, whether natural or achieved, but by faith in Jesus Christ.*” What follows (*So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified*) may amount to so much tautological repetition.

*2:19 - For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.*

Comments: At first blush this verse seems to spell the end of any Torah relevance for the apostle. But a careful reading will reveal its true meaning. The

verse starts out with the word “for” (Greek=γάρ, gar) a conjunction indicating that it is linked to a previous argument. In this case, Paul’s “for” represents an answer to the “if” clause introduced in verse 17 (*“If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners...”*). The key to understanding verse 19 is in answering exactly how we as individuals in verse 17 come to be made aware that *“we ourselves are sinners”*). Prior to his salvation experience Sha'ul was blinded to his true condition: dead in trespasses and sin. However, now that the Spirit has taken up residence within him, via the sacrificial death of Yeshua, he can look back to how the Torah played a part in bringing him to this newfound revelation about himself. The Torah, working in concert with the Spirit of God, revealed sin for what it was: violation of God’s righteous standard. Thus, through the Torah—that is, through its proper function of revealing and condemning sin, the individual is brought to the goal of the Torah, namely the revelation of the Messiah himself. Once faced with the choice to remain in sin or be set free by the power of the Blood, Paul confesses that he “died” to his old self and was consequently made alive in the newness that is accredited to those who choose life!

But Paul says that he died to Torah. What does he mean by such a statement? Are we to assume that in Yeshua Paul is now somehow dead to obedience to the Torah? May it never be! Simply put, he now realizes that his new life in the Spirit is a life to be lived without the fear of being condemned as a sinner by the very Torah he previously thought he was upholding! The Torah has a properly installed built-in function of sentencing sinners to become the object of HaShem’s punishment and ultimate rejection, a rejection that will result in death if the person never choose the Messiah of life. Paul is teaching the Galatians that his choice of Yeshua is to be understood as a death of self and the former life that Torah condemned in favor of a new life of serving God through the Spirit, a choice brought on by the revelation of Messiah found within the very pages of the Torah itself! Such freedom in Messiah does not liberate one from Torah, rather, such freedom liberates one to be able to walk into Torah as properly assisted and seen from God’s perspective!

*2:21 - I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”*

Comments: Bringing his arguments of the previous verses, and indeed the chapter as we have it, to a close, Paul again reinforces the truth that the “righteousness of God” is attained for an individual at Christ’s expense and not through the rubrics of a man-made conversion ceremony (read here as *“through the law”*). The “law” in question is the Oral Tradition that only Isra'el can inherit blessings in the World to Come, a belief formerly held to by the apostle himself. To be sure, if being declared righteous (understood to be primarily forensic, but including behavioral as well) could be achieved via the flesh (that is, being born Jewish or converting to Judaism) then truly what need would there be for a Messiah to come and provide it later for anyone? Paul would have the reader to

understand that such righteousness is altogether outside of human achievement and therefore must be procured by surrendering to the power of the Anointed One of God.

### Chapter Three

*3:2, 3 - I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

Comments: No other chapter of the Bible has caused more theological misunderstandings than Chapter Three of Galatians! We would do well to tread cautiously as we seek to unlock its meanings...

Again, Sha'ul returns to his irony with a rhetorical question about the origins of the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh among the Galatian believers. Sha'ul surely knows first hand from whence the Spirit flows from God to an individual. However, in this portion of his letter he is attempting to shock the readers back into some semblance of "biblical reality." Having begun with the truth of Yeshua's atoning death, how could they possibly be considering going back on such a revelation? To the apostle, such a notion was ludicrously untenable! Again, knowing that the Greek word for law (nomos) can refer to the Oral Tradition of proselyte conversion helps us to understand Paul to be challenging its validity among genuine covenant members. Surely lasting covenant membership is not acquired by human effort, but rather by placing one's trust in the Ultimate Son of the Covenant, Yeshua himself. Our opening question might be better phrased as so: "*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by becoming proselytes, or by believing what you heard?*" Paul immediately provides his answer, a resounding "*Are you so foolish?*" To suppose that human achievement could in some way trump the grace of God as afforded by his Only Son was an exercise in futility! The second question then is merely a clarification of his previous inquisition stated this time using the explicit language of the Influencers, viz, "human effort," referring back to the proselyte ceremony. The historic position held to by the later emerging Christian church that the apostle is pitting true faith in Yeshua against any supposed Torah observance finds no basis from the context of Paul's argument here. Indeed, we must allow the context of the letter to determine what is driving his consternation. Read without the clarity of context, we will forever misconstrue Paul to be teaching Gentile believers that HaShem's Laws hold no valuable place in the practical application of the very Promise inherited through Yeshua the Savior. Read without the clarity of context, we will misunderstand Paul to be denigrating the Torah in favor of being led by the Spirit.

*3:5 - Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*

Comments: This verse is a restating of the previous round of rhetorical questioning. Obviously by now we know that Paul is not in favor of ethnic-driven righteousness, a position maintained by his detractors. The evidence that the Galatians are already in possession of genuine and lasting covenant status is the fact that the Ruach HaKodesh is indeed working among them! Recall Peter's surprise when the Ruach HaKodesh fell freely on Cornelius and company in Acts 10: 44-48. Why was Peter surprised? Because the long-standing belief among the Judaisms of the 1<sup>st</sup> century sincerely assumed that God only chose Jews as covenant partners! Paul here is acknowledging the genuine working of the Spirit among his fellow Gentiles as proof positive that they were existing covenant members and not merely "Gentile-to-Jewish converts" in the process of becoming covenant members. The question is meant to raise the issue in the minds of the Galatians as to what exactly attracts the attention of God himself: flesh or faith? The answer is given below using Avraham as the paradigm.

*3:6 - Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Comments: Throughout his letters, the Apostle Paul (Rav Sha'ul) seems to take great interest in Avraham, referring to him no less than 29 times!<sup>29</sup> Ya'akov (James) also makes use of Father Avraham in chapter 2 and verses 21-23 of his letter, going so far as to bring the binding of Isaac into the equation for us. For Ya'akov, Avraham's faith was perfected by his corresponding actions. Germane to our study, however, is the phrase "*credited to him as righteousness,*" penned by Moshe in B'reshet (Genesis) 15:6 and referenced by Sha'ul in Romans 4:3

**For what does the Tanakh say? "Avraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness.**

Given its location within Paul's arguments, both from Romans and Galatians, it is clear that the phrase is referring to imputed righteousness, that is, positional (forensic) right standing with HaShem. For Paul, it is axiomatic that Moshe describes this quality chronologically before Avraham receives the covenant of circumcision in B'reshet chapter 17. This bespeaks of the correct order in which to appropriate the covenant responsibilities of God. On the micro, saving faith in God, symbolized by God accrediting his account as righteous (Hebrew תְּדַכָּח tz'dakah), precedes the patriarch's obedience to the sign of circumcision. On the macro, the covenant of Avraham precedes the covenant with Moshe.

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<sup>29</sup> Assuming Paul wrote Hebrews, the count is as follows: Romans 4:1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 13, 16; 9:7; 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Galatians 3:6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 18, 29; 4:22; Hebrews 2:16; 6:13; 7:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9; 11:8, 17.

Thus, we can infer that Sha'ul brings Avraham into the argument to show that forensic righteousness is conferred to those who are not circumcised as well as to those who are—read Gentile and Jew respectively.

**Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is indeed the God of the Gentiles (Romans 3:29).**

And,

**Now is this blessing for the circumcised only? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say that Avraham's trust was credited to his account as righteousness; but what state was he in when it was so credited - circumcision or uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision! In fact, he received circumcision as a sign, as a seal of the righteousness he had been credited with on the ground of the trust he had while he was still uncircumcised. This happened so that he could be the father of every uncircumcised person who trusts and thus has righteousness credited to him, and at the same time be the father of every circumcised person who not only has had a b'rit-milah, but also follows in the footsteps of the trust which Avraham avinu had when he was still uncircumcised (Romans 4:9-12).**

But what is it about the narrative in Genesis that leads Moshe to finally declare Avram/Avraham as righteous at this juncture? Is there something within the story that would cause any reader to make the same assumption? What was going on in the mind of the Holy One? Perhaps we can draw some conclusions by looking at the passage from a telescopic overview. Allow me elaborate?

The flow of the Genesis narrative has been an interactive look at Avraham and his contending with God ever since God called him away from his native land in chapter 12:1-3. There, in what amounts to a unilateral agreement, we find that HaShem promises to increase his offspring beyond numbering. The corresponding covenant ceremony will later be enacted in p'sukim (verses) 7-20 of chapter 15. But leading up to this point, and trailing afterwards, is a grammatical clue as to what—or whom—Avraham actually placed his trust in!

In B'resheet 12:1 Moshe recalls that ADONAI spoke to Avram.<sup>30</sup> If we trace every occurrence where God and Avram interact we will discover something quite interesting. Continuing with our investigation, HaShem appears to Avram in 12:7,<sup>31</sup> and in chapter 13 verse 14 ADONAI again speaks to Avram.<sup>32</sup> But when we arrive at chapter 15 the narrative appears quite odd. Instead of God appearing or speaking to Avram, the first clause of the first verse records:

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<sup>30</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם

<sup>31</sup> וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם

<sup>32</sup> וַיהוָה אָמַר אֶל-אַבְרָם

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם

**After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram...**

Likewise verse 4 confesses,

וַהֲנִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר

**And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying...**

Verse 6 of chapter 15 reveals Avram's reaction to the Word of the LORD by stating that it was at this moment that he believed the unbelievable and it was credited to him as righteousness. Remember, up until this point, Avram had remained childless, and was beginning to suppose that maybe the heir of his household was to be the recipient of God's promise from Genesis 12:1-3.<sup>33</sup> The narrative of chapter 15 trails off with statements amounting to "ADONAI said to him, "I am ADONAI,"" (verse 7)<sup>34</sup> and "That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram." (verse 18)<sup>35</sup>

Who or what was this mysterious "Word of the LORD" that suddenly<sup>36</sup> appeared in the parenthesis of the narrative with Avram?

I will let the Chazal (the Sages of Blessed Memory) add their input to this Hebraic feature of the story:

In Scripture "the word of the Lord" commonly denotes the speech addressed to patriarch or prophet (Gen. xv. 1; Num. xii. 6, xxiii. 5; I Sam. iii. 21; Amos v. 1-8); but frequently it denotes also the creative word: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Ps. xxxiii. 6; comp. "For He spake, and it was done"; "He sendeth his word, and melteth them [the ice]"; "Fire and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling his word"; Ps. xxxiii. 9, cxlvii. 18, cxlviii. 8). In this sense it is said, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps. cxix. 89). "The Word," heard and announced by the prophet, often became, in the conception of the seer,

<sup>33</sup> B'resheet 15:2, 3.

<sup>34</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה

<sup>35</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּרִית

<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew word הִנֵּה "hineh" is explained by Jewish authorities as "...untranslatable. It is often rendered as 'here' or 'behold,' but this is an approximation of an expression that has no equivalent in the Indo-European languages. For this reason, it is often left untranslated. In general, it serves to intensify a statement and to provide emphasis. Here, the intensity denotes that it was a sudden or intense experience." (Navigating the Bible, online commentary to Genesis 15:4)

an efficacious power apart from God, as was the angel or messenger of God: "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Isra'el" (Isa. ix. 7 [A. V. 8], lv. 11); "He sent his word, and healed them" (Ps. cvii. 20); and comp. "his word runneth very swiftly" (Ps. cxlvii. 15).<sup>37</sup>

The Word of the LORD is in fact the LORD, ADONAI himself! This much is made clear by the objective text and the subsequent notations that we observed in Hebrew via the footnotes. But let us take it one step further to complete the mystery. In Aramaic, the sister language to Hebrew, the translation of "word" becomes מֵאִמַּר mah'amar, from which we get "memra." Since the Hebrew "Word" was already identified as possessing personality, the corresponding memra likewise took on identity! Early Jewish theologians defined the Memra, or Word of God, with six different characteristics. In the first portion of his Gospel, Yochanan (John) associates each of these qualifications with their Messianic fulfillment in Yeshua. These six claims were:

1. Memra is defined as distinct, yet the same as God. This struggle as to the nature of HaShem persists to this day. Messianic Jews point to the use of the term echad as a composite unity to assist in the explanation of this issue. Yochanan in Yochanan 1:1 stated: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Complete Jewish Bible). Yeshua Himself spoke of the fulfillment of this attribute when He stated, "I and the Father are one." Yochanan 10:30, CJB
2. The second attribute of the Memra, Word of God, was that it was the agent of creation. Yochanan states that Yeshua fulfills this in Yochanan 1:3: "All things came to be through Him and without Him nothing made had being." . Rabbi Sha'ul succinctly stated this in Colossians 1:15b-16, referring to Yeshua: "He is supreme over all creation, because in connection with Him were created all things — in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, lordships, rulers or authorities — they have all been created through Him and for Him."
3. The third attribute stated that the Memra was the agent of salvation. This is claimed in Yochanan 1:12: "But to as many as did receive Him, to those who put their trust in His person and power, He gave the right to become children of God." Yeshua stated His role as agent of salvation several times, most forcefully in Yochanan (John) 14:6b: "I AM the Way — and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me."
4. The fourth Jewish attribute of the Memra was that Memra was the agent of Theophany (the visible presence of God). In Yochanan 1:14 one reads: "The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw His Sh'khinah, The Sh'khinah of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." Indeed, one might consider the incarnation reality of God in Messiah Yeshua to be a prolonged Theophany. As Rabbi Sha'ul forthrightly stated

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<sup>37</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, pp. 464-465.

in Colossians 1:15a concerning Yeshua: "He is the visible image of the invisible God."

5. The fifth attribute of Memra was that of being the agent of covenant signing. In Yochanan 1:17 the author writes: "For the Torah was given through Moshe, grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah." This was the fulfillment of the prophetic words of Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah), written in the thirty-first chapter of his self-titled book in verses 30 (31) and 32 (33): "Here, the days are coming," says Adonai, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah ... For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says Adonai: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their heart; I will be their God, and they will be my people."
6. The final attribute of Memra was that of being the agent of revelation. Yochanan writes of this in verse 18 of the first chapter of his Gospel: "No one has ever seen God; but the only and unique Son, who is identical with God and is at the Father's side — He has made Him known." When Philip asked Yeshua to reveal the Father, Yeshua's reply was "Have I been with you so long without your knowing me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Yochanan 14:9.

Indeed as scholars have summarized: "The writings of John confirm that his understanding of Memra was 100 percent Hebraic. He affirms that Yeshua fulfills all six attributes and all Jewish expectations of Memra."

## Conclusions

Avram placed his trust in ADONAI. The raw data gathered from the narrative tells us that it was the Word of ADONAI who received the object of such faith. To be sure, Avram's response is unique, employing the moniker "Adonai, God,"<sup>38</sup> instead of merely YHVH like in 14:22.<sup>39</sup> Sarna notes this shift in titles in his commentary to Genesis,

This Hebrew divine title, rarely used in the Torah, appears here for the first time. It is used in a context of complaint, prayer, and request. Here, the word for "Lord" is '*adonai*, "my Lord," not the divine name of YHVH, and its use suggests a master-servant relationship. Abram does not permit his vexation to compromise his attitude of respect and reverence before God.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

<sup>39</sup> אֶל-יְהוָה אֵל עֶלְיוֹן. "...unto the LORD, the most High God."

<sup>40</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Commentary to Genesis* (The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 113.

However, in comparison to Sarna above, we must carefully note that the Hebrew text of ADONAI (אֲדֹנָי) itself is a peculiar rendering. How so? According to ‘The Scriptures’ translation by the Institute for Scripture Research (ISR) the original Hebrew name of YHVH has been emended by the Scribes in 134 passages!<sup>41</sup> This means that in 134 places in our existing Masoretic text, the Hebrew may read ADONAI (אֲדֹנָי) but the original word was in fact YHVH יהוה! Richard Spurlock of *Bereans Online*, a well-balanced messianic web site with a nice collection of podcasts for downloading, makes a similar observation in his notes to the course ‘Messiah Unveiled’:

A most interesting feature of Genesis 15 is evident only in the Hebrew. In the English of Genesis 15:2, the two words ‘Lord God’ are used. The English translation is that the English translators have up until this point used the scribal tradition of *kere ketiv* [say/write] with regard to the Tetragrammaton [sic]. If you remember, the ancient scribes used a system of circumlocution to encourage the reader to not say the Holy Name out loud. What was written was the four letters of a *yod*, a *hay*, a *vav*, and a *hay*. Under those consonants, the scribes placed the permanent *kere ketiv* in the form of vowel points. The vowel points were for the word ‘*Adonai*’ [Lord]. Thus the reader, when they came to the Holy Name, would say, ‘*Adonai*’. The English translators took this tradition to another level. Instead of writing the four letters, they substituted ‘LORD’ in all capital letters. This informed the reader that the Hebrew behind the word was in fact the Holy Name.

When we get to Genesis 15:2, the translators have a problem—the actual word ‘*Adonai*’ is used next to the Holy Name. The problem is that if they followed their translation consistently, it would say, “Lord LORD,” which is difficult rendering. Following the scribal tradition of circumlocution (word substitution), they simply write ‘Lord GOD.’ The ‘GOD’ is in fact a substitution for the Holy Name in this case...

What is the significance of this word arrangement? This is the first time this word combination is used in Scripture. This word combination is used in other places in Scriptures, but not very often. We need to investigate to see if there is some connection between these passages, and if it is a Messianic connection.<sup>42</sup>

What are we to make of this exchange of names and how does it relate to Yeshua and the Memra? May I suggest (under the guidance of the Apostolic Scriptures) that the Memra of YHVH appeared to Avram in such a way as to

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<sup>41</sup> The Scriptures, *Explanatory Notes: Emendations by the Sopherim*, (Institute for Scripture Research), p. 1214.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Spurlock, *Messiah Unveiled* (available at <http://www.bereansonline.org/default.htm>, 2005), p. 34-35.

allow Avram to address him as a servant would address his visible, flesh and blood master in face-to-face reverence and respect? Did Avram see a man? Did he see the invisible YHVH? I can't be dogmatic either way since biblical theophanies are often shrouded in mystery, but my gut feeling is that Avram saw the pre-incarnate LORD Yeshua with his natural eyes and yet called him YHVH! One thing is sure: Avram believed the unbelievable, and it was to the Word of the LORD—the Memra—that he addressed his objective faith! Surely HaShem saw into the heart of the patriarch and recognized the appropriation of the choices that lay before him. What is more, only the LORD himself can supernaturally open the eyes of a man to allow him to make a choice between choosing his Messiah or rejecting him. Avraham chose to lay hold of the Promise given in Genesis 12:1-3 by seeing at the heart of such a promise a glimpse of the Messiah who would bring it to pass! Tim Hegg provides a concluding thought to our study,

The response of God is said, once again, to come via His "word"--"the word of the LORD came to him saying...." God assures Abram that he will indeed have a son, and then He takes Abram outside to give him a sign of the promise He has just made. But the sign itself requires faith. For God shows Abram the stars and declares: "So shall your descendants (literally "seed") be." Not only would Abram have a son, but the descendants of Abram would endure from generation to generation, so that in the end, the offspring of Abram would be beyond counting.

But would God's word—His promise of a son—be enough for Abram? After all, it had been some time (perhaps as much as 20 years by the Sages reckoning) since the initial promise had been given, and there was still no son. Sarai was still barren. In fact, God's word was enough for Abram, as the next verse (v. 6) indicates. "And he believed in the LORD." Moses has reserved this clear statement of Abram's faith for the moment when the promised son is specifically the focus of attention. Surely Abram believed from the time that God first revealed Himself to him. His actions prove his faith: he left Ur, traveled to the place that God had indicated, forsook the idolatry of his fathers, and worshipped the One true God. But Moses intends us to see that Abram's faith was cast upon God in a particular fashion—in connection with the promise of a son. And thus we have the all important verse: "And he believed in the LORD, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."<sup>43</sup>

*3:10 - All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

Comments: This verse when misunderstood from its larger context will invariably lead the reader to the incorrect conclusion that Paul is advocating complete and

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<sup>43</sup> Tim Hegg, *Parashah Twelve* (torahresource.com, 2003), p. 2.

mitzvah-by-mitzvah (commandment-by-commandment) Torah submission for everyone wishing to attain right-standing with the Almighty. That the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms did not advocate a view which required complete Torah obedience before one could be counted as a covenant member is attested to in the later rabbinic compilations that survived the destruction of the Temple. Put simply, no one in Paul's day thought that a person could practically walk out each and every single commandment. Nor did anyone in Paul's day believe that God expected such obedience of Isra'el. No, such a notion finds its home among ignorant ideology and theology borne out of ignorance to the Laws of God and the Ways of God. Our verse is a contrast to the previously statement made in verse 6 where Avraham is said to have been considered righteous on the basis of his faith. By comparison, those who do not imitate Avraham, but instead seek to circumvent God's method of declaring a person righteous actually fall into the trap of legalism. When Sha'ul uses a statement like "*all who rely on observing the law*" he is referring to two positions: Firstly, he is speaking to those who believed that covenant status was extended by God due to ethnic status, whether native-born or convert. Such individuals, instead of living within the blessing of HaShem, were in reality found to be the object of God's curse, because instead of submitting to God's way of making a person righteous, they were said to be setting up their own way of righteousness, a charge leveled against unbelieving Isra'el by Sha'ul himself in Romans 9:31, 32-10:3. Secondly, he is teaching against any superstition notions that God extends covenant status to the individual who simply avails himself of Torah obedience outside of genuine faith in the giver of the Torah. This is proven by the conditional clause, "*All who rely on...*" To what would the individual be relying upon for righteousness? It must be either his ethnic status or his Torah observance. Paul would have argued against either view.

The phrase "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law*" is lifted from Deuteronomy 27:26, indicated by the familiar "*for it is written.*" Paul is going to prove his argument—that lasting covenant membership is granted to those exercising faith—directly from the Torah itself. The reference here by Sha'ul however is neither a direct quote from the Masoretic Hebrew text, or a direct quote from the Greek Septuagint (LXX). He may be paraphrasing the general meaning of the verse for his readers. The meaning is nevertheless captured by Sha'ul: the covenant member to be, as well as the existing covenant member, must follow after all that God has spoken to do.<sup>44</sup> Picking and choosing which commandments are relevant and which ones aren't is not left to the covenant member. Only God is allowed to determine which commandments might if ever fall into disuse and which ones will not. But even more to the point of Sha'ul's argument here is the historical reality that each and every covenant member bound himself to pursue the "Righteous One"

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<sup>44</sup> A condition agreed upon by corporate Isra'el herself at the inauguration of the Covenant on Mount Sinai, as recorded by Moshe in Exodus 19:7, 8.

promised by the Torah!<sup>45</sup> The very thing that a covenant member was expected to do was to exercise faith in God and in his Messiah to come, who by Sha'ul's writing had already arrived! The individual who failed to reach this conclusion ultimately found himself a candidate for being "cut off" (Hebrew=כרת, karat) by God himself due to his lack of faith.<sup>46</sup> In stating that the one who denies genuine faith lives under a curse, Paul opts for the Greek word κατάρα, katara, which conveys the notion of a spoken curse,<sup>47</sup> a clear reference to God's words as pronounced in our Torah passage of Deuteronomy, i.e., the Book of the Law.

*3:11 - Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."*

Comments: Sha'ul now states emphatically that "*no one is justified before God by the law,*" a statement that can only mean that "*no one is justified before God by submission to a man-made ceremony as postulated by the prevailing halakhah of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms.*" Alternately, Sha'ul's statement is a teaching against any mistaken notions that the Torah in and of itself automatically granted covenant status to the individual participant. Again Paul uses a conjunction "*because,*" Greek ὅτι, hotee as a clarifier to further the truth that would-be covenant members do not walk into Torah submission to gain covenant status, rather, submission to God's Torah is proof of a commitment already made on the part of an existing covenant member: "*...because, the righteous will live by faith.*"

*3:12 - The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."*

Comments: The quote is from Leviticus 18:5, a verse that Sha'ul will eventually go on to use again in Romans 10:5 in a similar discussion about covenant membership. The context of the passage in Leviticus warrants careful study:

**1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for**

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<sup>45</sup> See Deuteronomy 18:15-19, which was understood in Yeshua's day to be referring to "The Prophet," namely, Prophet Messiah, as evidenced by the people's reaction in John 7:40-42. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms also inferred and anticipated the coming of a Righteous One from numerous passages lifted from the Major and Minor Prophets.

<sup>46</sup> Romans 11:19-22.

<sup>47</sup> TSBD, κατάρα.

**the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.**  
**(Emphasis, mine)**

Here the writer, Moshe, describes the lifestyle of an existing covenant member as characterized by obeying the laws spelled out by the Torah. Paul refers to such a position as “clearly” described in the previous verse. In other words, Paul expects his readers and opponents alike to come to the same conclusion as he: genuine Torah submission does not precede genuine faith; genuine Torah submission is the natural, expected result of genuine faith. Stated another way: genuine and lasting obedience flows from the heart that has been circumcised by the Spirit of God himself. The order of procession is vitally important for Paul’s argument: faith comes first; obedience follows faith. Such a processional order is also implied in the historical order to which the covenants in question were given: the Avrahamic Covenant, typified by faith, preceded the Mosaic Covenant, typified by obedience. By comparison, the Influencers had the sequence reversed, suggesting that faith came as a result of following after the teachings of Torah, as indicated by their preoccupation with the ritual of circumcision.

*3:13 - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

Comments: There are golden moments when the best interpretation of Scripture is Scripture. This verse seems to find a parallel in Chapter 4. Allow me to quote verses 4-6 from that location:

*“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."”*

The impact of Christ redeeming those who name his name for salvation from the curse of the law in 3:13 bears a striking similarity to 4:4 and the first part of 4:5 “...to redeem those under the law.” That we have previously defined the term “under the law” as a position reserved for those whose hearts have not received messianic regeneration is key to understanding Paul’s phrase “the curse of the law.” I understand them to be tandem phrases. That is, the person who lives “under the curse of the law” surely lives “under the law” as well. Both phrases describe a position of ill favor and eventual punishment by God. Under the law speaks of existing under the condemnation that Torah pronounces against persistent sinners. Thus, in the economy of the Torah community of ancient Isra’el, to live under the curses instead of under the blessings was to be recognized by God as living in sin and disobedience to his mitzvot (commandments). Surely Moshe instructed the people that obedience invited God’s blessings, while continual and unremorseful disobedience invited God’s

curses.<sup>48</sup> But Messiah did not merely redeem our physical lives from diminishment of blessing if we failed to perform the Words of Torah; Yeshua actually redeemed both body and soul from the ultimate curse pronounced upon the individual who failed to graduate to genuine lasting faith in the Giver of the Torah, a redemption spoken of in legal terms throughout the Apostolic Scriptures. The plain sense of the verse is not confusing: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Torah. He did not redeem us from the Torah itself.

But in what way did Messiah “become a curse” for us? Quite simply, Yeshua was put forth as the propitiation for our sins when he died on the cross. As the sinless sacrifice, the Father deemed it necessary to place the corporate sin of the world upon his Son so that his Righteousness might be vindicated in the biblical truth that “the wages of sin is death.”<sup>49</sup> The word “cursed” in the quote from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 “*Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree*” only stands to reinforce the Levitical notion that the sacrifice truly bears the weight of the sin imparted to it. To be sure, if there was found no substitute for the party guilty of a capital offence, then he was to be hanged as a sign that God had deemed him cursed. In the mystery of the Godhead, Yeshua, the sinless Lamb of God, became the object of such punishment on behalf of those who name his name for salvation. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf.<sup>50</sup> As for 3:13, 14 we shall explore the furthering parallels to 4:4-6 when that passage arrives below.

*3:17, 18 - What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.*

Comments: The first part of this passage, the mention of the promise, becomes a key element of later Pauline literature. That God would make an unbreakable Promise to Avraham and his offspring and then bring it to pass vindicates both the Father’s competence as well as his trustworthiness. For Paul, it is imperative that the existing covenant member understands the proper relationship of the Avrahamic Covenant to the Mosaic Covenant. Allow me to quote Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz,

For those who trust HaShem for the promises, the proper order for faith and obedience is set by the sequence in which the covenants were given. In other words, faith must precede obedience. But the kind of faith accepted by HaShem is one that naturally flows into obedience. True obedience never comes before faith, nor is it an addition to faith. It is

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<sup>48</sup> Deuteronomy Chapters 27, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>50</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.

always the result of true biblical faith. To rephrase this in terms of the covenants: the covenant of promise (Avraham) must come before the covenant of obedience (Moshe). If we were to put Moshe first, attempting to secure those promises by obedience, we would be going against HaShem's order. (This, by the way, is the key to unlocking the difficult midrash used by Sha'ul in Galatians 4:21-31.) All we could hope for would be a measure of physical protection and a knowledge of spiritual things. But we could not receive justification or a personal relationship with the Holy One through obedience to the Torah; it all had to start with faith. Avraham came before Moshe, but Moshe did not cancel out Avraham! The two complemented each other—as long as they came in the proper order.<sup>51</sup>

Put plainly, far from diminishing or annulling the Abrahamic Promise, the Torah actually comes along 430 years later to support and compliment it! Even if Christian commentators disagree with my conclusion that the Torah compliments the Abrahamic Covenant, surely they must agree with the plain sense of Paul's words, which speak of the impossibility of the Torah doing away with the Promise to Abraham! God did not somehow start with "salvation by faith," move to "salvation by works," and then switch back to salvation by faith!" Sha'ul's disagreement with his detractors then is seen as a difference over which order these two covenants should be placed in. As we have learned, the order in which they appear both in Scripture as well as historically demonstrates the proper order in which their respective lessons should be actualized: Avrahamic precedes Mosaic; genuine and lasting faith in God will always precede genuine and lasting obedience to God.

Quite surely, the Influencers had the sequence backwards, placing the proverbial cart before the horse. In such a situation, the covenant member-to-be mistakenly believed that the Promise—referred to as the "inheritance" in verse 18—sprang forth from obedience to a ritual implied by the Torah, the ritual of the proselyte. In this order, faith results from works and human achievement. In this order, faith in God—the Promise—is rendered non-effectual and unnecessary. Paul would not have his talmidim (students) falling for such blatant errant theology. The inheritance must arrive to humanity by other than human means in order for HaShem to receive his proper acknowledgment. The son of promise (Yitz'chak) was to be born, not of human effort, but by divine fiat. Likewise, the Messiah—the Ultimate Son of Promise—would be born of miraculous circumstances, proving his connection to the antecedent theology that God alone can secure the Promise for his children.

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<sup>51</sup> Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 33.

*3:19 - What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.*

Comments: See the extended section labeled “**Galatians 3:19**” of this commentary.

*3:21 - Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.*

Comments: Again, the plain sense of the first part of this verse is cause to understand that the Avrahamic and Moshaic covenants work hand-in-hand with one another. Torah is not in opposition to Abraham! As for the second part of this verse, Paul simply restates what he previously challenged the Influencers to consider: God’s Promise of covenant membership and ultimately blessings in the World to Come are secured by faith, as opposed to being procured through conformity to a man-made ritual supposedly hinted at in the Torah. The “righteousness” mentioned in this verse is surely equated with positional righteousness. The verse is not meant to sound as if Sha’ul is denigrating the Torah of God; the Torah is not a salvific document. Rhetorically, the Apostle challenges all of Judaism to properly understand the role that the Law of HaShem plays in the life of both an unbeliever and a believer. Torah leads to Mashiach. But once found, Torah continued to instruct the new covenant member in matters of practical righteousness.

*3:23 - Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*

Comments: In the previous verse, the Scripture is personified as “conclud[ing]” all under sin.” Here the term “faith” is playing a similar role. Literally the Greek reads “before of-the yet to-be-coming the faith.” Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν How are we to understand Paul’s statement? Who or what is “the faith?” Is he suggesting that before the coming of Yeshua that there was no one of faith? Is he advocating a works-based righteousness as ostensibly taught in the Torah before the coming of Yeshua? In order to understand this verse we must weigh it in light of the previous verse where the phrase “the promise by faith of Jesus Christ” is found. Paul is teaching the valuable principle that before an individual comes to faith in Yeshua, he is held prisoner by sin and by the Torah that defines such sinful behavior. To be sure, a person not yet freed from his sinful passions is a prisoner of unrighteousness, a veritable slave of himself if you will. Paul is describing a state of existence walked by every single human since the fall of Adam. He is not speaking of a period on planet earth when no faith was extant, and mankind pined away in darkness and “supposed” slavery to the Law awaiting the coming of the Messiah.

More to the point of Sha'ul's context, however, is the understanding that when he says "held prisoners by the law," he really means "in subjection to the condemnation brought on by sin, condemnation rightfully administered by Torah," the Greek phrase *hupo nomos ὑπὸ νόμον* being rendered as "under the law" in the KJV.

*3:24 - So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

Comments: The KJV renders our verse thusly, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The Greek word for schoolmaster is *paidagogos παιδαγωγός*. We gain our English word pedagogue from this Greek word. Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD) defines the word as, "a tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood."<sup>52</sup> The point of Paul's argument here is that the Torah is a tool in the "hands" of the Ruach HaKodesh, designed by the Father to lead us to the Teacher of Righteousness. The Torah is not the Teacher in and of itself. The Torah is not the goal; Messiah is the goal. The Torah functions to lead the unregenerate man to faith in the central object of the Torah: Yeshua of Natzeret. Remember that starting in chapter 3 and verse 19 Paul has been giving us a digression on the purposes and function of the Torah. His audience, no doubt made up of Jews and Gentiles alike were equally in need of such tutelage until arriving at the moment of personal salvation. His final statement, "that we might be justified by faith" sends a chilling challenge to his detractors who were opting for justification by ethnic status. I might add, that a similar challenge awaits the conventional Christian who supposes that once he reaches the Goal (Messiah) that the Torah has ceased to function, a position championed by ostensible support from the very next verse in this chapter! However, Paul would not agree to dismissing the Torah so easily once one affirms personal faith in Yeshua. Like a master tool in the hands of the Master Craftsman, the Torah employs many functions, and leading the boy to the schoolmaster is only one of them.

*3:25 - Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

Comments: This verse must be understood within the argument that Rav Sha'ul is making, as well as within the overall context of the Bible itself: faith in Yeshua does not nullify the Torah of HaShem, a truth stated explicitly by Paul in Romans 3:31. What then is the verse trying to teach us? Simply that once an unregenerate man (the boy in the example given above) reaches the desired

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<sup>52</sup> Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD), *παιδαγωγός*.

goal (the Teacher of Righteousness) he no longer needs to be led by a paidagogos, for he has reached his destination! The paidagogos, having served its intended function now takes on a new role for the boy, one of instructing the lad in matters of life-long sanctification and servitude to the Teacher of Righteousness. Alternately, the verse may be another way for Paul to be teaching his talmidim that once we have arrived at faith in Yeshua that we are no longer under (a pejorative position in this usage) the schoolmaster, another term for the Law [of condemnation], i.e., “under the law”=“under a schoolmaster”=shorthand for “under the condemnation of the function of the Law that is reserved for unregenerate sinners.”

*3:28, 29 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Comments: In verse 26 of this chapter Paul states that the Galatians are all the children of God, a preview of his continuing argument for genuine adoption and covenant membership by those placing their unreserved trusting faithfulness in the Goal of the Torah, Yeshua the Messiah. In our present verse he uses universal language equal to the inclusion of every known ethnic, social, and gender-specific set common to the ancient near east: Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. The doublets were a common way of identifying the dualistic breakdown of all men in the eyes of a Jewish person, compare Romans 1:16; 2:9-11; 3:29, 1 Corinthians 7:19. The term “Greek” (actual Greek word Hellen Ἕλληνας) refers to a non-Jew and is to be understood as synonymous with Gentile. His point is obvious: the Good News is not subject to ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism, much to the consternation of the Judaisms of his day. Rather, the old Christian hymnal says it all: “Whosoever will may come.” In its present syntax the verse is somewhat formulaic: Faith in Messiah→Abraham’s seed→heirs according to the promise found in the very Torah of Moses! Compare this to the Influencer’s formula: Ethnic status→Abraham’s seed→heirs according to the flesh.

## **Chapter Four**

*4:1, 2 - What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.*

Comments: Rav Sha'ul now turns his attention to a teaching on the biblical concept of the heir. The Greek word rendered heir in our verse above is kleironomos κληρονόμος and as understood from the English refers to one who receives a portion allotted to him by law (as can be inferred by the suffix of the Greek nomos=law). The word shows up 14 times in the Apostolic Scriptures but is most concentrated in Rav Sha'ul's letters (3x in Romans and 3x in Galatians alone). What is Paul trying to teach us? Having begun with the peidagogos

theme in the last chapter he now focuses on the logistics of how the parent, the father of the boy in our previous midrash, has control over how and when the boy is to gain the promised family inheritance. Notice that the verse teaches that the child (a term signifying spiritual immaturity, viz, unregenerate) is both a heir and a slave. He must mature in his faith before he can utilize the family inheritance promised by his father. Once he reaches the “legal age” set by the father he then gains ownership as it were of the family inheritance, but not sooner. Until such a time, he is subject to guardians and trustees. The whole midrash is a teaching on covenant membership from a primarily 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish perspective: the Jewish people are the child, heirs according to birth, but slaves to sin and death, owners of the promises (the estate) of HaShem as spelled out to the Fathers of the Faith, Avraham, Yitz’chak, and Ya’akov, yet under the supervision of guardians and trustees (the Law and the Prophets) until the moment of spiritual salvation set by the Father in Heaven, the moment of personal trusting faithfulness in the Promised Seed, viz, Yeshua. Once the child (the Jewish people) matured in their faith (placed trust in Yeshua) they gained lasting covenant membership and thus received the promise of the Father. Merely being born Jewish did not secure the promises offered by the Father. Rather, they, being heirs, were considered as slaves being governed as it were by the Torah (the paidagogos) until they should meet the Teacher of Righteousness. In this passage Paul reveals that ‘Am Isra’el does enjoy covenant status on a limited basis due to being merely born into Avraham’s family. Yet, he does not emphasize this truth unnecessarily as it had a tendency to lead the average Jewish person to an illogical conclusion, one that suggested full and lasting covenant membership based on their position at birth (or conversion for the non-native-born Gentile) without having arrived at the “time set by his father.”

*4:3 - So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*

Comments: Paul now switches to the personal pronoun “we” to intimately identify with his audience. He too was a son of Avraham according to the flesh. He too was an heir, yet was treated like a slave until arriving at personal trust in Yeshua. Jewish ethnicity was found to be lacking of true covenant membership short of embracing faith in the Promised Seed. He stops to explain this slavery lest his audience misunderstand the analogy. Isra’el was, to one extent or another, always in slavery, even though she, at the time of Paul’s letter, dwelled in the Land of her forefathers. Now, the Zionists of Paul’s day would not easily argue about such slavery, pointing to Rome as her captor, yet Paul wanted his readers to come to an even more personal and pertinent realization that outside of personal trust in Yeshua they were slaves to the stoicheion στοιχείον<sup>53</sup> of the

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<sup>53</sup> Thayer’s and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (TSBD) στοιχείον: the elements from which all things have come, the material causes of the universe the heavenly

very world around them! In fact, the Stoics were those ancient Greek philosophers that the religious Hebrews were attempting to avoid becoming like! Yet Paul now reveals that outside of the regeneration offered by the Spirit of the Messiah a person was a legal heir (a slave) to the baser principles of human nature, complete with all of its ugliness, something surely shocking to the candidate of righteousness.

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**\*Under Construction! The following verses will also receive commentary as time permits.**

*4:4 - But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,*

Comments:

*4:5 - to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Comments:

*4:6, 7 - Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

Comments:

*4:8, 9 - Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*

Comments:

*4:10 - You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*

Comments:

*4:11 - I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

Comments:

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bodies, either as parts of the heavens or (as others think) because in them the elements of man, life and destiny were supposed to reside.

*4:21 - Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?*

Comments:

*4:22, 23 - For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.*

Comments:

*4:24 - These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.*

Comments:

*4:25, 26 - Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*

Comments:

*4:28 - Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

Comments:

*4:29 - At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.*

Comments:

*4:30 - But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

Comments:

*4:31 - Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

Comments:

**Chapter Five**

*5:1 - It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

Comments:

*5:2 - Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.*

Comments:

*5:3 - Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.*

Comments:

*5:4 - You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

Comments:

*5:5, 6 - But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

Comments:

*5:7 - You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*

Comments:

*5:11 - Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.*

Comments:

*5:13 - You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

Comments:

*5:14 - The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Comments:

*5:16 - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Comments:

*5:17 - For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

Comments:

*5:18 - But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

Comments:

*5:19-21 - The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Comments:

*5:22, 23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Comments:

*5:24-26 - Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

Comments:

## **Chapter Six**

*6:1-10 - Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each*

*one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Comments:

*6:12 - Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.*

Comments:

*6:13 - Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.*

Comments:

*6:14 - May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

Comments:

*6:15 - Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

Comments:

*6:16 - Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.*

Comments:

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**10. Summary**

Let us summarize what we have learned concerning the book of Galatians and the situation facing the Apostle there:

Dovetailing what he composed in Galatians, in his letter to Rome, Sha'ul wrote in 3:28 that God considers a person righteous on the grounds of trusting, which has

nothing to do with the Torah (or as in KJV “deeds of Law”). On the surface this seems problematic for my own teachings that consider Torah observance to be of great significance. Yet, the problem here is really more a matter of translation than of theology. What Sha’ul is really talking about when he employs the Greek phrase “ergon nomos,” translated here as “works of Law” is in actuality a technical phrase that the Judaisms of Sha’ul’s day employed to speak of the halakhah, that is, the proper way in which a Jew is to walk out Torah. Indeed, the prevailing view of the sages of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century held to the common belief that Isra’el and Isra’el alone shared a place in the world to come. Thus, if a non-Jew wished to enter into HaShem’s blessings and promises, such a person had to convert to Judaism first. To be sure, this is one of the primary arguments delineated in the letter to the Galatians.

But for Sha’ul no such ‘man-made’ conversion policy existed in Scripture!

By contrast, Sha’ul taught most assuredly that Gentiles were grafted into Isra’el the same way that Avraham was counted as righteous by God in B’resheet (Genesis) chapter 15: faith in the promised Word of the LORD. Thus, the phrase “works of Law” has a Hebrew counterpart: ma’asei haTorah. What meaneth ma’asei haTorah? The Dead Sea Scrolls used this phrase as well, and since the discovery of those manuscripts we have now come to know that it refers to “some of the precepts of the Torah,” as adjudicated by the halakhah and by the particular community wielding the most influence. To be sure, the halakhah that teaches Gentile inclusion only by way of conversion (read most often as “circumcision” in Galatians) was naturally at odds with the True Gospel of Gentile inclusion by faith in Yeshua plus nothing! If we understand that quite often Sha’ul’s use of the term circumcision in Galatians is actually shorthand for “the man-made ritual that seeks to turn Gentiles into Jews” then the letter begins to make more sense Hebraically and contextually.

In essence, “works of the law” refer to those “group requirements” as outlined and delegated by each individual group functioning under the prevailing Judaisms of Paul’s day. Rav Sha’ul (Apostle Paul), missionary to the Gentiles, had to defend the correct Torah viewpoint in his letters addressed to the Churches at Galatia (specifically chapter 5), as well as to the one in Ephesus. Circumcision, a shorthand way for Paul to say “conversion to Judaism/becoming a Jew,” was historically misused, but there is no reason for us to continue in such a misunderstanding. Nor is there any reason for the emerging Torah communities to shrink back from that which God has clearly given, provided we maintain our primary identity as that of one firmly grounded in Mashiach.

To be “under the law” is a pejorative position originally hinted at all the way back in Deuteronomy 29:19-21,

**“If there is such a person, when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself secretly, saying to himself, 'I will be all right, even**

**though I will stubbornly keep doing whatever I feel like doing; so that I, although "dry," [sinful,] will be added to the "watered" [righteous].'**

**“But ADONAI will not forgive him. Rather, the anger and jealousy of ADONAI will blaze up against that person. Every curse written in this book will be upon him. ADONAI will blot out his name from under heaven.**

**“ADONAI will single him out from all the tribes of Isra'el to experience what is bad in all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the Torah.” (Emphasis, mine)**

The verse clearly teaches us that to have “every curse written in this book upon you” is to be in a state of “not forgiven by ADONAI,” viz, “under condemnation,” viz, “under the law.”

Only the Spirit of the Holy One, writing the Torah on the heart and mind, can bring the participant to the intended goal of surrendering to the Mashiach and out from under the curse pronounced in the law. With our natural mind, we read, "do this..." and "don't do that..." and we have a tendency to misunderstand the grace behind the words. Yeshua came to explain the gracious intent of every command, by explaining the primary thrust of the Torah in the first place: leading its reader to a genuine trusting faith in the Messiah found therein—namely himself!

Moreover, grace is needed when sin blinds our eyes to believe that covenant status is granted on the basis of ethnicity, whether natural or achieved. Historic Isra'el of the 1<sup>st</sup> century genuinely believed that by virtue of being born Jewish they were automatically guaranteed covenant status. What is more, from their point of view, if someone from non-Jewish stock wished to join the covenant people all he or she needed to do was convert to Judaism, hence my use of the terms “natural” and “achieved” respectively. Natural Isra'elites—those native-born—held to the prevailing theology that Torah was given to maintain the covenant status already acquired at birth. The “ger” (Hebrew for stranger, alien, etc.) was deemed as someone in the process of becoming a Jew via the vehicle of proselyte conversion.

Rav Sha'ul went to great lengths to refute such teaching in his letters both to the Romans and to the Galatians. To be sure, if we apply this hermeneutic to those letters, instead of adopting a “grace versus law” hermeneutic, the Apostle begins to make more sense theologically and historically. I am convinced more now than ever that a foundational understanding of Paul's writings must take into account the historical fact that 1<sup>st</sup> century Isra'el reckoned herself as right-standing before HaShem on the basis of ethnicity (read as “being Jewish”) alone! She did not feel that keeping the Torah equaled positional (forensic) righteousness; she concluded—albeit incorrectly—that keeping Torah was the

vehicle that one used to maintain covenant status already achieved either at birth or by conversion.

## 11. Conclusions - Torah: Negative, Neutral, or Positive?

Our opinions of Paul and his letters should first and foremost be influenced by the raw data found within the Scriptures themselves, since it only stands to reason that historically when his letters were penned, the TaNaKH was the only inspired corpus of literature available to him. Thus, it is reasonable to presume that Paul would also expect his readers, particularly his Jewish ones, to hold similar views of the TaNaKH. “And just what view would that be?” Should it be:

- 1) Negative, as in the prevailing Christian view, that Torah was given merely to contain and limit transgressions so that man did not become excessively sinful?
- 2) Neutral, as in the Messianic Jewish view, that Torah was given to expose sin for what it really was, namely the transgression of God’s perfect standard of holiness?
- 3) Positive, as in recent Pauline authorship, that Torah was given to provide the means by which an existing covenant member might have his sins covered, with an ultimate view towards the coming eternal Sacrifice, Yeshua the prophesied Messiah?

With these options in mind let us draw our conclusion of Galatians by examining what the Torah has to say for itself, followed by a few quotations from Paul. Drawing from the biblical principle of presenting two or three witnesses to strengthen an argument, I will cite two from the 5 Books of Moshe, two from the Prophets, and two from the Writings. We will then allow these TaNaKH witnesses to either buttress Paul’s statement about the Law, or to pale in comparison to his conclusion in Galatians. So that no “foul play” accusations may be leveled, in my choice of verses from the Chumash, I selected only verses that refer to the written Torah, as it pertains to its historical revelation, viz, “Sinai” (post Avraham, post Egyptian Exodus):

Torah:

**Look, I have taught you laws and rulings, just as ADONAI my God ordered me, so that you can behave accordingly in the land where you are going in order to take possession of it. Therefore, observe them; and follow them; for then all peoples will see you as having wisdom and understanding. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, 'This great nation is surely a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God as close to them as ADONAI our God is, whenever we call on him? What great nation is there that has laws and rulings as just as this entire Torah which I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)**

And,

**"However, all this will happen only if you pay attention to what ADONAI your God says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah, if you turn to ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being. For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' On the contrary, the word is very close to you - in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it! (Deuteronomy 30:10-14)**

Nevi'im (Prophets):

**Only be strong and very bold in taking care to follow all the Torah which Moshe my servant ordered you to follow; do not turn from it either to the right or to the left; then you will succeed wherever you go. Yes, keep this book of the Torah on your lips, and meditate on it day and night, so that you will take care to act according to everything written in it. Then your undertakings will prosper, and you will succeed. (Joshua 1:7, 8)**

And,

**"Blessed be ADONAI, who has given rest to his people Isra'el, in accordance with everything he promised. Not one word has failed of his good promise, which he made through Moshe his servant. May ADONAI our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us or abandon us. In this way he will incline our hearts toward him, so that we will live according to his ways and observe his mitzvot, laws and rulings which he ordered our fathers to obey. May these words of mine, which I have used in my plea before ADONAI, be present with ADONAI our God day and night, so that he will uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Isra'el day by day. Then all the peoples of the earth will know that ADONAI is God; there is no other. So be wholehearted with ADONAI our God, living by his laws and observing his mitzvot, as you are doing today." (M'lakhim Alef [1 Kings] 8:56-61)**

K'tuvim (Writings):

**The Torah of ADONAI is perfect, restoring the inner person. The instruction of ADONAI is sure, making wise the thoughtless. The precepts of ADONAI are right, rejoicing the heart. The mitzvah of ADONAI is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of ADONAI is clean, enduring forever. The rulings of ADONAI are true, they are righteous altogether, more desirable than gold, than much fine gold, also sweeter than honey or drippings from the honeycomb. Through them your servant is warned; in obeying them there is great reward. (Tehillim [Psalms] 19:8[7]-12[11])**

And,

**For the mitzvah is a lamp, Torah is light, and reproofs that discipline are the way to life. (Proverbs 6:23)**

Finally, the witness of the Apostle Paul himself in books other than Galatians:

**So the torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good. (Romans 7:12)**

And,

**But you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, recalling the people from whom you learned it; and recalling too how from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through trusting in Yeshua the Messiah. All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)**

Nu?<sup>54</sup> Within the context of Galatians 3:19, have you the reader decided which view of the Torah you think Rav Sha'ul held to? Negative, neutral, or, positive?

## **12. The Promise**

A “Christian” attempt at disproving the validity of the important covenantal sign of circumcision has caused much strife and division among the body of believing Jews and Gentiles. The matter is made clear when we understand that HaShem never meant for this sign to secure the promises for the believer! This was to be the sign that he was connected via covenant to a larger family. Is it valid for the

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<sup>54</sup> A general-purpose Yiddish word meaning variously, “Well?” “So?” “Indeed!” “I challenge you,” or “If not that, then what?”, with many possible inflections and overtones.

Jews today? Yes! In this way, we forever identify physically and spiritually with the unending covenant made with our father Avraham. Is it practical for non-Jewish believers? Unfortunately at this juncture in history, it is not. Until the Church gets right its view of the Torah and the trappings of legalism, it is somewhat discouraged by Messianic Jewish rabbis. I am not saying that Gentiles cannot undergo this ritual. I am delighted to encounter those few Gentiles who truly understand it's meaning enough to "go under the knife." Is it necessary for the salvation of an individual? No! It never was!

What makes Avraham such a great role model of faith is that, not only did he trust in the Word of HaShem, but the LORD saw into his future and predicted that his offspring would also be taught how to trust in the Almighty. Let's look at Genesis 18:17-19,

**"ADONAI said, "Should I hide from Avraham what I am about to do, inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him? For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of ADONAI and to do what is right and just, so that ADONAI may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him." (Emphasis, mine)**

This is a fantastic statement from the mouth of the One who sees every human possibility! Would that we might have HaShem pronounce this blessing over our families today! What must we do? The divine tandem-like actions spoken of here must not be taken too lightly. Firstly, God promises to be faithful to make himself known to us. We like faithful Avraham are then enabled and subsequently covenant-bound to obey the Teachings of our Heavenly Father. Finally, such Teachings are uniquely designed to bring about a righteous behavior in our lives, aligning our lives to be the object of God's righteous promises! To be sure, the syntax of the above p'sukim (verses) is hinting at that very reality (note the running continuity suggested by the connecting phrases "**so that**" in the quote above)! Furthermore, we must, like faithful Avraham, trust in the LORD against all unbelievable odds, to perform in our lives, the promise that he has given us through Yeshua our Messiah! What is that promise?

**"Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose; because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous he also glorified!" (Romans 8:28-30)**

We usually stop at the first verse, but reading further informs us of our true identity in Messiah: righteous heirs according to trusting faithfulness, causing us to be called, as faithful Avraham was called, “righteous!”

In closing, we affirm with perfect faith that genuine and lasting covenant status is granted to the individual who eventually exercises genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem—namely, the Messiah Yeshua. Such status is offered freely to both Jew and Gentile. Jewish people with natural lineage tracing back to Ya’akov are in fact born with a “corporate covenant status” given freely by God and based on his promises made to Avraham. However, this does not automatically grant them the status of right standing in a positional sense. There is no such thing as “involuntary corporate righteousness” in the Torah of HaShem. For the native-born Jewish person, the proper sequence for the covenants is demonstrated when such an individual “graduates” from [mere] corporate faith and belonging towards personal faith in God. To be sure, it is only when God does his monergistic work of opening the eyes of the blind and drawing the individual into his covenant of faith that the person attains genuine and lasting covenant status—the kind of covenant status that is worthy of a place in the ‘Olam Haba (Age to Come).

What place hath the Torah in the life of such an individual? The Torah comes alongside of the Promise (covenant status) and acts as a guarantor that the individual will also achieve behavioral righteousness, thus placing him or her on a direct collision course with the blessings of HaShem! Far from frustrating the grace of God, Torah compliments the grace of God!

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