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Exegeting Galatians

A Messianic
Jewish
Commentary

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<http://www.servantofmessiah.org>

EXEGETING GALATIANS

A Messianic Jewish
Commentary



A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)

By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

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PREFACE

Ten Common Questions Regarding Torah Observance for Gentile Christians

If you are like me, sometimes you want to know an author's main point within a few minutes of delving into one of his studies. This way you can decide if you want to invest the time it will take to read the next few hundred pages he wrote in support of his main thesis. That being the case, I will go ahead and tip my cards to you, my readers, right from the beginning. From my limited experience of studying Paul with many well-meaning folks, both Jewish and Gentile, layman and seminarians, I have found that those who study Paul fall into essentially two often opposing camps when it comes to interpreting and practically applying his letter to the Galatians: 1) Lutheran (Reformation) Paul, and 2) New Perspective on Paul (NPP).

The first school of thought—Lutheran Paul—represents essentially the traditional reading of Paul, the popular reading of Paul, the prevailing perspective of Paul within standard Christianity. This hermeneutic for the most part espouses to a belief that Paul seems to depict Judaism as coldly and calculatingly legalistic, a system of 'works' righteousness, where salvation is earned by the merit of good works. To quote James D.G. Dunn, "Since Paul's teaching on justification by faith seems to speak so directly to Luther's subjective wrestlings, it was a natural corollary to see Paul's opponents in terms of the unreformed Catholicism which opposed Luther, with first-Century Judaism read through the 'grid' of the early sixteenth-Century Catholic system of merit. To a remarkable and indeed alarming degree, throughout this Century the standard depiction of the Judaism which Paul rejected has been the reflex of Lutheran hermeneutic."¹ This view of Paul often interprets Paul as preaching a "Law-free" gospel, where believers in Yeshua (Jesus) are set free from the "bondages" of the Law of Moses and are instead obligated by the Law of Christ. While I actually agree with most of the central, foundational truths of Christianity, and even though I too am not ashamed to call myself a "Christian," for the most part, as a Messianic Jewish man who believes that the promise of the New Covenant teaches that the Law of God (Torah) is written on my heart and that by his Spirit I am subsequently empowered and covenant bound to keep it, I'm afraid that I simply cannot espouse to the prevailing, traditional Christian views that teach that much of the Torah (ceremonial and civil) is not for [Gentile] believers in Christ.

In fact, with the exception of the rejection of the ongoing relevance of the so-called "ceremonial" and "civil" parts of the Law, I firmly believe Luther and Calvin (Lutheran Paul and Reformation Paul perspectives) did their jobs well, and I commend and respect them for that. In contrast to what many NPP advocates often assume, I sincerely believe they demonstrated their understanding of Paul quite accurately, yet felt the need to contextualize his message for their respective modern audiences. In other words, Luther (and Calvin after him) did what any good preacher should do with the timeless Word of God: interpret it and apply it to the current situation you are faced with. In this regard, to the degree that Gentile Christians are assured of their genuine covenant standing as securely rooted in the finished work of Messiah—as Gentiles,—Lutheran Paul and Reformation Paul are necessary and accurate applications of Paul's words. That being said, however, Lutheran Paul and Reformation Paul are not the same thing as 1st Century Paul. And that is why I believe we need, to some degree, all three views on Paul. For indeed, with the unfortunate exception of today's modern Messianic Jewish Movement and its ugly tendency to relegate Gentile Christians as 2nd class citizens in their congregations, most historic and modern Gentile Christians are not entertaining notions of taking on legal Jewish status for the ostensible sake of becoming genuine covenant members in Isra'el. No, for the mainstream Christian Church in general, this socio-religious power struggle seems to have been a uniquely 1st Century Jewish-Gentile dilemma.

The more recent school of thought—New Perspective on Paul—represents a break from Lutheran Paul in an effort to place Paul more sharply focused within the specific 1st Century religious Jewish communities that he existed among. The “seminal” work that introduced this new perspective to mainstream Christianity was published in 1977 under the title ‘Paul and Palestinian Judaism,’ written by E.P. Sanders, a Christian and New Testament scholar. Comparing Sanders to the Lutheran Paul, Dunn again notes:

Sanders, however, has built up a different presentation of Palestinian Judaism at the time of Paul. From a massive treatment of much of the relevant Jewish literature for that period, a rather different picture emerges. In particular, he has shown with sufficient weight of evidence that for the first-Century Jew, Israel’s covenant relation with God was basic, basic to the Jew’s sense of national identity and to his understanding of his religion. So far as we can tell now, for first-Century Judaism everything was an elaboration of the fundamental axiom that the one God had chosen Israel to be his peculiar people, to enjoy a special relationship under his rule. The law had been given as an expression of this covenant, to regulate and maintain the relationship established by the covenant. So, too, righteousness must be seen in terms of this relationship, as referring to conduct appropriate to this relationship, conduct in accord with the law. That is to say, obedience to the law in Judaism was never thought of as a means of entering the covenant, of attaining that special relationship with God; it was more a matter of maintaining the covenant relationship with God. From this Sanders draws out his key phrase to characterize first-Century Palestinian Judaism – ‘covenantal nomism.’²

Therefore, with regards to how to better understand Paul’s writings from within his own Judaism and their 1st Century covenant relationships, and to make his theological arguments more sociologically relevant from their perspective, Sanders employs a method of logic he describes as “getting in” and “staying in,” where “getting in” deals with election and “staying in” deals with obedience. The interpretations of ‘works of the Law’ and ‘justified’ (viz, status of righteousness) in Paul become tipping points of disagreement between the traditional Lutheran perspective on Paul and this newer perspective. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the ongoing (sometimes heated) debates over how to properly interpret and practically apply Galatians 2:16, a verse that uses both of these foundationally important Jewish concepts:

“...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16, ESV).

Sanders describes his own understanding of ‘works of the Law’ and ‘righteousness’ in Paul thusly:

One does not find in Paul any trace of the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish distinction between being righteous (man/man) and pious (man/God); nor is righteousness in Paul one virtue among others. Here, however, there is also a major shift; for to be righteous in Jewish literature means to obey the Torah and to repent of transgression, but in Paul it means to be saved by Christ. Most succinctly, righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect; in Paul it is a transfer term. In Judaism, that is, commitment to the covenant puts one ‘in’, while obedience (righteousness) subsequently keeps one in. In Paul’s usage, ‘be made righteous’ (‘be justified’) is a term indicating getting in, not staying in the body of the saved. Thus when Paul says that one cannot be made righteous by works of law, he means that one cannot, by works of law, ‘transfer to the body of the saved’. When Judaism said that one is righteous who obeys the law, the meaning is that one thereby stays in the covenant. The debate about righteousness by faith or by works of law thus turns out to result from the different usage of the ‘righteous’ word-group.³⁻

I want my readers to know right up front that I do NOT believe one can be counted as forensically righteous (viz, saved) by keeping the Torah. For that matter, I do NOT believe God ever expected perfect obedience, or that the Bible insinuates a hypothetical perfect Law-keeping anywhere at all. For one thing, all of the laws cannot be enacted by a single individual because the totality of them were not designed by God to be done by a single individual (some are for kings, some for priests, some for men, others for women, etc.). However, the “word is in [our] mouth and heart so that [we] can do it” (Deut 30:14), and “his commandments are not

“burdensome” (1 John 5:3), and it is possible to be “righteous before God and walk blamelessly in all the statutes and commandments” (Luke 1:6), and “the righteous requirement of the Law [is] fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:4). And in point of fact, “the Law is good if one uses it lawfully” (1 Tim 1:8), with the understanding that “the whole Law is fulfilled in one word” if you “love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14). Understanding the Law correctly means I dare NOT suppose that one can be counted as forensically righteous by the ‘works of the Law,’ and I dare NOT suppose one can be counted as forensically righteous by being born Jewish or by becoming a Jewish proselyte (see Section Three below for more on works of the Law and Jewish proselytism).

However, I am unashamedly in favor of saved Jews and Gentiles walking into the Torah of Moshe as a blueprint for daily living. This includes many of what Christianity identifies as “ceremonial” and/or “civil” commandments such as seventh-day Sabbath, keeping kosher, keeping the Festivals of Leviticus 23, and other such patterns of religion that most people associate with “Jewishness.” I do NOT believe it was “relaxed” or “fulfilled” in Jesus, so that we no longer have to keep it. I do NOT believe Paul warned any believers away from genuine Spirit-led Torah obedience—whether they be Jewish or Gentile. After all relevant sources have been brought to the table for examination, in the end, as a Messianic Jew with a “pro-Torah” conviction, I find that I have more agreement with the direction that the NPP is headed (towards covenant loyalty to Torah) than with where Lutheran Paul is headed (away from covenant loyalty to Torah).

I want to let the readers know right up front that my primary thesis to understanding the book of Galatians essentially launches from the New Perspective on Paul, although, I do not agree with all of the ramifications of the NPP view, and particularly with some of Sanders’ conclusions to his studies. But I think the NPP is headed in the right direction. Indeed, we have needed a fresh look at Pauline studies for a long time, and now that scholars are ready to accept the fact that Paul was a Jew who maintained a lifelong loyalty to Torah even after coming to faith in the risen Yeshua, we are finally able to begin to study Paul on his own terms and let him have his own voice (instead of that of a 16th Century reformer).

So, let’s begin to ask some probing questions. Why did Paul write the book of Galatians? Was it to warn Gentile Christians away from getting sucked into the dead religion known as Judaism? Was it to expose the uselessness of the Law of Moses in the life of a believer in Jesus? Was it to show fellow Jewish believers that to fall back to a life of ceremony, ritual, circumcision, Sabbath, Feast Days, kosher, etc., was to fall back into slavery and bondage, and that they should instead keep pressing forward to the freedom found only in a relationship with Yeshua? Or perhaps there was a different reason the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) superintended the writing of this letter.

Let’s imagine for a moment that you, a 21st Century Christian, have just finished reading the letter to Galatians, and then you pick up this commentary and go through it in one sitting. What thoughts do I, the author of this commentary, hope that you might have concerning what you just read here? I write my commentaries with the hopes that they will stimulate real-life dialogue about Jewish and Christian relations. I am keenly aware that the mainstream Christian movement does not embrace Torah obedience as a way of religious life, and that they quite often separate the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil components—with Jesus doing away with the ceremonial and civil.⁴ This commentary is designed to challenge the mainstream Christian notion that as believers in Yeshua we are no longer bound to ceremonies of the Law the likes of Sabbath, Feast Days, kosher, and of course that painful commandment, circumcision. To be sure, I affirm the ongoing validity and application of those commandments just listed—to include a host of others not listed here. Put another way, I don’t believe Jesus came to set us free from keeping Torah; he came to empower us to keep it properly.

In an effort to begin to develop a working context for the social settings that many believers might face after reading this book study to Galatians, I have decided to entertain ten common questions (or Christian objections) to the notion of Torah observance for Gentile Christians. Indeed, in my experience of speaking at various Christian churches and Bible studies as a Messianic Jew, I have been asked these exact questions

or variations of these questions by genuine and well-meaning Christians no doubt, but questions which often times stop Gentile Christians from embracing the notion of Torah observance in their lives. The objections and the subsequent answers are not exhaustive. They are only meant to serve as the beginning of a dialogue between those believers who embrace Torah as a lifestyle and those believers who do not, and as a primer to this study on Galatians and Paul. For ease of understanding, this preface was actually designed to stand alone as its own mini-study on Torah observance. These ten questions were originally presented as a live Bible study to a Christian men's group in Boulder Colorado in 2013 a few days before I moved to South Korea.

1. Question: What is Torah?

Answer: Torah is "God's Teaching" but Torah is also "Law." Using this comprehensive historical definition, the whole bible is Torah because all of it is God's thoughts that have been breathed out by him. Recall Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:16-17: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."* However, the word Torah most often simply refers to the first 5 books of the Bible.

2. Question: To whom was Torah given and who is required/allowed to follow it?

Answer: Recall that the Torah was historically given to Isra'el nearly 3500 years ago, but realize that Isra'el's post-Egypt beginnings included both native-born sons of Jacob, as well as those mixed racial multitudes that God delivered out of Egypt during the Passover. These two groups came to the foot of Mount Sinai, received the Words of God, and were collectively called "Isra'el" by the text (read the Exodus narratives carefully again). Paul later reveals that the "mystery of the Gospel" is that according to Rom. 11 and Eph. chapters 2 and 3 and specifically 6:19, Gentiles are "grafted into the commonwealth of Isra'el via Messiah, and become fellow heirs sharing in the richness of the root of the Olive Tree and inheriting the blessings spelled out in the Torah for all of obedient Isra'el." Therefore, since Isra'el is actually a multi-ethnic entity, Torah actually applies to all who name the name of the LORD as their one and Only God. This naturally includes Gentile believers in Yeshua.

3. Question: Didn't Yeshua fulfill the Law and nail the Law to the cross?

Answer: This is a central teaching of the Bible and thus, this answer is going to be longer than normal. Yeshua did indeed bring the Law to its fullest intended meaning and expression. The root Greek word *pleroo* (fulfill in Matt. 5:17) simply means to fill to the top, to make full, to bring to realization. Contrary to popular Christian teaching, God's Torah never commanded or expected sinless perfection else the sacrifices for sin would be meaningless. However, in Messiah, we are in fact supposed to strive towards perfection in this life until one day we finally put it on for eternity. Therefore, in this life, and while the Temple stood in Jerusalem, true obedience to Torah included bringing sacrifices when one sinned—thus, the Torah actually anticipated our failure to keep it from time to time by making provision for our shortcomings (read Gal. 3:19). Without expecting sinless perfection, the Torah nevertheless does consider even a single breach to be guilty of violating the whole, thus, to break one commandment was to be guilty of breaking them all (read James [Jacob] 2:10). And since the final payment for sin would have demanded the final death of the sinner (Ezek. 18:20), Yeshua paid this price by dying in our place—thus fulfilling the payment required by the Torah. But Yeshua's words here in Matthew carry an additional meaning, as evidenced by his own explanation in verses 18 through 20 (and indeed the rest of his sermon on the Mount). In the following verses, the Master plainly reveals that all of Torah must eventually be fulfilled, and even implies that true followers of God will carry out this fulfillment by doing and teaching others to do even the least of the commandments. After all, just because Yeshua obeyed the Torah perfectly, this doesn't excuse believers from remaining obedient to its commandments. On the contrary, now that we have a perfect example of Torah obedience to emulate, we too—by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh—can and should pursue Torah obedience, and teach others to do so, if we wish to be obedient to the Master's words here in Matthew. So what exactly got nailed to the cross if it was NOT the Torah? Paul explains in Col. 2:14 that it was the certificate of our debt—our ultimate

failure to pay for our sins—that was nailed to cross; it was not the Torah that was nailed to the cross. We owed God a debt we could not pay because the payment demanded a sinless sacrifice—a payment we could never make on our own. This accords with the Torah, which actually adjudicates penalties for unrepentant sinners. By Yeshua's blood, those penalties (debts) have been paid in full and have satisfied God's courtroom ledger—they have been nailed to the cross. Elsewhere in Romans, Paul teaches that because believers have died to sin in Yeshua, the ultimate penalty for sin—death—no longer applies to us. Jesus nailed those penalties of the Torah that were reserved for unrepentant sinners to his cross. For a fuller treatment on the sacrifices of the Torah, read or listen to my commentary *Towards Understanding Sacrifices and Atonement* available at my site www.GraftedIn.com.

4. Question: Doesn't Paul teach in many locations that we are free from the Law?

Answer: Biblical freedom does not mean free from Law. Again, knowing that Yeshua set us free from sin, its proclivities, its bondage, and its ultimate penalty, helps us to understand Paul's teachings on this subject. The paradigm set by the Exodus narrative teaches us that sin (bondage) prevents us from truly worshiping God the way he deserves to be worshipped. Moses said, "Let my people go so that they may serve me!" Once Yeshua makes us alive in him and sets us free indeed, we are then free to worship God properly without the fear of condemnation or bondage to sin. This means we are free to walk into Torah the way God intended it to be walked out: by the Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Read Romans 8:1-7 as well as Answer 10 below.

5. Question: Paul says in Rom 6:14 that we are not under Law but under grace.

Answer: The difficulty in correctly interpreting Paul is in understanding that his uses of the word Law in many of his letters applies the definition from the context, which means the root Greek word used (nomos=law) can apply to a variety of definitions. Paul's "not under Law" phrase is preceded by "For sin shall not have dominion over you..." In this verse, Law does not mean we are not under obligation to Torah commands. Rather, it most naturally functions in this verse as shorthand for "not under the bondage of sin and therefore under the condemnation of the Law," a just condemnation reserved for unrepentant sinners. The reason we are not under [the] condemnation [of the Law] is because we are not under bondage, and the reason we are not under bondage is because we have been set free and are under [the] grace [of Yeshua's blood].

6. Question: Paul says, "We are not saved by "works of the Law." Explain.

Answer: This will easily be the longest answer of the set because it will develop one of the core hermeneutic keys to historically understanding Paul's letters. "Works of the Law" (greek=ergon nomou) is one of the most challenging statements of Paul when read outside of the context of Paul's 1st Century Jewish worldview. On the one hand, mere mechanical Law-keeping will NEVER save anyone, nor will sincere Law-keeping for that matter. The Torah was not given of God to provide salvation of the soul. However, it is a wonderful sanctification tool when used by the Holy Spirit. And it is a tool used to highlight and convict both regenerate and unregenerate men of sin. So on the theological level, it is true that keeping the Law does NOT save us. In fact, keeping the Torah has never saved anyone. However, the standard Christian theological discussions on "Law vs. Grace" often fail to grasp Paul's 2000 year-old historical and sociological discussions about group membership and what this meant to many 1st Century Jews. In Paul's day, Isra'el sincerely, albeit incorrectly, believed that group affiliation is what mattered most in terms of corporate salvation—both in this life and in the life to come after one died. Belonging to (getting into and staying in) the family clan of Isra'el was the most important detail an individual person could focus on. Jews both then and now refer to the social policies that govern Jewish life as "halakhah," a Hebrew word referring to "the way in which to individually or corporately walk out Torah in a practical manner." The Torah has built-in God-given halakhah, but most often, it was the additional responsibility of Jewish leaders to determine specific group policy, etc., where the Torah was silent in some matters. In their segregated way of thinking, all of covenant Isra'el was comprised of Jewish people only, viz, every one in Isra'el was a Jew. If a non-Jew wanted to

attain corporate salvation (both now and after they died), that person needed to legally convert to become a Jew first and thus join “Jewish Israel.” Once they were legally recognized as Jewish, their place in the physical covenant was ostensibly maintained by keeping the Torah. This “group membership-imposed Torah observance” concept is termed “covenantal nomism.” Thus Paul’s term “works of the Law” is actually a sociological and technical phrase used to describe the historic Jewish-only policy that forbade Gentiles from joining Isra’el without going through a man-made conversion policy to become a Jew. In short, this policy suggests that the Torah was and is for Jews only. “Works of the Law” was an ancient way of referring to “Jewish identity leading to covenant faithfulness.” For Jews in the 1st Century, God was offering a simple package deal equation: “Jewish Isra’el” + “Torah keeping” = “corporate salvation both in this life and in the life to come.” Obviously by now most Christians understand that this historic, theological, Jewish-only policy is at odds with the genuine gospel of God through his chosen Messiah Yeshua, a gospel taught from Genesis to Revelation. Using this more historically accurate way of interpreting Paul’s writings in the NT, we understand Paul to be opposing this 1st Century inaccurate theological policy by saying to both Jews and Gentiles, “No one gets into Isra’el (is saved) merely by being or becoming Jewish and then stays in Isra’el by keeping Torah...” How do we know this to be the proper interpretation of Paul’s writings? If we study the NT as an historical document alongside the other extant writings that have survived from the 1st Century Judaism (the rabbinic commentaries, Talmud, etc.), as well as corroborate the theology of the Old Testament in proper context, then we begin to get a more accurate picture of the pattern of theology of the 1st Century Jewish people and what we discover is that the Jewish concept of individual/group salvation cannot be easily caricatured by simplistic “merit theology” the way historic Christianity has traditionally characterized Jewish devotion to Torah.

7. Question: Doesn’t Romans 14 teach that Sabbath-keeping is optional?

Answer: Space does not permit me to develop the complete context of this familiar passage. But suffice to say Paul could NOT have been suggesting that Sabbath-keeping is optional because the Torah does not present Sabbath-keeping as optional for Isra’el (read Exodus 31:16). On the contrary: Sabbath is the very sign of the Mosaic covenant. It is the very wedding ring between God and his bride Isra’el. The passage is most likely comparing fast days with non-fast days, and the fact that those who fast consider that day as special, whereas those who are not fasting on that same day do not consider that fast day special. Moreover, the larger context even goes on to teach that God accepts each person’s devotional behavior since it is done in service to the very same God as each man’s counterpart. This means that even if Paul were referring to Sabbath, at the very least, no one can judge one’s brother based on keeping or not keeping. There is much more to this passage but I will leave off here for now.

8. Question: Explain Colossians 2:16.

Answer: The verse reads, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” (ESV). The traditional interpretation of this passage suggests a scenario where a 1st –Century Torah-observant believer is passing judgment on a non-Torah observant believer for NOT keeping the Torah. However, this doesn’t accord with the historical context in light of what we learned in Answer 6 above. It is more likely that Paul understood that gentile believers would be joining existing Jewish communities in his day, and that these Jewish communities would feel uncomfortable with Gentiles keeping Torah as Gentiles, while at the same time claiming the promises of God through Yeshua. It is more likely then that the judgment being passed was not from Torah-observant believers down to non-Torah observant believers, but was in fact the opposite: it was likely judgment was being passed from the unbelieving Jewish community to Torah-observant gentile Christians for keeping Torah without going through the ritual of conversion first. In a word, it is historically tenable that unbelieving Isra’el became jealous and outraged at Paul’s teachings at the newly fledged gentile inclusion into Isra’el via association with a slain Jewish martyr sans circumcision.

9. Question: Doesn’t Paul explicitly say in Galatians 5 that the Law is bondage?

Answer: Read Answer 6 above and then read Galatians again. Context shows that Paul is combatting ethnic-driven corporate righteousness and ostensible covenant membership based on the social expectation and maintenance of Law-keeping. The bondage of chapter 5 verse 1 is spiritual bondage spelled out for any believer who might wish to return to a 1st Century Jewish worldview of corporate/individual salvation and sanctification based on group membership and maintenance of Torah commands. Recall that in covenantal nomism, one “gets in” by belonging to the group (being legally born with or married into Jewish identity, or conversion to the legal status of Jewish), and one “stays in” by keeping Torah. Remind yourself that neither of these two “gets in—stays in” facts are true in God’s courtroom. Thus, Paul is warning the genuine Galatian believers that to “get in” one places his trust in Yeshua, and that to “stay in” one waits for the hope of righteousness by faith. The debt to the “whole Law” of verse 3 is a debt to whatever ethnocentric Jewish conversion policy the hapless gentile converts would submit themselves to should they venture down that bondage-laden path—a debt that surely excluded group membership and Torah observance for non-Jews. Justification by Law in verse 4 means ostensible justification by the policy that teaches a “Jewish-only Isra’el.”

10. Question: Isn’t the Law written on our hearts now? Why try to keep it externally?

Answer: Having the Law written on the heart is indeed a NT feature (read Hebrews chapter 8 and chapter 10), but wasn’t having the Law on the heart already an Old Testament feature from the beginning? Let’s keep reading to find out. Speaking of the Torah, Moses taught in Deut. 30:14, “The word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” The psalmist stated, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). Surely Psalm 19:7-13, as well as the entire chapter of 119, is speaking favorably of the Torah of Moshe—the Law of God. Paul coined the phrases “Law of the Spirit of life,” and “law of sin” in Romans. He also coined the phrase “Law of Christ” in 1 Cor. 9:21, and again in Gal. 6:2. In Yeshua, Paul calls the Torah holy, righteous, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14) and considered himself to be in agreement with and a servant of the Law of God with his mind (Rom. 7:22, 25). Moreover, Paul also speaks of love being the “fulfillment of the Law” in Rom. 13:10, and James (Jacob) speaks of the “Perfect Law of Liberty” in 1:25 of his letter to believers. With these data in mind, where then should the Law of Moses fit within the NT theology for the believer in Messiah? Firstly, we must affirm that according to the Bible, only the circumcised heart can have the Law of God written upon it. Also, recall that when the NT was being written, the ONLY righteous Law given of God that Isra’el knew of was the Law of Moses—the very same Law that Yeshua stated in Matt. 5 would not pass away—even down to the smallest jot or tittle—until all is fulfilled (read Answer 3 above). Therefore, the NT writers could not have been speaking of anything other than the Law of God that would be written in our hearts as believers. The proof that the Law written on our heart is the very Law of Moses is made evident when we go back and continue to read about this “internal” heart law from the pages of the Old Testament itself:

Deut. 6:6, “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.”

Deut. 10:16, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.”

Deut. 30:6, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”

Ps. 40:8, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

Jer. 31:33, “But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Ezek. 11:19-20, “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

Ezek. 36:26-27, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and

cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them].

It is clear from these “Old Testament” verses that the Law of the heart is the Law of God—the Law of Moshe. It is also clear that the Spirit of God—the Ruach HaKodesh—writes this Law on the heart of those who genuinely know and love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, a love only possible when one surrenders to the Messiah Yeshua. With this in mind, we can now appreciate Paul’s statement in Rom. 8 (hinted at in Answer 4 above, but presented in its entirety here):

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:1-8, ESV).

We see then that the Torah is the universal document for both peoples and it outlines God’s plan for all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles. God’s eternal promises are intended for all those with circumcised hearts and only the Spirit of God can write the Word of God on the heart of an individual. Thus, the Torah is not just for Jews only! A person does not need to take on legally recognized Jewish status in order to be grafted into the people group of Isra’el. This will become a central theme of Paul’s letters and it will particularly be helpful for us as we study the historical, social, and religious context of the book of Galatians.

¹ James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Section I.

² Ibid., Section I.

³ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress Press, 1977), p. 544.

⁴ Example article: <http://www.gotquestions.org/ceremonial-law.html>.

INTRODUCTION

In my opinion as one who embraces both Yeshua as Messiah as well as the Torah of Moshe as a practical guidebook for everyday living, I believe historically, the book of Galatians has challenged Christian commentators due largely to the technical discussions of biblical topics ranging from circumcision, to the Torah, to freedom in Christ. Sha'ul (a.k.a. Paul or Saul) uses quite a number of technical phrases and words in this letter and these terms, when removed from their original 1st Century Judaic context, will have the tendency to form the impetus for many and varied Christian interpretations that end up teaching concepts nearly quite the opposite of their original purpose. I am not so bold as to imagine as one author that I have uncovered total truth on the matter. Rather, what I am attempting to do is challenge us as students of God's Word to take a very scientific approach, if you will, to understanding how Paul's original readers would have interacted with this letter, and exactly what course of action the author Paul was expecting them to take as a result of reading and implementing his letter. This means putting aside our preconceived Jewish and Christian biases and letting Galatians—indeed the entire Word of God—speak for itself. We all see through glasses tainted by bias, and I am no different. But how different would the text become if we could borrow the glasses of the Apostle Paul for a few weeks while we poured through his letter concept by concept? By God's grace, this study is going to attempt to do just that.

This study is going to be a bit different in its approach to the letter of Galatians. I am not going to simply conduct a verse-by-verse exposition of every pasuk (verse) that Paul wrote. Instead, the first ten lessons will treat the context of the letter of Galatians as a whole topical study, examining concepts found in the letter one by one first—viz, circumcision, works of the Law, under the Law, etc. Once we have laid the contextual foundation for the social setting of this letter, I believe we will be in a better position to exegete individual verses (tough passages) one by one, which we will actually do in the second, more lengthy excursus portion of this commentary (see the Table of Contents for more details).

It is my hope that this contextual study along with its limited excursus of selected tough passages from the book 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 portion of the contextual study, allow me to start in B'resheet (Genesis) with Avraham and circumcision. We will put "bookends" on the study by concluding with Avraham and circumcision as well in Section Ten (The Promise: Trust and Obey). If we begin to peel back the mysteries surrounding this simple biblical command, and the way the 1st Century Judaisms interacted with it, we stand a better chance at understanding Sha'ul and his enigmatic instructions.

1. “B’RIT MILAH” (COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION)

The book of Galatians contains an important rebuke and admonition to 1st Century Isra’el and to the Gentiles living among her in the region known as Galatia. Among its central topics mentioned, circumcision surely occupies a good deal of the apostle’s foundational hermeneutic principles. He who unlocks Paul’s important corrective theology behind the popular Jewish notion of ‘covenant of circumcision’ (Hebrew=b’rit milah) unlocks a good portion of the meaning to the rest of the letter itself. In order to properly see circumcision the way Paul saw it, our theology must be rooted, not in the teachings of the rabbis of today, or even in the sermons of the pastors of today (not that either one of those are bad), but our theology must originate from the Torah first—the very same way Paul’s was. And in the end, if the views of the rabbis and pastors of today line up with what the Torah teaches, then all is well and good.

Paul took a survey of 1st Century Isra’el’s current social understanding of circumcision and he immediately spotted a problem in her historic approach and application to covenant status in relation to circumcision. Dr. Hung-Sik Choi, adjunct professor at Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology here in Seoul, South Korea, captures the force of the problem in his short paper on ‘The Galatian Agitators’ Theological Rationale For Circumcision’:

Although many aspects of the agitators’ gospel are unclear, there is little doubt that circumcision was an important component. There are two indications. It can be safely inferred from 5:2-3 that the Galatians intended to be circumcised because they were persuaded by the agitators’ demand of circumcision. In 6:12-13 it is apparent that the agitators in Galatia were teaching that the Galatians must be circumcised. They were trying to compel the Galatians to be circumcised (6:12). And also they wanted the Galatians to be circumcised so that they may boast about the circumcision of the Galatians (6:13).⁵

Paul knew that circumcision as a sign of the covenant was first given to Papa Abraham way back in Genesis 17, and that its location in the narrative was key to properly understanding and applying its covenantal meaning. Paul then set out to allow the Holy Spirit to masterfully utilize this wonderful covenant sign as a didactic teaching for his readers in Galatia. Given the fact that his immediate readers lived in the exact same social setting as him, we can only assume they better understood his use of this term when it shows up in his letter to them. Unfortunately, since successive generations of Bible readers are understandably removed from that 1st Century Jewish social context, arguably, we stand a greater chance of misunderstanding this term without help from the Genesis narrative. To be sure, if we want to see what Paul saw, we have to start with Abraham also.

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 reveals 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.

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. 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, precedes the patriarch's obedience to the sign of circumcision. On the macro, the covenant of Avraham precedes the covenant with Moshe.⁶

Thinking from a 21st 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.

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 circumcise both himself as well as 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!

With this foundational Genesis teaching in our arsenal, we are now poised to turn our attention directly to Paul's continuing application of circumcision in the life of a 1st Century covenant member—be he Jewish or Gentile. Paul does not indicate in Galatians that circumcision was being relaxed now that the prophesied Messiah has come and gone. What Paul does teach is that circumcision must be properly understood and applied on a community level if each Torah-true covenant member was to remain in right standing with God. Put another way, to misunderstand the meaning of circumcision as a 1st Century Jew or Gentile was to risk "falling from grace," a warning Paul will reiterate directly in chapter five of his letter to this community. We will continue to unpack the implications of misunderstanding and misusing this covenantal sign when we discuss the topic of 'works of the Law' below.

But just before we turn to the socio-religious aspects of circumcision, we may remind ourselves that we know as 21st Century Bible students studying the scriptures that circumcision was given by God to Avraham as an important covenant sign for him and the generations to come after him. But have you ever stopped to ask the obvious "\$64, 000" question: "Why did God ask Avraham to cut away *that* particular part of his body?" Since I believe it bears relevance for our correct understanding of Paul and the book of Galatians, it is to this topic that we will turn our attention next in this study.

⁵ Hung-Sik Choi, *The Galatian Agitators' Theological Rationale for Circumcision* (Torch Trinity Journal paper), p. 1, cf. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 45-60; H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 6; F. F. Bruce, "Galatian Problems," *BJRL* 53 (1970-71): 263-266; J. D. G. Dunn, "'Neither Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, but ...' (Gal. 5.2-12; 6.12-16; cf. 1 Cor. 7.17-20)," in *La Foi Agissant par L'amour* (Galates 4,12-6,16), ed. A. Vanhoye (Rome: Abbaye de S. Paul, 1996), 79; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 290-294, 560-561.

⁶ Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Excursus - Genesis 15: Credited to Him as Righteousness* (Tetze Torah Ministries, 2006), p. 1.

2. OUCH FACTOR: “WHY THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGAN?”

Why did God have Avraham circumcised (remove the foreskin) 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?

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.

Tim Hegg of FFOZ notoriety has been, in my opinion, spearheading the movement to bring about a more accurate view of Paul and the Judaism's 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, worshipping 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.”

Now that we understand—as Paul understood—that circumcision was to be an eternal marker of covenant participation, pointing to the One who would be born, not by human effort, but by God’s supernatural power, we can begin to appreciate the importance this topic played in the formulation of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Surely the Galatian Jews and Gentiles were entertaining notions of implementing community circumcision based on their [mis]understanding of the social benefits it provided as a people group of God. However, given the views we have just examined, we in the 21st Century Christian communities have no reason now to continue misunderstanding and misapplying this important covenant sign as well.

As we begin to unlock the meanings behind Paul’s technical words and phrases in this Messianic commentary to Galatians, and then begin to carefully apply their true meanings, it is my aim that the believing Jewish and Gentile body of Christ might be knitted one to another even more tightly as we both find our true and lasting identity rooted in the Person and work of Yeshua HaMashiach. In order to deepen our appreciation for Paul’s important 1st Century work, we will turn systematically to the concepts “works of the Law,” “covenantal nomism and justification,” and “under the Law.” To be sure, familiarity with the 1st Century sociological Jewish aspects of these terms will pave the way towards a better, more accurate understanding and application of the book of Galatians.

This first term, “works of the Law,” will whet our appetite for digging into the background of Paul’s 1st Century Judaism...

3. “WORKS OF LAW” PART ONE: PROSELYTE CONVERSION (UNDERSTANDING THE BACKGROUND)

In this section, I will begin to demonstrate how our discussion about circumcision (in the first two sections of this commentary) and Sha’ul’s phrase ‘works of the Law’ (alternately ‘works of Law’) actually work in tandem with one another. My understanding of the phrase ‘works of the Law,’ in conjunction with my convictions about the relevance of Torah in the lives of Jewish and Gentile Christians, occupies a central place in my interpretation and application of the book of Galatians. These next three sections on works of the Law (and proselyte conversion), covenantal nomism, and justification, will, therefore, appear much longer than other topical sections to my commentary.

The book of Galatians contains a few technical terms and phrases that make it a bit more difficult for the average Bible student to understand from a casual reading perspective. I believe the term “circumcision” is one of those terms since it functioned as a metonym for Jewish identity. I also believe “works of the Law” is a technical phrase in Paul. To be sure, a “best practices” hermeneutic will seek to uncover the historical, grammatical, social, religious, and linguistic contexts of the passages in question before attempting to apply a practical application.

It is no secret that God commanded Isra’el to circumcise both their native born male children as well as foreigners who joined the family clan, way back in Genesis 17:9-14, and repeated again briefly in Leviticus 12:1-3. Equally true is the fact that in the Genesis narrative with Dinah and the sons of Shechem, that “forced circumcision” for the purpose of inclusion into the existing community of Isra’el is portrayed:

The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone (Gen. 34:13-17, ESV).

We may also note that according to the Exodus narratives, if a foreigner wished to eat of the commemorative Passover meal (later clarified in 2nd Temple Judaism to pertain exclusively to the specific meal that was eaten in Jerusalem using lambs slaughtered in the Temple), that he was required to take on circumcision so as to be counted as a “native of the land”:

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you (Ex. 12:43-49, ESV).

In point of fact, the texts that mention Gentile circumcision do NOT explicitly teach that Gentiles referenced are actually converting to become Jews by taking on circumcision. However, by the 1st Century, Isra’el operating under the false security that their covenant status was secured by their ethnic status abused this fundamental commandment by identifying their males—as well as any Gentiles who joined Isra’el—exclusively as circumcised Jews. Even the modern Stone Edition TaNaKH translation of the Old Testament published by ArtScroll, an exclusively (non-Messianic) Jewish publication, interprets those instances where

Gentiles take on circumcision as if the Gentiles have become proselytes to Judaism. Observe this lengthy quote from this online copy of the Talmud, Tractate Yevamot (folios 47a and 47b), where the Gentile proselyte enters the mikvah (baptismal) waters as a “foreigner” but comes out as a “Jew”:

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: ‘What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions’? If he replies, ‘I know and yet am unworthy’, he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin [of the neglect of the commandments of] Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner and the Poor Man’s Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. Furthermore, he is addressed thus: ‘Be it known to you that before you came to this condition, if you had eaten suet you would not have been punishable with kareth, if you had profaned the Sabbath you would not have been punishable with stoning; but now were you to eat suet you would be punished with kareth; were you to profane the Sabbath you would be punished with stoning’. And as he is informed of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments, so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfilment [sic]. He is told, ‘Be it known to you that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at the present time are unable to bear either too much prosperity, or too much suffering’. He is not, however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects.⁷

With regards to our text here in Galatians, in the words of Dr. Hung-Sik Choi, circumcision, with its corresponding “mark of Judaism” was basically being “forced” upon the Gentiles wishing to join the existing Jewish communities:

It is entirely likely, therefore, that the importance of circumcision as a prerequisite for becoming a Jew and as the mark of the convert to Judaism was the theological rationale of the agitators. They would have insisted that the Galatians must enter Israel through circumcision in order to become the people of God; for them salvation is within Israel exclusively. Since the concept of Abraham as the prototypical proselyte was present in Judaism (Jub. 11.15-17; Apoc. Abr. 1-8; Josephus, Ant. 1.154ff.; Philo, Virt. 212ff.; Gen. Rab. 46.2), they may well have argued that the Galatians should be circumcised in order to be proselytes as Abraham was. At any rate they no doubt argued that the only way for the Galatians who were not Abraham’s physical offspring (“aliens”) to become the members of Abraham’s family who can inherit the Abrahamic blessings was by accepting circumcision, an entrance requirement into the people of God.⁸

We will hear more from Dr. Choi later below. Sufficient for now is the importance of realizing that this proselyte conversion policy caused no small amount of grief to the Apostle to the Gentiles, which renders this misuse of circumcision (viz, Jewish identity) all the more tragic given the fact that Paul actually still places value in circumcision itself (read Rom. 2:25; 3:1, 2). However, even more unfortunate is the emerging Christian Church’s wholesale rejection of this covenantal sign as a relevant obedience marker in the communities of HaShem. Basically, it appears that ancient Isra’el turned circumcision into a mark of Jewish identity, and then created social policies that enforced a Jewish-only membership into its covenant communities, along with its concomitant Torah observance and maintenance of membership.

Paul’s ‘works of the Law’ surely includes Torah observance on some level, whether that observance is identified as legalistic or not. This aspect of works of the Law is quite easy to ascertain from the way Paul uses this phrase in his letters. However, it is the socio-religious aspect of this technical term that seems to be largely absent from many mainline Christian commentaries. The Church seems to have forgotten (or doesn’t know) that Torah in ancient Isra’el (as it does today) plays a vital social function to shape the very foundations and patterns of religious Jewish life. If Jewish Isra’el had shared this religious foundation of

Torah with the rest of the world the way she was supposed to do (cf. Deut 4:5-8; Isaiah 42:4; 49:6; Matt 5:14-16) then I suppose Paul would never have needed to pen his famous words in Galatians at all.

But that is not what happened. Sadly, National Isra'el began to boast about this possession called Torah, to the exclusion of anyone else who did not belong to Jewish Isra'el. Thus, I maintain that Paul uses 'works of the Law' in his letters to identify ancient Isra'el's wrongly imposed ethnic markers, identifiers which in turn functioned to regulate Gentile immigration into covenant Isra'el, with circumcision/proselyte conversion describing the legal Jewish status needed to belong to the people group of Isra'el. It appears, then, that Paul did not invent this term, but was instead using language familiar to Jews (and likely many Gentiles) of his day. To be sure, 'works of the Law' is not exclusively Pauline. However, up until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Pauline authors believed it to be a phrase perhaps invented by Paul since it had no direct equivalents in extant literature anywhere. The ancient Hebrew fragments from Qumran however, specifically the one classified as 4QMMT, changed all of that.

Bishop N.T. Wright notes that 'MMT' is the transliterated acronym of the phrase "some of the works of the Law," התורה מעשי מקצת (C27). MMT is reconstructed from six Qumran fragments, none of them complete (4Q394–399). It seems to be a letter, written in the mid-second Century BCE, from the leader of the Qumran group to the head of a larger group, of which the Qumran sect was once a part. He reproduces an English translation of the fragment that contains our phrase 'works of the Law' in his commentary on 4QMMT and Justification:

Now, we have written to you some of the works of the Law, those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen that you possess insight and knowledge of the Law. Understand all these things and beseech Him to set your counsel straight and so keep you away from evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial. Then you shall rejoice at the end time when you find the essence of our words to be true. And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him, to your own benefit and to that of Israel.⁹

His summary comments to these findings are presented in his conclusion:

The comparison and contrast between Paul and MMT, in short, highlights for us today the way in which Paul's writing on justification belongs firmly within its Jewish context, and the significance of the new thing Paul was saying precisely within that context – exactly the sort of point for which Earle Ellis has become famous. On the one hand, we only understand Paul if we see that, like the author of MMT, he was making the comprehensible second-Temple Jewish point that the eschatological moment had arrived, that the community of the new covenant had been established, and that the proper definition of this community in the present was a matter of the utmost urgency. On the other hand, by contrasting Paul with MMT we can see the difference it made when the eschatological event in question consisted of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah. No longer would the new covenant community be defined in terms of a sub-set of ethnic Israel, marked out by 'works of Torah', defined this way and that with a developing halakhah. The new covenant community formed through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and the gift of the eschatological Spirit, would be known by the faith which that same Spirit evoked through the gospel, the faith that acknowledged Jesus as the risen Messiah and Lord. And that meant that the community was open to all. Herein lies the deep Jewishness of Paul, and his greatest innovation.¹⁰

Having just examined "b'rit milah" in Section One and the "ouch factor" of circumcision in Section Two, we should be asking the following vital questions at this point: "From a 1st Century socio-religious Jewish perspective, how exactly does circumcision fit in with works of the Law? After all, isn't circumcision actually included in the commandments spelled out by the Law itself? Why are they listed as two distinct and ostensible Gentile requirements in Acts 15:5?"¹¹

The Church observes that Isra'el—both then and now—is preoccupied with Torah observance. The Church assumes this is because Isra'el hopes to gain right standing with HaShem through her devoted obedience to even the Law's smallest of details. The Church labels this devotion to Torah "Works of the Law," taken from

the phrase found eight times in six verses in Paul's writings.¹² Based on the context of Paul's negative comments about this term, the Church chooses to interpret this phrase as "mere commandment-keeping done for the sake of ostensibly gaining favor in God's eyes." Given this simple caricature, it is easy to understand why historic Christianity has equated this phrase with legalism. What is more, with this premise firmly in view, it is a short step for the historic Church to then reject the covenant sign of circumcision, since it is naturally assumed by the Church that Isra'el also hopes to be accepted by God as righteous based significantly on merely being the "Chosen People."

Tying our discussion on circumcision (read here as Jewish identity) with our discussion on works of the Law, we can readily affirm that most Christians also know that by the 1st Century, the Judaisms of Paul's day began to use the term "circumcision" as a stand-in term to designate Jewish identity (cf. Gal. 2:7-9). But many may not know that also by Paul's day, the term circumcision had shifted from the simple physical act with its corresponding sign of the Abrahamic covenant as recorded in Genesis chapter 17 to a more broad sociological and religious term indicating a status of "righteous before God" based on simply being a Jewish member of the commonwealth of Isra'el. Works of the Law—which obviously included covenantal circumcision—then becomes part of the socio-religious fabric of those groups advocating the Jewish-only policies that regulated supposed covenant membership, policies that Paul likely held to prior to his faith in Yeshua (read Gal. 5:11), policies he eventually identifies as "another gospel" in Galatians 1:6-9.

That the Torah (with its attendant "works of the Law") along with Jewish identity/circumcision had taken on socio-religious functions in Paul's day is attested to by Dr. Choi in his short survey of recent Galatians studies, quoted here at length for us to examine. Choi makes several references to James D.G. Dunn's thoughts in the following lengthy quote:

Scholarly attention has also concentrated on a sociological approach to Paul's letters. Some scholars have focused on Paul's authority in relationship with the churches in Galatia. Most interpreters have agreed that one of the critical issues in Galatia is the social issue of how Gentiles enter the people of God. Thus, commentators have argued that Paul's Gospel of justification by faith is to be understood in light of this social issue. Many scholars shed some new light on the issue of Paul's attitude to the law and Judaism and the disputes between Paul and the agitators in Galatia by means of such a sociological approach. In particular, Dunn highlights 'the social function of the law' which he believes to be important for understanding the mind-set with which Paul is engaging in Galatians. He argues, "Unless this social, we may even say national and racial, dimension of the issues confronting Paul is clearly grasped, it will be well nigh impossible to achieve an exegesis of Paul's treatment of the law which pays proper respect to historical context." Dunn is distinctive in understanding the social function of the law that "serves both to identify Israel as the people of the covenant and to mark them off as distinct from the (other) nations." In light of the social perspective on the law, Dunn understands the works of the law "as not only maintaining Israel's covenant status, but as also protecting Israel's privileged status and restricted prerogative."¹³

Indeed Dunn's own words on his definition of "works of the Law" are telling. Commenting on Paul and Romans chapters 2 and 3 we read:

Paul introduces the phrase, somewhat oddly, at the conclusion to the first main part of the exposition (Rom. 3:19-20); again the implication must be that its meaning or reference was either well known or self-evident. Since the second half of the preceding discussion was a refutation of Jewish presumption in their favoured status as the people of the Law, the 'works of the Law' must be a shorthand way of referring to that in which the typical Jew placed his confidence, the Law-observance which documented his membership of the covenant, his righteousness as a loyal member of the covenant. This is confirmed by the way in which in the following paragraphs 'works of the Law' are associated with 'boasting' (3:27, 28; 4:2), thus explicitly recalling the earlier passage where Paul specifically attacked his own people's presumption as being the people of the Law (2:17-20, 23), with circumcision once again serving as the distinguishing mark of 'the Jew' (2:25-29).¹⁴

What is more, with the term circumcision functioning as a metonym for Jewish, with "works of the Law" likely

functioning as a term that envisioned both entry into the covenant via becoming “Jewish” through taking on circumcision (for those outside seeking to get in) as well as the accommodation of the maintenance of membership within the covenant that “works of the Law” provided (cf. Gal. 3:2-5), it is easy to gloss over the fact that the Torah as a whole was beginning more and more to take on a role that God never intended it to play, which was that of a prized social status for those who possessed knowledge of the Torah. Indeed Paul hints at Jewish boasting over being “instructed from the law” in Romans 2:17-23:

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the Law (ESV).

We are now able to put three 1st Century socio-religious aspects of Jewish communal life on the table for careful examination: circumcision (read here as Jewish identity), works of the Law (read here as obedience to commandments that mark out Jewish covenant membership in Isra’el), and the Torah itself as an ostensible unique possession of the Jewish people. On this third issue, we will briefly turn to Tim Hegg’s vital work entitled ‘Is the Torah Only for Jews?’ which I downloaded for free from his site on 4/16/2003. Hegg, quoting the rabbinic literature (Midrash Rabbah to Numbers xiv.10, Midrash Rabbah to Exodus xlvii.3, and Sifra 112c) writes:

In fact, it was the view of the Talmudic Sages that the Torah was offered to every nation, but only Israel accepted it. For some of the rabbis, this acceptance of the Torah made Israel worthy of God’s election:

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, choose them (Israel)? Because all the nations rejected the Torah and refused to accept it, but Israel gladly chose the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Torah.

The Torah, therefore, was the distinguishing mark (from the rabbinic viewpoint) that separated Israel from the nations. The Midrashim state this clearly:

If it were not for my Torah which you accepted, I should not recognize you, and I should not regard you more than any of the idolatrous nations of the world.

‘Yet for all that, in spite of their sins, when they have been in the land of their enemies, I have not rejected them utterly’ (Lev. 26:44). All the godly gifts that were given them were taken from them. And if it had not been for the Book of the Torah which was left to them, they would not have differed at all from the nations of the world.¹⁵

In reference to how Paul describes Gentiles as those “who do not have the Law,” in Romans 2:12-14, Dunn also comments on the notion that ancient Isra’el likely held to a common Jewish belief that the Torah that God gave to Isra’el at Mount Sinai became the sole possession and responsibility, not only of Isra’el, but more specifically and exclusively of “Jewish” Isra’el, and that this Torah marked her out as a distinctly separate people from the pagan nations surrounding her: “In other words, the Law and the Jewish people are coterminous; the Law identifies the Jew as Jew and constitutes the boundary which separates him from the Gentiles.”¹⁶

So, as I see it, we have historic Isra’el abusing vital aspects of their covenant status and Torah obligations, based in part on her developing ambivalent attitude towards foreigners joining Isra’el in connection with her own self survival mechanisms as a marginalized people group—and of course, a bit of blindness to Yeshua as their prophesied Messiah—and we end up with the developments of what I call Ethnocentric Jewish Exclusivism. Add to this the historic Church’s misunderstanding of Torah obedience and circumcision based on her negative reaction to anything that makes Gentile believers look “Jewish,” rooted in part by Isra’el’s abuse and misunderstanding of the very same Torah that prophesied that Jesus was the true Messiah and

what do we end up with? A mess! Put another way, historic Isra'el of then and now obviously misunderstands her own Scriptures. Along comes the Church taking her cue from [unbelieving] Isra'el concerning the meaning of Torah observance and works of the Law, and we end up with the blind leading the blind. Oy vey!

Because of the compounding of these historic misunderstandings, today (as well as 2000 years ago), Christianity has developed an unnecessary amount of paranoia surrounding circumcision, eventually going so far as to reject it altogether—a clear violation of God's words to Abraham in Genesis 17:13: “...*So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.*” In some ways I cannot blame them for taking this stance. In some ways, it is as if Jewish misuse of the covenantal sign of circumcision caused God to act as a disciplining Father and “temporarily take that toy away from the Jewish people” until they could learn how to properly appreciate and apply its true, biblical meaning. I don't mean that God reversed his policies concerning the importance and necessity of circumcision for male members of Isra'el. What I mean is that, using his messenger to the Gentiles, God—through Paul—teaches Isra'el a valuable theological lesson regarding misusing the sign of the Abrahamic covenant known as circumcision. How so?

Paul effectively “relegates circumcision to back burner status” without actually destroying the biblical command by establishing halakhah (group policy) that forbids Gentiles from taking on circumcision during their initial entry into the commonwealth of Isra'el via faith in Yeshua (cf. Gal. 5:2-6). This is why those Jews in Acts 21:21 were beginning to fear the rumor that Paul was attempting to actually uproot Torah by forbidding circumcision for Jews as well: “...*they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.*” Paul's stance in 1 Cor. 7:19 that “being circumcised means nothing...” must've been quite shocking to Torah-zealous Jews outside of the context it was meant for, which was to show that in Messiah, Jewish identity was not a prerequisite to be accepted as righteous in the community.

The way I see it, the Judaisms of the 1st Century were basically “glorifying” circumcision. 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 xlv.) 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!"¹⁷

Mark Nanos has also demonstrated most creditably that the Judaisms of the 1st 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 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.

With this background of circumcision and proselyte conversion for Gentiles in mind, we are now better poised to uncover the true meaning of phrases such as "works of the Law" and "under the Law." I maintain that the phrase "works of the Law" cannot simply mean "deeds done in accordance with Torah commands" if we are to give the surviving Jewish documents of the 1st Century their proper place among scholarly research. But even more important is the fact that if we interpret works of the Law as Torah observance, then we end up with Paul discouraging Gentiles (and by inclusion Messianic Jews as well) from keeping the commandments of God—a position I believe is untenable given Paul's positive views of Torah observance spelled out elsewhere in his letters.¹⁸

As convenient as it is to simply interpret "works of the Law" every place we find this phrase in Paul as if Paul were discouraging "works done in obedience to the Law," I find this hermeneutic to be unfair to the context of Paul's writings and to the scriptures as a whole. The context of Paul's use of the phrase "works of the Law"

likely describes Jewish people hoping to maintain right-standing as Jewish covenant members with God by keeping the commandments of the Law. But it might just as well be describing Gentiles wishing to gain covenant membership into the community of Isra'el by taking on Jewish status (viz, circumcision) and then likewise maintaining membership status by keeping the commandments imposed upon them as proselytes ('circumcision' plus 'works of the Law' working in tandem like two sides of the same coin to confer a status of 'righteous' that unfortunately was not acceptable to God). Either side of this "coin" would be a misuse of the Law, since both represent striving under the power of the flesh (see Paul's rebuke in Gal. 3:3). Since Paul's letter to the Galatians is primarily directed towards his Gentile readership, I tend to work from the understanding that "works of the Law" is Paul's way of speaking against the hopelessness of Gentile proselyte conversion to Judaism for supposed covenant membership into Isra'el—and thus achieving the status of "righteous" before God—that the works of the Law supposedly offered.

Surely Paul must have been knowledgeable about the motives behind those seeking "self justification" for the ostensible sake of covenant membership. After all, "works done in obedience to the Law" that are motivated by a genuine love for God and man cannot be what Paul is discouraging, right? Remember, Paul actually affirmed, "...*what matters is keeping the commandments.*" (1 Cor.7:19) To be sure, the Messianic Jews in Acts 21:20 were all "zealous for the Law" and the believers in Jerusalem seemed to find this position acceptable. What is more, Paul himself argues in Romans 2:25 that "circumcision [“Jewish” membership in Isra'el] was indeed of value if you obey the Law." So (hypocrisy notwithstanding), for later Christian authors to assert that Paul frowned upon keeping Torah at any cost—no matter the intensions of the individual who is doing the Torah-keeping—finds no support from the scriptures. On the contrary, the Old Testament is replete with the fact that God is very much pleased with non-hypocritical obedience to his Law and readily punishes cold-hearted Torah-breakers.

We conclude then that Paul must of necessity have been working from the understanding that many Jews likely assumed they were already genuine and lasting covenant members in Isra'el based on God's election and/or based on their own Jewish identity gained at birth, and that many Gentiles without these pedigrees were likely seeking some sort of covenant membership into Isra'el as offered via the proselyte conversion policy enforced in those days (read Acts 15:1 with Matthew 23:15 in mind).

⁷ http://www.come-and-hear.com/yebamoth/yebamoth_47.html

⁸ Hung-Sik Choi, *The Galatian Agitators' Theological Rationale for Circumcision* (Torch Trinity Journal paper), p. 12-13.

⁹ http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_4QMMT_Paul.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Acts 15:5 "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." (ESV)

¹² ESV "Works of the Law" (Greek= ἔργων νόμου *ergon nomou*) is found in Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16(3x); 3:2, 5; and 3:10.

¹³ Hung-Sik Choi, *A Survey of Recent Galatians Studies* (Torch Trinity Journal paper), p. 136-137.

¹⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 221.

¹⁵ Tim Hegg, *Is the Torah Only for Jews?* (www.torahresource.com, 2003), p. 5, downloaded on 4/16/2003.

¹⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 221.

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumcision_in_the_Bible#In_rabbinic_literature

¹⁸ See for instance 1 Cor. 7:19, "Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's commandments."

4. “WORKS OF LAW” PART TWO: EXAMINING GALATIANS 2:16

Now that we have briefly examined circumcision in Section One and Two, and the background to proselyte conversion/works of the Law in Section Three, let us begin to finalize our examination of works of the Law by singling out its first use in Galatians at Galatians 2:16. We will revisit this verse when we get to it in the Excursus portion of my commentary below; its treatment in this section is merely intended to be an “appetizer.” Indeed most commentators on Paul identify this verse as a part of one of the central theological threads of the letter to the Galatians. Let’s put my thesis to the test and see if my understanding of works of the Law fits with the context of Galatians 2:16. Let us start this section by reminding ourselves of Dunn’s working definition of Paul’s term “works of the Law.” Commenting on Galatians 2:16, Dunn writes:

‘Works of law’ are nowhere understood here, either by his Jewish interlocutors or by Paul himself, as works, which *earn* God’s favour, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as *badges*: they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what mark out the Jews as God’s people; given by God for precisely that reason, they serve to demonstrate covenant status. They are the proper response to God’s covenant grace, the minimal commitment for members of God’s people. In other words, Paul has in view precisely what Sanders calls ‘covenantal nomism’. And what he denies is that God’s justification depends on ‘covenantal nomism’, that God’s grace extends only to those who wear the badge of the covenant. This is a historical conclusion of some importance, since it begins to clarify with more precision what were the continuities and discontinuities between Paul, his fellow Jewish Christians and his own Pharisaic past, so far as justification and grace, covenant and law are concerned.

More important for Reformation exegesis is the corollary that ‘works of the law’ do not mean ‘good works’ in general, ‘good works’ in the sense disparaged by the heirs of Luther, works in the sense of self-achievement, ‘man’s self-powered striving to undergird his own existence in forgetfulness of his creaturely existence’ (to quote a famous definition from Bultmann). The phrase ‘works of the law’ in Galatians 2.16 is, in fact, a fairly restricted one: it refers precisely to these same identity markers described above, covenant works – those regulations prescribed by the law which any good Jew would simply take for granted to describe what a good Jew did. To be a Jew was to be a member of the covenant, was to observe circumcision, food laws and sabbath. In short, once again Paul seems much less a man of sixteenth-Century Europe and much more firmly in touch with the reality of first-Century Judaism than many have thought.¹⁹

I think Dunn is onto something quite relevant in regards to our study in Galatians with his explanation about works of the Law. But we also need to be reminded that many religious Jews of Paul day most often already viewed their existing covenant status as secured based on Jewish identity (read here as circumcision), rooted as it was in the corresponding foundation of the “Merit of the Fathers (i.e., based on HaShem’s faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)²⁰. Owing to the fact that even if Paul’s term “works of the Law” referred to that “different gospel”²¹ with its “badges” that marked out existing covenant members as they walked in maintenance and repentance according to Torah, because of the nationalistic Jewish policies being enforced in those days, those non-Jews seeking inclusion by these badges still at some time had to take on legal Jewish status if they were not quite sure if they were already born with it. We can catch hints of this errant “Jewish-only” policy as we recall verses like, “*Or is God the God of Jews only?*” Rom. 3:29, and “*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners...*” Gal. 2:15, and “*Unless you are circumcised [read here as Jewish] according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,*” Acts 15:1.

This is why I believe, when Paul has the Gentiles wishing to join Isra’el in focus, it is necessary to interpret Paul’s phrase “works of the Law” not merely as legalism (mechanical obedience to the Law), but rather as a technical term referring to a specific 1st Century deficiency surrounding Torah observance and proselyte conversion for Gentiles, but it takes digging into the historic cultural and sociological context of covenantal

nomism to see this technicality more clearly (see Section Five below). Yes, any approach to HaShem that circumvents the work of the Cross is tantamount to legalism, but 1st Century (Jewish) Isra'el did not see themselves "working" their way towards God's grace. To be sure, they believed, per election, that God singled them out from among the nations as an act of pure grace! And this would not be an entirely inaccurate viewpoint. In their eyes, the Torah is not a burden! It is a gift of grace from a loving Father! What I am trying to say (along with Sanders, Dunn, Wright, Hegg, Nanos, etc.) is that I believe it is not entirely accurate to identify 1st Century Isra'el's "works of the Law" through the lens of 21st Century "merit theology."

For purposes of comparison, let us examine traditional Christian perspectives as well as recent Pauline interpretations of Galatians 2:16. Martin Luther himself has an excellent commentary to Galatians available for free if one does an Internet search for it. While I agree with the general theological aspects of his comments to Gal 2:16 (viz, "good works will not justify, only faith justifies"), I nevertheless disagree with the specific historical and sociological background that he implies Isra'el held to:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.

For the sake of argument let us suppose that you could fulfill the Law in the spirit of the first commandment of God: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart." It would do you no good. A person simply is not justified by the works of the Law.

The works of the Law, according to Paul, include the whole Law, judicial, ceremonial, moral. Now, if the performance of the moral law cannot justify, how can circumcision justify, when circumcision is part of the ceremonial law?

The demands of the Law may be fulfilled before and after justification. There were many excellent men among the pagans of old, men who never heard of justification. They lived moral lives. But that fact did not justify them. Peter, Paul, all Christians, live up to the Law. But that fact does not justify them. For I know nothing by myself," says Paul, "yet am I not hereby justified." (I Cor. 4:4.)²²

I do not believe 1st Century Isra'el was hoping to enter into covenant (be justified) with God via Torah obedience (works of the Law). A cursory reading of the various daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly, (and sometimes longer!) loyalty to the commandments as outlined by Moshe on HaShem's behalf do not indicate that God was expecting perfunctory (let alone perfect!) performance of commandments for the sake of justification from him. Torah itself simply does not lend to such an interpretation. Quite frankly, Luther's rhetoric seems more likely to strongly echo his own quibble against the Papacy of his day than to accurately describe Paul's intentions.

Matthew Henry's ubiquitous Concise Commentary on this passage is, in my experience, representative of mainstream Christian views:

2:15-19 Paul, having thus shown he was not inferior to any apostle, not to Peter himself, speaks of the great foundation doctrine of the gospel. For what did we believe in Christ? Was it not that we might be justified by the faith of Christ? If so, is it not foolish to go back to the law, and to expect to be justified by the merit of moral works, or sacrifices, or ceremonies? The occasion of this declaration doubtless arose from the ceremonial law; but the argument is quite as strong against all dependence upon the works of the moral law, as respects justification. To give the greater weight to this, it is added, But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ the minister of sin? This would be very dishonourable to Christ, and also very hurtful to them. By considering the law itself, he saw that justification was not to be expected by the works of it, and that there was now no further need of the sacrifices and cleansings of it, since they were done away in Christ, by his offering up himself a sacrifice for us. He did not hope or fear any thing from it; any more than a dead man from enemies. But the effect was not a careless, lawless life. It was necessary, that he might live to God, and be devoted to him through the motives and grace of the gospel. It is no new prejudice, though a most unjust one, that the doctrine of justification by faith alone, tends to encourage people in sin. Not so, for to take occasion from free grace, or the doctrine of it, to live in sin, is to

try to make Christ the minister of sin, at any thought of which all Christian hearts would shudder.²³

Continuing our look at Galatians 2:16, I want to shift from general Christian views to perhaps some popular Messianic Jewish views. 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. In my opinion, Stern still writes from a decidedly “Lutheran” perspective with regards to the legalism of the 1st Century; Stern seems to describe works of the Law in terms of merit theology, with its attendant “perversion of Torah into a set of stiff rules and focus on the minutia of commandments.” I believe Stern was working from a time prior to the discovery of 4QMMT and perhaps that is why, even though his overall purpose as a Messianic Jew is to exonerate Torah, in the end, his interpretation of works of the Law sadly misses the mark quite a bit. Nevertheless, I want to put his views on the table due to his important contributions to the Messianic Jewish movement as a whole.

“Having known but that not is being justified man out of works of Law if ever not through faith of Messiah Yeshua, also we into Messiah Yeshua we believed, in order that we might be justified out of faith of Messiah and not out of works of Law, because out of works of Law not will be justified every 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 “dikaiousune” refers to behavioral righteousness.

“Works of law,” translates the Greek phrase “ergon nomos” ε[ργον νομοσ. Since the word “nomos” means “Law,” 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 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. 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).²⁴

I disagree with Stern’s working interpretation of works of the Law. Don’t get me wrong. I agree with the theology behind what he is saying (works-righteousness, viz, legalism, will *never* save anyone, and a

legalistic misuse of Torah is obviously displeasing to the God who gave the Torah). I simply disagree with the historic plausibility of Stern's interpretation of the phrase works of the Law. To be sure, in the case of the Galatian congregation, I maintain that the specific social issue that drove Paul to write the letter was the "different gospel," the gospel that was "contrary to the one Paul preached,"²⁵ which sought to transform Gentiles into Jews via a man-made ceremony of conversion, performed under the guise of "covenant inclusion." I don't, as Stern seems to infer, believe that Paul set out to explain the differences between "Spirit-led Torah obedience" and "legalistic perversion of Torah commands."²⁶ To appreciate the consternation that this halakhah caused Sha'ul, one has to understand that within the 1st Century Judaisms, the prevailing view was that "all Isra'el have a place in the World to Come," a maxim based on a popular rabbinic interpretation of the key phrase "*Your people are all righteous...*" of Isaiah 60:21, as explained in the Mishnah at Tractate Sanhedrin 10:1.

What is more, from the perspective of the Ethnocentric Jewish Exclusivism of the 1st Century, 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 the proselyte prerequisite for non-Jews, which primarily included circumcision but eventually went on to include Sabbath, food laws, and other purity issues imposed on covenant members wishing to maintain a status of "righteous" in the commonwealth of Isra'el. And given these unique insights into the minds of the early Judaisms, we see why it is necessary to avoid simply labeling any form of Torah obedience—whether from the 1st Century or from the 21st Century—as legalism, viz, merit theology the way I perceive Stern seems to be characterizing the phrase works of the Law."

Having just examined Stern's view of Gal 2:16, let us take a look at Dunn's specific notes to this verse as well:

As to the immediate context, the most relevant factor is that Galatians 2.16 follows immediately upon the debates, indeed the crises, at Jerusalem and at Antioch which focused on two issues – at Jerusalem, circumcision; at Antioch, the Jewish food laws with the whole question of ritual purity unstated but clearly implied. Paul's forceful denial of justification by works of law is his response to these two issues. His denial that justification is from works of law is, more precisely, a denial that justification depends on circumcision or on observation of the Jewish purity and food taboos. We may justifiably deduce, therefore, that by 'works of law' Paul intended his readers to think of particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws. His Galatian readership might well think also of the one other area of law observance to which Paul refers disapprovingly later in the same letter – their observance of special days and feasts (Gal. 4.10). But why these particular 'works of the law'? The broader context suggests a reason.

From the broader context, provided for us by Greco-Roman literature of the period, we know that just these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively Jewish. Writers like Petronius, Plutarch, Tacitus and Juvenal took it for granted that, in particular, circumcision, abstention from pork, and the sabbath, were observances which marked out the practitioners as Jews, or as people who were very attracted to Jewish ways.³⁰ These, of course, were not all exclusively Jewish practices – for example, not only Jews practiced circumcision. But this makes it all the more striking that these practices were nevertheless widely regarded as both characteristic and distinctive of the Jews as a race – a fact which tells us much about the influence of Diaspora Judaism in the Greco- Roman world. It is clear, in other words, that just these observances in particular functioned as identity markers, they served to identify their practitioners as Jewish in the eyes of the wider public, they were the peculiar rites which marked out the Jews as that peculiar people.²⁷

I believe that if Paul meant to specifically single out a "short list" of Torah commands that uniquely marked

out covenant membership for these Galatians Gentiles seeking legitimate acceptance into Isra'el—at least from the perspective of the Influencers pressing the issue—then, ‘works of the Law’ likely does, in fact, refer specifically to circumcision and the food laws like Dunn suggests. However, I also believe, given that Paul goes on to use ‘works of the Law’ in Romans as well as here in Galatians, perhaps we might suggest that ‘works of the Law’ could be understood as describing a kind of sectarian halakhah that served to separate any given group from another group in terms of right-living before God Almighty. In other words, when comparing Jews to Gentiles, works of the Law served to separate the two groups on the basis of circumcision and the food laws. However, when comparing circumcised with other circumcised Jews, the Judean version of works of the Law might not particularly be the same as the Qumran version of works of the Law and visa versa. Of course for Sha’ul, no matter which community he would find himself visiting, either way he is certainly going to argue for entrance into the lasting people of God via faith in Yeshua (as opposed to works of the Law), and maintenance of membership via walking by the Spirit (per Gal 5:16, 18, 25, in opposition to works of the Law).

Lastly, let us see how Tim Hegg understands Galatians 2:16. Backing up to Gal 2:15 to get a context, Hegg notes:

Thus, when Paul writes, “we are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,” he is deliberately using the language of those who were distancing themselves from the Gentiles, and encouraging the Gentiles to become proselytes in order to leave the status of “sinner” and enter the circle of “Jews by birth.”

This being the case, v. 15 is a continuation of the dialog/rhetoric of v. 14. We might paraphrase the two verses this way:

“. . . If you, being a Jew, participate with Gentiles even though the community halachah you have is against doing so, then why do you compel the Gentiles to follow your halachah when you’re not even willing to be consistent? Don’t you hear the argument of your chaverim ringing in your ears? “We’re Jews, not ‘Gentile sinners!’”

This is not the last time that we will find Paul quoting the stock clichés of the influencers. And it will be important for us to keep our eyes open for this kind of rhetorical device as we follow Paul’s arguments.

Thus, v. 16 begins Paul’s direct answer to the question that he had presented to Peter in vv. 14-15. And what is his answer? That final and ultimate covenant membership is gained through faith in Messiah, not through any ritual of conversion (for Gentiles) or even by maintaining one’s covenant status through doing the mitzvot. For though Jews enter the covenant on a physical basis through lineage to Abraham, yet in terms of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, these come only to those who have the faith of Abraham—they do not come as a result of merely being physically related to the covenant.²⁸

Hegg’s own interpretation of ‘works of the Law’ is provided in his commentary to Galatians as the following:

The fact that both the phrases (“works of the Torah” and “counted as righteousness”) are found in this document is incredibly important for understanding the same phrases in Paul. What we now understand is that the phrase “works of the Law/Torah” was used in Paul’s day to refer specific sets of rules or halachah which a group required for its self-definition. Simply put, such a list of “works of the Torah” constituted the entrance requirements into the group. Since the group would no doubt consider its own interpretations of the Written Torah to be the correct interpretation, they would also have held that only those who adhere to their halachah would be actually obeying the Torah and living righteously. “Works of the Torah,” then, refers to halachah required for entrance into the covenant community (as envisioned by each sect), not personal obedience to God’s word. And since covenant membership was considered one and the same with the status of “righteous,” it is not difficult to understand how adhering to a given halachah to gain membership in the community was attached to being reckoned as righteous.²⁹

I tend to think Dunn and Hegg combined (in contrast to the popular Christian views) offer the most accurate interpretation of Gal 2:15, 16, and works of the Law, by describing for us the important socio-religious

background necessary to appreciate the unique consternation that Jewish-only works of the Law policies were causing our apostle to the Gentiles. Interpreted in this manner, we as believers seeking justification and sanctification found exclusively in Yeshua, need only to begin to distance ourselves from a limited use and application of the Torah as some sort of entry list for Gentiles seeking legitimacy in the covenant and communities of Isra'el, as well as distance ourselves away from any supposed reliance on maintaining our place in God's people by relying on works of the Law as Jews and (basically former) Gentiles.

The negative impact that the prevailing Christian hermeneutic that interprets Paul as forbidding any sort of Torah obedience—whether with right motives or not—has for today's emerging Torah Communities is devastating. To wit, we Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles indeed seek to become more obedient to God's Holy Scriptures as we continue to grow and consequently answer the Holy Spirit's tug on our heart to return to covenant faithfulness. Imagine our shock and confusion when our Christian friends and family members who don't embrace a Torah-based lifestyle label our Torah-obedience as mere legalism! "You guys are going back under the Law!" "You guys are returning to legalism!" "You guys are trying to earn your position in God's eyes!" These are some of the sentiments we Torah-keeping Jews and Gentiles hear from our mainstream Christian counterparts. In my experience as a Torah-keeping Jewish man that embraces Yeshua, part of the Christian confusion can be cleared up by understanding that Sha'ul's "works of the Law" doesn't describe mere legalistic commandment keeping, but instead captures the sociological notion of Torah-keeping for the sake of maintaining covenant membership—a sort of "social badge, boundary marker, or ostensible "Jewish" responsibility to uphold Torah because we are in a covenant partnership with HaShem" perspective. And in the eyes of the early Judaisms, this quote unquote "partnership" started with legally-recognized ethnic Jewish identity, a view the current Torah Movement—and the mainstream Christian Church—should rightly repudiate.

¹⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Section II.

²⁰ Recall John's rebuke of some religious leaders who might suppose they "have Abraham as [their] father," perhaps in hopes that the righteousness of Abraham would transfer down to them somehow.

²¹ Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV), "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

²² <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mlg/view.cgi?bk=47&ch=2>

²³ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/galatians/2-16.htm>

²⁴ David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 535-537.

²⁵ Galatians 1:6-9.

²⁶ Stern renders the familiar "works of the Law" as "legalistic perversion of Torah commands" in his Complete Jewish Bible translation of Galatians 2:16.

²⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Section II.

²⁸ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), p. 68.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 100.

5. COVENANTAL NOMISM AND JUSTIFICATION

Before we transition for the most part from circumcision and works of the Law into a different Pauline phrase known as “under the Law” (in Section Seven below), I want to tie works of the Law together with the pattern of religion in 1st Century Isra’el by briefly examining the theological concepts known as “covenantal nomism” and “justification.” If, as I maintain, 1st Century Isra’el did not define “works of the Law” (i.e., Torah observance) as legalism (the way the Church defines legalism), how then exactly did she conceptualize and define her Law-keeping? What was her motive for remaining so devoted to the Torah and subsequently to the covenants? Did she believe her Torah observance granted her initial “salvation”? Or perhaps did she instead believe her Torah observance helped to maintain a status of non-idolater (viz “justified existing covenant member”) since her initial and ongoing “salvation” was believed to have been gained by belonging to the people group of Isra’el, and therefore, such maintenance was necessary to stay “saved”?

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 1st Century Judaism and how it reportedly defined itself in terms of patterns of religion, has been carefully labeled as covenantal nomism. Theopedia.com introduces and describes covenantal nomism for us in the following way:

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.

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? Sander’s 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.”³⁰

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)³¹ actually exonerates 1st 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 ‘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.³²

Indeed, for the last 30 or 40 years, ever since biblical scholars began noticing serious inconsistencies with the characterizations of rabbinic Judaism by Lutheran Paul proponents, as well as the anachronistic portrayal of Paul’s supposed ambivalence in regards to Judaism and Torah relevance, this radical “new perspective on Paul” has been on the rise. Craig L. Blomberg, Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Colorado, speaks of this “new perspective” as a “new look” at Paul’s writings:

Put simply, the last twenty-five years of Pauline scholarship has come to see the so-called “new look” on Paul become the reigning paradigm. Contrary to classic Reformation thought, Paul was not a scrupulous Jew, increasingly frustrated with his inability to keep the Law perfectly and thus merit God’s favor. Indeed early first-Century Palestinian Judaism was a religion of “covenantal nomism.” Jews understood they were already right with God by virtue of birth into the unique covenant God had made with his elect people, Israel; the role of obedience to the Law was one of “staying saved,” not “getting saved,” and was not too different from Paul’s concept of faith working itself out through love (Gal. 5:6). The major difference between Paul and the Judaism of his day, then, for Sanders and the new look, is the acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah, not a contrast between grace and works-righteousness.³³

Dunn seems to think that Sanders’ description of covenantal nomism actually describes his own personal understanding of works of the Law. Speaking of his own examination of the phrase ‘works of the Law’ found in Qumran literature, Dunn writes:

In terms introduced by Sanders, ‘works of the Law’ is, then, another way of saying ‘covenantal nomism’—that which characterizes ‘being in’ the covenant and not simply ‘getting into’ the covenant (as Sanders himself put it). And in terms of the preceding analysis, ‘works of the Law’ are Paul’s way of describing in particular the identity and boundary markers which Paul’s Jewish (-Christian) opponents thought, and rightly thought, were put under threat by Paul’s understanding of the gospel.³⁴

Essentially as I see it, when Sanders began to undertake the research behind his 1977 ‘Paul and Palestinian Judaism’ publication, he felt the need to reexamine (and at times challenge and correct) the prevailing Christian perspectives as regards the 1st Century systematical approach to the doctrines of soteriology (salvation) as well its resultant sanctification. However, he decidedly felt the need to move beyond what he describes as a too narrow standard Christian approach to these topics. Using his now famous “getting in” and “staying in” language, he describes ‘pattern of religion’ thusly:

A pattern of religion, defined positively, is the description of how a religion is perceived by its adherents to function. ‘Perceived to function’ has the sense not of what an adherent does on a day-to-day basis, but of how getting in and staying in are understood: the way in which a religion is understood to admit and retain members is considered to be the way it ‘functions’. This may involve daily activities, such as prayers, washing and the like, but we are interested not so much in the details of these activities as in their role and

significance in the 'pattern': on what principles they are based, what happens if they are not observed and the like. A pattern of religion thus has largely to do with the items which a systematic theology classifies under 'soteriology'. 'Pattern of religion' is a more satisfactory term for what we are going to describe, however, than 'soteriology'. For one thing, it includes more than soteriology usually does: it includes the logical beginning-point of the religious life as well as its end, and it includes the steps in between.³⁵

I personally believe that the prevailing Judaisms that existed in the first Century initially upset the biblical balance in the period following the Maccabees (from 164 BCE to 63 BCE) by teaching that legally recognized circumcision was the vehicle by which a loyal Jew as well as 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 this problem in the first Century. Both in Acts 15:1-35, as well as 21:17-26, the Jerusalem Council had to address the issue of forced Jewish identity for Gentiles seeking salvation (viz, entrance or "getting into" the people group of Isra'el), as well as whether or not both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah needed to (continue to) "rely on the works of the Law" as opposed to "living in the freedom of Messiah."

In the end, after reading Acts 15, we know that the Messianic leaders of Jerusalem eventually decided it was not necessary to turn Gentiles into Jews in order to join Isra'el. The conclusion of the council, then, was that Gentiles did not need to become proselytes (the term "circumcision" being shorthand for "conversion to Judaism") in order to enjoy full covenant status in Isra'el, which naturally includes Torah participation. Indeed, as Peter had first testified in the home of Cornelius, the inclusion of the Gentiles was by the grace of God, not by means of a man-made ceremony. In order to assure their acceptance into the newly emerging Messianic Communities, the Gentiles were to make a decisive break with the pagan temple and its idolatry, which would involve ridding themselves of any of the pagan customs that marked that idolatrous form of worship (remember, throughout the book of Acts the Gentiles were already to be found in the mainstream Jewish synagogues as "potential converts to normative Judaism").

As we have already examined in Section Three above, Galatians 2:16 not only focuses on 'works of the Law' but it also singles out 'justification by faith in Christ' which is Paul's antithesis to the Influencers' 'justification by works of the Law.' What exactly is this "justification" that Paul champions so boldly in his letter to Galatians, and how does his view of justification compare and contrast with his fellow unsaved Jewish community's views of the same term?

The verb "justified" (Greek=*dikaiooutai δικαιούται*) first shows up in Galatians at 2:16. This Greek verb can easily be translated as "make righteous" as well. Likewise, the noun "righteousness" (Greek=*dikaioσύνη δικαιοσύνη*) first shows up in Galatians at 2:21. While being careful not to confuse noun from verb, I nevertheless tend to use justified/justification and righteous/righteousness somewhat interchangeably in my commentaries. Dunn carefully notes the "start" and "finish" context of Paul's use of the term "justified" in this quote from his commentary to the New Perspective on Paul. Because of its relevance, I will quote him at length:

The crucial fact remains that in the Antioch incident, and in Galatians, Paul was confronted by a view which insisted that covenant status could not be sustained without 'works of the law'. In Jewish covenant theology, that also meant final vindication could not be assured without 'works of the law'. And in the Jewish-Christian adaptation of that, covenant status and final vindication depended on justification by faith completed by 'works of the law' (the clear implication of Gal. 3.2-5; cf. Jas. 2.22-4). Paul's point is to insist precisely that the ongoing process of salvation is wholly of a piece with its beginning; that as their initial acceptance by God was through faith, so is their continuation (Gal. 3.2-5) and their final acceptance (Gal. 5.5).¹⁰ Consequently the range of tenses in Galatians 2.16 probably denotes a richer theology of justification than Räisänen allows. To paraphrase the verse: 'Since man is justified through faith in Jesus Christ (the present tense can cover the whole process), we have believed in Christ Jesus (aorist = 'transfer') in order that we might be justified from faith in Christ and not from works of law (the aorist tense can refer to the goal of the whole process, as in

2.17 – the point being that justification is by faith from start to finish) because (as will become apparent at the last judgement) “no flesh will be justified by works of the law”.’ This seems a superior solution to Räisänen’s, who can only maintain his attempt to limit the verb to ‘transfer terminology’ by allowing that ‘in effect one has to “enter” twice: first here and then at the final judgment’. With this admission my point has been largely conceded: Galatians 2.16 has in view not only the initial act of acceptance, but the question of what then is necessary to ensure final acceptance.

Of course Paul has in mind not just justification by faith, but justification by faith in Christ. Justification by faith in Christ is, if you like, the Jewish-Christian refinement of Jewish election theology, which I characterized as ‘justification by faith’ to underscore the presupposition of divine grace which is central to that theology. It is that Jewish-Christian understanding which provides Paul with sufficient common ground for his dialogue with his fellow Jewish believers in Christ, and out of that Paul develops his own more characteristic emphasis (Gal. 2.15-16). I do not dispute that the end result of this development was a breach between (rabbinic) Judaism and Christianity. I do dispute that this was ever Paul’s intention or that it was inevitable within the context of the much broader stream of pre-70 Judaism. Within that broader stream Paul’s interpretation of covenant and promise was a legitimate option for Jews (and Judaism) within a wider range of options.³⁶

We shall hear more from Dunn and justification in the Excursus Section on Gal 2:16 below. For now, let us hear from N.T. Wright on this concept of justification. I tend not to completely understand how Wright can come to his conclusions that the Torah was only a “temporary provision until the coming of the Messiah.” Nevertheless, his summary comments on works of the Law and justification are beneficial towards my primary thesis, and as such worth repeating here for our careful consideration:

By declaring that certain people are within the covenant, the biblical doctrine of justification inevitably declares that others, at least for the moment, are not. Broadly speaking, that means unbelievers: Paul is concerned with the attempt to seek justification on grounds other than those set out above, grace and faith, the cross and the Spirit. The negative result of the doctrine is polemic against all spurious justification.

The central claim against which this polemic is aimed is the boast that covenant membership is for Jews and Jews only, with very few exceptions. Paul would have approved of John the Baptist’s warning against reliance on physical membership of Abraham’s family. Jewish birth, circumcision and possession of the law are in fact, in themselves, neither necessary (Romans 4) nor sufficient (Romans 9) qualifications for membership within the covenant. ‘Works of the law’ were not, as is usually thought, the attempt to earn salvation *de novo*: they were the attempt to prove, by obedience to the law given to the Jews, that one was already a member of Abraham’s family. Such an attempt is both misguided (because the covenant was always designed to include Gentiles as well as Jews) and impossible (because of universal sin, which the law merely showed up). The doctrine of justification therefore provides both a positive and a negative answer to the question ‘Who are the true children of Abraham?’³⁷

Speaking specifically about Peter and Paul in Galatians 2:15ff, Wright goes on to conclude:

The debate about table-fellowship recorded in Galatians 2 is therefore no peripheral issue, loosely related to the real question. It raises precisely the question of justification—who is within the covenant family? Peter’s behaviour at Antioch had implied that only Jews were really within the covenant, and that Gentiles were at best second-class citizens. Paul’s reply in 2:15ff, often taken completely out of this context and so robbed of its true meaning, is this: justification is not based on the fact of being a Jew, nor on keeping the Jewish law, but on faith: and, if Jewish Christians have thereby technically become ‘sinners’ by eating with Gentiles, this does not involve actual sin, whereas if they insist on living under the law they will be shown up as transgressors. The crucified and risen Messiah means a crucified and risen Israel, so that Christian Jews like Paul have left behind on the cross the fleshly status defined by possession of the law. To go back to the law as the basis of one’s own righteous status would be to spurn the grace of God, to behave as though the crucifixion of the Messiah were unnecessary.

From this point of view the argument of Galatians flows as smoothly as Paul's agitation will allow. The quotation from Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6 is not an arbitrary proof-text or a subtle Rabbinic ploy: the whole chapter deals with the question as to who Abraham's children really are, as becomes clear when we reach the conclusion in 3:29. Abraham's family cannot be the people of the law: the law only brought a curse, and anyway was only a temporary provision until the coming of the Messiah. Jesus has taken the curse on himself, enabling God to fulfil the purpose of the covenant, which was that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles.³⁸

Lastly, returning to Sanders and his "getting in" and "staying in" language, we find these comments on righteousness in Paul in his famous Paul and Palestinian Judaism work (repeated from my Preface Section above):

One does not find in Paul any trace of the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish distinction between being righteous (man/man) and pious (man/God); nor is righteousness in Paul one virtue among others. Here, however, there is also a major shift; for to be righteous in Jewish literature means to obey the Torah and to repent of transgression, but in Paul it means to be saved by Christ. Most succinctly, righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect; in Paul it is a transfer term. In Judaism, that is, commitment to the covenant puts one 'in', while obedience (righteousness) subsequently keeps one in. In Paul's usage, 'be made righteous' ('be justified') is a term indicating getting in, not staying in the body of the saved. Thus when Paul says that one cannot be made righteous by works of law, he means that one cannot, by works of law, 'transfer to the body of the saved'. When Judaism said that one is righteous who obeys the law, the meaning is that one thereby stays in the covenant. The debate about righteousness by faith or by works of law thus turns out to result from the different usage of the 'righteous' word-group.³⁹

Systematic theology recognizes that God relates to mankind on at least two different levels: temporal and eternal. With regards to Isra'el according to the flesh, Paul teaches that, *"to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ"* (Rom 9:4, 5, ESV). Essentially, on a temporal level, Isra'el is the one, true, chosen people group of God—exclusively in relationship with the One, True God of the Universe—and since God cannot change (Mal 3:6), his choosing Isra'el is an eternal position, since "as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:28, 29, ESV).

The ethnic people group commonly referred to as Jewish Isra'el is characterized by covenantal nomism with its attendant works of the Law. Even though they are "partially hardened" to the truth of their own Messiah (Rom 11:25), they do in fact possess a righteousness (justification) that, although rooted in the flesh (temporal), is nevertheless not necessarily a bad thing in and of itself! To wit, Sha'ul himself recognizes that zeal for God (covenantal nomism) is an admirable quality after all, if only such zeal would drive the Torah-pursuant Jew into the waiting arms (Matt 23:37) of the "Teacher of Righteousness":

"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24, ESV).

The Greek of 'guardian' in this verse is paidagogos παιδαγωγός. As I note in my Excursus Section below to this verse, the 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."⁴⁰ 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.

Thus, Paul affirms the Torah's positive function in the plans of God, in that Torah represents the object of National Isra'el's nomistic pursuit, because, as he is going to teach elsewhere in Romans, the only reason faithless Isra'el misses the Messiah—the very goal of the Torah (read Rom 10:4)—is because her eyes are blinded by her own ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism:

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works...” (Rom 9:30-32, ESV).

HaShem designed the Torah to be kept. God desires to reward those who pursue obedience (cf. Rom 2:6, 7). The Master himself affirms the fact that keeping and teaching others to keep even the least of the commandments is accompanied by a reward:

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:19, ESV).

Also, God through Moshe instructed that Isra'el's obedience to his Ways would result in “righteousness,” viz, reward follows obedience:

“And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us” (Deut 6:24, 25, ESV).

And also take note of the positive benefits provided by Torah in this well-known passage from the Writings:

“The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps 19:7-11, ESV)

Likewise, Paul recognizes that to obey Torah as a circumcised, albeit perhaps “fleshly” Jew was in fact a

good thing, because even from a limited, temporal perspective, obedience draws the temporal rewards (righteousness/justification) of God:

“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified... For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the Law...” (Rom 2:13, 25, ESV)

Thus, physical Isra’el’s covenantal nomism perspective is not altogether an improper response on the part of limited covenant members.

However, with equal precision, Paul goes on to explain that, *“not all who are descended from [physical] Israel belong to [Remnant] Israel, and not all are [lasting] children of Abraham because they are his [physical] offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your [lasting] offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring”* (Rom 9:6-8, ESV, emphasis mine). Thus, we learn that there exists an “Isra’el” within Isra’el—which in point of fact is the Remnant! This Remnant dwells within Isra’el’s family “olive tree” of Romans chapter 11 (cf. Rom 11:17-24), yet the Remnant is not characterized primarily by ethnicity or even Torah observance (covenantal nomism), but instead by faith in the Messiah of Isra’el! For what does Paul say?

“...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Gal 3:26-29, ESV)

This implies that a Jewish member of Isra’el can be born into the first level of covenant membership, but then matriculate to the second level of covenant membership without leaving his heritage Olive Tree or the Torah behind. Jews do not cease to be Jews once they come to faith in Messiah. What is more, Gentiles do not need to take on legal Jewish status in order to be counted as forensically righteous in God’s eyes. On the contrary, the passage quoted in Galatians three above is teaching that as one people group of God—the Remnant of Isra’el—our primary covenant identification is rooted in the work of the Cross, as opposed to our former ethnic boundaries of Jew and Gentile. Our “Messianic covenantal nomism” is similar in structure, yet necessarily differs from unsaved Isra’el’s covenantal nomism, in that ours is not a pattern of religion that is exclusively Jewish. Instead, ours envisions those grafted into Isra’el from the nations, via faith in Yeshua (cf. Eph 2:13-22), and includes “the obedience of faith” (cf. Rom 1:5; 16:26) and commandments done for the sake of the “Law of Christ” (cf. Jn 14:15; Gal 6:2). Our “Messianic justification” is rooted in a work that God has done through his Son Yeshua, instead of works that we might do on our own:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:21-24, ESV).

That I purport that Paul’s opponents likely believed that justification came from belonging to a people group in possession of the Torah is a given by this point in my commentary. Even if we allow for the fact that the Greek nouns and verbs used to describe justification and justify in Paul (Greek=δικαιοσύνη and δικαιοῦται respectively) can in fact at times imply past (as in when we were initially saved), present (as in our ongoing daily life of sanctification in the Spirit), or future aspects of our behavioral and forensic position before HaShem (as in when God finally declares us perfect in his sight at the end of the Age), nevertheless, the overall implication vital to our understanding is exactly *how* we were/are/will be justified. Works of the Law taught one way; Paul taught something entirely different.

As for introducing the topic of justification at this juncture in our section here on covenantal nomism, I basically intended to briefly interject that we should begin to realize by now that Paul intends his readers in Galatia—both Jewish and Gentile—to agree with him that even though a person might not have legalistic

tendencies in mind when loyalty to the Torah is in question, nevertheless, such loyalty must not be confused with merit when it comes to God's declaration of "justified," no matter if that justification is described as "static" or "ongoing." Put another way, I think Paul would affirm the inherent goodness of being "zealous for the Torah" (cf. Acts 21:20 and also see Rom 2:13, 25; 3:31; 7:12, 16, 22, 25) so long as one is reminded that this is in fact the expected behavioral response of faithful (justified) covenant members in the first place (cf. Deut 6:4-9; 1 Jn 5:3). This would also explain the positive sentiments that Paul expresses about maintaining obedience to the Torah.

From the perspective of covenantal nomism then, the "yoke that neither we nor our fathers could bear" in Acts 15:10 most certainly is NOT HaShem's gracious Torah; it is most likely a man-made system of "righteous behavior" as regulated by the prevailing halakhah of that day. Covenantal nomism did not view Torah observance and supposed maintenance of membership as a burden the way many later Christian exegetes did and still do down to this day. It is hardly likely that non-Messianic Jewish leaders would have pejoratively labeled their own written and oral Torah as "unbearable." However, Peter was a Messianic Jew with eyes opened by the risen Yeshua. One would imagine, then, that the yoke Peter was referring to in Acts 15 was more than likely the burdensome extra "fences" that the leaders has placed around the written word of God.⁴¹

I say again, the Judaisms of that day were NOT advocating "works-based salvation," as articulated by the current Church teachers of today. Rather, a "covenantal nomism" for all who would be counted as "justified" in the community of Isra'el was the standard party line expected to be towed by every "good Jew." The bringing near of the Gentile believers was not effected through negating the Torah, but through overcoming the rabbinic teaching that required Gentiles to "become Jews" through becoming proselytes in order to be received into the covenant people of Isra'el. The gospel message of the Apostles proclaimed that, like Abraham of old, covenant membership was based upon faith, not upon the flesh (ethnic status).

In conclusion to this section on covenantal nomism and justification, we should recognize now that in regards to the pattern of religious membership and behavior expected for genuine and lasting covenant members in Isra'el, membership enjoyed by both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, Ephesians 2:11-22 nicely dictates and describes the decision reached by the Jerusalem Council:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)

My ongoing detailed discussions about circumcision, works of the Law, covenantal nomism, and justification are meant to allow us as Bible students to more carefully understand the very real social and religious struggles that the 1st Century Jewish and Christian communities faced as they interacted with one another so long ago. Many non-Messianic Jews believed they were justified by being Jewish and upholding the works of the Law (recall that the 4QMMT fragment instructed its members to adhere to their 'works of the Law' if they wished to be "counted as righteous"). Many Christ-believing Jews understood they were justified by faith in Christ and by continued reliance upon the Ruach HaKodesh. And the poor Gentiles not raised in a Torah

community, yet seeking to turn from idolatry unto the Living God, were caught up in the middle of these “Jewish power exchanges” over salvation and sanctification. To be sure, it is not just Sha’ul’s letter to the Galatians that portrays these intense social struggles for us to assess. Indeed, as we continue to examine the rest of the Apostolic Writings more closely, we will see that it was not just Paul who had his hands full with Isra’el’s covenantal blindness. A careful examination of a familiar story in the book of Acts reveals some surprising details concerning how do Gentiles fit with Isra’el as well. Allow me to elaborate on Acts Chapter 10 in a way in which, perhaps, the average Christian has never considered.

30 <http://www.theopedia.com/new-perspective-on-paul>

31 James D.G. Dunn is known for coining the phrase “new perspective on Paul” back in 1983._

32 <http://www.theopedia.com/new-perspective-on-paul>

33 <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/justification-and-variegated-nomism-vol-1/>

34 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 220._

35 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress Press 1977), p. 17.

36 James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Additional Notes.

37 http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Justification_Biblical_Basis.pdf

38 Ibid.

39 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress Press, 1977), p. 544._

40 Thayer’s and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (TSBD), paidagw.gov.

41 Recall Yeshua’s words in Matt. 23:4 about certain Jewish leaders tying up “heavy burdens” and laying them upon men’s shoulders but not being willing to lift one finger to help move them.

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-theon θεοῦ (N, M)=feared+God (i.e., God-fearer).

2840-Koinoo κoinόω (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).

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 κoinόω) 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 declaratively 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 borne 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 תָּהוֹר) and

unclean (tamei aem'j) 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 ajgevmitoß 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 three 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 ajqevmitoß*, found in only two places in the Apostolic Scriptures,⁴² is a composite of two Greek words: the word *tithemi tivqhmi* meaning “to set, put, place, set forth, establish,” and again, the article “a” rendering the word *tithemi tivqhmi* into its negative value.⁴³ Thus, *athemitos ajqevmitoß* does convey the notion of “unlawful,” but we should carefully note that if Kefa wanted us to understand that such a prohibition was rooted in the written word of God, the Torah, then he would have used a conjugation of the Greek word *nomos novmoß*, which normally refers to God’s Torah. To be sure, our writer Luke uses *anomos a[nomoß* at Acts 2:23 (rendered “wicked” in KJV and “godless” in the NASB) when referring to those men who crucified Yeshua. The TSBD defines the adjective *anomos a[nomoß* as “destitute of the Mosaic law, departing from the law, a violator of the law, lawless, wicked.”⁴⁴ By comparison, the adjective *athemitos ajqevmitoß* 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).⁴⁵

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, considering how the written Word of God describes forbidden and permissible foods, and considering the core nature of the Gospel as revealed to Abraham, the father of those faithful Jews and Gentiles who are in Messiah (Romans chapter 4; Galatians chapter 3), the message of the Acts 10 vision is actually crystal clear. Certain forbidden animals of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are declaratively unclean (*akathartos ajkavqartoß*, corresponding Hebrew is *tamei aem’j*), and thus should not be eaten by covenant members because HaShem says not to eat them (he declares them “off limits”). The Torah never hints at a time when such a declaration would be reversed by Divine decree or such (the traditional understanding of the Acts 10 vision). However, those loyal to covenant faithfulness need not worry because the vision was never about food in the first place. It was about people. Those Gentiles from the nations that God was brining into Remnant Isra’el via faith in Yeshua are not intrinsically (and thus, irredeemably) unclean (*akathartos ajkavqartoß*) like the 1st Century Judaisms were professing. Jews should not avoid them merely because they are Gentiles by birth and remain Gentiles in Yeshua. They, like all men, have been created in God’s image, and as such, should be viewed as defiled (*koinos koinovß*) by the stain of sin, yet in need of cleansing (*katharizo kaqarivzw*) by the blood of Yeshua.⁴⁶

⁴² Acts 10:28; 1 Peter 4:3

⁴³ TSBD, *ajqevmitoß*.

⁴⁴ TSBD, *a[nomoß*.

⁴⁵ For a thorough treatment of Stern’s reasoning behind his translation of this verse see his Jewish New Testament Commentary, pp. 258-259.

⁴⁶ Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Acts 10* (Tetze Torah Ministries, 2007), pp. 4-7.

7. “UNDER THE LAW”

Traditional Christianity would have us believe that the phrase “under the Law” (Greek=ὕπὸ νόμον) refers to mere obligation to keep the Commandments, a sort of shorthand for “under obligation to keep the whole law.” Therefore, when Paul states in Romans 6:14 and 15, for example, that we are “not under the Law but under grace,” the average Bible reader hears Paul saying that, in Messiah, we are not under obligation to keep the Law of Moses since we are now “under the Grace of Christ.” In this way, the Church interprets Paul’s words as setting up a dichotomy of Law vs. Grace, with Grace being the obvious and preferred victor. After all, it is correctly assumed that Paul’s use of the term “Law” in this verse is pejorative—that is—something that is negative and to be avoided by a true follower of Yeshua. What is more, even without knowing fully what the term means at first, we must still agree with Paul’s negative use of the term “Law” here, for indeed, he is describing something we should indeed avoid at all costs. But is he referring to mere Commandment keeping? Is Torah-keeping something a believer in Yeshua should avoid? Surely legalistically following after Torah is something we should never engage in (more on this view below), but is Paul even talking about a legalistic view of Torah observance in his use of “under the Law” in Galatians?

We are not in Romans at this moment. We are in Galatians, and context demands that any given word or phrase must be given its proper surrounding consideration in order for it to have its proper meaning and application. Paul uses the phrase “under the Law” a total of five times in this letter to Galatia and each use has its own contextual meaning. For instance, in Galatians 4:21, ‘those who desire to be under the Law’ must mean ‘those Gentiles who desire to take on legally-recognized Jewish social status via the man-made ceremony of conversion,’ in order for the verse to fit the overall context of Paul’s rebuke in that chapter. Used in this way, ‘under the Law’ and ‘circumcision’ function as synonyms, both describing Jewish identity—whether natural or achieved. We simply cannot assume that standard Christian commentaries on this phrase are accurate if we are to be noble Bereans in this matter, especially since most of those same commentaries unknowingly or unwittingly carry around a fair amount of anti-Jewish or anti-Torah bias. What is more, a well-known Messianic Jewish source also unfortunately falls into the trap of applying the context of Romans’ use of this phrase to the book of Galatians.

I will single out David Stern’s commentary to Galatians:

Likewise, the term “*upo nomon*” (“under the Law”), which appears five times in this letter, 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 for “living under the oppression cause by being enslaved to the social system or the mindset that results when Torah is perverted into legalism.”⁴⁷

Turning again to our example from Romans 6:14 and 15 above, “under the Law” used there indeed refers to being found to be “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 (in these two verses from Romans) 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.

And to be fair to context, Paul does in fact apply the “condemnation” aspect and application of “under the Law” from Romans 6:14, 15 specifically to Galatians 5:18,

KJV (King James Version) But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the Law.

John K. McKee of TNN Online correctly agrees with this Galatians “condemnation” definition. Addressing Galatians 5:18 in his article *What Does Under the Law Really Mean* 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.⁴⁸

In conclusion to this section, whenever we encounter the phrase “under the Law,” we must be careful to examine the context of the passage in question if we are to properly interpret and apply its usage. Thus far, we have examined two of Paul’s more well-known examples of this phrase “under the Law.” The Romans usage teaches us that “under the Law” is equated with “under condemnation.” To be sure, 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 (read Romans 8:1). 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! Legalistically following after Torah does not change your status before God. Man cannot add to that which God perfects.

Moreover, in accordance with Sha’ul’s use of “under the Law” in Galatians 4:21, where he speaks against Gentile proselyte conversion to Judaism, in his mind, an unnecessary and supposed legal change in social status added nothing to those wishing to be counted as true Israelites in the Torah Community. Gentiles in Jesus were as complete as they needed to be and to seek to ostensibly become Jewish only insulted the genuine gospel of grace by which they were so marvelously called. To Paul, 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 truly under grace. We are not under condemnation. We have been wonderfully forgiven in Messiah! We truly 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.⁴⁹

Paul's teaching on 'under the Law' naturally leads us into a discussion about Torah observance itself, and its relevance to believers in Messiah Yeshua. It is that topic that I will now turn to in Section Eight below.

8. “Shomer Mitzvot” (Torah Observant)

Because of the importance of the discussions on the Law of God—the Torah—within the scope of a Messianic commentary on the book of Galatians, I have decided to devote an entire section to Torah observance for Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. By this point in my commentary, it should not be difficult to comprehend the massive differences between the prevailing Christian opinions and the prevailing Messianic Jewish perspectives, particularly in regards to the Law of God. In a word, historic Christianity does not embrace the so-called ceremonial and civil parts of the Torah of Moshe as an everyday lifestyle the way historic Messianic Judaism and the current Torah Movement of today does. This is what we call an in-house debate. Both groups of people profess belief in Yeshua as Messiah.

In my experience, much of the differences between these two “saved people” organizations, regarding the relevance of Torah for Christians, lean towards one or two key verses in the gospels or in Paul, rather than carefully reasoned examinations of a whole book the likes of Galatians, and this is unfortunate because a single verse can, in effect, become the “spokesman” for an entire theological position. Your average Bible student, then, too easily becomes lazy and fails to test the soundness of theology that is rooted either in a single religious slogan or in a single verse. If this is not the case, then why aren’t many who study the New Testament basing their interpretations and applications of the Law of God primarily on the Old Testament itself? To be sure, the overwhelming context of the TaNaKH as whole does not present a view of Torah that suggests it will be relaxed once the Messiah arrives on the scene.

I would tend to think that most religious Jews—myself included—would find the prevailing Christian conclusion that the “Law is done away with in Christ” to be “unfortunate” in the sense that it such a view essentially robs heritage Isra’el of a rich collection of historical and religious traditions that, in many cases, are actually rooted in the text itself! After all, not all traditions are bad. To be sure, the popular view that sees the “ceremonial” and “civil” parts of the Law as expired, with the “moral” parts of the Law continuing on, amounts to what I find to be a cleverly veiled adversarial attack on those commandments that tend to make a person look like an historical Jew, viz, they tend to make a person resemble someone who is an advocate for establishing the ‘works of the Law’ all over again (Sabbath, food laws, circumcision, etc.).

What is more, nothing in the prophecies of Isra’el hints at an “apostle to the Gentiles” who will enforce policies in Isra’el that teach the abrogation of Torah as a viable lifestyle of the redeemed peoples of HaShem. I would like to present what I believe to be scriptural “proof” that the book of Galatians and indeed Paul as a follower of the One, True Jewish Messiah simply could not have taught the abrogation of the Torah as a whole. 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)

This admittedly limited presentation of select Bible passages clearly enjoins ongoing covenant faithfulness and loyal to HaShem upon any and all who wish to be counted among the members of God's family called Isra'el. Christians may not choose to identify the life they lead as “Torah observance,” but make no mistake, it

is in fact in keeping with the Law of God—the Torah of Moshe—to espouse genuine faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and to pattern one’s life after the life that he lived. In this way, whether one is Jewish or not, or whether a Christian embraces the so-called ceremonial and civil parts of Torah or not becomes an issue related to ongoing sanctification due to the biblical reality that “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6) is, in point of fact, to be (as orthodox Jews say) “shomer mitzvot,” viz, Torah observant. So, let us talk about this notion of “Torah observant” for a bit.

The Hebrew word $\text{remw}\{\text{v}$ “shomer” means “keeper of,” or “to be observant”; in the Qal stem, the root word rmX “shamar” suggests the idea of “safeguarding.”⁵⁰ The Hebrew word $\text{t}\{\text{w.cim}$ “mitzvot” is the plural form of the word hwcm “mitzvah,” meaning, “command”; thus, $\text{t}\{\text{w.cim remw}\{\text{v}$ “shomer mitzvot” (say: show-mair meets-vote) means “keeper of the commands,” or more generically “Torah observant.”

Many believers—specifically Jewish believers without a formal background in Judaism, and Gentile ones who wish to identify with the Scriptures of Isra’el—have questions about what it means to be “Torah observant.” Pursuing the Torah as the Master Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ) modeled it for his followers is sometimes referred to as hklh “halakhah,” coming from the Hebrew word $\text{\$lh}$ “halakh” for “walk.”⁵¹

In Judaism, safeguarding and keeping the Torah is central to performing the will of HaShem.⁵² Indeed, as properly understood from HaShem’s point of view, the whole of Torah was given to bring its followers to the “goal” of acquiring the kind of faith in HaShem that leads to placing one’s trusting faithfulness in the One and only Son of HaShem, Yeshua HaMashiach.⁵³ To this end, the Torah has prophesied about him since as early as the book of Genesis (3:15), and continues to speak of him until its conclusion in Revelation (22:20). In this capacity, the Torah hrwt acts like its etymological counterpart hry “yarah”⁵⁴ (an archery term) in that it “teaches” its adherents how to properly identify with HaShem by helping them to “reach the mark.” To be sure, one of the most common Hebrew verbs used to identify “sin” NQT “chatah” literally means, “to miss the mark.”⁵⁵

As our current expedition into the book of Galatians has so aptly demonstrated, obedience to the Torah has long since been an oft-misunderstood subject, both in the Jewish community and the Christian one. To be sure, as we seek to better understand the historical context of Paul’s writings in Galatians, we must continually remind ourselves that in the 1st Century Judaisms, the prevailing theology sincerely—albeit incorrectly—believed that genuine and lasting covenant status was granted to Jewish Isra’el and Jewish Isra’el alone. Tim Hegg captures this concept well in his book *The Letter Writer*.

If the extant Rabbinic literature contains at least some expression of the general viewpoints of 1st Century Pharisaism, then it is safe to say that the prevailing Pharisaic view of Paul’s day was that every Israelite was secured a place in the world to come.⁵⁶

All Isra’el have a portion in the world-to-come, for it is written, Your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.⁵⁷

The verse referenced in the Talmud above (“for it is written”) is taken from Yesha’yahu (Isaiah) 60:21, which reads:

Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (ASV).

However, the literal Hebrew of “**Thy people also shall be all righteous**” is $\sim\text{yiqyid;c} \sim\text{'LUK} .\text{\$eM};[\text{.w}$ “**And your people all of them [are] righteous [ones].**” The translator’s insert of “**shall be all**” is not in the text, however the future context of the passage lends to this choice of wording, of which I agree. Nevertheless, this statement of the prophet’s lead the Sages to adopt a position similar to the one listed in the Talmud, viz, Isra’el exclusively shall be righteous. In this capacity the Sages imagined that Torah does not function to lead the individual to an imputed righteousness (the way the pedagogue leads the boy-student

to the Teacher of Righteousness in Galatians 3:24), rather, the Torah is given to the person who is righteous either by birth or by conversion.

It is my understanding that the errors surrounding one's relationship to Torah can be corrected once a person resolves the issues surrounding identity and legalism, begins to understand the intended nature and function of the Torah in the first place, and then faithfully applies it to their own lives. Because the Messiah has already come, the Torah is now a document meant to be lived out in the life of a faithful follower of Yeshua, through the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, to the glory of HaShem the Father. It should not be presumed that it could 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. To state it succinctly, Torah observance is a matter of the heart, always has been⁵⁸, and always will be.

It is my desire that this commentary to the book of Galatians will assist the average non-Jewish believer, or new Messianic Jewish believer in his desire to become a more mature child of God.

“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer” (Deuteronomy 10:12-16, NIV).

Because the Torah is written on the hearts of all who truly name the name of Yeshua as LORD and Savior, it is meant to be followed to the best of our ability. We have no reason for fear of condemnation, or the trappings of legalism!

In conclusion to this section on Shomer Mitzvot (Torah Observance), consider this explanation (Hebrew=midrash) on our relationship to two of the more well-known biblical covenants:

The following explanation is meant to serve as a primer to the individuals' search to become “Torah Observant.” It is not meant to be an exhaustive definition on the subject, rather, it is simply an introduction to a series of teachings in this area. To be sure, this Torah Teacher is not the subject matter expert. But the following “midrash” (teaching example) should enlighten the average believer: (I'm pretty sure my friends at **First Fruits of Zion** have made me familiar with the following example. I have, however, modified it somewhat.)

‘Most new automobiles come with two important pieces of literature: an owner's manual, and a set of registration papers. The first of these is free with the purchase of the car. The latter needs to be obtained legally by the purchaser. ‘In the event of a traffic altercation (accident, speeding, etc.), the driver of the vehicle is required to produce the proof of registration (among other things) to the policeman making the report. Failure to do so will have serious repercussions on the part of the driver, as this information vitally links the driver to the ownership of the car. Obviously the registration paper is very important.

‘On a similar vein, a long trip out and abroad on a hot summer day, without the use of the air conditioner, will prove to be uncomfortable, to say the least—especially, if the region is a humid one. A flat tire during this trip would spell “double disaster.” Because this is a new car, the driver is unfamiliar with the climate controls, so the heat is unbearable! Also, he or she may be ignorant when it comes to changing a flat tire! Where does the driver turn to for assistance? Fortunately the owner's manual covers such topics as “climate controls, changing a flat, oil pressure, engine maintenance, and even radio features.” The owner's manual proves to be a valuable tool in providing both comfort and peace of mind in this situation.’

The matter of Torah Observance is made clearer when one understands the relationship he or she has to the Covenants. The Torah spells out at least two very important Covenants in the life of a follower of HaShem

(God). There is the **Avrahamic (with Abraham) Covenant** and the **Moshaic (with Moses) Covenant**. The Avrahamic Covenant serves to represent the registration papers, in our above midrash. Prior to coming to faith, the Torah served as a reminder of sin (Romans 7:7-12). This is not the **only** function of Torah, but it is a primary one. After coming into a relationship with HaShem, through His Son Yeshua, the person underwent a change in relationship to the Torah. The Avrahamic Covenant became for him or her, a “promise of inheritance.” And what is this “inheritance”? “Eternal life,” through trusting faithfulness. It became their “**proof of ownership**” so-to-say. It still reminded him or her of their sin. However, because we now constitute the “**Righteousness of HaShem**” (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21), we are now free to pursue following HaShem without the threat of death for disobedience! To be sure, the Torah spelled certain death for some disobedient acts committed by the supposed covenant follower (see: Exodus 31:12-18 “Sabbath violation”). Even the **New Covenant** Scriptures (B’rit Chadashah) teach, “The wages (payment) of sin is death.” But now Yeshua’s atoning death has “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13, **KJV**). “Death” and “condemnation” are no longer our wages (Romans 6:23; 8:1).

The Moshaic Covenant was added for the “enjoyment of the promise” already available through our participation in the Avrahamic Covenant. The Moshaic Covenant became our “owner’s manual,” providing blessing, maintenance, and enjoyment of promise to our lives.

“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, which naturally flows into obedience. True obedience never comes before faith, nor is it an addition to faith. It is always the result of true biblical faith.”⁵⁹

Torah Observance is a matter of the **heart**. It always has been and always will be. The Torah Proper (first Five Books of Moshe) instructed the people of Isra’el to “love ADONAI your God with all their heart, all your being and all your resources” (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is where “Shomer Mitzvot” begins—by loving HaShem, and accepting Him on His terms. By this, I mean accepting His means of covenant obedience. For today, this means acceptance of Yeshua, His only Son, for Jew and non-Jew alike.

Covenants require a response on the part of the follower. HaShem, for His part, has provided the “promise of inheritance” for all those who participate in the Avrahamic Covenant. The response to this covenant is “faith.” The nature of the Moshaic Covenant is “blessing, maintenance, and enjoyment of promise.” For all who wish to participate, the response to this covenant is “obedience.” It’s that “easy.”

⁴⁷ David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 537.

⁴⁸ <http://www.tnnonline.net/two-housenews/torah/under-the-law/index.html>

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 537, 538.

⁵⁰ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), rmX.

⁵¹ Ibid, \$lh.

⁵² Deuteronomy 5:1.

⁵³ Luke 24:27, 44-47; Romans 10:4.

⁵⁴ BDB, hry.

⁵⁵ Ibid, נשן

⁵⁶ Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (FFOZ Publications, 2002), p. 85.

⁵⁷ m. *Sanhedrin* 10:1, the gemara is b. *Sanhedrin* 90a.

⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 6:6; 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Romans 7:22; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16.

⁵⁹ Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 32.

9. SUMMARY

In my historical research into this book by Sha'ul (Apostle Paul), I have discovered that much of the social fabric of the 1st Century Judaism that we read about suffered from a sickness I like to call Ethnocentric Jewish Exclusivism. I have written about this concept in another paper that dealt with studies on group prejudice. I believe the paper nicely summarizes our study on Galatians and helps to form the necessary social background required to properly understand the book in its original historical and religious context, and therefore have decided to include a quote from that work here:

The New Testament writer Paul of Tarsus (a.k.a. Apostle Paul) had much to say about the Judaism of his day and the ethnocentric cultural requirements they were imposing on the non-Jews. To be sure, Paul is traditionally misunderstood by the Christianities of today as teaching an abrogation to Torah, circumcision, and Jewish culture as a whole—in a word—ethnic genocide. A proper understanding of 2nd Temple Judaism will uncover many of the true motives driving the ethnic competition between Jews and non-Jews.

Group-level stereotyping of Gentiles by Jews as pejorative pagans, with no viable and positive contribution possible for the Jewish community, can clearly be seen in this research. Negative attitudes by the Jewish community turned into prejudice against non-Jews, which lead to discrimination against non-Jews as an ethnicity, and eventually provided the Jewish leaders with a mechanism for installing anti-Gentile group policies that were racially driven. Indeed, the power to enforce group prejudice and discrimination is what gives racism its social advantage over subjugated minorities.⁶⁰

The book of Galatians obviously includes an ongoing drama involving two social groups (Jews and Gentiles) not so much over the identity of Jesus the Christ, but perhaps more over who has the right to join Isra'el (who is a Jew?) and subsequently follow after the Torah of Moshe. Recall that the Torah was historically given to Isra'el nearly 3500 years ago, but realize that Isra'el's post-Egypt beginnings included both native-born sons of Jacob, as well as those mixed racial multitudes that God delivered out of Egypt during the Passover. These two groups came to the foot of Mount Sinai, received the Words of God, and were collectively called "Isra'el" by the text (read the Exodus narratives carefully again). Paul later reveals that the "mystery of the Gospel" is that according to Rom. 11 and Eph. chapters 2 and 3 and specifically 6:19, Gentiles are "grafted into the commonwealth of Isra'el via Messiah, and become fellow heirs sharing in the richness of the root of the Olive Tree and inheriting the blessings spelled out in the Torah for all of obedient Isra'el." Therefore, since Isra'el is actually a multi-ethnic entity, Torah actually applies to all who name the name of the LORD as their one and Only God. This naturally includes Gentile believers in Yeshua.

Let us go back now and take a look at what we have covered so far in these sectional chapters to this Messianic Jewish commentary to the book of Galatians.

Circumcision:

In Section One, we read in Genesis 17 how God commanded Abraham to be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. God also commanded eight-day old baby boys to be circumcised later on in the book of Leviticus. Circumcision was a command of God so the Jews rightly took it seriously, as they do with all of God's commandments. From a practical application perspective, we Jews do not believe that the Law has come to an end in Messiah therefore we still practice infant circumcision.

Circumcision pointed towards the promise of God that he would bless Abraham with many descendants, culminating in the quintessential son of Abraham, Yeshua the Messiah. By remaining loyal to the 'b'rit milah,' the covenant of circumcision, male members of Isra'el were signaling their continued reliance, not upon the flesh (the member of procreation) to bring about God's promises in their lives, but instead they were demonstrating their continued dependency upon the miracle working power of the LORD Almighty to enact blessings in their lives. And even though Messiah has now already come, circumcision still serves as a

reminder that all who wish to be counted among Abraham's genuine and lasting children must appropriate the same faith as Abraham had, that is, "faith in the promised Word of the LORD."

Circumcision was a hot topic in the 1st Century of Israel. By Paul's day, it had lost its simple "surgical" meaning and had taken on a socio-religious meaning. Instead of being a sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:9-14; Lev 12:3), it had become code word Jewish ethnicity, as well as one of the key requirements for conversion to Judaism for Gentiles not born Jewish. Quite simply, it was being misused by the Judaisms of Paul's day to seal the deal for Gentile proselytes wishing to be counted as legally recognized Jews and therefore "righteous" Israelites in the Jewish communities. This was quite upsetting to Paul because the Torah (Law) prescribed NO such ceremony. Proselyte conversion was entirely a man-made rubric—and an unnecessary one at that. Paul taught that believing Gentiles and Jews were both genuine covenant members. And both were covenant-bound to follow Torah—including circumcision. Paul only dissuaded circumcision in Galatians due to Jewish misuse of this God-given sign.

What then, exactly, does Paul indicate when he teaches we are 'circumcised in Christ'? The short answer is that to be circumcised in Christ means one is saved, taking the word "circumcision" here to refer to "circumcision of the heart, indicative of genuine faith in Yeshua (Jesus)." To be sure, a few verses later we read, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'" (Rom 4:3) Circumcision implies cutting something away, whether it is physical foreskin, or spiritual unbelief. Circumcised in Christ means unbelief has been cut away from the heart so that one sees Messiah by faith, and such faith saves him.

The term "circumcision" in Paul's day quite often implied Jewish identity by context. The entire chapter of Romans 4 is Paul's exposition to combat the 1st Century mistaken notion that Jews and only Jews were genuine covenant members in Israel. Recall that Jewish males were circumcised as eight-day-old baby boys (Lev 12:3). In effect, according to common Jewish reasoning, they were "born with covenant status."

The reason circumcision gets brought into Paul's discussions so prominently (Rom 2:25-29; Rom 3:1; 1 Cor 7:18, 19 Gal 2:12; Gal 5:2-11; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:11; Philippians 3:3; Titus 1:10) is because by the 1st Century, Israel was using the term circumcision more as a sociological term that referred to Jewish status, than as a covenant sign that pointed to the Abrahamic promise of Gen 17:9-14. In the eyes of these "ethnocentric" Jews, circumcision was the sign that guaranteed them covenant status and salvation (Acts 15:1).

So if a Gentile wished to join Israel, a man-made ceremony of the proselyte was prescribed, in which one could ostensibly change their ethnicity and become Jewish. And because the same prevailing Jewish views believed the Torah to be a Jewish-only document, once a person earned their Jewish status, the Torah became their covenant possession and responsibility.

We know this is the correct understanding of these opening verses because of Paul's line of reasoning later on down in the passage in Rom 4:9, 10:

"Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised."

If I were to paraphrase these two verses and insert the implied historical, grammatical, and sociological meanings, they would sound something like this:

"Is this blessing, that those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered because the LORD will not count his sin—in a word, salvation, only for those with legal Jewish status, or also for those who are not Jews, that is the Gentiles? For we state with certainty that salvation was counted by God to Abraham as righteousness in Gen 15:6 and the Scriptures are definitely reliable. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he became Jewish? It was not after, but before he became Jewish."

The notion of "Jewish-only Israel," and a "Jewish-only Torah" is also corroborated from reading the

surviving, non-inspired Pharisaic writings from before and after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, namely, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Talmud and other rabbinic writings, etc. They indeed help us to better understanding the historical, grammatical, and sociological background to our own inspired Apostolic Writings (viz, the NT).

Lastly, “circumcised in Christ” does not necessarily mean that physical circumcision is no longer valuable. For what does Paul say?

Rom 2:25

“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.”

Rom 3:1, 2

“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

Works of [the] Law:

In Sections Two and Three we shifted from our study of circumcision and began to dig into the socio-religious background of Paul’s famous phrase ‘works of the Law.’ What we learned, especially from Qumran’s 4QMMT document, as well as from the surviving rabbinic literature is that ‘works of the Law’ is not merely a description of ‘works.’ What Sha’ul is really talking about when he employs the Greek phrase “ἔργων νόμου ergon nomou,” translated as “deeds/works of Law,” is in actuality a technical phrase that the Judaisms of Sha’ul’s day employed to speak of the socio-religious and ethnic boundary markers that separated Jews from Gentiles and which undergirded covenant membership and group sectarianism. Indeed, the prevailing view of the sages of the 1st Century held to the common belief that Jewish Isra’el and Jewish Isra’el alone shared a place in the world to come (Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin 10:1, which references Isaiah 60:21). Thus, in their way of thinking, if a non-Jew wished to enter into HaShem’s covenant blessings and promises, such a person had to convert to Judaism first (take on legal Jewish status, which granted covenant membership), and then exercise “maintenance” of existing covenant membership by ongoing loyalty and obedience to the Torah. To be sure, this is also 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 the Remnant of 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, viz, Yeshua. Thus, the original Greek phrase translated as “works of Law” has a Hebrew counterpart: ma’asei haTorah. What meaneth ma’asei haTorah? The Dead Sea Scrolls used this phrase as well,⁶¹ and particularly in those manuscripts we have now come to know that it refers to “some of the precepts of the Torah,” as adjudicated by each sectarian halakhah, and implemented by the various communities wielding the most influence over any given group (i.e., Essenes vs. Pharisees, etc.). To be sure, the common social perspective of 1st Century religious Isra’el that taught Gentile inclusion into covenant Isra’el only by way of conversion (read most often as “circumcision,” viz, Jewish identity in Galatians 5:2) was naturally at odds with the True Gospel of Gentile inclusion into the community of Isra’el by faith in Yeshua plus nothing! If we understand that quite likely Sha’ul’s socio-religious use of the term circumcision in Galatians 5:2 is actually shorthand for “the man-made ritual that sought to turn Gentiles into Jews before they could be counted as covenant members” then the letter begins to make more sense Hebraically and contextually.

‘Works of the Law’ as a religious slogan in Paul’s day appears to have focused primarily on the way Torah and Jewish identity served to distinctively separate and elevate Jewish nationalism above all other social expressions of what was deemed “righteous” in God’s eyes. Dunn expresses it well in this quote from his (now famous) ‘The New Perspective on Paul’ essay:

Paul has no intention here of denying a ritual expression of faith, as in baptism or the Lord's Supper. Here again we should keep the precise limitations of Paul's distinction between faith in Christ and works of law before us. What he is concerned to exclude is the racial not the ritual expression of faith; it is nationalism which he denies not activism. Whatever their basis in the Scriptures, these works of the law had become identified as indices of Jewishness, as badges betokening race and nation – inevitably so when race and religion are so inextricably intertwined as they were, and are, in Judaism. What Jesus has done by his death and resurrection, in Paul's understanding, is to free the grace of God in justifying from its nationalistically restrictive clamps for a broader experience (beyond the circumcised Jew) and a fuller expression (beyond concern for ritual purity).⁶²

By focusing on a test case verse in Galatians (Gal 2:16), we were able to ascertain that in essence, when Paul has Gentile inclusion into Isra'el in mind, "works of the Law" referred to those sometimes locally autonomous "group requirements" that were being imposed on non-Jews, as outlined and delegated by each individual group functioning under the prevailing Judaisms of Paul's day (recall that the Qumran community has unique works of the Law that necessarily differed from some of the other Jewish community's works of the Law). When it came to works of the Law for Jews, we discovered that Paul most likely had obedience to Torah done for the sake of keeping Jews separate from "Gentile sinners,"⁶³ and ostensibly for maintaining one's "righteous" place in the covenant people in mind. So, as far as the equality of both people groups in Messiah is concerned, 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 was, therefore, directly related to works of the Law in that it was a shorthand way for Paul to talk about "conversion to Judaism/being or becoming a Jew/maintaining covenant membership via Torah observance." Once again, we must remind ourselves that even though circumcision was historically misused and misapplied as "Jewish identity," 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 the Torah that God has clearly given for us to obey, provided we maintain our primary identity, not necessarily as "Jewish" or "Gentile," but as that of one firmly grounded in Mashiach.

Covenantal Nomism and Justification:

We saw in Section Five that to better understand Paul's 1st Century Judaisms from their historic perspective one needs to gain an appreciation for the way the people interacted with the Torah as a social responsibility and with how one expressed his loyalty to the covenant. What we found is that according to Sanders research, one got 'into' the covenant by ethnicity (Jewish lineage) and one stayed 'in' by maintenance of commandments. Indeed, in Sanders' view, the ancient discussions on covenantal nomism in the minds of the rabbis essentially amounts to systematic teachings on salvation:

In favour of the use of the term 'soteriology' is that it points to a concern which is central to Judaism: a concern to be properly rather than improperly religious, to serve God rather than to desert his way, to be 'in' rather than 'out'. When a man is concerned to be 'in' rather than 'out', we may consider him to have a 'soteriological' concern, even though he may have no view concerning an afterlife at all. There does appear to be in Rabbinic Judaism a coherent and all-pervasive view of what constitutes the essence of Jewish religion and of how that religion 'works', and we shall occasionally, for the sake of convenience, call this view 'soteriology'. The all-pervasive view can be summarized in the phrase 'covenantal nomism'.⁶⁴

Covenantal nomism concerns itself with keeping the Torah for the express purpose of exercising the freedom of living as an existing covenant member, with the scriptural assurance that God was pleased with such nomistic service, provided it was done in faith. Covenantal nomism did not view the Torah as a yoke of bondage the way the historic Christian communities have done.

However, doesn't Paul explicitly say in Galatians 5 that the Law is bondage? Context shows that Paul is combatting ethnic-driven corporate righteousness and ostensible covenant membership based on the social expectation and maintenance of Law-keeping. Because of the ground breaking work done by Sanders,

scholars have come to learn that the social relationship to the Law, as described by Paul and his contemporaries, is best subsumed under the label 'covenantal nomism.' The bondage of Galatians chapter 5 verse 1 is spiritual bondage spelled out for any believer who might wish to return to a 1st Century Jewish worldview of corporate/individual salvation and sanctification based on group membership and maintenance of Torah commands. Recall that in covenantal nomism, one "gets in" by belonging to the group (being legally born with or married into Jewish identity, or conversion to the legal status of Jewish), and one "stays in" by keeping Torah. Remind yourself that neither of these two "gets in—stays in" facts are true in God's courtroom. Thus, Paul is warning the genuine Galatian believers that to "get in" one places his trust in Yeshua, and that to "stay in" one waits for the hope of righteousness by faith. The debt to the "whole Law" of verse 3 is a debt to whatever ethnocentric Jewish conversion policy the hapless Gentile converts would submit themselves to should they venture down that bondage-laden path—a debt that surely excluded group membership and Torah observance for non-Jews. Justification by Law in verse 4 means ostensible justification by the policy that teaches a "Jewish-only Isra'el."

What we learned from our studies on this topic is that axiomatic for Paul in his teaching on covenantal nomism and justification is his Messianic understanding and application of Habakkuk's famous pasuk, "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4). In Hab 2:4, the last half of the verse is usually translated: "...the righteous shall live by his faith." But based on one Hebrew word in the verse, it could just as easily be translated: "...the righteous shall live by his faithfulness." The Hebrew word *emunah* is both faith and faithfulness, which is why NIV, NLT, NET, and GWT all have faithfulness for this word. Interestingly, Young's Literal Translation has "steadfastness."

The origin words for faith and faithfulness share a noun and verb relationship in both Hebrew and Greek. Tim Hegg of TorahResource.com explains the Hebrew and Greek noun and verb cognates this way:

One of the major difficulties we encounter in our discussion of "trust," "believe," and "faith/faithful," is that there is no corresponding verbal form of "faith" in the English language. We have no way of saying that one "faithed" or that someone is "faithing" in God. Yet in both the Hebrew and the Greek the word group expressing the concept of faith also contains a verb cognate. For example, the Hebrew verb *ʾaman* ('*aman*), "to be supported"⁶⁵ from which we derive the verb "to believe," has the corresponding noun *ʾemunah* ('*emunah*), which means "faith" or "faithful." Likewise, the Greek verb *pisteuō* (*pisteuo*), "to believe," has the corresponding noun *pistis*, (*pistis*), which means "faith" or "faithful." Unfortunately, many English readers do not realize that "believing," "having faith," and "being faithful" all derive from the same word group whether in the Hebrew or the Greek.⁶⁶

The way I see it, faith and faithfulness function as two sides of the same coin, in that they are both precious in God's eyes. Don't misunderstand me. I am NOT saying we are saved by works. Perish the thought! I am saying genuine faith will lead to genuine faithfulness. 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 God rather than rebel against him as before. Millard Erickson stated, "Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God."

Thus, our verse in Habakkuk is a fitting one for our study on faith and faithfulness. For indeed, this passage is a decisive verse for the Apostle Paul. Here, the famous phrase "the just shall live by faith" must be understood from the original context of Habakkuk to mean that the righteous person lives on the basis of his faithfulness. In the time of Habakkuk, the nation was being torn in her loyalties, whether to trust God and the covenant He had given, or to ally herself with the nations for protection. Habakkuk's statement is made with this in mind: the righteous (those who have faith in God) will live (be protected and sustained) by faith (by demonstrating a faithful trust in God and His promises). It is this understanding of faith that Paul carries into the argument of Romans and is sustained throughout the book.

Thus, “the righteous shall live by his faith” does not simply mean he will claim to have faith then but do nothing about it. On the contrary, if he has genuine faith then he will demonstrate genuine faithfulness to the God that he claims to have faith in. And in this faith and faithfulness, he shall indeed live!

Acts 10:

In Section Six, we conducted another test case using Peter and the account in Acts 10. What we found is that the Jewish nationalism that was present in Paul’s Galatians was also very much alive and well in Peter’s book of Acts experience with Cornelius. To be sure, Peter himself needed to be taught a very valuable lesson on Gentile equality in Messiah, and that is the reason HaShem sent the vision in the first place. If the rabbinic literature that survived the destruction of the 2nd Temple is any indication of the pattern of religious life in 1st Century Isra’el, then the Judaisms of Peter’s day held to the common belief that Jewish Isra’el held an exclusive place among the righteous peoples of the earth. The poison of Ethnocentric Jewish Exclusivism that permeated the first Century Jewish society erected a wall of separation between your average Jew and your average Gentile (read Eph 2:14 with this view in mind). Because of this social view, many religious Jews sought to keep a measured distance away from most Gentiles, believing the average Gentile to be intrinsically “unclean,” capable of transmitting ritual impurity to Jews, and or leading Jews away into idolatry.

A careful reading of the Greek of Acts 10 and Peter’s conversation with God showed that this simple fisherman was also blinded by the prevailing Jewish traditions and bylaws that sought to avoid Gentiles at all costs, and it took the Spirit of God to open Peter’s eyes to the truth that, in Yeshua (Jesus), Gentiles too can be cleansed by the power of the Messiah’s blood (Acts 10:34, 35, 43).

Under the Law:

Beginning with Section Seven we turns our eye to another one of Paul’s famous “Law” phrases. Earlier on in the book of Galatians, most often we found that the technical term “under the Law” was also used as another way to speak of Jewish identity. For Gentiles wishing to be included into Isra’el, the man-made ritual known as conversion could ostensibly secure this legal identity. By the time we get to the latter half of chapter five of Galatians, however, Paul had changed his polemical tone and was now assuring those truly in Christ that if they are led by the Spirit they are no longer slaves to the old nature—viz—“under the Law.” Having the mind controlled by the old nature is death. Conversely, having the mind controlled by the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh is life and true shalom. Those who are controlled by the flesh cannot please God and are destined to suffer the ultimate punishment the Torah spells out for unrepentant sinners, that is, condemnation. This “under the Law” condemnation is what Paul meant by its usage in 5:18, and his theology is taken squarely from the Torah proper. Specifically, 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 passage 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 Mashiah 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!

So, those of us who claim membership in an existing Torah community, the One Law Movement (a.k.a., the Messianic Jewish Movement) confidently affirm and teach obligation to Torah commands for both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. And yet Paul says in Rom 6:14 that we are not under Law but under grace. The difficulty in correctly interpreting Paul is in understanding that his uses of the word Law in many of his letters applies the definition from the context, which means the root Greek word used (nomos=law) can apply to a variety of definitions. Paul's "not under Law" phrase is preceded by "For sin shall not have dominion over you..." In this verse, Law does not mean we are not under obligation to Torah commands. Rather, it most naturally functions in this verse as shorthand for "not under the bondage of sin and therefore under the condemnation of the Law," a just condemnation reserved for unrepentant sinners. The reason we are not under [the] condemnation [of the Law] is because we are not under bondage, and the reason we are not under bondage is because we have been set free and are under [the] grace [of Yeshua's blood].

Shomer Mitzvot:

Lastly, in Section Eight, we devoted an entire chapter to talk about Torah observance, or "shomer mitzvot" as many religious Jews call it. Does Galatians signal the end of the age of Law for Christians? Did the Apostle Paul preach the end of the Law? The short answers are "no," and "no." Paul not only DID Torah, he also taught others to DO the Torah.

For instance, these facts can easily be observed by James' instructions to Paul in Acts 21:24, *"...thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the Law."* James was addressing this specific rumor among the Judean Jews concerning Paul: *"...that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs."* Paul demonstrated by his lifestyle that the Law did not come to an end in Messiah. Moreover, Paul admitted to this fact later on in his life (Acts 21:24; Acts 24:14-16; Acts 25:8; Acts 26:4, 5). Notice also that James does not add any supposed "three-part" breakdown to the Law (moral, ceremonial, civil). He just says "Law." This would indicate those three designations are probably unsanctioned man-made distinctions, and as such, are confusing and unnecessary.

We can also easily observe Paul's view of the Law in Rom 3:31, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law." We could also use Rom 7:22, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being." Also, see Rom 7:25, "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

What then did we learn concerning the believer's relationship to the Law? What came to an end in Messiah is the curse of the Law for those in Messiah (Rom 8:1). However, this curse is still in effect for those outside of Messiah. What also came to an end in Messiah was the wall of separation that was erected by the Jewish communities in Isra'el who were wishing to keep a religious separation between Gentiles and Jews (Eph 2:11-22). In Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles who embrace Yeshua (Jesus) as LORD become "one new mankind." As one new mankind, they both comprise the Remnant of Isra'el and both inherit the blessings and promises of God—which includes the Torah given to Isra'el.

Besides, if Paul taught the end of the Law, then, as a disciple of Yeshua, he would be going against the words of his Master, "Do not think I came to do away with the Law..." (Matt 5:17) Yeshua clearly defined his use of the word "fulfill" in this passage by giving us the immediate example of Matt 5:19, "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Based on Yeshua's words, if Paul wanted to be great instead of least in the kingdom, then Paul needed to not only DO the Law, but teach others to DO them as well. Which brings us full circle: by his life, Paul not only DID the Torah, he taught others to DO it as well. Indeed, Dunn's comments in his book *Jesus, Paul, and the*

Law challenge the traditional Christian interpretation of the book of Galatians as a whole, as well as Paul's ostensibly negative perspective towards the Torah for Jewish and Gentile believers alike:

In short, Paul's attitude to the law in Galatians has regularly been misperceived as more unyieldingly negative than it is. The misunderstanding has been based on a misperception of "works of the law" = "good works" and of 3:10 as requiring perfect compliance with the law. But once the point has been grasped that Paul's chief target is a covenantal nomism understood in restrictively nationalistic terms—"works of the law" as maintaining Jewish identity, "the curse of the law" as falling on the lawless so as to exclude Gentiles as such from the covenant promise—then it becomes clear that Paul's negative remarks had a more limited thrust and that so long as the law is not similarly misunderstood as defining and defending the prerogatives of a particular group, it still has a positive role to play in the expression of God's purpose and will.⁶⁷

Applying what we studied about the popular contest between "Law vs. grace" towards a better hermeneutic approach to the book of Galatians and Paul's writings as a whole, we find that grace is indeed 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 1st 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.

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 1st 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.

60 Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Towards Understanding 1st Century and 21st Century Jewish Attitudes: Studies in Group Prejudice* (Tetze Torah Ministries, 2011), pp. 10-12.

61 Dead Sea Scrolls, 4QMMT, section C 25-32.

62 James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Section II.

63 Recall Gal 2:15 where Paul reminds Peter that, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners." _

64 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress Press 1977), p. 17.

65 The *qal* only shows up one time in the Tanach (Lamentations 4:5), and the root meaning of "supported" is actually derived from the meaning attached to its usage in other forms. BDB offer "confirm" or "support" as the root meaning of the verb.

66 Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (FFOZ Publications, 2002), p. 17-18.

67 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 250-251.

10. THE PROMISE: TRUST AND OBEY

Well, my dear friends, we have finally come full circle. We began our investigation into Galatians in Section One (B'rit Milah) with the patriarch Avraham and physical circumcision, and we conclude here in Section Ten (The Promise: Trust and Obey) with the patriarch Avraham and circumcision. 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 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!"

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 HaShem has cleared him of guilt for past sins, and (b) that HaShem has given him a new human nature inclined to obey HaShem rather than rebel against him as before.

It all boils down to the evangelical notion of justification and sanctification. Webster's defines the word 'justify' thusly:

1 a : to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable **b** (1) : to show to have had a sufficient legal reason (2) : to qualify (oneself) as a surety by taking oath to the ownership of sufficient property.

2 a archaic : to administer **justice** to **b** archaic : **ABSOLVE** **c** : to judge, regard, or treat as righteous and worthy of salvation.⁶⁸

Millard Erickson stated, "Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God."⁶⁹

I want to demonstrate a good biblical view of trust and obedience by examining two of the New Testament's better known, yet seemingly opposing authors: Sha'ul (Apostle Paul) and Ya'akov haTzaddik (James the Just). The former wrote some 13 or possibly 14 letters to the believing communities of his day; the latter was the physical brother of our LORD Yeshua himself.

Some see a contradiction between Paul and James on the teaching of justification. Paul emphatically taught that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law while James argued that a man is justified by faith and works (James 2:14-26). Luther is such an individual who saw the two prophets' teachings to be in opposition. Insisting that Paul's view was correct, Luther belittled James's epistle, calling it an 'epistle of straw.' Such an approach to the two authors is not necessary. When the literary context of each other is examined it can be demonstrated that there is no contradiction. The key to understanding these two seemingly contradictory authors is to understand how each uses the terms justified, faith, and works. These words must be defined by their respective contexts. Observe the following table:

<u>Paul</u>	<u>James</u>
Faith =genuine faith and reliance upon God for salvation.	Faith =mental assent that could fail to affect one's actions.
Works =works apart from faith that one believes are able to, or help make him a genuine covenant member.	Works =works that can be done through faith, which attest to genuine faith.
Justified =declared righteous by God because of your trust in his means of salvation.	Justified =show to be righteous as evidenced by your actions. ¹

Paul emphasized that we are saved by faith in Yeshua, and not by our natural or achieved ethnic status. James emphasized that the kind of faith that results in salvation will necessarily produce works that show evidence of that faith. Paul was concerned about people adding anything to faith that they believe is meritorious for their salvation. James was concerned about people professing to have faith that is not really faith at all, but rather a lifeless mental-assent to Messiah. It seems that James was attacking the 1st Century Jewish distortion of the Torah's teaching on justification, wherein faith is some dead orthodoxy with no corresponding behavioral changes. Even Paul found it necessary to fight against this distortion of his teaching on justification (Romans 3:8; 6:1, 15). James pointed out that if a person has genuine salvific faith, works will follow after him showing evidence of that faith. Avraham really did believe God, and his works evidenced that fact. If Avraham had refused to offer Yitz'chak upon the altar, it would have demonstrated a lack of faith in God's promises to him (James 2:21-24).

In Sha'ul's letter to Ephesus he also seems to be in opposition to Ya'akov (a position which we will examine shortly). A cursory reading of Eph 2:8-9, a familiar passage, gives us the impression that only by faith alone are we considered righteous, and that external actions (assumed to be obedience to Law) are of no apparent consequence to HaShem. The passage needs to be understood in its entirety-to include verse 10! The entire context affirms the biblical fact that our gracious gift of righteousness was indeed granted unto us so that in union with Messiah Yeshua, we might live the life of good actions already prepared for us to do!

Let us examine what Ya'akov has to say about faith and works.

Sanctification and holiness are near equivalents theologically. Both words in their various forms are translated from the same Hebrew root meaning to “cut” or “separate,” and the Greek word *hagiasmos*, meaning “consecration.” The core concept of holiness, then, is separation and consecration to God (Leviticus 11:44). In our culture sanctification has come to mean the pursuit of moral perfection. Although the latter is included in the Biblical concept of sanctification, it is a corollary to the idea of separation. Sanctification results in morality, but sanctification is not tantamount to morality. God is said to be holy because He is separate from creation and is morally pure in contradistinction to sin.

A reading from James chapter 2 verses 14-26 appears as an overemphasis of actions as opposed to faith. In reality, a common understanding of these verses might give the reader the impression that works are more important than faith itself. Yet, Ya’akov’s audience, unlike Paul’s, seemingly did not have a problem with an enforced conversion policy. Instead they had a problem with a dead faith that led them nowhere! So Ya’akov masterfully constructed a correct biblical theology that showed that genuine biblical trust ALWAYS leads an individual into genuine biblical actions! This is in complete harmony with what Sha’ul was teaching! Faith must not be substituted for good works, and good works should not be substituted for faith! Moreover, good works do not replace faith, nor does faith cancel out the performance of good works. To be straightforward:

“Faith and good works go hand in hand! One without the other is incomplete and lacking of true biblical righteousness!”

We therefore come to understand that for Paul, there was no bifurcation between “faith” and “faithfulness.” They are two sides of the same coin. One may therefore speak of either with the full assurance that the other exists.⁷⁰

Moshe goes to great lengths to demonstrate that a heart that is devoid of true biblical faith (there really is only ONE kind of biblical faith folks!) is a heart that will lead the individual down a degenerative path straight into the curses pronounced in the Torah! The heart of doubt is ultimately headed for destruction, as the curses vividly demonstrate! Moshe’s heart, which is the heart of the Father, is that they would truly circumcise their hearts to follow after HaShem and his ways, and to become the people that God truly desires them to be!

Torah is God’s teaching to men about righteousness—what it is and how it behaves. The true believer (anyone who is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb) does not *do* in order to *become*. He does because he is what God has made him—the righteousness of God in Messiah. Thus Ya’akov writes, “I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18) The true Torah is the walk of faith-faith and rest in the finished work of Messiah.⁷¹

Blessings and curses might therefore be “woodenly” labeled “the expected consequences of our heart condition.” If we follow trust and obedience, blessings will follow us! But if we harden our hearts and pursue doubt and disobedience, then the Torah instructs us that not only will the blessings be withheld, but that the curses will actually pursue us instead the blessing (see Deuteronomy 28:45). To be sure, we don’t deserve any blessings at all! Yet God in his mercy sees fit to grant blessings, provided we continue in his covenant with a heart that is governed by genuine trust!

The prophet Yechezk’el (Ezekiel) stated it well:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

“I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them.

“You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God.

“I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will summon the grain and increase it, and not send famine against you.” (Ezekiel 36:26-29, emphasis, mine)

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 because faith and faithfulness (obedience) go hand in hand!

Within the scope of the blessings and promises of God, I firmly believe that Paul repudiated the offensive notion a segregated perspective of covenant membership where Jews keep one set of laws and Gentiles keep another set (i.e., the Torah was/is for Jews only). Instead, Paul advocated ‘One Law’ for both Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Messiah. To be sure, speaking to both Jews and Gentile believers, we know with a firm conviction that he taught on the unity of the Body in this well known passage from the book of Ephesians:

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:4, 5, ESV).

One Law (One Torah)

Within these wonderful foundational truths on biblical unity between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and before turning to a limited, verse by verse selection of “tough passages” from the book of Galatians, I would like to conclude these ten sectional portions to my Galatians commentary with a word about ‘One Law.’

As recently as two years ago, I conducted a short web interview with Caleb Hegg, son of well known Messianic Bible teacher Tim Hegg, on the concept known as ‘One Law’ or ‘One Torah’ as many Messianics choose to call it. The interview itself can be viewed on Caleb’s One Torah Revolution website at this link: <http://onetorahrevolution.com/videos/>

Here is my own personal transcript of that interview:

(Interview with Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, conducted by Caleb Hegg via Skype

Date: 09-19-2014)

What is your definition of “One Torah” theology?

Exodus 12:49 in Hebrew reads:

~ ,k.kw{t.B r'G;h reG;l.w x'r.z,a'l h,y.hly t;x;a h'rw{T

“One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.” (KJV)

“One Torah” theology likely borrows its name from this or one of the other two passages found in the Torah proper where native-born sons of Ya'akov and sojourners were being addressed together in covenant responsibility (see Ex. 12:49; Num. 15:16; 29).

Practically speaking, “One Torah” believes that HaShem historically gave one covenant document to follow as a way of life for anyone wishing to identify as covenant Isra'el. Naturally, this would also include the faithful

remnant of Isra'el, whom we believe to be Jews as well as those from the nations who have been grafted into Remnant Isra'el. Instead of purporting that the New Testament is for Gentile Christians, and that the Torah was or is for Jews only, One Law commits both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah Yeshua, as children of faithful Abraham, to follow after the Torah of Moshe, while retaining our distinctive ethnicities as Jews and Gentiles together in the Body of Messiah. (More on "commitment" in my answer to the question about Divine Invitation below)

Within One Torah theology, is there a distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Body of the Messiah?

Yes, we are distinct: Jews are Jews and Gentiles are Gentiles. Using an analogy of a marriage between a man and a woman, Jews and Gentiles in Yeshua are complimentary covenant pairs designed by God to showcase his faithfulness when we walk together in love and unity under the banner of Yeshua. We know for sure that the Apostle Paul recognized these distinctions because when addressing the Body of Messiah he repeatedly refers to Jews and Greeks or Jews and Gentiles in his letters. (More on this "identity" issue in my answer to the question about Divine Invitation below)

What do you say to people who claim "One Torah" theology is replacement theology?

Replacement Theology has its roots in the mistaken notion that, since the coming of Jesus, the Church has replaced Isra'el as the chosen covenant people of God; the Jews are "out" and the Christian Church is "in." It sounds pretty cut and dry. However, this is error. The Bible teaches no such thing. Similarly, Two House theology teaches that Christians cease being Gentiles and instead become Israelites, when they come to faith in Yeshua. This thinking is also wrong-headed. We One Law proponents advocate that Gentile Christians actually get grafted into and become fellow heirs with the remnant of faithful Isra'el, called the One New Man by Paul in Ephesians. This is the Church. This is the "mystery" of the Gospel hidden down through the ages. And since One Torah now closely associates the Church with Remnant Isra'el in one Body, as opposed to picturing the Church as distinct from Isra'el like historic Christianity has, many Christians accuse One Torah advocates of supporting Replacement Theology. When our detractors hear us say that the Church is identified as part of Remnant Isra'el, to them, it smacks of "Christians replacing Jews." In point of fact, when it comes to Isra'el's inheritance from HaShem, we Christians are partakers—not overtakers.

What is your response to someone who says that the Jews should keep Torah, but the gentiles are only "Divinely Invited" to keep it, but are not required to do so?

This answer is going to be a bit longer than the previous ones. While it is true that the Torah is a unique covenant document intended for God's intimate covenant Bride Isra'el, as over and against the world in general who is not in covenant with God as his Bride, it behooves the careful Berean student of scriptures to accurately define Isra'el's identity first before one can accurately apply God's Torah equally and covenantally to each and every member within.

The basis for New Testament Gentile Christians merely being "invited" to follow Torah, contrasted with the Jews ostensibly being "covenant-bound" to follow it, must be based on the foundation of the TaNaKH in order for the logic to be sound. However, careful exegesis will show that despite how one defines historic Isra'el, in point of fact, she was never "divinely invited" by God to keep His Torah. The covenant treaty language simply does not read that way. On the contrary, God and Isra'el entered into a covenant arrangement with each other in which Isra'el for her part stated, "All that you have said we will do." The unified language of the agreement between God and Isra'el paints a picture of life-long commitment and promise on Isra'el's part to keep their side of the contract made between God and themselves, even if we know looking back in hindsight, that they would actually fail to keep their side of the covenant time and time again. Nevertheless, God NEVER reneged on his part; he was ALWAYS faithful to keep his part.

Viewpoints other than our own often start with the premise that Isra'el is a separate entity from the Church, and that the Torah was contractually given to Jewish-only Isra'el. Or, to put it another way, conventional

wisdom states that while the Church may in fact contain ethnic Jews who have come to faith in Jesus, historic Isra'el was and is supposed to be a Jewish-only culture, viz, the Torah is primarily for Jews only. At the very least, such views certainly purport that specific commandments are contractually for Jews only (i.e., circumcision). Parts of this thesis seem to be shared by mainstream Rabbinic Judaism as well.

Like Divine Invitation advocates however, One Law believes that the Family of Isra'el is a bouquet of Jews plus those from the nations that God has brought into Isra'el through Yeshua. The challenge comes from the fact that a cursory reading of the TaNaKH does in fact portray Isra'el as primarily composed of "Jews," and there is nothing wrong with this picture. However, this only shows that the mystery of Gentile engrafting was hidden down through the ages. Paul clearly says that Gentile inclusion into Isra'el via Messiah was a mystery; therefore it is not supposed to be clearly seen in the Old Testament. But that doesn't mean that Gentiles inclusion in Isra'el was non-existent. To be sure, if we examine the text using eyes opened by the Ruach HaKodesh, we find that those who joined Isra'el's God and her covenant were called Ger in the Hebrew script. Recall my verse from Exodus mentioned earlier. The ger is enjoined by HaShem to keep the very same Torah that native-born sons of Ya'akov are to keep. What is more, when we recall that it was not just sons of Ya'akov that participated in Y'tziat Mitzrayim (the Exodus from Egypt), then we begin to understand that the paradigm for God bringing those from the nations into his covenant people Isra'el began way back at the foot of Sinai rather than in the book of Acts.

This brings us full circle. If One Torah's thesis is correct that Gentile Christians join Jewish Christians to form the Church, aka, Remnant Isra'el, and Remnant Isra'el exists within the greater Commonwealth of (unbelieving) Isra'el, then greater Isra'el's obligations to Torah must necessarily extend to Remnant Isra'el as well. This means both Gentile as well as Jewish Christians are covenant bound to follow Torah as opposed to merely being divinely invited to follow Torah.

⁶⁸ <http://www.webster.com/dictionary/justify>

⁶⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 968.

⁷⁰ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 98.

⁷¹ Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 139.

GALATIANS CHAPTER ONE

Excursus of select “tough passages”

**This portion of my commentary focuses primarily on the verses from Galatians that have traditionally divided the Messianic Movement from Historic Christianity or have proved to be difficult interpreting in historical context. It does not examine every single verse of the book of Galatians.*

In this extended excursus to Exegeting Galatians and its famous “tough” verses and phrases, I wish to draw the student’s attention to various passages 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 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 1st 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 English Standard Version (ESV) will be my primary source. My own comments, and when necessary, paraphrasing, will follow immediately after each passage.

1:6, 7 - I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort 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 56.⁷² The villains of the piece, identified variously as “Agitators,”⁷³ “Judaizers,”⁷⁴ “Legalizers,” or “Influencers”⁷⁵ 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 *eujaggevlion*, 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 1st 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 Gentiles 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 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 former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

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 "former" modifies the phrase "life in Judaism" and not "previous Judaic 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 1st Century Judaism. Tim Hegg states it well,

We should note carefully that that word "former" (potev, *pote*, which, when functioning as a particle means "once, formerly) functions to modify the word "manner of life" (ajnastrofiv, *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.^{[76](#)}

^{[72](#)} Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament, Commentary to the Book of Galatians* (AMG Publishers, 1991), p. 613.

^{[73](#)} A handful of Bible translations use "agitators" for those whom Paul wishes would emasculate themselves in Gal. 5:12

where the Greek has ἀναστατούντες.

^{[74](#)} Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD): #Ioudai?zein, ee-oo-daizein=to adopt Jewish customs and rites, imitate the Jews, Judaize.

^{[75](#)} "Influencers" is a term coined by Mark Nanos, and popularized by Tim Hegg.

^{[76](#)} Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 30.

GALATIANS CHAPTER TWO

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

Comments: The key to understanding this verse is the “force” of the Greek word translated as “forced” (pun intended). Greek “force” (ajnagkavzw, anagkadzo, to necessitate, compel, drive to, by force, threats, etc.)⁷⁷, 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 1st 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 shows up a total of nine times in the Apostolic Scriptures.⁷⁸ 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 - But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Comments: “Not in step with the truth of the gospel.” The phrase suggests that Sha’ul is contending for defined and exclusive truths (note the definite articles in the Greek: τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *ten alethian*=the truth, and τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, *tou euaggeliou*=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.

“If you, though a Jew (a Jew by birth and not a convert), *live like a Gentile 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 ἈΙουδαίζω “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 Jews and Gentiles without either one having to be converted by coercion. The English word rendered "force" is our already familiar Greek word *anagkazo ajnagkavzw* "compel," "constrain." A fellow Torah student pointed out to me that the "Jewish customs" in question by Sha'ul likely included the specific group requirements that excluded Gentiles from full covenant membership and thus full Torah participation, viz, Oral Torah. For, in point of fact, Written Torah never forbids Jew-to-Gentile table fellowship.

2:15, 16 - "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Comments: The background behind understanding these important two verses was addressed in Section Four above (Works of Law Part Two). Verse 15 states, "*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners'...*" Tim Hegg writes in his Galatians commentary (p. 67) that the key to understanding this cryptic phrase is in knowing that it is not coming from the mouth of Paul. Rather, he is simply restating the popular views of the Influencers he is arguing against. I think Hegg's point is a strong probability. To be sure, to call a Gentile a "sinner" was, from a Jewish point of view, derogatory, and something Sha'ul likely 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.

I am indebted to a group of fellow Torah students in a Bible study that I attend weekly for pointing out that there may, however, be another way to understand "Gentile sinners" in this verse, and that is as connected to verse 17 where Paul says that Jews who choose to identify with Gentiles in coequal justification in Christ are candidates for being labeled "sinners" by the sectarian Jews who support the ethnocentric view of justification and fraternization. Thus perhaps by initially mentioning Gentile sinners in verse 15, Paul might be alluding to the fact that no matter "Jewish by birth" or not, if one seeks the way of the Cross, he is choosing the way of persecution and mockery (note his phrase "we too were found to be sinners" in verse 17 of the ESV).

Continuing with his sharp rebuke, Sha'ul categorically embraces the notion that true, biblical Judaism holds to the correct view that *a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.*" Contrary to the popular 1st Century 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 works of the law*" likely means "by conformity to a man-made ritual" for the Gentile, or "*by being born Jewish*" for the native born; works of the Law could and most probably also envisions the commensurate Torah obedience that was expected to flow out of the life of a professing covenant member, a life of obedience designed to mark a person out as belonging to the treasured people of God. Works of the Law in this fashion functioned as a badge of identification. We could translate the whole phrase thusly: "*...a man is not justified by his ethnic-driven identity, whether natural or achieved, nor by his subsequent social possession and maintenance of Torah, 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*) perhaps may or may not actually amount to so much tautological repetition (but see Dunn's comments below on the repetition of this verse).

However well-meaning I might be in my assessment of these two verses, I could be wrong. I wish to provide two of my favorite Bible commentator's remarks for secondary consideration. First, Tim Hegg's commentary

to Galatians has been indispensable in my understanding of Paul's 1st Century Judaism. Here is what Hegg has to say about these verses:

The question, then, is what will appeal to God in terms of declaring someone who is unrighteous in His eyes, righteous. For a given sect to come to the conclusion that their group, and their group alone, would be judged by God as righteous, and then to require conformity to man-made rules in order to enter the sect this was the kind of thing that Paul was combating. For never did inclusion in any group afford one the status of "righteous." Rather, righteousness was to be found in another-in the Messiah. And it is only those to whom His righteousness is applied, that may be assured of standing in the day of judgment and being welcomed into the presence of God as righteous. For Paul, the crux text relating this truth was Genesis 15:6, in which Abraham himself did not "earn" righteousness, but had it accredited to him through faith. Abraham stood as the paradigm for righteousness, and he gained his status of righteous before he was ever circumcised. Thus circumcision became a seal of his righteousness, not the means of it.

One hardly thinks that Peter or those who came from James (including James himself) had forgotten this fundamental truth. Note well the plural "we" throughout this verse and the next. But the strength of tradition had clouded their perspective so that apparently they could not see how their insistence that the Gentiles become proselytes was actually a denial of this foundational truth. *For they were insisting that the Gentiles become proselytes in order to enjoy the covenant fellowship which was already theirs through faith in Yeshua.*⁷⁹

Likewise, James D.G. Dunn's comments on these two verses is quite telling so I will quote him at length here so as to also provide a difference of perspective for Bible students to consider:

(a) First, then, how did Paul mean to be understood by his sudden and repeated talk of 'being justified'? – 'Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law ... in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ ... by works of law shall no flesh be justified'. The format of his words shows that he is appealing to an accepted view of Jewish Christians: 'we who are Jews ... know ...' Indeed, as already noted, Paul is probably at this point still recalling (if not actually repeating) what it was he said to Peter at Antioch. Not only so, but his wording shows that he is actually appealing to Jewish sensibilities, we may say even to Jewish prejudices – 'we are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles'. This understanding of 'being justified' is thus, evidently, something Jewish, something which belongs to Jews 'by nature', something which distinguishes them from 'Gentile sinners'. But this is covenant language, the language of those conscious that they have been chosen as a people by God, and separated from the surrounding nations. Moreover, those from whom the covenant people are thus separated are described not only as Gentiles, but as 'sinners'. Here, too, we have the language which stems from Israel's consciousness of election. The Gentiles are 'sinners' precisely in so far as they neither know nor keep the law given by God to Israel. Paul therefore prefaces his first mention of 'being justified' with a deliberate appeal to the standard Jewish belief, shared also by his fellow Jewish Christians, that the Jews as a race are God's covenant people. Almost certainly, then, his concept of righteousness, both noun and verb (to be made or counted righteous, to be justified), is thoroughly Jewish too, with the same strong covenant overtones – the sort of usage we find particularly in the Psalms and Second Isaiah, where God's righteousness is precisely God's covenant faithfulness, his saving power and love for his people Israel. God's justification is God's recognition of Israel as his people, his verdict in favour of Israel on grounds of his covenant with Israel.

Two clarificatory corollaries immediately follow.

1. In talking of 'being justified' here Paul is not thinking of a distinctively initiatory act of God. God's justification is not his act in first making his covenant with Israel, or in initially accepting someone into the covenant people. God's justification is rather God's acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant – whether that is an initial acknowledgement, or a repeated action of God (God's saving acts), or his final vindication of his people. So in Galatians 2.16 we are not surprised when the second reference to being justified has a future implication ('we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified ...'), and

the third reference is in the future tense ('by works of law no flesh shall be justified'). We might mention also Galatians 5.5, where Paul speaks of 'awaiting the hope of righteousness'. 'To be justified' in Paul cannot, therefore, be treated simply as an entry or initiation formula; nor is it possible to draw a clear line of distinction between Paul's usage and the typically Jewish covenant usage. Already, we may observe, Paul appears a good deal less idiosyncratic and arbitrary than Sanders alleges.

2. Perhaps even more striking is the fact which also begins to emerge, that at this point Paul is wholly at one with his fellow Jews in asserting that justification is by faith. That is to say, integral to the idea of the covenant itself, and of God's continued action to maintain it, is the profound recognition of God's initiative and grace in first establishing and then maintaining the covenant. Justification by faith, it would appear, is not a distinctively Christian teaching. Paul's appeal here is not to Christians who happen also to be Jews, but to Jews whose Christian faith is but an extension of their Jewish faith in a graciously electing and sustaining God. We must return to this point shortly, but for the moment we may simply note that to ignore this fundamental feature of Israel's understanding of its covenant status is to put in jeopardy the possibility of a properly historical exegesis. Far worse, to start our exegesis here from the Reformation presupposition that Paul was attacking the idea of earning God's acquittal, the idea of meritorious works, is to set the whole exegetical endeavor off on the wrong track. If Paul was not an idiosyncratic Jew, neither was he a straightforward prototype of Luther.

(b) What then is Paul attacking when he dismisses the idea of being justified 'by works of the law'? – as he does, again, no less than three times in this one verse: '... not by works of law ... not by works of law ... not by works of law ...' The answer which suggests itself from what has already been said is that he was thinking of covenant works, works related to the covenant, works done in obedience to the law of the covenant. This is both confirmed and clarified by both the immediate and the broader contexts.

The conclusion follows very strongly that when Paul denied the possibility of 'being justified by works of the law' it is precisely this basic Jewish self-understanding which Paul is attacking – the idea that God's acknowledgement of covenant status is bound up with, even dependent upon, observance of these particular regulations – the idea that God's verdict of acquittal hangs to any extent on the individual's having declared his membership of the covenant people by embracing these distinctively Jewish rites.⁸⁰

2:19 - For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to 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. 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 nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

Comments: This is the first time in Galatians that Paul uses the specific noun "righteousness" (Greek=dikaiosisune δικαιοσύνη). He is going to use this noun again in a nearly identical argument in

Gal 3:21.⁸¹ This courtroom term is related to our familiar verb "justified" (Greek=dikaioutai δικαιοῦται) from Gal 2:16, one being a noun and the other being a verb, but they both convey the same biblical concept: a status of "right-standing" that God exclusively grants to mankind, rooted in God's own righteousness, and yet is, as Hegg states, "neither purely forensic [positional] nor purely experimental [behavioral/practical]—it is both (emphases, mine)."⁸² What is more, in the forensic sense of this word, righteousness is something that we like Papa Abraham have now (cf. Rom 3:22; 26; 4:3-11; Gal 3:6, 7), as well as something that "we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of" (cf. Gal 5:5). Thus, positional righteousness is both now as well as "not yet." Moreover, while it is indeed true from the Torah's perspective that even mere "casual" Law-keeping results in a limited amount of behavioral righteousness being extended from God to the commandment-keeper (read Lev 18:5⁸³ and Deut 6:25⁸⁴ in light of Rom 10:5⁸⁵ afresh), I don't believe Paul is wanting his readers to follow that particular train of thought at this time. To be sure, we need to allow context to determine the best way to understand Paul's intentions here.

With Ephesians 2:8, 9 in mind⁸⁶, some like to interpret this verse as a generic teaching leveled against works-righteousness, where mankind in general might be found trying to gain salvation (forensic righteousness) by doing good works (without the Law necessarily even being in the picture, yet supposedly being singled out by Paul here in Galatians as a sort of supreme example of "good works that a man could do"). In this way, the verse would basically be saying, *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through doing good works, then Christ died for no purpose."* The theology behind taking "Law" here to mean "good works in general" would not be incorrect (viz, good works do not secure salvation), but this would not do justice to the historical and religious context of the section begun in Gal 2:15, which is most definitely a carefully-reasoned, narrow argument aimed at Jews and their relationship, not to your average "good works" in general, but specifically to the works of the Law as "Jews by birth."⁸⁷

David Stern's Complete Jewish Bible translates this verse as, *"I do not reject God's gracious gift; for if the way in which one attains righteousness is through legalism, then the Messiah's death was pointless."* I believe the theology behind this translation is accurate (legalism is not the path to forensic righteousness), and yet I do not think Paul is using Torah (Law) in this manner here. To be sure, if sincere Law-keeping will not result in salvation (the position that historic Christianity takes), how much less will legalistic Law-keeping result in salvation? The context of this verse was established in Gal 2:15, 16 with 'works of the Law' above, and it will be picked up again at Gal 3:2, 5, 10 where 'works of the Law' shows up again, so I believe "Law" here is likely somehow related to "works of the Law" in Galatians as a whole.

Lastly, since the Church's interpretation is so similar to Stern, both of which are surprisingly closer to the Jewish context of Galatians than interpreting Law in this verse as mere good works, we should rightly recognize the accuracy of the theology behind interpreting this verse as a teaching against Jews or Gentiles trying to leverage salvation (forensic righteousness) through keeping the commandments specifically, without even saying anything about motive, be they sincere or legalistic (i.e., *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the keeping the commandments of the Law, then Christ died for no purpose"*).

Consider Titus 3:4-7:

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being

justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (ESV, emphasis mine).

Here we have a verse with both “works” and “righteousness” in the same immediate context. And wouldn’t most agree that “works done in [behavioral] righteousness” would have to at the very least include “works done in accordance with the Law”? After all, every good religious Jew knows and affirms that God’s standards of behavioral righteousness are spelled out in the Law of God, and most Christians affirm that the forensic righteousness found exclusively in Yeshua is also grounded in the truths of Torah as well (cf. Rom 1:17 and specifically Rom 3:21, 22, *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction...”*). Thus, using the popular Christian hermeneutic, we could easily interpret Titus 3:4-7 as Paul stating, *“not because of works done by us in accordance with the righteous standard that Torah spells out for us to live by,”* and such an interpretation would then seem to be supported by our Gal 2:21 verse here.

As well structured as the popular Christian hermeneutic is in regards to dismantling works-based salvation, I don’t believe this is how Paul is using “Law” here. The broad application just described would not capture the full force of the fact that 1st Century Isra’el believed that God extended forensic righteousness narrowly to the individual Jew—and indeed narrowly to the people of Isra’el as a whole—supposedly based on the distinction that Jews were, in point of fact, called out and chosen as the elect of God,⁸⁸ and that as the elect of God, they were subsequently covenant bound to follow after Torah with all their heart, soul, and strength (read the Shema of Deut 6:4-9). Put simply, if the surviving rabbinic writings are any indication of the pattern of religion in 1st Century Isra’el (as Sanders valuable research has so adequately indicated), then we have to confer that Paul’s Jewish audience was not seeking forensic righteousness through keeping the Torah; they were not trusting in their “good works” to save them (despite how many verses seem to indicate this with their wording⁸⁹). They were not attempting to gain entry into the covenant as adults by keeping HaShem’s commandments. Instead, they were seeking the subsequent ongoing forensic *and* behavior righteousness (one coin called “righteousness” yet with two sides) that was ostensibly and exclusively granted to Jewish covenant members who remained loyal to the Torah (i.e., covenantal nomism). It is those nationalistic presuppositions that the Jewish people of Paul’s day held to in regards to viewing the Torah as a social prize, a thing to be coveted in and of itself, a treasured reward that supposedly proved to the surrounding nations that God deemed them exclusively as forensically righteous as a people group—this ideology is what Paul is seeking to dismantle in his letter to Galatians.

Thus, we can interpret this verse within its historical and socio-religious context as Paul bringing his carefully-worded, technical, Jewish and Gentile arguments of the previous verses (Gal 2:15-20), and indeed the chapter as we have it, to a close. By opting for the single word “Law” instead of his usual phrase “works of the Law” like he used three times in Gal 2:16 when speaking of justification above, Paul can address National Isra’el’s ethnic blindness as a whole, while at the same time again reinforce the genuine truth to those individual Gentile Christians who were considering the Jewish “good news” of membership into the communities of Isra’el via the process of proselyte conversion, that the “righteousness of God” (indeed, such righteousness is the subsequent result of God’s declarative ‘justification’ of Gal 2:16) 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”*), or by self effort. Alternately, if the emphasis is instead on group righteousness instead of individual righteousness, we could have Paul using “Law” here to say that the Jewish “social badge” of Torah as a supposed “trophy” for Jewish Isra’el does not signal “righteous approval” from God on the salvific group level—or on any level for that matter. **For indeed, to restrict the Torah to ethnic Isra’el is to deny the universal gospel message contained therein!**

If this understanding is correct, this would render the verse along these paraphrased lines, *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if individual and group-level forensic and behavioral righteousness were through merely possessing the Law as an exclusively God-treasured people group—possession that naturally leads to our obedience of it—then Christ died for no purpose, because such an ethnically restrictive view of the Law*

excludes those from the nations for whom God beforehand intended to include as forensically and behaviorally righteous in his promises to Abraham.”

In conclusion to our exegesis of this verse, according to Paul’s Messianic understanding of National Isra’el’s covenant status with God, the fact that, at the time of the writing of the book of Galatians, Isra’el was (in their self-understanding) in exclusive possession of the laws of God did not mean she was the only chosen people group that God had promised to bless. Indeed, the Abrahamic covenantal promises of Genesis 12:3 envisioned “all the families of the earth” instead of the limited scope of a supposed “Jewish-only Isra’el” like the Influencers were purporting. Context would suggest then that the “law” in question is the specific Written Torah, yet as it was unfortunately limited—nay, destroyed⁹⁰—by its Oral Tradition counterpart (the Jewish policies known as halakhah), laws that conveyed the notion that Isra’el exclusively (read here as “Jewish Isra’el”) can inherit blessings in the World to Come, a belief formerly held to by the apostle himself. To be sure, as an individual, 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 and then maintaining obedience to the Torah, viz the ‘works of the Law’), then truly what need would there be for a Messiah to come and provide it later for anyone, Jew or Gentile alike? Paul would have the reader to understand that such genuine righteousness (the total verdict as rendered from God himself) is altogether outside of Jewish and Gentile achievement and therefore must be procured by surrendering to the power of the Anointed One of God, namely Yeshua the Messiah.

⁷⁷ Thayer’s and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (TSBD), [ajnagkavzw](#).

⁷⁸ Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45; Luke 14:23; Acts 26:11; 28:19; 2 Cor. 12:11; Gal. 2:3, 14; 6:12.

⁷⁹ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* ([www.torahresource.com](#), 2002), p. 70.

⁸⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), Section II.

⁸¹ Gal 3:21, “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness (**δικαιοσύνη**) would indeed be by the law” (ESV).

⁸² Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* ([www.torahresource.com](#), 2002), p. 76.

⁸³ Lev 18:5, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord” (ESV).

⁸⁴ Deut 6:25, “.And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us” (ESV).

⁸⁵ Rom 10:5, “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them” (ESV).

⁸⁶ Eph 2:8, 9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (ESV).

⁸⁷ Gal 2:15, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (ESV).

⁸⁸ Note Amos 3:2, ““You only have I known of all the families of the earth...” (ESV).

⁸⁹ Rom 2:6; 3:27; 4:2-6; 9:11, 32; 11:6; Eph 2:8, 9; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5.

⁹⁰ Recall the Master’s words in Matt 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (ESV), where the Greek word *καταλῦσαι* “abolish” likely implied “destroying” them through improper interpretation and application.

GALATIANS CHAPTER THREE

3:2, 3 - Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

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 among the Judaisms of Paul's day, that the Greek word for law (νόμος nomos) could include a reference to the Oral Traditions and more specifically to halakhah that governed proselyte conversion, helps us to understand Paul to be challenging the validity of these ethnically restricted views of Torah among genuine covenant members. Surely lasting covenant membership is not acquired by human effort (viz, works of the Law), 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 generic Torah observance in general finds no basis from the context of Paul's argument here. Indeed, we must allow the historical and socio-religious Jewish context of the letter to determine what is driving his consternation as a Messianic Jew who supports Gentile equality among non-Messianic Jews who do not support Gentile equality. 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 he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

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 1st 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 - Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Comments: Throughout his letters, the Apostle Paul (Sha'ul) seems to take great interest in Avraham,

referring to him no less than 29 times!⁹¹ 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'resheet (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'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 *h'q'd.c tz'dakah*), precedes the patriarch's obedience to the sign of circumcision (read hear as "Jewish identity" by the Paul's detractors). On the macro, the covenant of Avraham precedes the covenant with Moshe.

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.⁹² 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 12:7,⁹³ and in chapter 13 verse 14 ADONAI again speaks to Avram.⁹⁴ 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:

~'r.b;a-l,a h'wh.y -r;b.d h'y'h h,Lea'h ~yir'b.D;h r;x;a

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

Likewise verse 4 confesses,

r{mael wy'lea h'wh.y -r;b.d heNih.w

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 12:1-3.⁹⁵ The narrative of chapter 15 trails off with statements amounting to "ADONAI said to him, "I am ADONAI,"" (verse 7)⁹⁶ and "That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram." (verse 18)⁹⁷

Who or what was this mysterious "Word of the LORD" that suddenly⁹⁸ 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, 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).⁹⁹

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 *rmam 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:

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

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." 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."

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."

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’kinah, The Sh’kinah 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 Sha’ul forthrightly stated in Colossians 1:15a concerning Yeshua: “He is the visible image of the invisible God.”

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.”

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.”

What have we learned thus far? 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,”¹⁰⁰ instead of merely YHVH like in 14:22.¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰²

However, in comparison to Sarna above, we must carefully note that the Hebrew text of ADONAI (y’n{d]a) 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!¹⁰³ This means that in 134 places in our existing Masoretic text, the Hebrew may read ADONAI (y’n{d]a) but the original word was in fact YHVH h’w’h.y! 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.¹⁰⁴

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 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. Tim Hegg provides a summary 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.”¹⁰⁵

In conclusion to this section, we see clearly that 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!

3:10 - For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Comments: I did not include Gal 3:9 in my selection of tough passages, however, Gal 3:9, in my opinion, begins what is likely a six-part chiasmic structure of verses, with 9 and 14 forming the outer two points (the bookends), verses 10 and 13 forming the next inner layer, and verses 11 and 12 forming the innermost two points. Gal 3:9 and Gal 3:14 are linked by the topic of Abraham. Gal 3:10 and Gal 3:13 are linked by the topic of the curse of the Law, and Gal 3:11 and Gal 3:12 are linked by the presence of the word “live” (Greek=ζήσεται, zesetai). The introduction and conclusion to the theology developed in the chiasmus of Gal

3:9-14 is presented in Gal 3:14, and is indicated by the Greek conjunction ἵνα, hina, usually translated as “in order that,” “that,” “so that,” etc. The arrow indicates where Gal 3:10 falls in the six-part chiasmus. The basic six-part chiasmus looks like this:

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:9)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:10)<

C. LIVE (Gal 3:11)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:12)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:13)

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:14)

Essentially, when misunderstood from its larger context, this opening Gal 3:10 verse will invariably lead the reader to the incorrect conclusion that Paul is advocating complete and mitzvah-by-mitzvah (commandment-by-commandment) Torah submission for everyone wishing to attain right-standing with the Almighty. That the 1st Century Judaism did not advocate a view that 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 must practically walk out each and every single commandment in order to receive covenant membership into Isra'el (viz, salvation). Nor did anyone in Paul's day believe that God expected this type of obedience from covenant Isra'el. This popular Christian viewpoint is unfortunately incompatible with a careful reading of the Torah itself.

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 "faith-filled" and "faithful" Avraham, but instead seek to circumvent God's true method of declaring a person righteous actually fall into the trap of being cursed by the very Torah they exalted in the first place! When Sha'ul uses a statement the likes of "*all who rely on observing the law*," ('works of the law' in other versions) he is referring to two positions: primarily and historically, he is speaking to those (Influencers, Judaizers, Agitators, Circumcision Faction, etc.) who believed that covenant status was extended by God due to ethnic status, whether native-born or convert (for more on this nationalistic view see the quote by James D.G. Dunn in my comments to verse 13-14 below). 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 through objective faith in Yeshua, they were said to be setting up their own way of righteousness through ethnic status/Isra'elite membership, a charge leveled against unbelieving Isra'el by Sha'ul himself in Romans 9:31, 32; 10:3. Secondly, in a more general sense like the Church is fond of pointing out, he is also likely teaching against any superstitious notions that God extends covenant status to the individual (Jew or Gentile) 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 supposed legal status as a Jew or his Torah observance/maintenance (or a combination of both, viz, covenantal nomism). 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*." One of the keys to correctly understanding the verse from Deuteronomy, and thus Paul's use of it here in Galatians, is in understanding that "everything written in the Book" also—indeed, primarily!—includes faith in Yeshua as the Promised Messiah. For indeed, Yeshua is the very conclusion, the very goal that "everything written in the Book" is pointing to (cf. Romans 10:4)! God is not asking his followers to try to keep every commandment in the Law as some sort of simplistic grocery list of do's and don'ts in order to avoid being cursed for lack of perfection. Paul sees another "gospel" being presented by his detractors, namely, the gospel of Jewish identity and proselyte conversion for Gentiles, a "gospel" that bypasses Yeshua as the exclusive object of faith spelled out by the Torah, and instead substitutes it for the false object of faith called ethnicity and Torah obedience for Jews only. Paul is out to set the record straight in this section of his letter by highlighting Avraham as the prime example of an uncircumcised man whom God "counted as righteous" based on faith. Moreover, Paul is going to prove his argument—that genuine and lasting covenant membership is granted exclusively to those

exercising objective faith in the Promised Messiah of the Torah—by directly quoting from the Torah itself.

Another key to correctly understanding this verse is to make the connection with historical context and remind ourselves that an ideology that strips God, his Torah, and his promises—indeed the very gospel itself—from the inclusion of the Gentiles in scope, is an ideology worthy of God's curse. Put another way, the ostensible covenant member practicing the works of the Law (the Torah for Jews only) is not, by God's very standard of righteousness, doing all that the Law asks of covenant members, because to live one's life according to the works of the Law is to discount those Gentiles who live by faith as genuine covenant members in Isra'el! We can be sure that Paul rejects this line of reasoning because he states quite emphatically in Romans 3:29, 30, *"Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith"* (ESV).

The reference to Deuteronomy by Sha'ul however is neither a direct quote from the Masoretic Hebrew text, nor a direct quote from the Greek Septuagint (LXX). He may be paraphrasing the general meaning of the verse for his readers. The Greek of "abide" (ESV) is ἐμμένω, emmeno, which does not need to mean or even imply perfect obedience to Torah like the popular opinion suggests. Indeed, the original verse from the Torah reads, *"Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." And all the people shall say, 'Amen"* (ESV). To insert "all" before the phrase "the words" is a translators' prerogative, but is not

absolutely needed. The Hebrew for "confirm" in Deuteronomy is kum קום, which literally means to stand or rise up. When we combine the Masoretic text version of this clause "confirm the words of this law" in this verse with the second clause "by doing them," we get the sense of "taking a stand for the Torah by obedience to its precepts, statutes and commandments." We know as believers that, per its God-given design, the Torah leads to Christ (see Rom. 9:31 where *"Isra'el pursued a Law that would lead to righteousness,"* and Rom. 10:4, *"Christ is the goal of the Law"*; also see Gal. 3:24, *"the Law is the tutor safeguarding our journey to Christ"*). The deeper meaning of this quote from Deuteronomy is then masterfully explained by Sha'ul: the genuine and lasting covenant member initiate, as well as the existing covenant member, must follow after all that God has spoken to do, which includes recognizing that the Torah ultimately portrays covenant National Isra'el as a bouquet of Jews and Gentiles who confess allegiance to HaShem and his laws. And to the extent that those in National Isra'el go on to matriculate to faith in Yeshua, their loyalty must include Law as upheld by the Messiah¹⁰⁶ of Isra'el! Their "righteousness" and genuine covenant membership is demonstrated by genuine faith, which is rooted in "listening to all the words of the Prophet that God raised up among them" (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15)—namely Yeshua!¹⁰⁷

Picking and choosing which commandments are for Jews and which ones are for Gentiles, which ones are relevant and which ones aren't, is not left to the covenant member, because the Deuteronomy verse commands that we "confirm" (take a stand for) the words of this Law by actually doing them." At the very least, God is expecting unquestioning obedience. Indeed, only God is allowed to determine which commandments might if ever fall into disuse for any given length of time (viz, the sacrificial and ritual laws, etc.) 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" promised by the Torah, as already mentioned above!¹⁰⁸ 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 recognize both Jews and Gentiles as covenant members, as well as—and more importantly—failed to matriculate to the "Messianic conclusion," ultimately found himself a candidate for being "cut off" (Hebrew=trk, karat) by God himself due to his lack of faith and obedience to all that the Torah enjoins upon covenant members.¹⁰⁹ In stating that the one who denies genuine faith lives under a curse, Paul opts for the Greek word katavra, katara, which conveys the notion of a spoken curse,¹¹⁰ a clear reference to God's words as pronounced in our Torah passage of Deuteronomy, i.e., the Book of the Law that Moshe spoke into writing.

3:11 - Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Comments: This verse is made up of two clauses: a thesis and a proof text joined by a conjunction that introduces the proof text. This verse also begins the first of the innermost two points of the six-part chiasmus began in Gal 3:9. Gal 3:11 and Gal 3:12 are linked by the presence of the word “live” (Greek=ζήσεται, zesetai). The arrow indicates where this verse falls in the six-part chiasmus:

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:9)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:10)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:11)<

C. LIVE (Gal 3:12)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:13)

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:14)

First Clause: This first clause, coming on the immediate heels of Galatians 3:10, now has Sha’ul stating emphatically that “no one is justified before God by the law,” a statement that by historical context must very likely mean, “no one is justified before God by works of the Law, viz, by Jewish identity and maintenance of Torah, or by submission to a man-made ceremony as postulated by the prevailing halakhah of the 1st Century Judaisms.” Dunn’s comments on this verse are appropriate at this time:

That ἐν νόμῳ [by the Law] (v. 11) is equivalent to ἐξ ἔργων νόμου [works of the Law] (v. 10) is plain (Bruce, Galatians 161), as also the parallel between 3.11 and 2.16 confirms. In Jewish self-understanding, the be ἐν νόμῳ [by the Law] is to live ἐκ πίστεως (by faithfulness)—in both cases the man who is righteous before God being in view, his righteousness being defined and documented precisely by the two phrases (ἐν νόμῳ, ἐκ πίστεως). To do what the Law specifies for the covenant people is to live ἐν αὐτοῖς [by them], to live ἐκ πίστεως [by faithfulness] (bracketed [...] translation of Greek phrases, mine).¹¹¹

Second Clause: Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 in the second clause to prove that works of the Law will not justify (save) a person. Interestingly, many Bible translations use “faith” for the Greek of Gal 3:11 here, when translating Paul’s quote from Hab 2:4. However, many of those same translations use “faithfulness” for their translation from the original Hebrew!¹¹² Speaking of Habakkuk 2:4, Dunn goes on to say,

The usual understanding of Hab. 2:4 MT – ‘...will live by his faithfulness’. It is not necessary to the discussion here to resolve the question of whether Paul intended the ἐκ πίστεως [by faith] to go with Ὁ δίκαιος [the righteous] or ζήσεται [will live].¹¹³

We will discuss “faith” and “faithfulness” a bit more closely when we examine the second clause of Gal 3:12 below. For now, I want you to notice how Paul sets at odds what the Influencers were taking for granted, namely, that righteousness is grounded in ethnicity and Torah maintenance (works of the Law), and he does this by reminding his readers of what the book of Habakkuk teaches on how the genuinely righteous will “live.” Paul uses the scriptures to counter their limited nationalistic line of reasoning. This tells us that works of the Law is NOT “abiding by all things written in the book of the Law” (Gal 3:10), that works of the Law attracts the curse of the Law (Gal 3:10), and that works of the Law do not count as true faith (Gal 3:12), but instead actually count as “self effort” (Gal 3:3). Because the verb “justified” (δικαιοῦται) is parallel to the

adjective “righteous” (δίκαιος), basically, we could paraphrase the verse along these lines: “Clearly no one is declared as righteous before God by a Jewish-only Law commitment, because the scriptures have already demonstrated in Abraham, and continue to teach with Habakkuk, that the person who is declared as righteous by God himself will be justified by that person’s genuine faith and will live his life according to such faith.”

Alternately, Sha'ul's statement is a theological teaching against any mistaken notions that Torah obedience in and of itself automatically granted covenant status to the individual participant, whether Jewish or Gentile. In other words, the viewpoint held by historic Christianity and Reformation Paul proponents is not completely off base. Between his statement and his proof text, Paul used the conjunction "*because*," Greek ο&ti, hotee, to signal the immediate supporting proof text that would-be covenant members (read here as Gentiles) do not walk into Torah submission to gain covenant status.

3:12 - *But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."*

Comments: Buckle in because it is going to take me a bit longer than usual to explain this particular verse within the context of this chapter... Are you ready? Here we go...

This verse forms the second of the innermost two points of the six-part chiasmus by linking together the word "live" found in Gal 3:11 and Gal 3:12. The arrow indicates where this verse falls in the six-part chiasmus:

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:9)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:10)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:11)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:12)<

B. CURSE (Gal 3:13)

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:14)

Like, the previous verse before it, this verse is also made up of two clauses which are separated by a Greek conjunction, but this time it is ἄλλ', all, usually translated as "rather," "on the contrary," "but," "instead," etc. Even though the conjunctions of these two verses are different in the Greek, I believe they are both essentially functioning in the same manner. That is, like Gal 3:11, the conjunction here likely introduces the supporting clause since the two clauses function as thesis and proof text. Like Gal 3:11, we shall look at each clause one at a time. Verse 12 starts with the small Greek word 'de,' that, when translated into English, often signals the beginning of a contrasting clause. Owing to the fact that the verse breaks were not in Paul's original writing, and to the fact that the same Greek phrase of 11 and 12 ('ek pisteos'=by faith) is used by Paul in back to back fashion, I believe that the first clause of verse 12 is most naturally read as an immediate contrast to the last clause of verse 11. This would make it read as "...the righteous shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4)...but (Greek contrast 'de') the Law is not of faith..."

First Clause: "*The Law is not based on faith...*" At first blush, a surface reading of this first clause seems to have Paul simply and tersely stating that the Torah has nothing to do with faith ("*the law is not of faith*," or "*the law is not based on faith...*"). Indeed, this is essentially how the first clause is interpreted and translated in a few well-known Bible versions.¹¹⁴ However, does Paul truly believe that God's written Torah is unrelated to genuine faith? Are Law and faith mutually exclusive concepts? Do Law and faith—as many Christian commentators regularly teach—belong to two distinctly different historical realms (dispensations)? We already know that Paul believes a primary function of the Law is to point men to Christ—for indeed he is going to explicitly tell us so in Gal 3:24 below. What is more, Romans 3:31 explicitly states that faith does not "overthrow" (ESV) Law. It seems anachronistic to me then for Paul to be setting up a Christian-like dichotomy between Law and faith since, as both he and the Judaism of his day would affirm, clearly the TaNaKH demonstrates that God expects genuine faith to be a vital component of the fabric of the social communities of his Law-keeping children. To be sure, faithlessness (the lack of genuine faith), which always leads to law-breaking, is what got Isra'el in hot water time and time again, prompting God to punish and eventually exile them from their Land. "The Torah is not based on faith..." with implications that Law (as properly understood as God's revelation to humanity) and faith (properly understood as humanity's response to God's revelation)

are mutually exclusive concepts, simply cannot be what the apostle is conveying here. We must look beyond a surface reading and let context dictate the proper interpretations of Law (Greek= νόμος, nomos) and faith (Greek= ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ, pisteos) in this verse. We will examine Leviticus 18:5 and this supposed “dichotomy” between Law and faith below when we look at the Second Clause with the comments from Garlington.

Essentially, in my estimation, in order to correctly understand the first clause, we must simultaneously link it to the verse from Habakkuk while at the same time connect it to the quote from Leviticus as Paul wants us to. Most importantly, however, we must allow for the context of the letter and the socio-religious “emergency” occasioning the letter to guide our interpretation of the word Law here. Because this is a carefully reasoned argument, I believe there are two strong nuances for the way he is using “Law” and its relation to “faith” in this first clause.

Nuance One: As with Dunn’s point made about Gal 3:11 above, Paul may simply be using nomos once again as shorthand to describe the position of the Influencers, i.e., “works of the law,” viz, “legally-recognized Jewish identity that leads to Law-keeping and covenant maintenance.” This would make it similar to how he just used nomos in the previous verse, making it read something like, *“But works of the Law do not count as faith...”* What is more, even if we did not choose to translate nomos as shorthand, opting instead for the Law proper, we would still have to agree that Paul opposes the position that genuine covenant membership (read here as faith) follows from ethnically motivated law-keeping (the way his opponents believed). Rather, in Paul’s mind, law-keeping is the inevitable fruit of being a genuine covenant member as secured by faith in Isra’el’s Messiah Yeshua. This he is going to prove by bringing in the quote from Leviticus, which conveniently includes the tem “live” just like the Habakkuk verse he just quoted above. As contextually sound as making Law into works of the Law seems to stand by itself, I do not think this is the exclusive nuance of the word “Law” here. Additionally, I think he also includes Nuance Two below.

Nuance Two: We know that works of the Law is likely the best way to translate “Law” in Gal 3:11, and we know that verse 11 and verse 12 here are closely related. So if the nuance were to focus on “Law” and leave out the “works of the” part, what exactly would *“the Law is not based on faith”* (*“the Law is not of faith,”* ESV) mean? How is Paul using “Law” here, and precisely why cannot the Law pave a way for faith to follow afterwards? To put it another way, why can’t faith (viz, covenant membership) be a product of (ek=have its source in) Law-keeping (read here as Jewish identity) the way the influencers were suggesting? The Greek has ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ho de nomos ouk estin ek pisteos, literally, *“The moreover Law not is out of faith.”* The Greek preposition ἔκ, ek, according to the HelpsBible.com, is defined as having “a two-layered meaning (“out from and to”) which makes it out-come oriented (out of the depths of the source and extending to its impact on the object).”¹¹⁵ We already know from Gal 2:16, 21 and Gal 3:11 that justification (viz, forensic salvation) does not flow out of a subset of the Law known as works of the Law (read here as Jewish identity). Now Paul must want us to also make sure we know that *“[the] Law [in general] does not even progress towards (ek=out of) faith.”* Why wouldn’t Law-keeping help move an individual in the direction of being recognized by HaShem as a “faithful” covenant member (read here as faith)? How did Paul’s opponents get this vital scriptural sequence turned around?

Firstly, let us see if we can better understand the way Paul’s readers and opponents may have interacted with the twin Torah concepts of faith and faithfulness as they followed Paul’s argument from Habakkuk to Leviticus. In Hebrew, the noun concept of ‘faith’ and the verb concept of ‘believe/believing’ are rooted in the same word. What is more, often when the NT uses the noun ‘faith,’ Greek language allows for the additional, grammatical nuance of the same or similar nouns to be translated into English as ‘faithfulness,’ One Christian pastor described it this way,

“In English there is a difference between “faith” and “faithfulness”, and there is a difference in the meaning of these words because in reality and experience these are two different things altogether. Who doesn’t know the difference? Faithfulness is a word that focuses inside the self, but faith is a word that focuses outside the

self, upon an object that is being believed or trusted in. Faithfulness has to do with how reliable or trustworthy I am. Faith has to do with how reliable and trustworthy the object is that I am believing in.”¹¹⁶

This concept is similar to the English word ‘trust’ being translated as a noun sometimes and as a verb at other times. To be sure, the Greek noun *pistis/pisteos* (i.e., faith, belief) closely relates to the Greek verb *pisteuo* (usually translated in English versions as believe). Thus, in Hebrew thought, to verbally affirm that one has belief in a set body of truth, must eventually lead to and include actions done in faithfulness to that very body of truth as well. As such, the Habakkuk 2:4 passage could just as easily have been understood by the Judaisms of Paul’s day as, *“the righteous shall live by his faithfulness (the emphasis being on outward actions rather than inward truths).”* If this were the case, then in my opinion verse twelve here in Galatians should also imply faithfulness (Greek noun *πίστεως*) when modern translators choose the related English noun faith: *“But the Law is not out of faith/faithfulness.”*

Secondly, in order to appreciate the popular 1st Century misunderstandings of Habakkuk 2:4 with Leviticus 18:5 we must remind ourselves that according to the biblical sequence of the two most significant covenants demonstrated by Abraham and Moshe (Genesis to Deuteronomy), Abraham represents “faith,” whereas Moses represents “Law.” If this narrow example represents the influencers’ theology, then “Law” does in fact come sequentially after “faith,” (the Law IS of faith, taking the word “of” to imply “continues after”). In addition, perhaps Paul’s detractors were relying on this very example by teaching that all those who belong to circumcised Abraham (Jews and proselytes) are obligated to keep both the Written Law as well as the Oral Law that is attached to it. In their minds, the Law IS of (continues sequentially after) faith and therefore Gentiles who wish to be counted as righteous must be circumcised as well as keep the Law (recall the words of the believing Pharisees of Acts 15:5, *“It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses”*). Paul’s theology in this section may be visualized thusly:

Step One: Faith (Abraham=beginning of covenant membership based on faith, viz, circumcision of the heart)

Step Two: Torah (Moses=Law given to all existing covenant members)

Step Three: Faithfulness (Covenant membership is for all who have faith in Messiah; Spirit-led faithfulness to Torah vindicates Spirit-produced faith)

Conversely, the influencers’ theology of this section may be visualized thusly:

Step One: Ethnicity (Abraham=beginning of Jewish identity and covenant membership as indicated by physical circumcision)

Step Two: Torah (Moses=Law given to keep Jewish Isra’el separate from idolatrous Gentile peoples)

Step Three: Faithfulness (covenant membership and Torah are for Jews only; Law-keeping is vital for maintaining one’s place in the covenant)

Paul will eventually spell out some of the furthering damning implications of following the influencers’ dangerous theological view in Gal 5:3 by warning the Galatian Gentile Christians, *“every man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole Law,”* a statement that must by context refer to a Gentile convert’s commitment to a Jewish-only written and Oral Torah. Such a commitment would demonstrate that the new Jewish proselyte is separated from his fellow believing Gentile counterparts who had decided not to undergo conversion. This type of Jewish-only commitment to the Torah runs counter to the Abrahamic promise itself!

Therefore, since the phrase “the Law is not of faith” is specifically Paul’s rebuttal of the Influencers’ theology, our anticipation of Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5 in the second clause of Gal 3:12 is going to show us that it is “faithfulness” that is, in point of fact, sequentially after (“out of”) genuine “faith,” (i.e., *“the one [of faith] who does them shall live by them [in faithfulness]”*). The Influencers’ already knew that Abraham came before Moses. Like the believing Pharisees of Acts 15:5, the Galatians influencers were likely using this sequence to

prove that Gentile proselytes must be circumcised (the works of the Law) and then move towards Torah obedience for ongoing and final justification. Paul also affirms that Abraham came before Moses. For Paul, however, his opponents' ecclesiological interpretation of the historical Abraham to Moses narrative nevertheless represents faulty theological reasoning, and he centers his rebuttal on the scriptural proofs he has offered from the message of his larger context begun in Gal 2:15 and continuing up to Gal 3:11 thus far. Paul's reasoning is rooted in the biblical truth that the blessing of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:14) extends to the Gentiles as Gentiles, and not as Jewish converts, precisely because God told Abraham, "in you all the families (Hebrew=Gentiles) of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Paul's warnings in this section of his letter clearly demonstrate that the Torah itself, as rightly understood, rejects any and all restrictive misuses of its teachings (the ethnic driven form of Torah obedience called works of the Law), reasoning which supposedly promised to accomplish a right-standing in the sight of HaShem based on national election.

In conclusion to our exegesis of this first clause, according to Paul, obedience to the Law, whether acceptance of it as a whole (Nuance Two), or by highlighting some of the so-called boundary-marking commandments like circumcision, food laws, etc. (Nuance One), does not produce genuine and lasting covenant membership. I am going to opt for launching from Nuance One in our background exegesis because of what I understand Paul to be warning us about by using 'works of the Law' alongside 'Law' in Gal 3:10, 11. I am then going to suggest we include Nuance Two when interpreting and practically applying the first clause of this verse in its most broadly understood perspective. Nuance Two is important because of the fact that when historically penned by Moshe in Lev 18:5 (as quoted in the second clause of Gal 3:12), Isra'el's understanding of basic covenant faithfulness and Torah obedience in general were both originally less bound by ethnicity than the more narrow concept known by Paul's day as 'works of the Law.' In other words, I do not think Paul uses Leviticus only as a proof text for his immediate and historical argument against the exclusion of Gentiles into the covenant with Isra'el. I think he also uses it to wrest Torah as a whole from its 1st Century "Jewish-only" distortion. He seeks to return to a historically and scripturally sound interpretation of circumcision and of Torah obedience.

Second Clause: *"The man who does these things will live by them."* This is essentially a quote from Leviticus 18:5. Don Garlington in A Shorter Commentary on Galatians starts us off by reminding us of the popular Christian interpretation of Paul's use of Leviticus in Galatians here:

Virtually every commentator recognizes that Paul, in some way or the other, plays off believing and doing in v. 12. But in what sense are the two set in opposition? The majority of scholars assume that they are mutually exclusive by the nature of the case: "faith" by definition excludes "works," and vice versa. However, in historical perspective, any dichotomy between believing and doing in the Jewish schema is simply off base: Judaism was and is as much a "faith system" as Christianity. The inseparability of faith and obedience in the Hebrew Bible is still intact, but in Paul both have been refocused on Jesus, the crucified Messiah. It is true that v. 12 poses a problem for this reading. Its proposition, "the law is not of faith," is buttressed by the words of Leviticus 18:5: "the one who does them will live in them." On the usual interpretation, Paul is taken to mean that "the law has nothing to do with faith" in this sense: whereas the law required performance, the gospel enjoins only faith. As the argument goes, anyone who would be justified "on the basis of works" must reckon seriously with what the Torah itself says: "the one who does them will live in them." However, this more or less traditional interpretation falters for two reasons. (1) "Doing the law," according to the context of Leviticus 18:5, is not "performance" but the exercise of faith within the parameters of the covenant. (2) Neither the OT nor later Jewish theology recognizes a distinction between doing and believing: they are the two sides of the same coin...¹¹⁷

We also learn from Garlington that perhaps a significant number of Jewish teachers of Paul's day likely interpreted the "live" of Lev 18:5 not merely as life in the here and now, but also as life in the age to come:

Indeed, "live" does mean primarily "to go on living" in the land, especially in view of Ezekiel 20, the first

“commentary” on Leviticus 18:5. Even so, we must reckon with the fact that in certain strands of Jewish interpretation the eschatological dimension is very much present. For example, the Qumran Manual of Discipline (1QS 4:6-8) makes “everlasting blessing and eternal joy in life without end” the extension of “long life” and “fruitfulness” here and now (cf. Dan 12:2; Wis 2:23 [passim]; 2 Macc 7:9; 4 Macc 15:3; 17:12). Conversely, reserved for those who follow “the spirit of falsehood” (the apostates) are a multitude of plagues now and “everlasting damnation,” “eternal torment” and “endless disgrace” hereafter (1QS 4:12- 14). Likewise, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Onqelos to Leviticus 18:5 both posit everlasting life as the reward of doing the Torah (cf. Luke 10:25). Indeed, such an eschatological slant on the life of Leviticus 18:5 would have played readily into Paul’s hands, as he transposes the life of the Torah into eternal life in Christ.¹¹⁸

So which one is it? Does Leviticus promise life in the Land of Isra’el, or does it speak of life in the Age to Come? With these data to get us started, let us attempt to uncover Moshe’s intended meaning of Leviticus 18:5 and its relevance for Galatians 3:12 by allowing Paul to explain it for us. Sha’ul will eventually go on to use Lev 18:5 again at Romans 10:5 in a similar discussion about covenant membership. The meaning of Lev 18:5 is formed by the context of the passage as a whole, and obviously warrants careful study, but first let’s have some fun with the Hebrew and the Greek manuscripts:

1. **And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,**
2. **“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God.**
3. **You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.**
4. **You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God.**
5. **You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:1-5, ESV, emphasis, mine)**

Hebrew:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמַתְּ אֵלֶיָּם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

כִּי הָיָה אֲרֻמְצֵרִים אֲשֶׁר יָשָׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְכִי הָיָה אֲרֻמְצֵנָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶם שָׁמָּה אֲלֵכֶם וְכִי עָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְכִי תֵלְכֶם:

אֲתֵם שָׁמָּה תַעֲשׂוּ וְאֲתֵם תֵּלְכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

שֹׁמְרֵי אֲתֵם וְאֲתֵם שָׁמָּה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֲתֵם הָאֲדָמָה בְּתוֹכָהּ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Interestingly enough, in the LXX (Septuagint) the Greek of the verb “does” (ποιήσας) in the phrase “person does them” of Lev 18:5 is an aorist active participle verb, often used to denote a general ongoing past¹¹⁹ (thus, most translations rightly show “having” [participle] “done” [past]). However, in the original Hebrew, this same verb h,f][;y ya’aseh is an imperfect (i.e. future) tense.

Likewise, since we referenced the LXX and the Hebrew, let us also take a quick peek at the Greek manuscripts of our Galatians verse. In the Greek text of the Byzantine Majority and the Greek Orthodox Church text, as well as in the two Textus Receptus manuscripts (Scrivener’s and Stephanus), Gal 3:12 reads, “ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.” A wooden word for word reading of the matching Greek from these four manuscripts would look something like this, “*The moreover Law not is out of faith rather the having done these things person will live by them.*” By comparison, the Nestle and the Wescott and Hort manuscripts leave out “ἄνθρωπος” (man, person, human, etc.) and show “ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν

αὐτοῖς.” And the Tischendorf manuscript differs from all of these in that it alone has the conjunction “ἀλλὰ” (otherwise, but, rather, etc.) instead of “ἀλλ’,” nevertheless, the meaning is essentially identical with all the others.

The research into the Hebrew and the Greek may in fact be theologically pointless. I don’t believe it significantly changes the meaning of the verse, whether the verb tense describing Torah obedience is in the past or in the future. However, the central message of the verse is significant enough for Sha’ul to have it form the support behind his theology of the first “*Law is not of faith*” clause: “life” in this verse speaks of living safely in the Land of Promise, namely, Isra’el. But germane to his point is the fact that it is not the doing of (or having done) the commandments that results in covenant membership, rather, the existing covenant member will, in fact, govern his life in accordance with God’s laws. To Paul, the sequence of events spelled out in Leviticus undermines the theology of the Influencers, which Paul rejects with his counter statement “*the Law is not based on faith.*”

Conclusion to Galatians 3:12 as a whole: In reality, with all of the biblical data to work from, Paul likely had at least these three sequentially important concepts to work with in choosing the closely reasoned theology of this verse (permit me to play with the biblical concepts of faith and faithfulness by displaying this as “faith[fulness]” for a moment): Consider this sequence: FAITH>Law>FAITH[FULNESS]. If we focus on the sequence of the first two, then the LAW is out of FAITH; LAW comes after FAITH (Moses comes after Abraham). Yet, if we focus on the sequence of the last two, then LAW is not of FAITH[FULNESS]; LAW comes before FAITH[FULNESS]. Finally, if we focus on the sequence of the first and the last one, then FAITH[FULNESS] indeed does proceed from genuine FAITH—the very point Paul is highlighting by quoting Leviticus 18:5.

Within this smaller “live” context argument forming the two innermost points of our six-part chiastic structure, we can easily imagine that this may well be the heart of Paul’s pericope, because in Leviticus the writer, Moshe, describes the lifestyle (the living) of an existing covenant member as characterized by obeying the laws spelled out by the Torah. This is similar to the righteous man living by his faith/faithfulness in Hab. 2:4, used by Paul just a verse earlier in Gal 3:11. In both verses, faithfulness (right living) flows from genuine faith. Paul refers to the Leviticus position as “clearly” described in the previous verse (“*now it is evident*” in the ESV). The Influencers must have believed that “the Law *is* of faith,” with the word Law carrying Nuance One, which included a focus on ethnicity for both Jews and Gentiles. Likewise, the word “faith” to the Influencers must have conveyed both the concept of covenant membership, as well as faithfulness (obedience/maintenance) in relation to Torah commandments. “The Law *is* of faith” for the Influencers must have meant, “Jewish identity (physical circumcision) vindicates covenant membership (justification), which then warrants continued obedience to Torah in order to maintain covenant membership earned either at birth or by conversion.”

For Paul, however, even though his opponents’ theology included most of the right verses with most of the right players, sadly they had reached most of the wrong conclusions. In its broadest application as understood by Paul, “the Law is not of faith” conveys the idea that “the Law is not a salvific document,” “the doing of the Law was not designed to subsequently produce salvific faith in God.” However, within the immediate context of his argument against sectarianism, this phrase likely means, “physical circumcision (works of the Law) does not count towards forensic justification (read here as genuine covenant membership by the Influencers).” Alternately, we could understand this phrase to be Paul’s challenge that, after reading both Hab. 2:4, as well as Lev. 18:5 in context, Paul expects his readers and opponents alike to come to the same conclusions as he: both circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles as faith-centered covenant members follow in faithfulness to Torah. This alternate reading may in fact be only a subtext at this point. However, we have already addressed the primary indictment of Paul’s argument, in our exegesis above: the version of physical circumcision that the Influencers were teaching was a ‘Law of the flesh’ and as such, God did not recognize it as faith-centric; in Paul’s mind, their distortion of “Law” was “not of faith.”

3:13, 14 - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Comments: Since we are nearing end of the chiasmus, allow me to repeat what I stated in the comments to Gal 3:10. Gal 3:9, in my opinion, begins what is likely a six-part chiasmic structure of verses, with 9 and 14 forming the outer two points (the bookends), verses 10 and 13 forming the next inner layer, and verses 11 and 12 forming the innermost two points. Gal 3:9 and Gal 3:14 are linked by the topic of Abraham. Gal 3:10 and Gal 3:13 are linked by the topic of the curse of the Law, and Gal 3:11 and Gal 3:12 are linked by the presence of the word “live” (Greek=ζήσεται, zesetai). The introduction and conclusion to the theology developed in the chiasmus of Gal 3:9-14 is presented in Gal 3:14, and is indicated by the Greek conjunction

ὥστε, hina, usually translated as “in order that,” “that,” “so that,” etc. The arrow indicates where Gal 3:13 falls in the six-part chiasmus. The basic six-part chiasmus looks like this:

- A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:9)
- B. CURSE (Gal 3:10)
- C. LIVE (Gal 3:11)
- C. LIVE (Gal 3:12)
- B. CURSE (Gal 3:13)<
- A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:14)

There are golden moments when the best interpretation of Scripture is Scripture. Gal 3:13 seems to find a parallel in Chapter 4. Allow me to quote Gal 4:4-6 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.” We shall explore the furthering parallels to 4:4-6 when that passage arrives below. For now, let us focus on 3:13. That we have previously defined the term “under the Law” in some contexts 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 at times. 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 in some passages used by Paul 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). In other places of Paul’s letters, under the Law seems to simply refer to Jewish identity (cf. Gal. 4:21). Surely Moshe instructed the Jewish people that obedience invited God’s blessings, while continual and unremorseful disobedience invited God’s curses.¹²⁰ 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.”¹²¹ 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.¹²²

As pertinent a fact as this is for every sinner, there is likely, however, a more contextual and specific 1st Century use of the phrase “curse of the law” found in 3:13, as explained by James D.G. Dunn, which I will quote at length for my commentary here:

Verses 13-14 ‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf – as it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21.23 with 27.26) – in order that the blessing of Abraham might come in Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith’.

The thought clearly refers back to verse 10, as the formulation of the scriptural passage to align it with the Scripture quoted in verse 10 confirms. Paul must intend the ‘curse of the law’ to be understood in the light of verse 10. That is to say, the curse of the law is not simply the condemnation which falls on any transgression and on all who fall short of the law’s requirements. Paul has it in mind that the specific short-fall of his typical Jewish contemporary, the curse which falls on all who restrict the grace and promise of God in nationalistic terms, who treat the law as a boundary to mark the people of God off from the Gentiles, who give a false priority to ritual markers. The curse of the law here has to do primarily with that attitude which confines the covenant promise to Jews as Jews: it falls on those who live within the law in such a way as to exclude the Gentile as Gentile from the promise. This is confirmed by the second half of Paul’s formulation in verses 13-14: the purpose of Christ’s redemption from the curse of the law is precisely what we would (now) expect – viz. the extension of the covenant blessing to the Gentiles. The curse which was removed by Christ death therefore was the curse which had previously prevented that blessing from reaching the Gentiles, the curse of the wrong understanding of the law. It was a curse which fell primarily on the Jew (3.10; 4.5), but Gentiles were affected by it so long as that misunderstanding of the covenant and the law remained dominant. It was that curse which Jesus had brought deliverance from by his death.¹²³

In summary then, we can now easily see that Galatians 3:14 forms the conclusion reached by the logical flow and theology of the first six points of the chiasmus, indicated by the Greek conjunction ἵνα, hina, usually translated as “in order that,” “that,” “so that,” etc. The arrow indicates where this verse falls in the six-part chiasmus:

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:9)

B.CURSE (Gal 3:10)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:11)

C. LIVE (Gal 3:12)

B. CURSE (Gal 3:13)

A. ABRAHAM (Gal 3:14)<

Yeshua brought both Jew and Gentile out from under the curse of misusing the Law for nationalistic purposes, by suffering “outside the gate,”¹²⁴ basically as a Gentile sinner, as a cursed man who hung on a tree for his crimes, thus destroying that bad ideology that had the effect of creating hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and of limiting the divinely intended multinational scope of God, his Torah, his covenants, and his blessings. Paul masterfully describes this redemption for us in Ephesians 2:14-16:

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall

of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (ESV).

Put plainly, the Gentiles should not have been treated as second-class citizens in God's economy. The blessing of Abraham must extend to the Gentiles expressing faith in Yeshua, as equal covenant members in Isra'el, or else Isra'el is not Isra'el and the gospel is not the gospel. Therefore, Dunn's explanation seems to fit more contextually with the situation facing the 1st Century Judaism and with Paul's reasons for writing the letter to the Galatian congregations.

3:17, 18 - This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by 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 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.¹²⁵

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 out of priority, placing too much emphasis on ethnicity and a restrictive, nationalistic definition of Torah obedience. 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 ethnicity gained by obedience to a ritual implied by the Torah, the ritual of the proselyte. In this order, faith results from works and human achievement (ethnicity=works). In this order, genuine faith in God's Messiah for forgiveness of sins—i.e., the Promise—is rendered non-effectual and unnecessary because supposedly ethnicity and maintenance of commandments guaranteed righteousness and forgiveness of sins. Paul would not have his talmidim (students) falling for such blatant errant theology. Using Abraham as the exemplar of faith and justification, Paul shows that the inheritance must arrive to both Jews and Gentiles 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, not by striving to produce offspring with Hagar, but instead by divine fiat (viz, after Abraham and Sarah were past child-bearing age). 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.

3:19 - 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.

Comments: Here is Galatians 3:19 in six random, yet well-known, Bible versions:

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)

Let us turn to a few different Bible commentaries to examine this verse. The first commentary I would like to present and quote represents the historic Christian interpretation and application of this chair passage. The comments have been lifted from a well-known and well-respected online Bible-reading website:

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.¹²⁶

The comments on the verse are so straightforward and easy to understand that I didn't need to add additional thoughts to them at all. Instead, let's compare this Christian view with a well-known Messianic Jewish author for now before providing my own contrasting views.

Concerning this verse (3:19) Complete Jewish Bible author David H. 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 emphases, his):

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 particularly 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)^{[127](#)}

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 Israel 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).^{[128](#)}

Many Christians are likely to refer to John Calvin’s popular “three uses of the Law” in an effort to provide an answer to the question I have posed about how to best interpret Galatians 3:19. And exactly which of Calvin’s three uses of the Law should apply to Christians? I firmly believe all three apply! Indeed, most well-meaning Christians also agree with my position on these three uses. I believe Pastor R.C. Sproul, speaking on Calvin’s commentary to these designations, is representative of the views of mainstream Christianity:

Every Christian wrestles with the question, how does the Old Testament law relate to my life? Is the Old Testament law irrelevant to Christians or is there some sense in which we are still bound by portions of it? As the heresy of antinomianism becomes ever more pervasive in our culture, the need to answer these questions grows increasingly urgent.

The Reformation was founded on grace and not upon law. Yet the law of God was not repudiated by the Reformers. John Calvin, for example, wrote what has become known as the “Threefold Use of the Law” in order to show the importance of the law for the Christian life.

The first purpose of the law is to be a mirror. On the one hand, the law of God reflects and mirrors the perfect righteousness of God. The law tells us much about who God is. Perhaps more important, the law illumines human sinfulness. Augustine wrote, “The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace.” The law highlights our weakness so that we might seek the strength found in Christ. Here the law acts as a severe schoolmaster who drives us to Christ.

A second purpose for the law is the restraint of evil. The law, in and of itself, cannot change human hearts. It can, however, serve to protect the righteous from the unjust. Calvin says this purpose is “by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice.” The law allows for a limited measure of justice on this earth, until the last judgment is realized.

The third purpose of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God. As born-again children of God, the law enlightens us as to what is pleasing to our Father, whom we seek to serve. The Christian delights in the law as God Himself delights in it. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). This is the highest function of the law, to serve as an instrument for the people of God to give Him honor and glory.

By studying or meditating on the law of God, we attend the school of righteousness. We learn what pleases God and what offends Him. The moral law that God reveals in Scripture is always binding upon us. Our redemption is from the curse of God’s law, not from our duty to obey it. We are justified, not because of our obedience to the law, but in order that we may become obedient to God’s law. To love Christ is to keep His commandments. To love God is to obey His law.^{[129](#)}

Praise God that stalwart men of God such as John Calvin point us in the right direction in regards to the Law of God. Indeed, our opinions of Paul and of his letters should first and foremost be influenced by the raw data found within the totality of 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 as he held to.

Returning to our original examination of Galatians 3:19 we can now begin to draw some concluding thoughts about this verse. I believe It is very true that the Torah functions in all three of Calvin's assigned roles, and that every mature Christian—both Jewish and Gentile—should affirm the ongoing relevance of the important functions described by Calvin and those like him. However, given the immediate context of the following complimentary verses¹³⁰, it seems more likely that reminding the readers of what history now designates as Calvin's three uses of the Law, even though such designations would likely come later, is not the Apostle's intended meaning here. Instead, Tim Hegg seems to demonstrate Paul's true, "positive" intentions with his well-written explanation from his Galatians study, quoted at length here. His comments will draw this section to a close:

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.

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" (a[cri, *achri*; Hebrew d;a, 'ad) has the primary meaning of "marker of continuous extent of time up to a point, until."¹³¹ 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).¹³²

3:21 - Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be 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 - Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Comments: In Gal 3:22 the Scripture is personified as “imprison[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.” Pro; tou’ de; ejlqei’n th;n pivstin 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 nomon uJpo; novmon being rendered as “under the Law” in the KJV.

3:24 - So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order 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 paidagwgovβ. 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.”¹³³ 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 guiding the boy to the Teacher is only one of them.

3:25 - But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

Comments: This verse must be understood within the argument that 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 Rom. 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 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, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to 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 Rom. 1:16; 2:9-11; 3:29, 1 Cor.

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.

91 If we were to assume that Paul wrote Hebrews, the count would be 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.

92 ~r.b;a-l,a h'wh.y r,ma{Y;w

93 ~r.b;a-l,a h'wh.y a'reY;w

94 ~r.b;a-l,a r;m'a h'why;w

95 B'resheet 15:2, 3.

96 h'wh.y yin]a wy'lea r,ma{Y;w

97 tyir.B ~r.b;a-t,a h'wh.y t;r'K a.Wh;h ~w{Y;B

98 The Hebrew word hnnh “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)

99 Jewish Encyclopedia, pp. 464-465.

100 hiwh/y y'n{d]a ~r.b;a r,ma{Y;w

101 “...unto the LORD, the most High God.” !w{y.l,[lea h'wh.y-l,a

102 Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Commentary to Genesis* (The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 113.

103 The Scriptures, *Explanatory Notes: Emendations by the Sopherim*, (Institute for Scripture Research), p. 1214.

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

105 Tim Hegg, *Parashah Twelve* (torahresource.com, 2003), p. 2.

106 Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (ESV).

107 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.

108 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 1st century Judaisms also inferred and anticipated the coming of a Righteous One from numerous passages lifted from the Major and Minor Prophets.

109 Romans 11:19-22.

110 TSBD, *katavra*.

111 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 228, with footnote from 235.

112 NIV, NLT, NET, and GWT use faithfulness for the Hebrew of Hab 2:4, yet not a single one of them uses faithfulness in the Greek of Gal 2:11.

113 Ibid., p. 233.

114 See NIV, BSB, HCSB, ISV, NET, DBT, WEY.

115 <http://biblehub.com/greek/1537.htm>

116 <http://www.timothyministry.com/2014/07/faith-or-faithfulness.html>

117 http://www.thepaulpage.com/files/Shorter_Galatians.pdf.

118 Ibid.

119 The aorist is said to be “simple occurrence” or “summary occurrence”, without regard for the amount of time taken to accomplish the action. This tense is also often referred to as the ‘punctiliar’ tense. ‘Punctiliar’ in this sense means ‘viewed as a single, collective whole,’ a “one-point-in-time” action, although it may actually take place over a period of time. In the indicative mood the aorist tense denotes action that occurred in the past time, often translated like the English simple past tense.

120 Deuteronomy Chapters 27, 28.

121 Romans 6:23.

122 2 Corinthians 5:21.

123 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 228-229.

124 Hebrews 13:12.

125 Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 33. [126](#)

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=7&source=1&seq=i.55.3>.

127 David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary-Galatians* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 550.

128 David Guzik, *Galatians 3-The Christian, Law, and Living by Faith* (David Guzik, 2001) <http://enduringword.com/commentaries/4803.htm> [129](#)

https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sproul/threefold_law.html

130 The presence of angels and a mediator are not pejorative marks against the Torah, as many Christian teachers presume. Rather, in the 1st 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.

131 BDAG, a[cri.

132 Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 121.

133 Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD), paidagw.gov.

GALATIANS CHAPTER FOUR

4:1, 2 - I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

Comments: Paul 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). What is Paul trying to teach us? Having begun with the *paidagogos* 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 an 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 sonship from a 1st Century perspective, conveniently couched in terminology that the Galatians could easily identify with, that of Roman Law. I believe the Jewish people are the child, heirs according to birth, yet 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. They are 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 - In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary 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 stoiceion*¹³⁴ of the very world around them (4:8-9 below reveals these to be demons)! 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 even the baser principles of fallen human nature, complete with all of its ugliness, something surely shocking to the candidate of righteousness.

4:4 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the Law,

Comments: The first part of this verse requires little explanation; the meaning is quite obvious: ‘born of a

woman' speaks of Yeshua's humanity. Even though he came from heaven, he had an earthly mother named Miryam (Mary) making him as human as every other person born on planet Earth (Adam and Eve excluded from the mother category since God created them directly), fully able to—as the book of Hebrews describes—sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15). The second part of the verse containing the phrase “born under the Law” is usually understood to mean, “born into a law-keeping environment—viz—as a Jewish man in a Jewish community.” Indeed the Barnes Notes commentary to this verse conveys the prevailing Christian interpretation:

Made under the Law - As one of the human race, partaking of human nature, he was subject to the Law of God. As a man he was bound by its requirements, and subject to its control. He took his place under the Law that he might accomplish an important purpose for those who were under it. He made himself subject to it that he might become one of them, and secure their redemption.¹³⁵

Tim Hegg, however, sees Paul continuing the line of thought began in 3:13-14, indeed providing a parallel to that section. In his Galatians commentary he explains that born under Torah likely carries with it the sense that as sinners, mankind finds himself under the curse of Torah, a curse from which only the redemption proffered by Yeshua could bring a remedy.¹³⁶ Personally, I tend to think that Paul could be attempting to convey either one or both of these important aspects of Christ's being referred to as “under the Law.”

4:5 - to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Comments: Recall that I stated an opinion that there exists a parallel between these verses (4:4-6) and 3:13, 14. You are encouraged to read the commentary to 3:13, 14 from that location above. Starting in 4:5, however, as with verse four above, “under the Law” could refer to Jews, or it could refer to all those under God's condemnation as unregenerate sinners prior to coming to a personal decision of the Lordship of his Son, that is, Jews and Gentiles outside of Messiah. After all, Paul does in fact count himself in this group with his use of the first person plural pronoun “we.” And since he is writing to a group mixed of Jews and Gentiles, the “we” must apply the statement to all present. In this fashion, he describes Gentiles who most certainly grew up outside of a Torah-keeping community as those who were nevertheless “under the Law” while they were outside of the personal knowledge of Christ as Redeemer.

4:6, 7 - And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Comments: Continuing with the contextual son and heir theme Paul is emphasizing at the moment, he now wishes for his readers—both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah (but perhaps primarily Gentiles)—to understand that to strive to gain (or maintain) a legally recognized Jewish identity in the society of Isra'el is pointless if God has not sent his Spirit into their hearts, causing them to be counted as true sons and thus true heirs. Here once again, we see the true theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians: God determines genuine and lasting identity based on our personal identification with Yeshua, not based on establishing our own way of righteousness.

4:8, 9 - Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Comments: Paul makes the shocking statement here in Galatians that before his readers came to Messiah, they all—both Jews and Gentiles—were slaves to demons (also recall 1 Cor. 10:20-21)! In 1 Thess. 1:9 Paul says that we turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. So much for our supposed fleshly pedigrees outside of God's saving grace to rescue us from our own degenerated state of existence! What pathetic wretches we were before Christ found us and washed us clean! Once we begin to see our true identity before the Blood of Yeshua purchased us, we can start to appreciate the awesome price that God paid to actually redeem us! The passage speaks of some of his readers turning back to those weak and miserable principles, a view supposed by historic Christianity to be a return to Judaism and the Torah of

Moses. To be sure, in the eyes of the Church, the enslavement Paul warns against in verse 9 is the bondage to ceremonial commandments such as Sabbath, circumcision, and the dietary restrictions. But can this really be the correct interpretation of weak and miserable principles?

Elsewhere in Paul's letters, he calls the Torah "holy" and the commandment "holy and righteous and good."¹³⁷ How can he simultaneously call the Torah weak and miserable? I think if we let the weight of Paul's teachings in Romans and especially Colossians where he teaches against letting ourselves become subjugated to the elemental spirits of the world all over again, influence our interpretation of these passages in Galatians, then we will not fall for the historical trap of supposing Paul to be some kind of schizophrenic who waffles back and forth on his loyalty to Torah. Colossians 2:20-23 is worth quoting at length here:

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Considering verse 10 below, to which we will turn shortly, it is amazing how similar these two passages are! Hegg makes the comment that those wishing to return to the weak and miserable principles were perhaps wishing to straddle the fence between membership in Israel—the visible people of God, and pseudo membership with the extant Imperial Cult of Rome.¹³⁸ Indeed, growing persecution from Rome for no longer participating in the "required" allegiance to the gods of Rome, coupled with Paul's "pressure" to resist proselyte conversion, may have put these Gentile Christians between a rock and a hard place! Paul would not have them return to Emperor worship, and he would not have them submit to the message of the Influencers either! Oy vey! Talk about being in a pickle!

4:10 - You observe days and months and seasons and years!

Comments: Continuing with our comparisons between standard Christian views and Messianic Jewish views of this passage, we again find that many see in this verse, Paul warning his readers away from Sabbaths (special days), Rosh Chodesh (months), and perhaps the Sh'mitah¹³⁹ (seasons and years). Luther's commentary to Galatians is representative of the prevailing view of the Church.

The Apostle Paul knew what the false apostles were teaching the Galatians: The observance of days, and months, and times, and years. The Jews had been obliged to keep holy the Sabbath Day, the new moons, the feast of the passover, the feast of tabernacles, and other feasts. The false apostles constrained the Galatians to observe these Jewish feasts under threat of damnation. Paul hastens to tell the Galatians that they were exchanging their Christian liberty for the weak and beggarly elements of the world.¹⁴⁰

Given that the Influencers were certainly pushing for circumcision and Torah observance, the standard Christian interpretation certainly sounds quite plausible. However, as already noted at verse 9 above, the more convincing context of these "days, months, seasons, and years," points to Roman pagan calendar observances, the familiarity of which probably provided the impetus to "*turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world.*" Moreover, knowing that Paul personally confessed that he was a Torah-observant Jew his whole life renders the Christian interpretation of these observances untenable.¹⁴¹ Why would Paul keep Torah his whole life, even after coming to faith in Yeshua as Messiah, and then warn others against wanting to keep Torah also? The logic is faulty.

4:11 - I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Comments: If the Galatian Gentile Christians succumbed to the message of the Influencers and decided to undergo the ritual of circumcision (proselyte conversion), for the sake of the supposed covenant status that it promised, then indeed Paul would have wasted his efforts. For in truth, one can only swear his allegiance to either Yeshua, or he must serve another lord. Man cannot serve two masters. Yeshua himself stated that we

are either for him or against him (cf. Matt. 12:20), and Paul himself is going to present these two choices to his readers in 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.”* It is not as if by converting to legally-recognized Jewish status that somehow they would lose their salvation, if indeed they were genuinely saved in the first place. However, the situation here in Galatians is much more precarious than simply adding Judaism to Jesus. For indeed as we shall see when we get to Chapter Five, the Galatian Gentiles were considering ethnic status as a way to somehow be considered righteous instead of taking on the righteousness that is only supplied by Messiah. The issue at stake is not “genuine salvation + Jewish status,” but rather, “genuine salvation vs. Jewish status.”

4:21 - Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

Comments: As we have already discussed elsewhere in this commentary, the phrase “under the Law” can carry with it a variety of meanings, each depending on the specific context in which it is found. Here, the phrase likely refers to Jewish status as desired by those Gentiles wishing to please the huckstering Influencers. *“Tell me, you who want to be under the Law... (viz, you who want to be counted as legally recognized Jews in the community of Isra’el).”* Alternately, since in ancient Isra’el, as with today, to be a good Jew means to also be faithful to the Torah, Paul could be saying, *“Tell me, you who want to be in subjection to the Torah lifestyle as adjudicated by the halakhah of the Influencers.”* This halakhah, as we have discovered from extra biblical sources, was staunchly against allowing Gentiles into close community proximity for fear of the pagan defilement they supposedly transmitted. Thus, to conform to the halakhah of the Influencers would mean to have to eventually reject Gentile Christian fellowship, something Peter succumbed to in Chapter Two, but something Paul would have nothing to do with.

4:22, 23 - For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

Comments: Paul introduces an allegory—a midrash—by way of the biblical narrative about Father Abraham and his offspring. I believe at this point in his letter, that Paul wishes the Influencers themselves to actually hear his teaching. Perhaps as his letter was being read to the communities, Paul envisioned some in the crowd to be the very detractors he so carefully needed to expose as false. Perhaps if he, Paul, appealed further to Scripture directly, perhaps even the Influencers might be shocked back to some semblance of reality and give up trying to persuade those Gentiles from converting to Judaism for the wrong reasons. Whatever the reasons for introducing this allegory into his letter at this point, the interpretation of the allegory is quite to the point: a line of demarcation is being drawn in the sand between who is a genuine covenant member and who is not. In fact, those who are of Messiah are understood by Paul’s midrash here to be legitimate sons, while those of the Circumcision Faction—the Influencers—are understood by Paul to be illegitimate sons—bastards, if you will, and veritable slaves for sure.

The son of Abraham by the slave woman (understood to be Ishmael, even though he is not named directly) is likened to those seeking to be justified by human means, by the works of the Law, by circumcision, by legal Jewish identity. Comparatively, the son of Abraham by the free woman (Isaac) is likened to those seeking to be justified by faith in Yeshua as the promised Messiah, without becoming Jewish first. To strengthen the truth of his illustration, Sha’ul mentions that Ishmael was born when Abraham succumbed to his flesh—the way ordinary human beings procreate, while Isaac was born, not according to human effort, but by divine fiat after Abraham and Sarah were in reality too old to physically copulate for the sake of creating children. To be sure, Paul reminds the readers of God’s sworn oath to Abraham and calls Isaac the promised child.

4:24 - Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

Comments: The Greek word for ‘allegorically’ in this verse is the root word allegoreo ἀλληγορέω, from where we get our English word allegory. Sha’ul now reveals the core truth of his midrash by explaining that

he is referring to two opposing covenants, illustrated using (unnamed) Sarah, and (named) Hagar. Paul also wants his readers to understand that to expect right standing with HaShem according to the flesh—according to Jewish social status—is to be identified with a covenant of slavery, the covenant with Hagar and her offspring.

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

Comments: This covenant with Hagar and her offspring relates to where the Torah of Moshe was given because that is where the present Judaism of Paul's day all look to for the origins of the Nation of Isra'el as a people. Indeed, the biblical Mount Sinai is still revered by all of world Jewry today—as it rightfully should be, because it is there that God covenantally “married” as it were his bride Isra'el. Even though Paul specifically states that Hagar=Mount Sinai and corresponds to present city Jerusalem, oddly enough, Paul does not mention Sarah by name, nor does he say which mountain and city she stands for (if any). What he does say specifically is that the Jerusalem that is above is free (in opposition to the slave-city earthly Jerusalem), and that this heavenly Jerusalem is our mother (more on these distinctions below).

I'm sure in Paul's mind, it is a sad declaration that his beloved and beautiful earthly Zion, the City of God spoken of in Psalm 87:3, has to be identified in his allegory as a city in slavery with her children, in order for his readers to come to their senses. But this is the length to which Paul will go to shock his readers into reality. To flirt with the prospect of going through conversion for the wrong reasons is to be seen in God's eyes as going back into slavery. As is to be expected with most commentaries that one might find in your average Christian Bible bookstore, the historic Church has seen in these verses proof positive that the Old Covenant stemming from Mount Sinai represents slavery and must be replaced by the New Covenant stemming from the Heavenly Jerusalem that offers freedom.

However, since we now know that Paul is not contrasting the Old Testament Torah with the New Testament Gospel of Christ, but rather, he is contrasting the works of the Law (proselyte conversion coupled with legal Jewish status) with genuine faith in Yeshua, we needn't denigrate the Torah in order to make this midrash have genuine application for today's Christian. So much more could be said about the wrong way to understand Paul's allegory here, but I think I have made my point adequately so I will leave off for now.

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

Comments: Paul now assures those of his audience who are genuine believers of their position in Christ. They have all the identity they will ever need: children of promise. A conversion to Judaism via the manmade ritual of conversion will add nothing to their existing righteousness via Yeshua in God's eyes. This is not to say that Jewish identity is worthless. Far from it. In fact, as Paul will spell out in his letter to the Romans, there is in fact a great advantage to being born as a Jew (read Romans 3:1-9). But the sad truth is that the prevailing Judaism of Paul's day had wrongly believed that their covenant status as the chosen people of God was what earned them a right to stand before God righteously. They were trusting in the arm of the flesh to get them into the 'Olam Haba instead of placing their trust in the Sent One, declared to be the True Messiah by the power of a resurrected life.

4:29 - But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

Comments: Sha'ul now reveals a most painful scriptural truth: Darkness will always persecute righteousness; error will always strike out at truth; the flesh will always war against the spirit. So it is with those who are or wish to be counted as children of the promise: they will suffer persecution at the hands of those who show themselves to be children of the flesh. Yeshua explained it best:

18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If

they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. 25 But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'¹⁴²

Since the children of the promise (vs. 28) identify intimately with the ultimate Son born by the power of the Spirit (as opposed to merely being identified as legally-recognized Jews with no true saving faith in Yeshua), then they too can expect to be treated unfairly since "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*" (Eph. 6:12, KJV) We see then from this admission by Paul that the earliest persecution against genuine Christians came not from the Roman establishment but from the Jewish synagogues bent on expelling those from The Way from their midst. One need only read the book of Acts to see this played out in chapter after chapter, and in perfect fulfillment of Yeshua's prediction in John 16:1-4:

1 "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4 But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Indeed, the final truth of the matter is that in Paul's theology, a conversion to Judaism can never change the heart of an individual the way faith in Yeshua can, and those seeking to be "under the Law" (Gal. 4:21) will eventually end up identifying with Hagar of this allegory if they are not careful. Instead of creating community among Jews and Gentiles, they will end up siding with those who destroy community by condoning rejection of Gentiles and persecution of the children of the promise (vs. 28) in a Jewish-only Isra'el the way the prevailing Judaisms of Paul's day were presently doing.

4:30 - But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

Comments: Though making a choice to stand and be persecuted along with Yeshua might result in earthly persecution and expulsion from the established synagogues of their day, Paul would, nevertheless, urge his Gentile readers to reject manmade identity markers in favor of being received into the genuine inheritance offered only to those who identify with the free woman. In the Genesis narrative to which Paul is taking his analogy, Hagar was eventually cast out of Abraham's community, along with her son Ishmael. Thus, even though the son of promise (Isaac) was the object of mocking (according to the text, according to Jewish midrash, and according to the analogy Paul is painting), in the end, God vindicated Isaac's true status as recipient of Father Abraham's inheritance by confirming it once again to Abraham. Genesis 21:9-12 is relevant for our study here:

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named."¹⁴³

Interestingly enough, Paul's quote in Galatians about getting rid of the slave woman, etc., comes not from God's mouth as one would expect if they only read Paul and did not cross reference Genesis. Instead, Sarah is actually the one who uttered these words, and probably not in kindness! To be sure, Abraham was displeased at the sudden and obviously emotional outburst. Yet, Paul picks up on the prophetic truth of Sarah's spiteful proclamation and turns it into a promise about inheritance for his midrash and uses it as a

nice conclusion to this section.

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

Comments: Bringing his allegory to a close by restating what he said in verse 28 above, that if we choose to identify with Yeshua, the ultimate Son of Promise—the Quintessential Offspring of Avraham—instead of seeking to set up our own way of righteousness by purchasing a manmade Jewish identity via the proselyte conversion ceremony, then we, like Isaac of the Genesis narrative, will be counted as a true child of the free woman (heavenly Jerusalem)—a genuine child of Father Abraham and genuine heirs according to the Spirit.

134 Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD) *stoiceion*: the elements from which all things have come, the material causes of the universe, the heavenly 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.

135 Barnes' Notes, online version, 1843, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/galatians/4.htm>

136 Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 146.

137 Romans 7:12.

138 Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 157.

139 Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:20-22; Deuteronomy 15:1-6.

140 Martin Luther, *Galatians Four* (http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/luther_martin/Gal/Gal004.cfm?a=1095010).

141 See Acts 21:24; 24:14-16; 25:8; 26:4, 5.

142 John 15:18-25, NASB.

143 Genesis 21:9-12, ESV.

GALATIANS CHAPTER FIVE

5:1 - For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Comments: There is a very nice segue-way from the last verse of Chapter Four and the first verse of Chapter Five in the Greek, which can be easily be seen in the English (both verses NIV):

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

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.

As can be easily seen and understood by the words underlined above, “free” and “freedom” share the same root Greek word ἐλευθερία eleutheria. This is no mystery and it does not require seminary to notice the link between the two verses. The obvious sense is that Sha’ul is continuing his thoughts from the last chapter as he sets up an intense warning against letting oneself be influenced by a pseudo gospel that promises covenant membership and right standing with God in Isra’el (the message of the Influencers), but in reality will not deliver on the goods. Oh, on the surface, all might appear to be “hunky-dory,” but in point of fact, a conversion to Judaism (or legal Jewish status for those already born Jewish) will do nothing to change the volition of an individual outside of also allowing the Ruach HaKodesh to write the Torah on the heart. Don’t misunderstand what I am stating here. Jewish identity is a good thing to have. What is more, I am not stating that conversion to Judaism is the “unpardonable sin.” Rather, all too often, our outward actions reveal our true inner motives and when it comes to the object of saving faith, we must place our focus exclusively on Yeshua—God’s means of making a person forensically righteous—if we ever hope to be truly saved.

The Galatian Gentiles were at the crossroads of decision. Would they invest their faith in Jewish ethnicity? Or would they invest their faith in Jesus Christ—the one who died and rose again?

To be in Messiah is to be truly free (recall Yeshua’s declaration from John 8:36, *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”* (KJV)). How is it then that these Galatian Gentiles wish to return to the slavery that marked their former manner of life? Can’t they see that anything less than a complete commitment to the true Gospel is not good news at all, and will eventually result in slavery?

As is to be expected, historic Christianity interprets the slavery of verse one as a return to Judaism, a return to living in the confines of Torah observance, a return to Sabbaths, keeping kosher, keeping the Feasts, and of course, circumcision. I shouldn’t really need to bring Christian commentaries into this study for you to see that this is true, but since I cannot resist, I will include just one from David Guzik.

Yoke of bondage: This phrase reminds us of what Peter said in Acts 15:10 about those who would bring the Gentiles under the Law: Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? The Jews themselves were not able to justify themselves before God by the law, so they shouldn’t put that heavy, burdensome yoke on the Gentiles.

i. Certain Jewish teachers of that day spoke of the Law of Moses as a yoke, but they used the term in a favorable light. Paul saw a legal relationship as a yoke, but as a yoke of bondage. It is related to slavery, not liberty. This yoke of bondage does nothing but entangle us. We try hard to pull God’s plow, but the yoke of bondage leaves us tangled, restricted, and frustrated.

ii. It certainly was bondage. Jewish teachers counted up 613 commandments to keep in the Law of Moses. “Even to remember them all was a burden, and to keep them bordered on the impossible. Small wonder that Paul referred to subjecting oneself to them all as entering into slavery.” (Morris)¹⁴⁴

The standard Christian interpretation of this verse does not fit with Paul’s view of Torah, and most importantly, it does not follow from the Scriptural view of Torah. The Torah is not bondage; the commandments

are not burdensome, else 1 John 5:2, 3 would not make sense:

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (ESV, emphasis mine).

Moreover, with eyes opened by the Spirit of God (like Melekh Dah-vid had), to walk in Torah by faith in Messiah is to walk in liberty. Take careful notice of these verses from Psalm 119:44, 45:

“So I will keep Your law continually,

Forever and ever.

“And I will walk at liberty,

For I seek Your precepts” (NASB, emphasis mine).

However, if one bypasses Yeshua and places their trust in ethnicity and/or Torah obedience (viz, maintenance of covenant membership), then that person is truly a slave to their old nature—whether they know it or not. Bondage according to the biblical model is rejecting genuine faith in Yeshua, resulting in a status of “spiritual slavery.” The battle lines were not being drawn between the relevance of Torah for believers vs. the relevance of Yeshua for believers. Paul is not asking Christians to avoid Torah obedience so that Yeshua can be at the center of their devotion. This type of approach to the book of Galatians represents essentially a more modern Christian Church ambivalent attitude towards the Law of God vis-à-vis those who are already Christians. By historic comparison, the Influencers were likely accepting of Gentile proselytes proclaiming Yeshua as the Messiah of Isra’el (much like those believing Pharisees of Acts 15:5), provided, the definition of Isra’el was “Jewish-only Isra’el.” The Influencers do not seem to have a problem with Gentiles as Christians; they seem to have a problem with Gentiles as Gentiles! The lines were being drawn between the necessity of Jewish identity for covenant inclusion vs. the necessity of falling on the mercy and grace of Messiah for genuine covenant membership and forgiveness of sins. The yoke of slavery that one would return to is not a yoke of slavery to commandment keeping. The yoke of slavery one would return to is a life outside of the freedom of Messiah’s atoning righteousness. When the passage is put back into the socio-religious context of the 1st Century, we find that Paul doesn’t need to denigrate the Torah in order to elevate the work of Christ. The important issues in Galatians that we need to focus on in our study were the social questions surrounding membership in the people of God, and as we shall see in the next verse, circumcision (not Torah) was the fulcrum by which membership into 1st Century Isra’el was being weighed.

5:2 - Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

Comments: This verse sounds strikingly similar to what Sha’ul already stated in 2:21, “*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose*” (ESV). In 2:21, the contest in the mind of the Galatians used the verbiage of Christ vs. the Law. Here in 5:2, the contest uses the verbiage of Christ vs. circumcision. By this point in our study, it should be amply clear that Paul did not mean Torah observance when he used the word “Law” in 2:21. By the same token, it should be amply clear that he does not simply mean the physical cutting away of the flesh of the male sex organ when he uses the word “circumcision” in 5:2. In both passages, Paul states that if the Galatians wish to continue down the road constructed by the Influencers—the road described by the 1st Century Judaisms as “the law,” “under the Law,” “works of the Law,” and “circumcision,”—and reject the free offer of genuine and lasting covenant membership into Isra’el as offered by God and outlined in the TaNaKH, then (using the language of our verse here) the work done by Yeshua on the cross will indeed have no value for them at all, or (to use the language of 2:21) his death will have been purposeless.

Paul’s desperate, personal plea is demonstrated in the phrase, “*Mark my words! I, Paul tell you...*” (NIV). Our apostle to the Gentiles is pouring out his heart in an effort to yank them back from the dangerous precipice they are standing near. The stakes of the game are quite high indeed! The Galatian Gentiles are in

decision made and Paul would have them make the right decision based on the fact of Yeshua's historical importance and on the trustable testimony of scripture. But is Paul suggesting that mere circumcision alone could ruin all that Christ accomplished by his death and resurrection? How can a single act of the flesh ostensibly undo the mighty work of Yeshua's ministry on the cross?!

Herein lies the mystery of free will. God is mighty to save all that come unto him with a genuine broken spirit and broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). Likewise, Jesus himself stated in no uncertain terms that *"no man cometh unto the Father except by me"* (John 14:16, KJV). According to Paul's gospel, the object of saving faith—and subsequent genuine and lasting covenant membership into the Israel of God—can only be the Son of God, Yeshua the Messiah. Any other supposed "way to God," "way to receive the genuine favor and blessings of God," would ultimately prove to be a lie from the pit of Hell. The Galatians Gentiles were seeking the right goal, the very same goal the Jews were seeking: to be accepted as the people of God for the sake of receiving the blessing and favor of God. Paul is chastising the Galatians, not for the goal they are pursuing, but for the method in which they hope to secure that goal.¹⁴⁵ Having God's favor on your life is a good thing! After all, why else would Gentiles seek membership into Israel? Paul was trying to get them to understand that they had heard the message of the Gospel correctly and that they had begun as a community under the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, but that if they succumbed to the message of the Influencers and took on Jewish identity and Law-keeping at this stage in the game, and for the reasons he suspected they were taking, then, in HaShem's eyes, it would be tantamount to trying to "reach the goal under [their] own power" (3:3, CJB).

5:3 - I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Comments: The warning in 5:2 against trusting in Jewish conversion for covenant membership essentially repeats again in this verse. However, because circumcision and Torah obligation are both conveyed in pejorative terms in this verse, it presents difficulties for those who only read the scriptures from a face-value perspective, primarily because the Torah itself doesn't **warn** Israel **away** from circumcision and keeping its commandments! Adding to the interpretive challenge is the fact that in other letters, Paul himself seems to **approve** of the value of circumcision so long as one keeps the commandments! Consider Romans 2:25, *"For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision"* (ESV). Most Christian commentators see Gal 5:3 to be implying a warning **away** from circumcision and Torah obedience based on the fact that once a person becomes circumcised (understandably, this must indicate adult circumcision later in life), that person is subsequently obligated to obey every single mitzvah found in the Torah of Moshe. Such a choice, many commentators believe, would conflict with a life of faith in Yeshua. Of course, I disagree. Therefore, I want to explore two issues commonly brought up by this verse.

Issue One: Does Paul believe that there is a problem with circumcised people being obligated to keep the whole Torah?

Issue Two: Is Paul even talking about the written Torah of Moses here?

Let us start with **Issue One:**

Does Paul believe that there is a problem with circumcised people being obligated to keep the whole Torah? Additional questions might also be posed for our consideration. Does Paul have a problem with Gentiles wanting to keep the whole Torah? Did Paul have a problem with Jews wanting to keep the whole Torah? Didn't Paul believe that God expected total Torah obedience when he gave the Torah in the first place? Doesn't the Torah itself command total allegiance to its precepts and commands? So many questions... Let us begin to find some answers.

If we follow from the prevailing Christian interpretations of this passage, then anyone wishing to follow after Torah beginning with circumcision is going to run into a problem since no one alive can keep all of the Torah perfectly, and thus comes under condemnation for breaking even a single commandment. Such an

interpretation is supposedly confirmed by the words in James 2:10 that state, *“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it”* (ESV), and Paul’s own words in Galatians 3:10, *“For all who rely on works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’”* (ESV). Thus, the standard Christian interpretation has Paul warning anyone wishing to become circumcised that once they start down the path of Torah obedience, they are obligating themselves to keep all of it and to keep it perfectly! 100%! No deviation. No excuses. But since no one but Yeshua kept the Torah perfectly, the proposal is doomed to failure—sending the Torah-obedient follower into a tailspin, and crying out desperately for a Redeemer to rescue them from the bondage of impossible Torah observance that they have gotten themselves into by becoming circumcised. Once this poor soul realizes the error of their ways, they will abandon Torah in favor of the true freedom only offered at the foot of the Cross. They will turn from Torah obedience to a life of grace in Jesus, never to return to those old vestiges of Jewish bondage ever again. Is this what Paul is teaching the Galatian Gentiles who are entertaining the notion of becoming circumcised?

I have the highest respect for many, many Christian scholars and commentators both past and present. But I simply cannot agree with the line of thinking that supposes Paul is warning Christians away from Torah obedience based on the reality that no one can keep it perfectly. John MacArthur’s commentary sermon to this passage from Galatians will serve to demonstrate the standard Christian view. Because of its relevance, I have quoted it word for word at length from his website:

You know everybody’s been looking for righteousness, Jews and Gentiles. And you know who found it Paul says? Gentiles. And I suppose if we were to compare the two we’d probably say the Jews were looking harder. The Gentiles found it. Why? Israel followed after the law of righteousness has attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the Law, do you see? So many Jews wanting righteousness, searching for righteousness, seeking righteousness, never found righteousness because they tried to find self-righteousness. And the Gentiles just kind of wandering around got invited to the banquet didn’t they? By faith they came upon righteousness.

So first of all he says false doctrine, the false doctrine of human achievement renders Christ worthless to you. He may as well have never died. You may believe 99% in Christ act in your behalf and 1% in some act of your own and you’re disqualified. It might as well be that Christ did nothing, never existed and never lived. He prophets you nothing. He benefits you nothing. All of His sacrifice on the cross is absolutely empty, absolutely meaningless if you count on work that you’ve ever done to save you. All of grace, absolutely all. And if you add one work, grace is nor more grace. You’ve destroyed it and you’ve destroyed the gracious work of Christ. That’s a pretty strong statement then isn’t. Now he’s saying here, he’s continuing to compare and he’s showing the absolute dichotomy between grace and law.

All right, let’s go to the second thing. The first result of the doctrine of achievement is Christ profits you nothing. The second is this, “your debtor to the whole law,” verse 3. And boy this is really a hard one to handle. He says in verse 3, “I testify again to every man that is circumcised.” Every man literally, it says every man who lets himself be circumcised that’s the Greek rendering. Every man who let’s himself be circumcised. “If you are to do this, here’s another thing you’ve done, you are debtor to do,” what, “the whole law.” If you want to live by law fellow, you’re going to live by the whole thing. One goof and you’re finished.

That’s pretty strong stuff. He says, “I testify,” interesting word *martyromi*, it shouldn’t be translated just simply testify. That doesn’t really unload nearly the concept. It should be translated, “I protest.” Strong statement. I protest, look at this, again to every man. Now it may be that the again means I just said it in verse 2. I’m saying it again in verse 3. It may mean I’m protesting again as I did to you on a previous occasion. So it’s either a previous verse or a previous occasion, but whatever he says, “I am protesting that everyone who lets himself be circumcised is debtor to do the whole law.”

In other words, if you’re going to wipe out grace, there’s only one other thing you can live under, what is it? Law. And the only way to be justified by law is to do what? Keep the whole law. Man I don’t want any part of

it, do you? I don't want a thing to do with it. Man, I just accept the fact that God loved me and redeemed me by pure Grace. I didn't do one single thing to add to it and I'm scared to death to try to do one thing to add to my salvation. Then I'm out of grace and under the whole law and I'm damned because I can't keep it. No thanks. Pretty strong argument isn't it.¹⁴⁶

Here is the sad reality of Christian exegesis that has its origins in the early Gentile Christian movement that sought to distance itself from its Jewish roots and from anything that resembled Torah observance: the 1st Century Judaisms—to include the Apostle Paul—did not interpret God's commands to keep Torah as a rulebook that must be kept perfectly. As far as we can tell from reading the Torah itself, corroborated with the rabbinic writings that have survived from the first few centuries around the time of the writing of the Apostolic Writings, no one in Isra'el would have approached Torah observance with the interpretation that God was expecting 100% perfect obedience. In fact, quite the opposite is true, and it is easily understood if one will remove the anti-Torah bias and let the text speak for itself.

The Torah commands one to love God with one's whole heart, soul and being (Deut. 6:5). But the Torah anticipates our failure to keep its precepts and thus provides a means to restore the relationship with God and with our fellow man. From the perspective of the temporal covenant, the entire priestly cult with its sacrifices was that means. From the perspective of the eternal covenant, the blood of Yeshua is that means. On both levels, both the earthly/temporal/fleshly, as well as the heavenly/eternal/spiritual, we have a mechanism that will restore right standing with our God whenever we trip up and sin. Thus, the Christian notion that God expects 100% perfect obedience is wrong headed in its approach to begin with. God doesn't expect 100% perfect obedience. He knows we are faulty. That is why he sends his precious Holy Spirit into our lives to enable us to become more like Yeshua, and to actually walk into his Torah with empowerment.

Answers to the questions raised in **Issue One**:

I asked: Does Paul believe that there is a problem with circumcised people being obligated to keep the whole Torah?

Answer: No. Paul expects all genuine followers of HaShem to become submissive to Torah because that is one of the purposes for HaShem giving the Torah. Torah is a document that was meant to be followed under the power of the Ruach HaKodesh. Torah is meant to be kept, not discarded and ignored.

I asked: Does Paul have a problem with Gentiles wanting to keep the whole Torah?

Answer: No. As long as we understand that the word Torah here is being used to speak of God's Word as over against the additional legalistic fences that the Jewish sages had added to the written word of God.

I asked: Did Paul have a problem with Jews wanting to keep the whole Torah?

Answer: No. Jews, both Messianic and non-Messianic, were naturally spoken of in the Bible as being zealous for Torah (read Acts 21:20).

I asked: Didn't Paul believe that God expected total Torah obedience when he gave the Torah in the first place?

Answer: Yes. Paul correctly interpreted God's intended meaning of giving oneself completely to obedience to his Word. But this does not mean perfection; else the entire book of Leviticus with its sacrifices would not make any sense. God expects obedience, but he anticipates our failures. From ancient Isra'el's perspective in the TaNaKH, to follow after Torah meant to also bring the required sacrifices when one violated Torah. Thus, instead of expecting perfection, the logic follows that, from God's perspective, the required Torah obedience of Isra'el also actually anticipated Isra'el's failure to keep it perfectly.

I asked: Doesn't the Torah itself command total allegiance to its precepts and commands?

Answer: Yes, but this goal is completely attainable, but only if one surrenders his will to God by allowing God to write the Torah on the heart. Of course, using 20/20 hindsight, we now understand that this implies

surrendering to Yeshua, the very goal of the Torah from start to finish.

Conclusions to questions raised in **Issue One**:

Paul affirms that the Law expects total allegiance but not perfect performance. Contrary to popular Christian teaching, God's Torah never commanded or expected sinless perfection else the sacrifices for sin would be meaningless. However, in Messiah, we are in fact supposed to strive towards perfection in this life until we one day we finally put it on for eternity. Therefore, in this life, and while the Temple stood in Jerusalem, true obedience to Torah included bringing sacrifices when one sinned—thus, the Torah actually anticipated our failure to keep it from time to time by making provision for our shortcomings (read Gal. 3:19). Without expecting sinless perfection, the Torah nevertheless does consider even a single breach to be guilty of violating the whole, thus, to break one commandment was to be guilty of breaking them all (read James [Jacob] 2:10). Paul's words to the Galatians here in 5:3 are not a warning against mere biblical (physical) circumcision and God's understanding of Torah observance; he is warning them to avoid a sectarian halakhah (conversion) that is headed in the direction of the exclusion of Gentiles in Isra'el (more on this concept below).

Issue Two: Is Paul even talking about the written Torah of Moses here?

In my comments to Galatians 3:12 above I made the following observation,

"Paul will eventually spell out some of the furthering damning implications of following the influencers' dangerous theological view in Gal 5:3 by warning the Galatian Gentile Christians, *"every man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole Law,"* a statement that must by context refer to a Gentile convert's commitment to a Jewish-only written and Oral Torah. Such a commitment would demonstrate that the new Jewish proselyte is separated from his fellow believing Gentile counterparts who had decided not to undergo conversion. This type of Jewish-only commitment to the Torah runs counter to the Abrahamic promise itself!"

With that in mind, let us talk about this word "Torah" from a 1st Century Jewish perspective. At first blush, it does seem like Sha'ul is talking about the Law of Moses when he warns anyone wishing to receive circumcision that they are under obligation to keep the whole Law. But the careful Berean student of God's Word will discover that the 1st Century Judaism did not speak of the Torah in monolithic terms. That is, to the Judaism of Paul's day—as it is also in today's Judaism—there was the Torah Shebichtav (Written Torah) and there was the Torah Sheba'al Peh (Oral Torah). Many of you know the Oral Torah by its other familiar name: Talmud. The problem with this two-Torah idea is that in the 1st Century Jewish societies, more and more the Oral Torah (as unwritten sayings transmitted by the sages) was being received as equal to—or in some cases, more important than—the Written Torah. Yeshua did not have very nice words for those who allowed tradition to nullify his Father's Torah (read Mark 7:13).

Let's take a peek at this two-Torah concept as described by a well-known traditional (non-Messianic) Jewish organization named Chabad.org.

The Torah has two parts: The "Torah Shebichtav" (Written Law), which is composed of the twenty-four books of the Tanach, and the "Torah Sheba'al Peh" (Oral Law).

G-d told Moses that he will give him "the Torah and the commandments." Why did G-d add the word "commandments?" Are there any commandments which are not included in the Torah? This verse (amongst others) is a clear inference to the existence of the Oral Torah.

Originally the Oral Law was not transcribed. Instead it was transmitted from father to son and from teacher to disciple (thus the name "Oral" Law). Approximately 1800 years ago, Rabbi Judah the Prince concluded that because of all the travails of Exile, the Oral Law would be forgotten if it would not be recorded on paper. He, therefore, assembled the scholars of his generation and compiled the Mishnah, a (shorthand) collection of all the oral teachings that preceded him. Since then, the Oral Law has ceased to be "oral" and as

time passed more and more of the previously oral tradition was recorded.¹⁴⁷

Now, as a Messianic Jew, I am not saying that I agree with Chabad.org in that there truly exists two authoritative parts to HaShem's Torah. Quite the contrary. I believe and espouse to only ONE authoritative part to God's Torah: the Written Torah. Yes, I acknowledge the existence of an Oral Torah, but I do not believe its teachings are binding on believers—whether Jewish or Gentile.

Additionally, if we continue to research the history of ancient Isra'el's views on Torah, we will find that sectarian halakhah can also be interpreted as "laws binding on all group members." In other words, the term Law in ancient Judaism did not only speak of Written Torah and/or Oral Torah, but quite often, it also designated the specific "by-laws" that separated one sect from another, so that to identify with any particular sect, a follower would naturally come under the jurisdiction of the sect to which he had aligned himself. E.P. Sanders' remarks about sectarian Judaism in the 1st Century are fitting for our study:

The Pharisaic/Rabbinic concept of 'oral law' shows that they wanted to assert that the law given to Moses was adequate in all respects—even when they were in fact adding to it, deleting from it, and otherwise altering it. Similarly in 1QS a distinction is made between the 'hidden things' in the law, which are known only to the sect, and the rest (1QS 5.IIf.). Entrants to the community pledge to keep 'every commandment of the Law of Moses in accordance with all that has been revealed of it to the sons of Zadok' (1QS 4.8f.). Thus the sect's special rules were formally considered to be in 'the law of Moses', though from our point of view they are additions and modifications.¹⁴⁸

Relevant to our verse here in Galatians 5:3 is the striking similarity in verbiage between the Apostle Paul and those in the Qumran community of his day! Did you catch it? For those who would seek to be identified by the particular Jewish sect of their choosing, both Paul and the Qumran community spoke of the reality to "keep every commandment of the Law of Moses!"

Conclusions to the question raised in **Issue Two**:

Instead of Paul warning his Gentile readers away from total allegiance to the Written Torah of God if they undergo proselyte conversion to Judaism, perhaps it is better to understand the verse as a warning against total allegiance primarily to the Oral Torah and/or the sectarian halakhah of the Influencers—a halakhah that does not include Gentiles in their membership roster—a halakhah that Paul would definitely have problems with.

5:4 - You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Comments: Merit Theology would have the phrase "justified by the law" as teaching that anyone wishing to keep the Torah of Moshe perfectly for the purpose of gaining salvation has alienated themselves from Christ. They have fallen from grace. Why the alienation and the fallen state? Because, according to these same theologians, to attempt to keep the Torah for salvific purposes is tantamount to works/legalism, and everyone knows that we are not saved by works, viz, by legalistically following Torah, but by calling on the name of the LORD Jesus Christ. Luther's famous words on this passage are telling. Allow me to quote them at length:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Paul in this verse discloses that he is not speaking so much of circumcision as the trust which men repose in the outward act. We can hear him say: "I do not condemn the Law in itself; what I condemn is that men seek to be justified by the Law, as if Christ were still to come, or as if He alone were unable to justify sinners. It is this that I condemn, because it makes Christ of no effect. It makes you void of Christ so that Christ is not in you, nor can you be partakers of the knowledge, the spirit, the fellowship, the liberty, the life, or the achievements of Christ. You are completely separated from Him, so much so that He has nothing to do with you any more, or for that matter you with Him." Can anything worse be said against the Law? If you think Christ and the Law can dwell together in your heart, you may be sure that Christ dwells not in your heart. For if Christ is in your heart He neither condemns you, nor does He ever bid you to trust in your own good works.

If you know Christ at all, you know that good works do not serve unto righteousness, nor evil works unto condemnation. I do not want to withhold from good works their due praise, nor do I wish to encourage evil works. But when it comes to justification, I say, we must concentrate upon Christ alone, or else we make Him non-effective. You must choose between Christ and the righteousness of the Law. If you choose Christ you are righteous before God. If you stick to the Law, Christ is of no use to you.

Ye are fallen from grace.

That means you are no longer in the kingdom or condition of grace. When a person on board ship falls into the sea and is drowned it makes no difference from which end or side of the ship he falls into the water. Those who fall from grace perish no matter how they go about it. Those who seek to be justified by the Law are fallen from grace and are in grave danger of eternal death. If this holds true in the case of those who seek to be justified by the moral Law, what will become of those, I should like to know, who endeavor to be justified by their own regulations and vows? They will fall to the very bottom of hell. "Oh, no," they say, "we will fly straight into heaven. If you live according to the rules of Saint Francis, Saint Dominick, Saint Benedict, you will obtain the peace and mercy of God. If you perform the vows of chastity, obedience, etc., you will be rewarded with everlasting life." Let these playthings of the devil go to the place where they came from and listen to what Paul has to say in this verse in accordance with Christ's own teaching: "He that believeth in the Son of God, hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him."

The words, "Ye are fallen from grace," must not be taken lightly. They are important. To fall from grace means to lose the atonement, the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness, liberty, and life which Jesus has merited for us by His death and resurrection. To lose the grace of God means to gain the wrath and judgment of God, death, the bondage of the devil, and everlasting condemnation.¹⁴⁹

As accurate as Luther's theology is in explaining works/legalism vs. grace, unfortunately, it is NOT what the verse is speaking of historically. And we must remember this hermeneutic principle if we are ever to interpret scripture accurately: context is king, and any given passage must be interpreted in light of what it meant to the original audience before making practical application for us today. Using this principle, we cannot have Sha'ul warning his readers against misusing Torah observance for the purpose of justification (viz, salvation, membership into Isra'el, etc.). The term "law" here must be understood to indicate "legal Jewish status" or some other term similar to proselyte conversion for Gentiles. Paul is not warning them about a misuse of Torah. Paul is warning them about a misuse in identity and social status.

But how could Paul say that they have been "alienated from Christ," and that they have "fallen from grace"? Does Paul now imagine that his genuine Gentile Christian readers have somehow lost their salvation? Is that what alienation from Christ and falling from grace means? I think it hardly possible that Paul would speak of conversion to Judaism for a true Gentile believer as something that would undo a person's position of salvation in Christ. Rather, within the mystery of God's spiritual attraction on and calling of a person or a community, there seems to exist circles of graduated mercy and grace—revelation, if you will—so that the closer you get to surrendering your life completely into the loving arms of Yeshua HaMashiach the more light and revelation you are shown until the moment of salvation is finally "birthed" within you and you call upon the name of the LORD for personal deliverance. To join oneself to a believing community and then intellectually confess faith in Yeshua and then to shrink back, reject Jesus, and pursue another intellectual interest is indeed to alienate yourself from Christ and to fall from grace. It is not as if you had genuine salvation and then lost it. It is that by leaving Christ so cavalierly, you prove that you were never truly genuinely saved to begin with! Truly a dangerous game to play with God considering the sober warnings in Heb. 6:4-8, *"For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has*

drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned” (ESV).

The Torah teaches that if we continue on in the grace that God has shown us—even as unbelievers—that he himself will grant grace upon grace to help us understand the work the Messiah has done on our behalf:

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you...” (James [Jacob] 4:8, ESV)

I believe this verse works just as well for the unbeliever as it does for the believer. For example, would you not agree that those unbelievers who nevertheless attend church on a regular basis are “closer to accepting Yeshua” than possibly those unbelievers who don’t attend church and get a chance to hear the gospel at all? In my limited understanding of God’s grace, he positively utilizes the social settings that we associate with for his advantage and purposes in his efforts to reveal his Son to us. Children born of Christian parents in a Christian nation, surrounded by Christian friends would naturally exist in a more graduated state of “grace” than someone without all of these “advantages,” right? God rescued the People of Isra’el out of the clutches of the Egyptians so that he could bring them to the foot of Har Sinai (Mount Sinai), give them his Torah, and then bring them into the Land of Promise. Living in the Land of Promise, with the very words of the Living God of the universe in your community is definitely a position of grace—even if every single Israelite did not eventually go on to foster a personal relationship with their God. From God’s perspective, their position of grace (as the chosen people) did not change. Only when Isra’el continued to play the harlot by engaging in idolatry did they “fall from grace” so to say, and suffer exile from the Land.

5:5, 6 - For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Comments: These two verses form a semi-conclusion to verses 1-4. Verse 5 is included above in order to capture the context of Paul’s double “for” (Greek=γὰρ gar) argument (both verses start with the same English word), but I only want to specifically comment on verse six which reads, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*” Paul repeats this statement, with a slight variation, later on in 6:15, “*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*” Is Paul now saying that Jewish identity is worthless after the cross? For that matter, is he also saying that Gentile identity is likewise useless? If indeed we interpret his words this way, then how can we reconcile them with what he states in Romans?

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1, 2, NASB).

In a seeming reversal of opinion, Paul states in Romans that Jewish identity is “great in every respect.” This doesn’t sound like he consistently thought Jewish identity to be worthless. Perhaps he changed his mind from the time he wrote Galatians to the time he wrote Romans? To make matters even more confusing, he ends up repeating his original Galatians comments in his letter to the Corinthians:

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God*” (1 Cor. 7:19, NASB).

Is Paul schizophrenic? Why does he seemingly keep going back and forth on his opinions about Jewish identity? Is it “valueless,” or is it “great in every respect”? Of course I am being a bit facetious here just to prove my point. Context must determine the meaning of any given word or phrase we find in the Bible. The context of Paul’s whole warning in this chapter—indeed in the book as a whole—is the equality of Jewish and Gentile ethnicity in the Kingdom of God. Or to put it the way an old Baptist preacher once told me: “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” This is the exact opposite of the message the Influencers were teaching, for in their theology, there was no place in Isra’el for the Gentile wishing to be counted as equal among his legally Jewish counterparts.

Paul is not denigrating one ethnicity in favor of another. He values all ethnicities, and Paul would be the first to teach that a person should value his ethnicity and praise God in whatever station of life they find themselves in without investing unnecessary time trying to change things (read 1 Cor. 7:20). So, even though Jewish and Gentile identities are important in God's scheme of things, he also realized once he came to believe in Yeshua that being born Jewish did not grant a person automatic corporate right-standing in God's sight. Nor did conversion to Judaism guarantee a person a place in the 'Olam Haba. That same Baptist preacher used to say that when we get to heaven and St. Peter meets us at the pearly gates and asks why he should let us in that he is not going to ask us if we are Jewish or not. Instead, he is going to ask us if we are in Christ or not.

5:7 - You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Comments: That Paul describes his readers as "running a good race" means that he regarded them as beginning with the Truth of the Gospel and only after considering the ethnocentric message of the Influencers did they veer off the straight and true path so to say. In fact, Paul even goes so far as to indicate that if it were not for the sway of this other "gospel" that the Galatians would likely still be in pursuit of the pure Truth. In other words, Paul doesn't seem to indicate that once his readers acquired Truth that they then went looking for "more truth" in the marketplace of religions, but rather, they were already on the good path of genuine Truth and running for the finish line when the Influencers cut in and upset their momentum in so many wrong ways (to use the running metaphor that Paul chose).

5:11 - But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

Comments: As can be expected, prevailing Christian interpretations of this verse have Paul emphatically stating that he no longer believed circumcision to be of any value. They take Paul's words to naturally include the Torah as a whole, and therefore, would opine the apostle to be confessing his conversion from traditional Judaism to early Christianity of sorts. They gain support for their view from Paul's self confession earlier in this book at 1:13, interpreted to mean that Judaism was his former lifestyle but that Christianity is his present lifestyle: *"For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it"* (ESV).

But how can this view be tenable if Paul went on to circumcise Timothy in Acts chapter sixteen? What is more, if Paul was indeed confessing that he no longer felt Torah and circumcision were relevant for the life of a follower of Yeshua, why does he go through with the sacrifice decision from James made in Acts 21:17-26?

"Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law" (verse 24, ESV).

One view is that Paul was being accused of hypocritically switching back and forth to fit whatever situation he was in—sort of a "situation ethics" if you will. There will be more on this view below, when we take a look at Tim Hegg's remarks.

I don't really believe that Paul abandoned Judaism and circumcision and I don't think you the reader do either or else you probably wouldn't have made it this far into my commentary. Instead, that Paul still upholds Torah, but that he is merely conveying that he used to actually agree with the theology of a Jewish-only Isra'el is likely from his statement in this verse. To "preach circumcision" meant to tow the standard party line that "All Isra'el shares a place in the world to come," one of the primary motivating maxims of Paul's day, one based on Isaiah 60:21, *"Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified"* (ASV). Recall that the Influencers, like many of the Judaisms of the 1st Century, believed sincerely—albeit incorrectly—that genuine and lasting covenant membership was granted to Isra'el based on her ethnicity, and that if a citizen of another nation wished to join Isra'el's lot, that person had to undergo the manmade ceremony of the proselyte—complete with mandatory circumcision for males.

To be sure, if Paul were still preaching a Jewish-only Isra'el, then why would so many Jews in the book of Acts be out to kill him?¹⁵⁰ Why would he have gotten arrested for supposedly bringing Greeks into the Temple and defiling it?¹⁵¹ Why would he still be persecuted if he actually agreed that Gentiles needed to undergo the ritual of proselytism? Of course we already know the answer to his question. The true reason he receives persecution from the traditional Jewish authorities is because, in point of fact, he does NOT agree that Gentiles needed to become legally-recognized Jews before being received into the community of Torah-keeping Isra'el.

Consider once again the words of Mark Nanos here:

One of the critical questions in Christian theology is the relationship of its members to Jewish identity and behavior, an identity concern, which, for the original audiences, supports the claim that they understood themselves to be participants in Judaism, albeit not Jews. In Paul's time, although no longer, for Christ-believers who were not Jews, the first question was whether they could or should become members of Israel, Jews, which is accomplished by completion of the rite of proselyte conversion. For males, this includes circumcision at the conclusion of the conversion process. Circumcision thus functions in Paul's time as a metonym for the rite of proselyte conversion. It is a rite or work or deed prescribed by Torah to become a member of Israel, and thereafter, a person obliged to observe Torah, that is, responsible to practice Jewish behavior.¹⁵²

In my estimation, we must consistently return to this central hermeneutic principle if we wish to properly understand the book of Galatians from an historic religious perspective.

But, as mentioned above, there may be another way to interpret Paul's saying about "still preaching circumcision." Tim Hegg is of the opinion that "Paul was being accused of being inconsistent. He was preaching a "circumcision-free" gospel to the Galatians, but when among a primarily Jewish audience, he was holding the "party line" and teaching that Gentiles needed to become proselytes, in order to avoid being ostracized from his own community."¹⁵³ If Hegg is correct, then this would fit best with the overall context of Galatians.

The second half of the verse states, *"In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished."* To what "case" is he referring when he says *"in that case..."*? Naturally, he is referring to his previous statement. If he is still preaching that Jews and Gentiles are not equal before God, then the offence of the cross has been abolished. Why? Because, Yeshua's death opened the way for both Jew and Gentile to enter into the genuine presence of God without the perquisite of pedigrees and the like. Ephesians 2:14-18 says it best:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (NIV).

Couple the truth of this verse with what Paul teaches elsewhere:

But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23, NIV).

Yes, the cross of Christ is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles—truly offensive to both groups when one considers the absurd reality that God is willing to completely forgive a person on the basis of faith alone! "Surely," the world says to itself, "there must be more to it than that!" What a wonderful truth that God does NOT require more than that. Our sufficiency is in Yeshua alone!

5:13 - For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Comments: The place of Torah in the life of ancient Isra'el functioned to set the people apart from the world

in service to the One, True God of the universe. As the people engaged in the righteous activities of the Torah lifestyle, the surrounding people groups would have an opportunity to see and understand that God was close to his people as they called upon him, that they were wise, and that his statutes and ordinances were righteous!

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the midst of the land whither ye go in to possess it. Observe therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that, when they hear all these statutes, shall say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there, that hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is whensoever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day" (Deut. 4:5-8, JPS 1917).

What does this have to do with Paul explaining to his readers that they were called to be free? If Paul believed that his Gentile audience was genuinely grafted into Isra'el via faith in Messiah Yeshua, then Isra'el's grand call became their grand call as well. 1st Century Isra'el viewed the Torah as a community privilege, a God-given responsibility meant to be carried out by every "good Jew" since he bore the humble task of representing the image of the Divine "in the sight of all the other peoples" of the earth (recall Moshe's words from Deuteronomy above). What the average modern Christian often overlooks as they read about the Law in their Sunday school textbooks is that the central tenet of God's Torah was "Love God with all your heart, soul, and strength," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Too often, all the modern church Bible student sees in the Law is "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not!" They forget that the TaNaKH commanded Isra'el to have circumcised hearts so that they could in fact love and obey God with a genuine heart of faith, and subsequently love their neighbors the way they should.¹⁵⁴ Genuine freedom in Christ is freedom from the bondage of flesh and freedom to walk into Torah obedience—empowered by the Ruach HaKodesh. This is the point I am trying to make by reminding us about Isra'el's responsibilities to love God, love their neighbors, and be a light to the surrounding nations. The point I am stressing is that like Isra'el of old, Paul did not expect his readers to be able to embrace freedom and resist indulging the sinful nature under their own power! He urged them to serve one another in love. Indeed as Paul is going to state forthrightly in the very next verse, serving one another in love is tantamount to fulfilling the true intentions of the Torah, and this type of love can only be done as we live by the Spirit of God, which brings us to the next verse and to my next comment:

5:14 - For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Comments: If Paul thought that Torah was done away with in Yeshua, as the prevailing Christian interpretation would have us to believe, then how in the world is it also fulfilled (summarized) in a single command to love our neighbor as ourselves? Firstly, in stating that the entire Torah is fulfilled in a single command, Paul follows in a tradition not uncommon among Jews of his day, a tradition Yeshua himself seems to have also followed. Recall that when questioned about the greatest commandment, Yeshua stated that to love God was the greatest and that a second was like unto it: love they neighbor as thyself. He went on to explain that on these two hang the entire Law and the Prophets—i.e., the fulfillment/summary (Matt. 22:36-40). Tim Hegg and David H. Stern remind us that the Babylonian Talmud contains a well-known passage about Micah, Isaiah, Amos, and Habakkuk summarizing the Torah commandments, distilling them down to a few and eventually one command.¹⁵⁵

But is Paul saying that the rest of Torah is irrelevant and that we need only focus on this single command to love our neighbors? This can hardly be the correct interpretation, for indeed this would mean that Paul himself has just overthrown the greatest commandment, stated by Yeshua above to be love for God, with our neighbor coming in as a close second!

I think it fair to say that if we were to corner your average church pastor and ask them to state outright that they believe Paul to be uprooting all of Torah save this one commandment that they would not hold to that

opinion. Therefore, since we know Paul is not uprooting Torah here, we must confess that he is simply helping his readers to understand the Law's priorities about genuine, spirit-led love for God that works itself out in maintaining control over our own sinful propensities, all the while nurturing within us an unselfish love for those around us.

5:16 - But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Comments: This verse is such a wonderful promise for us as believers in Yeshua! What is more, it is so practical and easy to understand that it is incomprehensible why more Christians are not following its rich, spiritual truth. If we are to be obedient to God's ways and love our neighbor, as we ought, then we have to live by the Spirit so that we can allow God to empower us to subjugate our stubborn flesh. Paul has stated this very same principle elsewhere in his writings:

"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:12-14, ESV).

To live by the Spirit means to walk by the Spirit, to be empowered by the Spirit, to be filled by the Spirit (more on Spirit-filling below).

5:17 - For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Comments: Like verse 16, this verse too finds parallels in Paul's other writings:

"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Romans 7:15-23, ESV).

Like the Romans passage quoted above, Paul would have us understand here in Galatians that once a person surrenders to Yeshua, a war between his old nature and new nature begins, with the flesh battling the Spirit and the Spirit battling the flesh. Such a contest might lead one to despair and wonder if there will ever be victory for the child of God in Christ this side of heaven if this is the way it is going to be from now on. But Paul already gave us the answer to the dilemma of dealing with our stubborn flesh: *"Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."* As believers, we need not despair as long as we remain firmly rooted in Christ! To be sure, in Galatians 5:14, Paul conveys the concept of fulfilling the Torah by commending us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and in Romans, Paul equates the concept of fulfilling the Torah with walking according to the Spirit:

"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3, 4, ESV).

Isn't it fantastic how the Word of God fits perfectly together in all of its parts!

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

Comments: Nearly every Christian commentary I consulted on this verse interpreted it in such a way as to teach that being Spirit-led meant that one was no longer bound by Torah ceremonies and the like, taking the phrase "not under the Law" (Greek=ὐπὸ νόμον *hupo nomon*) to indicate "not under obligation to carry out

the letter of the Law.” To be sure, most of those same commentaries looked ahead in Galatians to 6:2 contrasting the law (νόμος nomos) in this verse (presumed to be the Law of Moses) with the Law of Christ in 6:2 (more on “Law of Christ” in my comments to that verse below). As was to be expected, those same Christian commentaries cross-referenced Paul’s words in Romans 6:14, particularly because the entire phrase “not under the Law” was used there as well.

David H. Stern’s Complete Jewish Bible translates this Galatians verse as “But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism.” I’m going to have to disagree with all of the standard Christian commentaries on this verse, and I’m going to have to disagree with Stern’s translation on this pasuk as well. Paul is not pitting Torah observance against being led by the Spirit. Nor is he contrasting the life of the Spirit with a life of legalism—as theologically true a statement as that may sound.

As was discussed in Section Seven as well as the Summary above, when Paul uses the phrase “under the Law” in his letters, it is usually utilized in a technical fashion, referring either to Jewish identity, or to the condemnation that the Torah spells out for sinners, brought on by a penchant lust for repeated and unremorseful sin. Context must determine which use is in view, and since Paul is in the middle of a dialogue about the old nature vs. the new nature that is controlled by the Spirit’s infilling, we can safely interpret “under the Law” in this verse as shorthand for “under the condemnation of the Law.”

But this verse not only emphasizes our freedom from condemnation, but our need to be “led by the Spirit.” I interpret the term “led by the Spirit” to be tantamount to being “filled with the Spirit,” a familiar phrase also found in Paul.¹⁵⁶ As one reads through my commentary here to Exegeting Galatians and notices the way I regularly disagree with standard Christian commentaries, one might get the impression that I have nothing positive to say about the prevailing Christian views at all, but that is far from the case. In point of fact, I have the utmost respect for every Christian translator and commentator that I encounter, often gleaning rich spiritual nuggets from their non-Law related materials. To be sure, John MacArthur is one of my all time favorites, and because of his pertinent words on the concept of being filled with the Spirit, I want to quote him at length here:

Facets of Spiritual Filling

When we use the word fill in English we normally think of something being placed into a container such as milk being poured to the brim of a glass, water being run into a bathtub, or gasoline being pumped into a gas tank. But none of those examples conveys precisely the meaning of to fill or be filled as does the Greek pleroo, a form of which is used in Ephesians 5:18 .

Pleroo has three shades of meaning that are helpful in illustrating the scriptural meaning of Spirit-filled. The first carries the idea of **pressure**. It is used to describe wind billowing the sails on a ship, providing the impetus to move the vessel across the water. In the spiritual realm, this concept depicts the Holy Spirit providing the thrust to move the believer down the pathway of obedience. A Spirit-filled Christian isn’t motivated by his own desires or will to progress. Instead, he allows the Holy Spirit to carry him in the proper directions. Another helpful example of this first meaning is a small stick floating in a stream. Most of us have tossed a stick into a creek and then run downstream to see the twig come floating by, propelled only by the force of the water. To be filled with the Spirit means to be carried along by the gracious pressure of the Holy Spirit.

Pleroo can also convey the idea of **permeation**. The well-known pain reliever Alka Seltzer illustrates this principle quite effectively. When you drop one or two tablets into a glass of water, they instantly begin to fizz and dissolve. Soon the tablets are transformed into clear bubbles throughout the glass, and the water is permeated with the distinct flavor of the Alka Seltzer. In a similar sense, God wants the Holy Spirit to permeate and flavor our lives so when we’re around others they will know for certain we possess the pervasive savor of the Spirit.

There is a third meaning of *pleroo*, actually the primary one in the New Testament, which conveys the sense of **domination** or total control. It is used by the Gospel writers to indicate that people were dominated by a certain emotion. In Luke 5:26, after Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and healed the paralytic, the people were astonished and “filled with fear.” In Luke 6:11, when Jesus restored a man’s hand on the Sabbath, the scribes and Pharisees “were filled with rage.” When our Lord told the disciples that He would soon be leaving them, He told of their reaction: “sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:6). Each of those uses reveals an emotion so overwhelming within the people that it dominated their thoughts and excluded every other emotion.

Most people are able to balance their emotions from day to day. But there are times when the emotional balance is tipped to one extreme or another. Such occasions might include a wedding, the death of a close family member, or an extreme emergency or trial. When someone is totally dominated by a particular emotional reaction in secular contexts, it can be foolish, sinful, a waste of time, or even frightening and physically harmful. But in our spiritual lives we are commanded to yield to the total control of the Holy Spirit, so every emotion, thought, and act of the will is under His direction. That kind of complete spiritual control is for our benefit and totally in line with God’s will.

A directly parallel passage to Ephesians 5:18 is Colossians 3:16, which explains in a slightly different way the meaning of the command “be filled with the Spirit.” The Apostle Paul says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” One can be filled with the Spirit only when controlled by the Word. It is knowing truth and obeying it (all emphases his).¹⁵⁷

Such powerful words for us to contemplate! John MacArthur hit the nail on the head with this one! I cannot stress enough the importance of this need: As believers we absolutely must, must, must be led by/filled with the Spirit! Jesus must, must, must be first and foremost in our lives if we ever hope to bear genuine and lasting fruit for the Kingdom of God, and if we ever hope to live victorious lives over our stubborn flesh. As Paul is going to admonish us in a few verses from now, those who belong to Yeshua prove their belonging by living lives marked by being Spirit led and Spirit filled. Such individuals have, by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, crucified the sinful nature so that they not only live by the Spirit but they keep in step with the Spirit’s leading.

5:19-21 - Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Comments: Paul provides a sample list of what life is characterized by when the old nature is in control instead of the Spirit of God in our lives. The harsh reality of this passage is, in my opinion, the very real possibility that if a person’s life is indeed regularly marked by actions similar to this list (which is not all-inclusive), then perhaps that person has not been truly born again. Again, getting ahead of myself here, those who belong to Christ have in fact crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires already. It is a spiritual reality in the mystery of Messiah! Even though true believers occasionally slip up and sin from time to time, our lives should not be characterized by such slip ups. Paul warns those who claim to belong to Yeshua, yet allow the acts of the sinful nature to dominate and control their lives, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. I don’t believe he is saying that the acts of the sinful nature have the ominous ability to somehow uproot the work of Christ in our lives. Rather, I believe he is saying that if we are consistently and unremorsefully sinning, even while professing faith in Yeshua, that we just might be fooling ourselves about being a genuine child of God.

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

Comments: This is one of the first passages that I memorized while growing up in a Baptist school. And I am

so glad I memorized it! The first part of the passage is self-explanatory and (Surprise! Surprise!) I heartily agree with every single Christian commentary that I consulted on the first part! It is the sermons on the last part of the passage that I regularly found disagreement with. Luther's comments are representative:

Galatians 5:23. *Against such there is no law.*

There is a law, of course, but it does not apply to those who bear these fruits of the Spirit. The Law is not given for the righteous man. A true Christian conducts himself in such a way that he does not need any law to warn or to restrain him. He obeys the Law without compulsion. The Law does not concern him. As far as he is concerned there would not have to be any Law.¹⁵⁸

When one properly reads through and studies the Torah with unbiased eyes, one does not encounter laws without love or rules without relationship. Instead, one encounters a God brimming with love for his people Isra'el! A God so in love with and concerned about them that he rescues them from the clutches of lawless Egyptian bondage and brings them to the foot of Har Sinai to personally hand them his gracious and righteous Law! This is the very same Law that Paul calls "holy and righteous and good" in Romans 7:12! This is the same Law that Paul calls spiritual in Romans 7:14! This is the same Law that Paul says he delights in with his inner being in Romans 7:21! This is the same Law that Paul confesses he is subject to with his mind in Romans 7:25! Are you beginning to see my point yet? I think it hardly considerate of the Torah or of Paul's writings to pin Paul with the concept of identifying the Law of God as worthless when it comes to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Of course we know and understand that the Law in and of itself without the commensurate Spirit's indwelling is nothing more than—as Tim Hegg likes to call it—letters on parchment. Thus, the proper position to take when studying Law and Spirit is not to contrast them against one another, but rather to compliment them one with another! They go hand in hand. They are both necessary in the life of a genuine follower of Yeshua. For indeed, as we have already noted from our quote from MacArthur above, to be Spirit-filled is to be controlled and filled with the Word of Christ! It is to have the Word of God permeate your every facet of being until you are saturated with the Words of the Master! One can be filled with the Spirit only when controlled by the Word. And all of this is in accordance with what has already been promised in the TaNaKH of old—to which we are certain Paul understood and agreed with. For indeed, when God promised Isra'el that he would take out the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh, he also promised to write his Law—the very same Torah given on Sinai—on the hearts of those whom he redeemed:

"And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19, 20, ESV).

And,

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you" (Ezek. 36:24-29, ESV).

We of course are also familiar with the famous passage out of Jeremiah 31 that speaks of a "new covenant"—a passage quoted at length in Hebrews chapter eight and repeated in Hebrews chapter ten—a passage which also promises that God would write the Torah on the hearts of all those who participate in his New Covenant!¹⁵⁹ In light of these data, I think it inconceivable that Paul would fail to make the positive connection between being genuinely Spirit-led as a follower of Messiah coupled with walking out the Torah in one's everyday life.

5:24-26 - And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Comments: Bringing his comments of Chapter Five to a close, Paul reiterates the true believer's position in Messiah. We are dead to sin. We are dead to legalism. We are dead to trying to earn God's favor. And for the Galatian Christian, this means he doesn't need to undergo an unnecessary legal status change from Gentile to Jew as if that will somehow improve his existing right-standing with God in Messiah! To be sure, outside of the genuine heart-change that happens when we are filled with the Spirit of Yeshua, a change in ethnicity (if such a thing is possible, according to some!) can never do anything to improve our true inner man, especially if that man is an 'old man.'

As he is going to go on and write in Romans 6:2, Paul teaches, *"How can we who died to sin still live in it?"* Indeed, we have in fact been given a new nature in Yeshua, one that does not seek to belong to the ways of the world, but instead seeks to be pleasing to the One who shed his very life-blood so that we might live as new creations unto God. And since we live (Greek= ζάω *zao*, exist among the living, enjoy life, have vital power¹⁶⁰) by this Spirit of Yeshua inside of us, Paul emphasizes, we will also keep in step (Greek=στοιχέω *stoicheo*, a word that has military connotations of proceeding or marching in a row¹⁶¹) with the Spirit! It is vital as we read through Paul—indeed all of the Apostolic Writings—that we understand the teachings on 'old man' vs. 'new man.' In Paul, 'old man' is a way of describing the old nature or volition or will of a person before coming to genuine faith in Jesus as LORD. By contrast, 'new man' is a way of describing our nature or volition or will once we have surrendered to Yeshua's Lordship:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV).

The truth of the matter is that Torah observance exists (from God's perspective) as a matter of the heart. It always has been and always shall be. Genuine and lasting covenant membership will always be characterized by genuine and lasting obedience:

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James [Jacob] 2:14-26, ESV).

And also see,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8, 9, ESV).

The Judaisms of Paul's day quite possibly had this sequence backwards: "Submit to the 'works of the Law' and God will grant you genuine faith and right standing in his people Isra'el."

¹⁴⁴ David Guzik, *Commentary on Galatians* (Enduring Word Media, 2004-

2010), <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/4805.htm>.

145 Romans 9:31, 32 says, "Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works." The pursuit of this righteousness was not a bad thing in God's eyes. On the contrary, it was the right thing to do! Paul does not chastise Israel for pursuing a law that would lead to righteousness. Instead, as the rest of the verse states, how they pursued it was real problem. If we continue on into Chapter Ten we will see that he chastises them for rejecting the Rock of Offense in 9:33 and sought to set up their own Jewish ethnicity (the "works" of 9:32). 10:3 describes it this way: "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."

146 John MacArthur, Sermon: *Fallen From Grace, Part 1: The Works of False Doctrine* (Grace to You, 1974), <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/1665/fallen-from-grace-part-1-the-works-of-false-doctrine>.

147 Naftali Silberberg, *What is the "Oral Torah"?* (www.AskMoses.com, as quoted by Chabad.org, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/812102/jewish/What-is-the-Oral-Torah.htm).

148 E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 248-249.

149 Martin Luther, *Galatians Five* (http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/luther_martin/Gal/Gal005.cfm?a=1096004).

150 Acts 23:12.

151 Acts 21:27-29.

152 Mark Nanos, *Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema* (<http://www.marknanos.com/Paul-Shema-10-27-08.pdf>, 2008), p. 7.

153 Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), p. 188.

154 Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4.

155 Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), p. 193, and David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary, Galatians 5:14* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), p. 565.

156 Ephesians 5:18.

157 John MacArthur, *What Does it Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?* (www.gty.org, 2003) <http://www.gty.org/resources/positions/P04/what-does-it-mean-to-be-filled-with-the-Spirit>.

158 Martin Luther, *Galatians Five* (http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/luther_martin/Gal/Gal005.cfm?a=1096023).

159 Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16.

160 Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD), ζάω.

161 Ibid., στοιχέω.

GALATIANS CHAPTER SIX

6:1-10 - Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Comments: At this point in Paul's letter to the Galatians, I think he is confident that the charlatans known as the Influencers (whom other Christian commentators call the Judaizers—a term I feel is inappropriate and possibly a racial slur) will eventually show themselves to be false teachers, particularly if they stay on in the congregation and continue to be shepherded as the flock of God along with the true sheep. In simpler terms, God vindicates his own. Indeed, Paul confidently states that a man reaps what he sows. The seed of the Influencers was rotten to the core and Paul knew all too well that once that seed had become full-grown, it would reap a harvest not of eternal life (as the Influencers were promising) but of destruction, because of the eventual revealing of the sinful nature of man as 6:7, 8 promises.

In these verses, which are packed with wonderful spiritual nutrition, Paul also states that by seeking the well-being of our fellow believers and putting their needs and burdens above our own (a theme he expounds upon quite nicely in Romans chapter 14 and 15), we show ourselves to be fulfilling the Law of Christ (Greek= νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ nomon tou Christou), a phrase that standard Christianity interprets in contrast to the Law of Moshe.

Paul says that when we live this way, we are fulfilling the Law of Christ

The Law of the Christ is the law written on our hearts that Jeremiah promised would come with the New Covenant

They are found on our heart and directed by the Holy Spirit

That's why I can't give you a list of the Law's of Christ

The Law of Christ can be summarized though, because Jesus did it for us

This Law replaces the Law of Moses

This is why we say that Christians still live by rules and standards

But those standards aren't found in reading the Ten Commandments or any other part of the Law of Moses

Our flesh loves to see things written in black and white

But in His wisdom, God chose to right His law in blood on our hearts where we can't see it

Instead, we can only follow Him in spirit and truth - if we follow Him at all¹⁶²

But why should we interpret this phrase as anything other than the perfect Law of God as already revealed in the pages of Scripture and as perfectly modeled by our Master himself? I think that when we unnecessarily add meanings to the text that are not warranted by the context (eisegete instead of exegete), we do damage to the text and bring about all manner of gross interpretations and practical applications. David H. Stern's translation of verse two reveals what I think to be the true meaning:

Bear one another's burdens - in this way you will be fulfilling the Torah's true meaning, which the Messiah upholds.

What is more, Tim Hegg, in my opinion, also brings out the proper meaning of the phrase "law of Christ" in his commentary to Galatians:

fulfill the Torah (teaching) of Messiah – The teachings of Yeshua were no doubt known among the congregations of The Way, even before the gospels as we know them were finalized in their canonical form. The Apostles were commissioned to "make disciples of the nations" and to "teach them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:18ff). Thus, the "Torah of Messiah" (νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ) should be understood as "the Torah as Messiah taught it and lived it." It is anachronistic to interpret the phrase as though the Torah of Messiah is different than the Torah of Moses. Surely it is at variance with a good deal of the rabbinic interpretations of the Torah, but it was not in any manner contradictory to Moses. To postulate such a thing would be to call into question the very veracity of Yeshua Himself, for any one who comes teaching something contrary to what is found in the Torah is considered a false prophet. Rather, Yeshua, both in His words and in His actions, brought the divinely intended meaning of the Torah to the eyes and ears of those He taught. His emphasis was upon a living out of Torah in which genuine love for God and for one's neighbor was the driving factor in *halachic* decisions. While the sages were expert at piling burdens upon men's shoulders without lifting a finger to help them bear the load (Matt 23:4), Yeshua sought to unwrap the Torah from the entanglements of men, and to show that living a life of Torah by faith is not a burden, but a delight.

Therefore, by bearing the burdens of one another, the followers of Yeshua fulfill the Torah as it was intended to be fulfilled, by living it out in the context of love for God, and love for one's neighbor. In this way, the Torah as taught and modeled by Yeshua would be fulfilled.¹⁶³

This may be more related to the concept of Law of Christ than to Galatians, but I feel the need to say it here anyway. If we in the Messianic Movement, Torah Communities, etc., are to be pleasing to God, simply following after Torah the way traditional Judaism does may not always prove to be appropriate for us, since we identify and belong to him and history shows that Yeshua quite often had differences of opinion in the way his contemporary Jewish leaders were ostensibly following after Torah. I am not saying that everything that Traditional Judaism is in regards to Torah is wrong. But what I am saying is that, as Jews and Gentiles in Messiah, our primary source of halakhah should not be Traditional Judaism, or Talmud, or Shulchan Arukh, etc., but instead should be the Law of Christ—the Torah as fulfilled and demonstrated perfectly by the Living Torah!

6:12 - It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Comments: Call a spade a spade! Paul is through with being coy about the whole situation. Indeed, we have already seen him "lose his cool" in 3:1-3 when he called his readers "fools" for being bewitched by the message of the Influencers. And then he really went overboard when he wished that those false teachers would follow through with the whole operation on themselves if they were so obsessed with taking off just a bit of the flesh from someone else merely for the purpose of notching their belts. (Hint: Read 5:12 and 13 again carefully in a few different versions and ask yourself this question: "Is Paul saying what I think he is saying?") Now here once again, he levels his guns at his detractors by revealing their impure motives of stooping to underhanded methods such as threats. What is more, according to Paul, their reasoning for wishing Gentile circumcision is shown, not to be so that they can sincerely help these Gentiles find a place in covenant Isra'el, but rather out of fear of identifying with Yeshua in persecution, an odd fact indeed, considering that the Influencers may have actually been accepting of Yeshua but not accepting of Gentiles in Isra'el as Gentiles. One verse later (down in 6:13, which we will explore shortly), he tips the hand of the Influencers, shows us their cards, and accuses them of hypocrisy by not even obeying Torah themselves!

The Greek word for 'force' in this verse is ἀναγκάζω anagkazo, and it carries the idea of compulsion by

force or threat if necessary.¹⁶⁴ We have encountered this word before in our studies, twice earlier in this letter, at 2:13 and again at 2:14. In fact, if you will recall, Paul was guilty of ‘compelling’ Christians to blaspheme before he himself came to believe in Yeshua as Messiah of Isra’el.¹⁶⁵ Of course context shows that it is not always wrong to try to ‘compel’ someone to do a particular thing. For instance, of the nine times this word is found in the Apostolic Scriptures, only four of those times does the context seem to indicate compulsion to do something wrong.¹⁶⁶ The point I am trying to make by bringing this verse up is that as far as the Influencers were concerned, the Gentiles were not being given a choice in the matter. Circumcision was being presented as the exclusive entry point into covenant Isra’el and Paul was seeking to set the record straight once and for all by correctly demonstrating from the Torah itself that God recons a person righteous, not by their ethnic status, but by their position of faith in the Risen Christ.

This also brings up an important historical fact for us to consider concerning the sharp disputes between the prevailing Jewish groups of Paul’s day and the members of the emerging sect known as The Way. Tim Hegg explains this disagreement for us:

Here we are given a most important insight into the situation of Paul’s day. The antagonism of the mainline Jewish community against the people of The Way did not center primarily upon the theology of Yeshua as Messiah. Other sects of the day had also proclaimed leading members of their sect as fulfilling the role of Messiah (as would happen eventually in the Bar Kochbah rebellion). The issue that was most egregious, and which had begun the split between the traditional synagogues and the synagogues of The Way, was the matter of Gentiles. Gentiles, as Gentiles, simply could not be tolerated nor accepted as full-fledged covenant members, and to treat them as though they were (which the congregations of The Way did) caused deep theological and sociological problems. From the standpoint of the rabbis, to allow a Gentile to assume full covenant membership was to diminish the basis of covenant membership from their perspective, that is, that covenant membership was guaranteed on the basis of a Jewish status. Moreover, the presence of Gentiles within the community was too dangerously close to acceptance of idolatry, for the Gentile world in Paul’s day was characterized first and foremost by their idolatrous practices. As long as The Way insisted on equal acceptance of Gentiles, the mainline Jewish communities simply could not accept them. Gentiles, as far as the rabbis were concerned, needed to be encouraged to become proselytes. For the traditional synagogue had no problem with Jews who held divergent opinions (note the stark contrasts between Pharisees and Sadducees in terms of their fundamental beliefs, yet the obvious manner in which the two sects interacted and lived together). It was the presence of Gentiles that created the division.¹⁶⁷

All too often the historic Church of yesterday and today seems to think that the belief in Yeshua was the primary dividing point between The Way and those of the traditional Judaisms of the time. And as we have already mentioned, indeed Jewish followers after The Way were eventually expelled from their own synagogues over their loyalty to Yeshua—just like their Master promised in John 16:2. But, as Hegg has so eloquently pointed out, as we earnestly study 2nd Temple Judaism in Isra’el, we must reckon with the fact that eventually The Way’s insistence of Gentile inclusion into Isra’el as Gentiles was the straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back when it came to differences between Paul’s Judaism and the others.

6:13 - For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Comments: Wow! That had to hurt their pride hearing the Apostle Paul accuse those representing the Jewish norm of failing to uphold one of the central pillars in Isra’el’s history—namely—the Torah. According to all they understood and professed, the Torah was for Jews only, and the Influencers no doubt felt it was their sacred duty to uphold the truth of God’s Word by preserving it from idolatry and supposed Gentile corruption. The irony of Paul’s words ring loudest when one realizes that according to the prevailing Judaisms of Paul’s day, circumcision was no longer merely another commandment found in the 613 Commandments of the Torah, but it had in fact become the pinnacle of social identity from an ethnic point of view. In the Torah it was originally given to Avraham as a sign of an existing covenant, but by Paul’s day, it

had been wrongly elevated by Isra'el to its position as a badge of social status among people groups of the ancient Middle East, ostensibly identifying Isra'el and Isra'el alone as the Chosen People with no room for other people groups to join their lot unless they became legally-recognized Jews first.

So what we have going on in this verse is a physically circumcised, Torah observant Jewish man accusing other physically circumcised Jewish men of not only violating Torah observance, but of the sin of hypocrisy by demanding that uncircumcised Gentiles become physically circumcised so that these same non-Torah-keeping yet circumcised men can boast about how they got those poor physically uncircumcised Gentiles to succumb to their threats. This sounds strikingly similar to what Paul is going to write about later on in Romans Chapter Two. Speaking to fellow Jews, he levels the following stinging accusation:

“But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God... You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Romans 2:17-29, ESV, with edits by myself).

The Influencers may have called themselves “Jews by birth” (2:15) but Paul called them Law-breakers. The Influencers viewed the Gentiles as disqualified until they became circumcised (Jewish), but Paul maintained that those Influencers disqualified themselves in the eyes of God by not “abide[ing] by all things written in the Book of the Law,” (3:10) as well as with their violation of the principle of “lov[ing] [thei]r [Gentile] neighbor as [them]self” (5:14). Such hypocrisy indeed!

There may be other ways to interpret the phrase “*that they may boast about your flesh.*” Hegg sees the strong possibility that this phrase means the Influencers were ready to welcome the Gentiles who underwent proselytism with a full embrace as covenant members, to welcome them into the life, culture, and history of the Jewish people. They were ready fully to affirm the Jewish identity of the proselyte.¹⁶⁸

6:14 - But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Comments: In stark contrast to boasting about one’s ethnic status as a Jew, Paul proudly confesses that he will never boast about anything save his trusting faithfulness in the cross of his LORD Yeshua. This does not mean that he considers Jewish identity worthless. Rather, that he knows how to prioritize what is most important against those details that are of lesser importance. We in the current Messianic/Torah Movement could stand to learn a lot from Paul’s example. Sadly, all too often, we are found to be quibbling about the ethnic identity of this person and the ethnic identity of that person, but what we should be focusing on is the identity of the Man from Galilee and how his righteousness has graciously paid the price for our sin!

6:15 - For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Comments: Paul now repeats what he stated earlier in 5:6 as well as what we find in 1 Cor. 7:19 (see my notes from that section above). However, he changes the ending part of the phrase here to say that what counts is a “new creation” (Greek=καὶνὴ κτίσις *kaine ktisis*), a phrase which carries the notion of a recently made form, fresh, a new kind of substance, unprecedented, or unheard of.¹⁶⁹ That the man-made conversion ceremony of the proselyte only “washed the outside of the cup, but does nothing for the refuse in the inside”¹⁷⁰ I think, is exposed by Paul in this verse. Indeed, Paul knew that a conversion from one ethnicity to another, without the heart change brought on only by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, could never do anything to solve the dilemma of the sinful nature of man in his quest to be pleasing to God.

Think about what the prevailing Judaisms of Paul's day were offering to the proselyte prospect: A chance to begin a new life as a Jew, as a genuine member of Isra'el, as a citizen of the society of those especially chosen to carry and proclaim Torah as God's true Word! To be sure, Jewish identity was/is something to be proud of and I am not mocking that reality here. But what I am trying to emphasize is that Jewish identity does not guarantee a person will have a right heart before God and before his fellow man. To borrow a lesson from the book of Hebrews, the entire sacrificial system with its priestly cult was never designed to bring the worshipper to "perfection"—viz—a changed heart. Only true faith in the Promised Messiah to come could move the heart of God to write the Torah of God on the heart of the individual—thrusting him into the community of genuine and lasting covenant members.

Thus Paul has to reiterate over and over again in his letters that being Jewish or being Gentile is not the most important thing a person should be focusing on in this life. We need to get our priorities straight and begin to see our heart situation from God's perspective. Membership into earthly Isra'el only gained one a temporal place among the people of God, a membership that effectively expired the moment one died. By comparison, if one desired to graduate or matriculate to an eternal place among the people of God, a membership that carries over past death, past the grave, one must be found in Messiah, and it is to this theme that Paul is going to return over and over again in his letters.

6:16 - And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Comments: This verse represents the final blessing of our letter to Galatians and thus brings his arguments against the Influencers to a close. Since this verse follows immediately after verse 15, I take the term "this rule" to refer to the standard of forensic righteousness previously spoken of in verse 15, namely: Genuine and lasting covenant membership into the eternal people of God is not procured by one's ethnicity, but only by placing one's genuine and lasting faith in Yeshua HaMashiach.

Moreover, it would seem that Sha'ul extends this blessing of ultimate peace and mercy exclusively to the group who conforms to this halakhah—a group Paul identifies as the "Isra'el of God."

But who or what is the Isra'el of God? Let us briefly examine a few Bible commentaries for some possibilities. Using Bible.hub's online commentary resources, I was able to cull together these few examples. The Pulpit Commentary states:

The words, "and upon the Israel of God," seem to be an echo of the "peace upon Israel (εἰρήνῃ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραήλ),» which, in the Septuagint, closes the hundred and twenty-fifth and hundred and twenty-eighth psalms. The addition of the words, «of God,» seems intended pointedly to distinguish the «Israel» which the apostle has in view from that which boasted itself as being Israel while it was not, and also from the false brethren (ψευδαδελφοί, [Galatians 2:4](#)) in the Christian Church, who were for linking themselves with the false Israel. The addition is not merely honorific, as in the expression, "the Church of God" ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#); [2 Corinthians 1:1](#); 10:32; 11:22; 15:9), but distinctive as well - that which alone God views and loves as "Israel" - to wit, the entire body of real believers in Christ, who, as portrayed in this Epistle, are "children of promise after the fashion of Isaac" ([Galatians 4:28](#)), Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise" ([Galatians 3:29](#)), and the children of "the upper Jerusalem, which is our mother" ([Galatians 4:26](#)). Of that portion of the true Israel which dwelt in Galatia (see [1 Peter 1:1](#); [1 Peter 2:10](#)), those who, like the apostle, consecrated themselves to Christ as crucified, were the guiding and characterizing element; and therefore his blessing shed upon these spreads itself also upon those connected with them.¹⁷¹

Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible adds the following description:

The "Israel of God", or as the Arabic version reads it, "Israel the propriety of God"; which he has a right unto, and a claim upon; who are chosen by him, Israel his elect; who are redeemed by him, out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation; who are called by his grace, and are styled Israel his called; who are justified in his Son, and by his righteousness; and for whose sake he is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give them repentance and remission of sin; and who are, or will be saved by him, with an everlasting salvation; and is a

name that includes all God's elect, whether Jews or Gentiles: though it may have a particular respect to such of the Israelites, or Jews, God had foreknown and reserved for himself; and who believed in Christ, and walked as new creatures, without confidence in the flesh. The Jews themselves own, that strangers, or proselytes, shall be called by the name of Israel; so they (b) explain [Isaiah 44:5](#), latter part.¹⁷²

Finally, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary adds these brief comments:

Israel of God—not the Israel after the flesh, among whom those teachers wish to enrol you; but the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith (Ga 3:9, 29; Ro 2:28, 29; Php 3:3).¹⁷³

I was pleasantly surprised by my brief investigation of Christian commentaries to find a consistent agreement with what I feel to be an accurate definition of this phrase “Isra’el of God.”

I have to wonder out loud if the Influencers felt the sting of Paul's descriptive and exclusive blessing since he did not automatically include those in traditional Isra'el who did not follow the rule he just laid out in 6:15. Indeed, Paul will end up repeating sentiments such as these in his letter to the Romans:

“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Romans 9:1-8, ESV).

As painful as it was for Paul to admit the truth of the gospel at times, nevertheless he must not compromise on truth: HaShem extends genuine and lasting covenant status only to those who find favor with God through Yeshua the Holy One of Isra'el. I say painful here because surely Paul loved and cared for his fellow Israelites—even if, in spiritual blindness no doubt, they rejected the Promised Messiah spoken about in their very Scriptures. Paul may have had harsh words for the Influencers but that doesn't mean he counted them among his enemies. To be sure, he must've included them among those whom he spoke about when he coined his famous words from Romans 9:3 above.

We could stand to learn a valuable lesson from Paul's feelings about those fellow Jews who were constantly at odds with his theology. They may have thought he was an enemy of Isra'el and ultimately of God, but he regarded them as worthy of genuine concern and prayer nevertheless. Indeed, Paul is going to remind us also as the “Isra'el of God” that our war is not *“against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Eph. 6:12, KJV).

We see that those to whom Paul extends his blessing in 6:16 are the genuine faithful remnant, called out from among both Jews and Gentiles to bear the name of Yeshua the True Messiah, for the purpose of bringing glory to God's Name and honor to his Kingdom as it is represented here on earth. They are those who have crucified the flesh with its old passions and volitions, and walk not by ethnic identity and Torah social status, but by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh and the Torah written on the heart. This is the Isra'el of God. This is whom Paul identifies with, and for whom he poured his heart out to in this great letter to the Galatians.

Therefore, in the mystery of ecclesiology, we must understand by now that Isra'el exists on two levels simultaneously: Isra'el according to the flesh and Isra'el according to the Spirit. Isra'el according to the flesh has been promised temporal, this-world blessings if she will remain faithful to God and obedient to the written Torah given at Sinai. Isra'el according to the Spirit has been promised eternal, world-to-come blessings if she will remain faithful to God and obedient to the Living Torah—Yeshua the Messiah. The two Isra'els are not

necessarily mutually exclusive; indeed God loves Greater Isra'el as well as Remnant Isra'el—which actually exists within Greater Isra'el. But they do represent two biblical teachings of righteousness that are not necessarily equal to one another: one earthly and one heavenly, one temporal and one eternal. It is not a bad thing to go from being a “stone-cold pagan” worshipping idols to becoming an Isra'elite according to the flesh who pursues God and his Torah. After all, that is indeed a step in the right direction, correct? Paul would have us to understand that one need not even convert to Jewish status in order to get oriented in the right direction. Just set your eyes on the Cross of Calvary and you will find “*joy unspeakable and full of glory!*”¹⁷⁴

And yet, those who choose to associate with Isra'el according to the flesh without also appropriating genuine faith in the Quintessential Israelite from Natzeret will find that their this-world blessings will end when life expires for them, and it may not end up being God who'll be waiting for them on the other side of the grave (if you catch my drift). Only those who have invested in the world-to-come blessings via genuine faith in Mashiaich will be able to enjoy blessings both in this world and in the world to come!

¹⁶² Verse By Verse Ministry, Galatians, 2013, https://www.versebyverseministry.org/images/uploads/Galatians_6.pdf.

¹⁶³ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), p. 214.

¹⁶⁴ TSBD, ἀναγκάζω.

¹⁶⁵ Acts 26:11.

¹⁶⁶ Cf: Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45; Luke 14:23; Acts 26:11; 28:19; 2 Cor. 12:11; Gal. 2:3, 14; 6:12.

¹⁶⁷ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), pp. 224-225.

¹⁶⁸ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (www.torahresource.com, 2002), p. 227.

¹⁶⁹ TSBD, καινή κτίσις.

¹⁷⁰ Matt. 23:25, 26; Luke 11:39.

¹⁷¹ Pulpit Commentary, *Galatians 6* (<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/galatians/6.htm>).

¹⁷² Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible, *Galatians 6* (<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/galatians/6.htm>).

¹⁷³ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, *Galatians 6* (<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/galatians/6.htm>).

¹⁷⁴ 1 Peter 1:8, KJV.

