

*Learning to Love*  
**HIS LAW**

Training Our Minds  
*to Think Like the*  
**CREATOR**

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## **LEARNING TO LOVE HIS LAW**

2011 | Erich Matthew Janzen

**Published by** Ministers of the New Covenant  
*ministersnewcovenant.org*

**Cover Design:** Erich Janzen

**First Printing:** August, 2011

**Printed in the United States of America**

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture references are from The Holman Christian Standard Bible. *All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.*

To my five children, with whom I love to study the Torah  
during our times of family worship. Love you guys!



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# Introduction

I love to talk with people about the Bible. It has to be my favorite "past time," if that is an appropriate title to give it. Others like to play baseball, football, checkers, cross-word puzzles, cook, but I'm for getting into a very deep theological discussion. It's as though my ears start to burn when I hear someone utter the word *atonement* or *commandment* or *Ezekiel* (just to name a few). I recall not too long ago being at a sporting event and over-hearing two gentlemen talking about a portion of Scripture. My wife remarked to me that it looked too much like I was eavesdropping. I guess you could call it "rubber-necking" over Scripture.

I feel like I've come a long way in discussing the Bible. Please do not misunderstand me to be to be saying that I have "arrived" or anything of the sort. I say this in all humility. My statement is simply addressing what has happened in my life over the past 15 years or so. 15 years ago I would not have had a clue as to how to interact with a subject like Christology. I may have even thought that such a term stood for the study of crystals. You think I'm joking, but it is true.

Let me tell you about the time I worked in a Christian book store. I was behind the counter that day, working the register, and in walks this nice fellow asking me if we carried any books on *Saint Augustine*. I was perplexed for a second, but then responded, "No sir, we do not carry any books on vacation spots or locations with the United States." This man looked at me like I was from another planet. He remarked that Augustine was a Catholic Saint, and then I felt like I was about as tall as a withered up tomato plant. This memory still makes me laugh today every time I think about it.

When talking to people you've got to be careful to speak to them in such a way that they are able to comprehend what you are saying. This is not meant to downgrade anyone's intellect, it's just that some people know more about certain things than others. I've had mechanics tell me about what is underneath the hood of my car and when they get through with the explanation I feel like I just took a crash course in Russian. I need the man to just slow down and explain to me in simple terms what the problem with my car is. I feel that sometimes I fall prey to the very same problem when talking

to people about God's law. Biblical law is a topic that I have immersed myself in. There have been years at a time when I "breathed, ate, and drank" Biblical law. I will always continue to study the subject, but I'm just saying that there have been times in my life when I couldn't get it off my mind for an instant.

I will at times get involved in a conversation with another person about the law of God, and I find myself speaking to them of things that are difficult to understand for the person that is unfamiliar with such; just like me when it comes to the engine of a car. I'll find that I tend to use both Hebrew and Greek words frequently and this makes for quite a look on the face of the listener. It would be much better if I tried to do the same that I long for my mechanic to do. I should slow down and be careful to focus on key points rather than explaining everything I've been drenched in for years.

I will tell you one point that is very easy to get people to see, and that is that they are indeed a law keeper. I remember getting this simple point across to a young woman who claimed to be an atheist. I can't for the life of me remember what sparked our conversation, but I know that the instant I heard her say she didn't believe the God of Scripture existed I saw a golden opportunity to share the Gospel with her. When I share the Gospel with others I generally make a habit to show them how that they are a *lawbreaker* – which we *all* are. I do my best to use their own conscience to reveal to them that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. This isn't difficult to do by the way, and is something you should be in the habit of doing when you witness to those needing salvation.

This day though was different, at least at first. The subject of whether or not the God of Scripture existed was in view and one of the first points I went to was the issue of morality. I asked her the question, "How can you say what is moral, *objectively*?" She responded by asking me to give more of an explanation. I went on to ask her if she would be offended if I introduced myself to her by slapping her with all my might right in the face. Laughing, she responded, "Well of course I wouldn't like that!" I then asked why she wouldn't like that. She said it wouldn't be courteous. I then asked her how she defined what was courteous. This is where it got rather difficult for her. See, she had to end up borrowing from my theistic worldview. She could not give a real definition for *courteous* without borrowing from the view that believes God really does exist.

My view begins with the God of Scripture, and then of course Scripture. Scripture then in turn reveals what is moral and what is not moral.

I commenced to explain to her that whether she realized it yet or not she knew what courteous was and what courteous was not because she was created in the image of God. She also was a keeper of Biblical law, not perfectly mind you, but simply a keeper of certain laws of Scripture. I asked her about murder (she opposed), theft (she opposed), adultery (she opposed), falsely accusing someone (she opposed). Now, I am not saying that she believed in every single law in Scripture, that's not my point at all. My point was to just show her that she too believed in obedience to Biblical law, even though she may not have thought of the laws she obeyed as being direct commands from Yahweh,<sup>1</sup> the Author of Sacred Scripture. I've talked to countless individuals who profess to believe in the Bible but are quick to tell me that the law has been done away with, nailed to the cross, taken away in Christ, or abolished. As soon as they find out that I believe in certain laws like wearing tassels, not shaving my beard, eating kosher, or keeping the Sabbath,<sup>2</sup> the next thing I hear is that Jesus came and died so we wouldn't have to be under such a burden in this New Covenant<sup>3</sup> we now live in. They claim that we are not under the law, yet at the same time (sometimes without realizing it) they keep numerous laws of Scripture. The laws I have already stated above (that I mentioned to the atheist) are just a few to begin with, but the list for the professing Christian usually goes much further. They usually do not believe in practicing things like homosexuality, fornication, greed, covetousness, idolatry, taking

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<sup>1</sup> Yahweh is the personal, proper name of the God of Israel. Many English Bibles today use the words LORD and GOD (in all caps) to remind the reader that the proper name Yahweh belongs in a particular text of Scripture. The fairly recent publication of the HCSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible) actually inserts the name Yahweh at many places in Scripture which emphasize Yahweh as God's name. For a detailed study concerning this name please consult our online publication titled, "Hallowed be Thy Name."

<sup>2</sup> These particular laws may be referenced by going to Numbers 15:37-41, Leviticus 19:27, Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14:3-21, and Exodus 20:8-11.

<sup>3</sup> The term "New Covenant" does not stand for the writings often called the "New Testament." The New Covenant is a term that is used for the Covenant (agreement) that Yahweh promised to make with Israel as prophesied about in Jeremiah 31:31-40 and reiterated to a large degree in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:15-17.

God's name in vain, honoring their father and mother, not drinking blood, and refraining from tattooing their body. In short, I explain to them that they really do not believe the law has been done away with, they just have not realized it yet. Sometimes I get this kind of a reply, "Well, I believe that we should obey any command that is repeated in the New Testament."<sup>4</sup> I have never had anyone show me the verse that would lead them to think this way, but nevertheless this is what I hear quite often. There are problems with such a view. For example, bestiality<sup>5</sup> isn't mentioned as being sexually immoral in the New Testament. The Old Testament speaks against sexual immorality and specifically names one such immorality, bestiality. Such is not the case anywhere in the New Testament. Some people remark to me that it is covered under the broad heading of fornication or sexual immorality that is condemned in the New Testament. My reply is this: how in the world do they know? Who made that decision for them? Who are they to decide that it is covered under this broad heading in the New Testament? Do you know what the truth of the matter really is? They know bestiality is wrong because the Old Testament, Biblical law condemns it, and also because God has placed *His law* upon the hearts of His people.

I want to stress the point that it is His law that is placed upon His people's hearts. I stress this because in this I find yet another objection that often surfaces with people. Some people say that they keep *a law* that is written upon their heart now under the New Covenant. There is still a major problem here. What if I claim the same belief and yet when we compare the laws that are written upon our separate hearts we find that they are not the same? What if *your* heart is telling you one thing and *my* heart is telling me another? What is the objective standard that we go to in order to see who is correct? I think the answer is simple; we go to the law of Almighty Yahweh as found in the pages of Scripture. However, for the person who claims the law has been done away with, there is no such law to consult. That is why I must stress that although Scripture does speak

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this book I use the terms New Testament and Old Testament because of the familiarity of the two terms. What is commonly called the "New Testament" is more accurately called the Apostolic Scriptures while the "Old Testament" is more accurately called the Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>5</sup> Bestiality is often wrongly spelled "beastiality." It is the grotesque practice of a human having intercourse with an animal, and is specifically condemned in Leviticus 18:23.

of a law being written upon a persons heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12) the law being written there is none other than the law of Yahweh, a *specific* law. This is not saying that each individual is their own standard, but rather that Yahweh's people know internally that certain practices are right and others are wrong because He has written HIS law upon their heart. People who claim to be led by "their heart" or by "the spirit" sometimes contradict what the Holy Spirit inspired to be written in Scripture. If your being led by "the spirit" isn't in direct alignment with the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, then you are being led by a different spirit.

The fact is that no one really believes we should not be governed by law. Try to actually convince a seventh grade teacher that he or she does not need to enforce laws in a classroom. Utter chaos will be the result. Try going to your county courthouse, find a local judge, and explain to him that there really isn't any need to have all the stop signs and traffic lights in town. Better yet, tell him there's no need to worry about stalkers or thieves that prowl the streets at night. Tell him you feel that the county need not be under the law, for you are free in Christ. Be honest with yourself. Do you really believe this is the position Christians should take?

I know that deep down inside you do not believe this, yet I hear over and over again this response when I explain to people why I do certain things. The echo is this, "That was in the *Old Testament*." Such a statement is made because people think that large portions of the Old Testament are irrelevant. People even buy "Bibles" today that only have the New Testament within them. Friend's, that's not a Bible. I've even heard preachers say things like, "We don't need God's law," or the statement that bothers me the most, "I wouldn't give a dime to a church that teaches people to keep God's law." Whoa! Can you believe that I have actually heard a preacher make such a statement? Believe it or not it is true, and I heard it while driving down the road and I hit the brakes so hard it nearly shoved me through the windshield. You laugh, but I am serious. I got so upset, I made it a point to get a thirty minute slot on the same radio station and dedicate about ten broadcasts to the subject of the Christian and God's law.

This subject is one that is very vast and can be overwhelming at times. I could go on and on about specifics<sup>6</sup> on numerous issues, but I am going to narrow the scope down to certain simple yet exhaustive chapters on this issue. This does not mean I will cover everything the Bible has to say about the law, but I will do my best to present to you a systematic knowledge of believing that the law of Yahweh has not been destroyed. This in turn is an effort to present to you why, as followers of the Messiah, we need to learn to love Yahweh's law more and more each day. Our minds can be renewed in spite of how we have thought or believed in the past. Please do not shove this book aside because it goes against what you were taught or what you may believe currently. Be a truth seeker, desiring truth no matter what it costs.

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<sup>6</sup> Please consult Appendix II for more resources to help aid you in studying the specifics of Yahweh's law.

## 1

## Contradictory or Harmony?

Does anyone remember getting into trouble as a child? I'm not talking about being a teenager, I'm speaking of being, oh, let's say 5 or 6 years of age and your Mother catches you doing something you knew you should never have even attempted. She begins to scold you and it seems like the first words out of your mouth are what those of us who live in the South call "back talk." Others may call it "contradict," as in, "Son, do not contradict your Mother."

What does a Mother mean when she commands her child not to contradict her? It is very easy. She has given a command, and the child has not followed through with the command. In talking to the child she does not want the child to speak something that opposes or goes against what she has set as the rules of the house. She can't be doing one thing and her children constantly be doing the opposite. The *1828 Webster's Dictionary of the English* language defines the word contradict as follows: "1. To oppose by words; to assert the contrary to what has been asserted, or to deny what has been affirmed... 2. To oppose; to be directly contrary to."

The question I pose to you now is this: do you believe that the New Testament is contradictory to the Old Testament? Do you believe it is opposed to the Old Testament? Do you believe it denies what has been affirmed in the Old Testament? What about this; do you believe the Old Testament taught the Israelites to keep God's law, spoke harshly towards them when they disobeyed God, but now under the New Testament, God says all of that has changed and is no longer required?

I think that most people who read the above questions will have trouble answering yes to the first three questions, but may answer yes to the last question. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm going on a track record. I've talked with hundreds of people about this and almost always I get the "vibe" that they do not believe those "Old Testament laws" are valid for this day and age. Oftentimes people believe they are somewhat primitive, archaic, out of date and have no place in the

life of a Christian. I want to say from the start that I am *extremely* opposed to such a belief. I do not believe that the New Testament is contradictory to the Old Testament in the least bit. I don't believe that anyone is saved differently now than they were then. Does that sound strange to you? Why? Is it because you have Bible verses telling you it is strange or is it because you have been taught one way all of your life and have never entertained the possibility of your belief system being incorrect? I believe it stems from the latter. I know it did with me.

When people tell me things like "That's Old Testament" or "Well, Christ died so we don't have to do those things any longer," I always ask for a Biblical explanation. I want to hear the person explain to me – *from the Bible* – why they feel the way they do. Why is it that they believe the two sections in the Bible labeled Old Testament and New Testament or so diametrically opposed to one another?

Take this example. Many people believe that individuals living under the Old Covenant were saved by works, but now, under the New Covenant, we are saved by grace. This is a common understanding with people, but this is not Biblical. Everybody that has ever been saved has been saved by grace. Genesis 6:8 tells us that Noah found grace in the eyes of Yahweh. This is why Yahweh saved him from the disaster of the flood. Exodus 33:17 tells us that Moses found grace in the sight of Yahweh. Grace is not some concept that came about at the time of the Messiah. It was a concept readily understood from the earliest times of the Patriarchs. The only way a person has ever been saved is by Yahweh finding grace upon their life and allowing them to see His truths and experience His presence.

But didn't the Israelites earn their salvation by obeying the law? This is not in the Bible, and if this was the case then what was the use of all of the animal sacrifices that had to be offered up as sin and guilt offerings?<sup>7</sup> Sin is the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). When an Israelite sinned he could be forgiven, but forgiveness was not obtained by beginning to obey the commands of God, it was

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<sup>7</sup> In Biblical law there are five particular types of offerings: burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. The sin and guilt offerings were gifts brought by the worshiper in such cases where unintentional sin was committed against God or against God and a mans neighbor. It is a misnomer to think that all animals brought were sin offerings. The majority of the sacrifices had nothing to do with sin but were gifts of thanksgiving and appreciation (Leviticus 1-5).

obtained by repentance and then the blood of a kosher<sup>8</sup> animal had to be shed. Yahweh gave the Israelites the shed blood of animals to make an atonement or covering over their sin (Leviticus 17:11). Furthermore, the Israelites never even had their sin permanently atoned for in the animal sacrifices. This is something only the blood of the Son of God can do. The Old Covenant Israelites received complete forgiveness because of the shedding of the blood of the Messiah (Hebrews 9:15), just like you and I.

A big part of the problem lies with the condition of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church-goers mind. People have been taught that the New Testament is in complete opposition to the Old Testament. In other words, that they have absolutely nothing in common at all. Instead of there being a flow of harmony between the two covenants, people believe there is opposition between the covenants, and that there is no unique similarity between the two. To them the Old Covenant consisted of a harsh God who gave Israel a very strenuous and burdensome law, while the New Covenant is a Covenant of mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness. There are, however, a few things that people are not being told. For instance, consider the following things which people generally believe are only taught in the New Covenant, which in actuality, are founded firmly in the Old Covenant.

- *Circumcision of the heart*: Therefore circumcise your hearts and don't be stiff-necked any longer. (Deuteronomy 10:16)
- *Mercy*: Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people *which* thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided *them* in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. (Exodus 15:13 KJV)
- *Forgiveness*: Yahweh, if you considered sins, Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness, so that You may be revered. (Psalm 130:3-4)

We also often hear many Pastors today state things like, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!" What does the Bible define as liberty? Is liberty defined as being free to do what one pleases? Is liberty defined as *not* being obedient to the commandments of Yahweh? You would think that the way some people talk all they

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<sup>8</sup> The word kosher stems from the Hebrew language and carries with it the meaning of "fit" or "clean" in the sense of permissible to eat. The kosher laws are particularly found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

have to do is believe something inside of their brain and this makes everything okay. Such is hardly the truth. Freedom can only be defined in Biblical terms, and according to the Bible there is no one who is completely free. You may now be thinking that you are free in Christ, or that Christ has made you free. If you are thinking this you are correct. But Christ has not made you free from himself has He? Has He loosed you from the presence of God? No, you are a servant according to Scripture. We are free from sin, but at the same time we are a slave to God. I've met people on the other hand who think that they are walking in liberty because they do not worship the God of Scripture. Well, they are correct at least in one sense – they are liberated from God, but that is certainly not a good liberation. The reason this is not good is because while they are free from God they are a slave to sin or we could say Satan. Paul speaks of this in Romans 6:16, "Do you not know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one you obey? Either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness." The majority of people living today are a slave to the Devil, and they don't even know it. How are they in slavery? In many ways; the Devil may have them bound to drugs or immoral sex or drunkenness or greed. They may not be able to hold down a job because they are a slave to laziness and thus poverty. The point is that you serve somebody no matter what you think. You are not completely free in the modern way of viewing freedom – you are just either ultimately serving God or Satan.

Here is the key though, when you serve God you are walking in the freedom that God has to offer you. There is freedom found in His law. Exodus 20:1 teaches that Yahweh brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Did He bring them out of bondage so He could lead them to Mount Sinai and give them laws of bondage? Of course not. Yahweh gave the Israelites laws of liberty, as the following Scriptures from Psalm 119 show.

- And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts. (Psalm 119:45 KJV)
- Your statutes are [the theme of] my song during my earthly life. (Psalm 119:54)

- Yahweh, the earth is filled with Your faithful love; teach me Your statutes. (Psalm 119:64)
- I will never forget Your precepts, for You have given me life through them. (Psalm 119:93)

I illustrate the point of freedom in obeying the law like this. Let's suppose you are driving down the road and you are obeying all the traffic and vehicle regulations. You aren't speeding, you are wearing your seat belt, and you are making sure to stop at all the red lights and stop signs. Out of nowhere appears a policeman. Do you feel worried or afraid? No, because you are *abiding by the law*. You have no need to worry about the policeman pulling you over and writing you a ticket. You are keeping the law and you are walking (or in this case driving) in liberty. Picture the same scenario, but this time you are *not* obeying the law. You've got your seat belt off, you are going 20 mph over the speed limit, and you just sped through a red light at a major intersection. What do you feel like when the police car appears out of nowhere? I would say there would be an immediate shockwave go throughout your body. You may even grit your teeth because you know what you've got coming to you. You are a lawbreaker, and you are in bondage. You must have a ticket given to you. You are not free.

What you may have forgotten for a moment is that what we are discussing right now is how things are taught in the Old Testament. We've looked at several Old Testament Scriptures thus far and all of them teach what I have just illustrated. There is freedom in the law of Yahweh. The Israelites never looked at the law that Yahweh gave them as bondage. They looked at it as loving instruction from a loving Father. As a loving Father, He looks out for us and gives us rules to see that we do not get hurt in this life we live.

This concept is seen from the Hebrew word for law. I do not have a problem with the word law, but oftentimes when people hear such a word all sorts of ideas cram into their mind. Law seems like a harsh term in the minds of professing Christians. I've even had people meet me and say something to the effect of, "Oh yes, I've heard about you. You believe in keeping *the law*."

The Hebrew word for law (*Torah*; pronounced toe-rah) has the meaning of teaching, instruction, or guidance. God is trying to teach us what is good for us. He did give Israel the Torah for their own

good (Deuteronomy 6:24) and the author of Proverbs tells us that in obedience to the Torah there is health to ones navel and marrow to ones bones (Proverbs 3:8). In the Torah we are brought length of days, a full life, and well-being (Proverbs 3:2). Yahweh even promised Israel freedom from disease if they carefully observed His Torah (Exodus 15:26). When you think about Biblical law you need to think this way. Yahweh is guiding you and instructing you in the way that is best for you.

I often mention the dietary laws to people in relation to this point. First and foremost the dietary laws are given to Yahweh's people for holiness. The law sets the people of God apart to Him. But there is a secondary quality to the dietary laws. Ask a local M.D. if obedience to the Biblical dietary laws will cause you to be a healthier person. I know a fellow who's Dad had problems with his heart. When the Dad went to the Doctor one of the first questions the Doctor asked him was if he consumed much pork. Why would the Doctor ask this if eating pork was not a hindrance to the man's health? What we learn here is that blessings come with keeping Yahweh's law.

We should not associate things like life, salvation, grace, mercy, forgiveness, health, and joy with *only* the New Testament. All these concepts are readily outlined in the pages of the Old Testament. I would suggest that you take the time to read or re-read the Old Testament. Mark the times you see these concepts mentioned. Allow Scripture to renew your mind, and learn to view Yahweh's law in the way He intended it to be viewed. Learn to *love* Yahweh's law.

## 2

# Looking at Prophecy

If you want to get people to come to a meeting about the Bible, all you need to do is advertise that you are going to predict when the Antichrist is coming on the scene or when the "rapture" will take place. I once heard of a book that sold thousands of copies titled, "88 Reasons why the Lord Will Come Back in 1988," or something like that. For some reason, people like to incline their ears to this material. If you hold a seminar on understanding the atonement or the person of the Messiah people do not seem to be interested. People are instead worried about prophecy.

Don't get me wrong, I believe prophecy is important. I enjoy studying prophecies; I just do not study them nearly as much as I study the issue of Theology, Christology or Soteriology.<sup>9</sup> I also do not study prophecy as much as I spend time studying God's law. I believe that if I am serving God with all my heart and strength, no matter how prophecy "pans out" I will be protected by the heavenly Father.<sup>10</sup> If Yahweh chooses to send His Son back in my lifetime I need to be worried about being a servant to Christ, and not so much about the precise moment that the return of Christ is going to take place. People tend to get things out of priority in my understanding. I do think that prophecy matters, but I think something is wrong when books like the one I mentioned sale thousands and a book on the theology of the atonement sits gathering dust on the shelf of a Christian bookstore.

This is the odd point. While there are many people in the world today who are overly concerned with prophecy or prophetic events, there are very few who recognize some very important *prophecies* in

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<sup>9</sup> Soteriology is the study of the doctrine or doctrines of salvation. A very common Greek word for salvation is *soter*.

<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that I believe we should not study prophecy. I personally believe in what is called pre-millennialism as well as a future seventieth week of Daniel (9:24-27) and fulfillment of Yeshua's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24.

the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of God's law having a priori place in the New Covenant. If you are good Bible student you know of the great prophetic chapters of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 that foretell of Israel's Messiah, but do you know of the prophecy's that speak of Yahweh's law being written upon the hearts of His people under the New Covenant? What exactly is the New Covenant? I've asked this to so many people over the past 10 years and I have yet to get a scripturally correct response. "Well, it's Jesus," some say, or, "The New Covenant is Matthew to Revelation." Still others answer by mentioning the death of Christ or His resurrection. All these answers are Bible based, but not one of them answers the question emphatically, specifically, and most importantly, from the passage that speaks most directly to the question.

I was working with a young man some years ago and I began to talk with him about the subject of Biblical law. I told him that he probably considered himself to be a New Covenant Christian. He shook his head quite vociferously as if to tell me that there was not a doubt in his mind that he was indeed a member of the New Covenant. We concentrated on establishing this further for the next few minutes and then I asked him the question. "Since you are a New Covenant Christian, can you tell me what the New Covenant is?" At this point the work truck we were riding in seemed silent even though the engine continued to roar as we traveled down the road. He was not expecting to be asked that question during a day where he was doing manual labor.

After a couple of minutes he looked at me and said, "Matthew, I don't know what the New Covenant is." I gently responded to him by saying something like this: "I'm not trying to be rude or mean to you by saying this, just trying to make a point. You just got through assuring me you were a New Covenant Christian. Don't you think it is terrible that you claimed to be such and didn't even know what you were talking about?" He agreed with me without even getting upset. I then had him take the Bible I carried around with me (KJV at the time)<sup>11</sup> and open up to the book of Hebrews where he could read the Biblical definition of the New Covenant. He read the following:

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<sup>11</sup> I use a variety of Bible translations for study, mostly staying with the more literal translations although sometimes a dynamic translation is appropriate. Good English Bibles include the King James Version, New American Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, and English Standard Version.

For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith Yahweh. For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Yahweh; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. (Hebrews 8:7-10, KJV)

Isn't it plain? The New Covenant is defined as Yahweh placing *His laws* upon the hearts and minds of His people. What makes this even stronger is the fact that this was prophesied about earlier in history in the book of Jeremiah. This section in Hebrews is actually a quotation of the prophecy found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Yahweh spoke this prophecy through Jeremiah the prophet, thus the initial or immediate audience to the words of Jeremiah would have been the people to whom Jeremiah was personally speaking or writing to. In this case (when we read Jeremiah chapter 1) we find that Jeremiah was writing to the nation of Judah specifically, and in principle, to the entire 12 tribes of Israel. Here's the point, when Jeremiah first told the Judahites these words, when he told them that days were coming in which Yahweh would write *His law* upon their hearts (the hearts of their descendants), what law do you think *they* had in mind? What law do you think *Jeremiah* had in mind? Can anyone honestly say that Jeremiah or his audience would have had any other law in mind other than the one that Yahweh gave through His unique prophet Moses?

The answer is evident. Yahweh was saying that *His law*, the law that was in effect at the time He spoke through Jeremiah, would be written upon the hearts and minds of His people, in a special way, at a future time. The time is called the New Covenant, as spoken by Jeremiah (31:31), and reiterated by the author of Hebrews (8:8).

Most people do not think of the New Covenant as a covenant of Biblical law, much less Mosaic Law. They instead are carried away with the false notion that the New Covenant is a covenant in which the law of Moses has been nailed to the cross or abolished; a covenant that neglects what Moses spoke and wrote thousands of years previously. They don't seem to be familiar with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:8-9a, "Am I saying this from a human perspective? Doesn't the law also say the same thing? For it is written in the law of Moses." Paul appealed to the law of Moses to prove a point. When is the last time you heard a Christian preacher do that?

The fact is that the prophecy in Jeremiah 31 has been neglected by the majority of those who profess to believe in the Bible. They are more worried about prophecy's concerning the Antichrist or the mark of the beast than they are in seeing a prophecy that directly relates to the continuance of the law of Moses. We aren't going to stop here though, because another prophetic book that deals with the law under the New Covenant heavily is the book of Ezekiel. You don't get many sermons from this book either, but it nevertheless contains some very meaty material when it comes to Biblical law under the New Covenant era. Ezekiel 36:24-28 states the following:

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 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*. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:24-28, KJV)

In this text we see language that is strikingly similar to that we have already read in Jeremiah's prophecy. We also see language that is akin to New Covenant terminology. Look at the words "clean water," "new heart," "new spirit," "put my spirit within you," "ye

shall be my people, and I will be your God.” There is no doubt that when Ezekiel was commissioned by Yahweh to prophecy this to the nation of Israel, the New Covenant that was to be inaugurated in the future was in full view. Did you notice what is a vital component to this prophecy? After Yahweh speaks of placing His Spirit within this group of people He then says that He will *cause* them to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments. This doesn’t sound to me like Yahweh’s law has been abolished under the New Covenant. If this were the case then you would have the New Covenant people with the law upon their hearts and minds (Jeremiah) and walking in the law’s statutes and judgments (Ezekiel) but at the same time teaching people under the New Covenant that the law has now been abolished in the Messiah. How much sense does that make?

I would say that it doesn’t make any sense whatsoever, and I honestly believe that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (and those hearing the initial prophecies) would too. My point here is that you have a *background* to the New Testament Scriptures in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament repeatedly gives forth prophecy or a foretelling about occurrences that will come about in the New Testament. If we do not understand that some of these prophecies clearly reveal that the New Covenant is one of obedience to God’s laws, statutes, and judgments, we may read ideas into the New Testament that were never meant to be read into it. In fact, ideas and doctrines *have been* read into the New Testament that were never intended to be understood by the readers of Old Testament prophecy and the first readers of the books that now comprise what we commonly call the New Testament. It’s as though someone has read a non-fiction book, but has began in chapter ten. They cannot really understand exactly what is going on, who the characters are, and the purpose of what is taking place.

There is yet one more prophecy I would like to center in on here. Let’s first take a look at Isaiah 51:4-6:

Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me,  
O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I  
will make my judgment to rest for a light of the  
people. My righteousness *is* near; my salvation is  
gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the  
isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they

trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. (Isaiah 51:4-6, KJV)

Notice here that Yahweh speaks of a law proceeding from Him and His judgment being a light to the people. This reminds me of the words of the Psalmist: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* Yahweh's word equals His judgment, and Yahweh's judgment equals His law or teachings. Through the teachings of Yahweh the pathway is lit up to show us the direction in which we are to walk.

Look next at how He contrasts what is going to pass away verses what is permanent. He speaks of the things of this earth growing old and wearing out like a piece of clothing. We've all had clothing that we've washed and dried numerous times, and after a while (sometimes a long while) that shirt you enjoy wearing so much gets thin and holey (I'm talking about actual holes here). Our bodies are the same; we live in a corruptible body that will return to the dust from whence it was taken. However, it is not this way with the righteousness of Yahweh. He states that His salvation is forever and that His righteousness will not be abolished. The word abolished here means to do away with something or to break something down. In this case it is saying that Yahweh's righteousness will not be brought down. Remember, the righteousness of Yahweh continuing is in contrast to the garment (heavens and earth) wearing out.

What is the righteousness that Yahweh speaks of here? Could it have something to do with His law? Look at Isaiah 51:7-8:

Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart *is* my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their reviling. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. (Isaiah 51:7-8, KJV)

We now have it laid out plainly for us to see. After Yahweh says that His righteousness will not be abolished He speaks of the people who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is His law. Does this sound familiar? It should; the law is mentioned as *being in the heart*, just like in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Take special care to recognize that these two statements are synonymous.

1. {Ye that know} *righteousness*.
2. {The people in whose heart} *is my law*.

Knowing righteousness is equivalent with having the law upon your heart. This proves that the righteousness spoken of in verse 6 (that will not be abolished) is Yahweh's *law of righteousness*; His righteous decrees and acts. This is why it could be said of Zechariah and Elizabeth that they were both righteous.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (Luke 1:5-6, KJV)

Do you see how that the phrase, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord" describes just how Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous? They were doing what was right; they were adhering to the laws of Yahweh.

Many preachers and theologians today will tell you that the law has been done away with. In reality they are telling you that the law has been abolished. You need to make sure to mention to them the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Show them how it is Almighty Yahweh speaking through these prophets. Show them how the law of Yahweh is intrinsically tied into the New Covenant. Also tell them that Yahweh says in Isaiah 51:4-8 that His law *will not be abolished*. It is not like clothing that wears out or flowers that fade away. His law endures forever. It is truly written upon the hearts of those who are genuine New Covenant people. Let these preachers know that as *Ministers of the New Covenant* (Second Corinthians 3:5-6) they need to be proclaiming correctly what the New Covenant actually is. If they

do not teach that the law of Yahweh is a major part of the New Covenant they are in disagreement with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and most importantly Yahweh Himself.

# 3

## Believing in Yeshua

Sometimes our emotions get in the way of our intellect. In just a moment someone can go from having a wonderful day to a tragic day, all because of getting into an argument with a person, and such a happening causes emotions to run high. Such can also be the case with listening to music. Music is meant to bolster our emotions, and I do not believe it has altogether a negative effect upon human beings. I remember reading in Scripture where David would play his harp for King Saul and this was to soothe the mind of King Saul. David's music affected Saul emotionally and such was a good thing not a bad thing. Often times though people are affected negatively by music. People listen to songs that aren't glorifying to the heavenly Father and then feel driven, sometimes unknowingly, to do things they would not normally do in their life. I've heard that suicides are sometimes committed due to emotions caused by music and song. This is just one example in a humongous ocean, but it is a true example. Our emotions play a very large factor in how we act or react in life situations. Many people are emotionally driven *spiritually*. People seek to attend churches that make them "feel good" or "relieve pressure." Can a scriptural worship service accomplish these things? Yes, it can, but the key is that it remain scriptural and not extra scriptural or non scriptural. Myriads of people today are feeling emotionally driven because they have attended a service that was designed to make them laugh or cry, but not designed to teach and equip them in the word of the Lord.

I've attended meetings before where there was *zero* preaching or teaching from the Bible and the other attendees believed it to be one of the best meetings in their life. Why is this? The answer is that it was an emotionally charged meeting. Even most sermons today are emotionally charged, but do not contain a serious study of the Scriptures. Texts are not read in their intended context, and meanings are derived from the text oftentimes to introduce

completely foreign applications that somebody supposedly gathered from "above." I once read of a fellow who was having a difficult time finding a wife. After some time of grief from the situation he listened to a message preached on the walls of Jericho, and within that message the preacher stated that if you were seeking a particular woman to be your wife then you needed to march around her seven times and claim her as your own so that the walls of her heart will tumble down and she will be yours! Do you honestly think that this was Yahweh's intention in relating this account to us in the book of Joshua? Did Yahweh intend for us to use the story to teach on knocking down the walls of a woman's heart? This story may sound strange to you, but messages similar to this are being preached every week in pulpits all over the world. These messages make people feel good, and most people are after a feel good religion rather than a serious fellowship with the Father and His only begotten Son.

People have gotten the idea that fellowship with the Son of God means that you have some sort of mental recognition that He is real. It's been shortened down now to about five minutes of your time and you can be saved. "Just repeat these words after me," many preachers say, and people repeat the words and actually think that they are saved in the Biblical sense of the word.

I have witnessed to multitudes of people about certain doctrines I believe and certain practices I have chosen to follow in my spiritual walk, and I usually get this message from people. "I just want to believe in Jesus," or "The Bible tells us to believe in Jesus and I'm doing that." To such people, belief in Jesus means that they have Him in their mind some times, and that they sing about Him at their church service once a week. Rarely do you find a person who realizes that believing in Yeshua<sup>12</sup> (Jesus) means that you believe in the *teachings* of Yeshua. You cannot divorce Yeshua from His teachings. What He taught expresses His heart and mind. What He expounded upon details for us who He really was. If you are not a believer in and a follower of the *teachings* of Yeshua then you will never have salvation. You will *never enter* into the kingdom of Yahweh.

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<sup>12</sup> Yeshua is the Hebrew name for the Messiah. This is the name our Messiah was given and called by when He walked this earth, being born into a Judahite family. This name is defined as meaning "he will save" in Matthew 1:21. It is a contraction of the longer, original form of the name Yehoshua which literally means "Yahweh will save." For a detailed study please visit our online publication titled, "Yeshua vs. Jesus."

It is a fact that Yeshua was an avid keeper of the law of Yahweh. The Bible is explicit in telling us that He knew no sin (Second Corinthians 5:21), in Him is no sin (First John 3:5), and that He is separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). Yeshua never violated the law of His Father, thus He never sinned (First John 3:4). John 8:29 tells us that Yeshua always does the things that please Yahweh. He kept Yahweh's law, and He taught others to obey Yahweh's law out of a pure heart and with a pure motive. He was a faithful Israelite, and a man who was devoted to His God and Father (Ephesians 1:3), Yahweh Almighty. One of the plainest statements Yeshua ever made about the law is found in Matthew 5:17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.  
(Matthew 5:17 KJV)

Our Messiah teaches us here that we should not even *think* that His mission involved a destruction of the law or the prophets. That is not His purpose in coming, as He explains. In light of such a clear statement why do so many people not only think it, but also proclaim it? You talk to people about this or that law and it seems that one of the first things out of their mouth is something like, "Well Jesus came and died, so we are free in Christ." If this statement had any truth in it then Yeshua's mission would have been to destroy the law. If His death destroyed the law, then His mission would have been to destroy the law. Rather, He has told us we shouldn't even be entertaining such thoughts. He did not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill.

This is where it gets tricky, not with the Bible, but with the minds of men. Some people I've talked to that know the verse in Matthew will respond, "Well, I don't believe He came to destroy the law. He came to fulfill it." Their meaning in such a statement is a circumvention of the actual intent of the original statement. In their minds the words "full-fill" actually mean to destroy or at least something very close to it. When they say that Yeshua fulfilled the law, they are meaning that He fulfilled it and thus it has been done away with; we do not need to worry about it anymore.

If the passage actually meant this it would be self contradictory. It would have Yeshua saying that He did not come to destroy the law,

but rather destroy it; completely nonsensical. In order for the passage to make logical sense we must understand the words fulfill and destroy to be opposites. He came to do "A" and not "B."

The word fulfill here does not have the sense of a prophetic utterance being fulfilled, in the sense that the Messiah fulfilled all that the law and the prophets said about Him. Do I believe He fulfilled certain prophecies? Absolutely, but there isn't the slightest notion in the context of Matthew 5:17 that would lead us in such a direction. We instead find the context showing (immediately before this verse - Matthew 5:14-16) that Yeshua is teaching His *listeners* that *they* are to be the "salt" and "light" of the earth and world. *They* are to influence men in a righteous way; *they* are to be holy examples to others. Notice carefully that Yeshua is speaking of *them* being examples; He is telling *them* to let *their* light shine so that others might see *their* good works, and glorify the Father which is in heaven. It is with this in mind that He then tells them not to think He has come to destroy the law. What is the meaning here then? They are to recognize that they must be obedient to the law and not think that He, as Yahweh's Messiah, is teaching them contrary to the law.

The meaning of the word fulfill here must be that He came to do the law, obey the law, and confirm the law. *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* lists these definitions under the number one heading of the Greek word for fulfill, "1. to make full, to fill, to fill up... to fill to the full, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally... I abound, I am liberally supplied... to flood... to fill, diffuse throughout one's soul..." Do any of these definitions sound like something is getting destroyed? As a matter of fact the same Greek word (*pleroo*) translated fulfill in Matthew 5:17 is translated as "fully preached" in Romans 15:19 in the KJV. So, we *could* translate Matthew 5:17b as "I have not come to destroy, but to fully preach the law and the prophets."

Any interpretation of the word fulfill which places it as a synonym with the word destroy has to be a false interpretation. We must seek to understand Yeshua's words as those who first heard Him speak understood them. They would have clearly understood Him to be telling them (a Judahite audience) that they should obey the Torah (law) and not think that His teachings were contrary to the Torah. Yeshua then continues His words by saying the following:

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18 KJV)

For starters, the word “verily” has the meaning of “I am telling you the truth.” The Greek word here is the word *amen* (pronounced ah-mane), from where we get the English word amen. When a preacher is preaching and someone in the congregation speaks out “amen” the congregant is expressing that He believes the preacher is telling the truth. Yeshua goes on to speak of until heaven and earth pass away. Let me ask you - are heaven and earth still here? Of course heaven and earth are still here. Yeshua uses similar terminology in Matthew 24:35 where He says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Those that are familiar with Scripture know that *Yahweh’s* words are also said to be unable to pass away in Isaiah 40:8, “The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.” We would do well to also note the words of Yeshua in Luke 16:17, “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter in the law to drop out.” Make sure to catch the potency of this statement by the Messiah. He is telling us that it would be easier to destroy the heavens and the earth than for one small stroke of the law to be destroyed. I think of trying to destroy the heavens, much less the earth, and I can’t even imagine the realm of possibility in accomplishing such a thing. As impossible as this may seem, Yeshua makes His point by saying that *it would be easier* for a person to do this than destroy the smallest letter of the law of Yahweh. This is telling us in the plainest of terms that the law will not be destroyed, in perfect harmony with Isaiah 51:7. Matthew Poole commented on this verse in Luke by saying the following:

Neither do you scandalize me, as if I came to teach a new doctrine, contrary to the law and the prophets. I tell you the quite contrary; heaven and earth shall pass away, before one tittle of the law shall pass. Your vain interpretations of the law shall be destroyed, or amended, but the law of my Father shall remain as a certain rule of life to his people until the world shall have an end.

The latter part of Matthew 5:18 states in harmony with Luke 16:17 that not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law until all is fulfilled or accomplished. The word jot here is the Greek word *iota* and is of Hebrew origin. It refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The *yod*. The *yod* is the smallest letter in the entire Hebrew language. The word tittle is taken from the Greek word *keriaia* and has to do with the hornlike curvatures of the Hebrew letters that made up the Hebrew words. Lexicons give us the definition of an extremity, apex, or point of a letter. The meaning here then is that not even the minutest portion of the law will pass until all is accomplished. Right now someone may be wondering, "Well what about when all is accomplished?" This question is asked because it assumes that once all is accomplished the law will pass away, and I would say that in one sense this would be accurate. In the final Kingdom of Heaven there will exist no sin, no death, it will be quite a utopia for the residents. If no sin exists then it is obvious that there is no law existing, but does this mean the Kingdom will be lawless? Not at all, for we read time and time again of the Kingdom being a lawful Kingdom rather than a lawless one. Scripture tells us that the new heavens and new earth will involve worship on holy days such as new moons and Sabbaths (Isaiah 66:22-23), nothing that commits iniquity will be able to live in it (Matthew 13:41), and everything that commits sin will be cast out (Revelation 21:1-8). Yeshua's words should be understood to say that the law will continue right on up to the establishing of the Kingdom, and then there will be a finality or culmination of righteousness, and wickedness will cease to exist.

We may think that verses 17-18 only tell us that *Yeshua* kept the law and that it will not pass, but verse 19 makes it certain that *Yeshua* requires His listeners to fulfill the law as well. Before we read verse 19 let me make a very important point. If your interpretation of verse 17 and 18 does not come to the conclusion found in verse 19 then your interpretation is in error.

Therefore whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches [these commandments] will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Do you see the word “therefore” in the first sentence? I heard a preacher say this one time, “Anytime you see the word ‘therefore’ you need to ask yourself what it’s ‘there for.’” In this case, Yeshua is telling us this: “Based upon what I have just stated and proclaimed, the following is also true. Whoever of you breaks even the smallest of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom. However, if you practice and teach them you will be called great in the Kingdom.” Yeshua is saying that we must follow His example. We must practice and teach the commandments from the least of them to the greatest. We must keep the law. The righteousness of the law must be fulfilled by those who walk after the spirit (Romans 8:1-4). It really could not be any plainer.

I would like to now share with you what commentator Albert Barnes’ states in regards to this teaching of Yeshua. I do not know if Mr. Barnes’ even believed completely what he wrote, but it is nonetheless quite powerful and true:

Shall be called great, he that teaches that *all* the law of God is binding, and that all of it should be obeyed, without attempting to specify what is most important, shall be a teacher worthy of his office, shall teach the truth, and shall be called great. We learn hence,

(1.) That all the law of God is binding on Christians.

Comp. James 2:10

(2.) That all the commands of God should be preached, in their proper place, by Christian ministers.

(3.) That they who pretend that there are any laws of God so small that they need not obey them, are unworthy of his kingdom. And,

(4.) That true piety has respect to all the commandments of God, and keeps them, Psalm 119:6.

("shall be called great" 1 Samuel 2:30")

In light of what Yeshua taught here let me make one more point that you have probably already thought of either knowingly or unknowingly. The law that Yeshua spoke of in this text is none other

than the Law of Moses. Remember, there was no New Testament even written at the time Yeshua was teaching. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, etc. would come along at a later time. Yeshua was not discussing any kind of "new and improved law," only the law that He had been taught to obey and follow even from childhood; the Law of Yahweh through the mouth of Moses. If you have a desire to be great in the Kingdom of heaven you must practice and teach the commandments of Moses. Moses and Yeshua aren't at odds with one another. Following Moses means believing in and following the teachings of Yeshua. Isn't that what Christian means anyway? Doesn't it mean a follower of Christ? Are you a Christ follower?

I will end this chapter by saying that I've always been taught from childhood that I was supposed to follow Christ. "Do what He did," people said. "Always make sure to follow His example." We even had the fad a few years back where a lot of the young people in churches were wearing the bracelets with the letters "WWJD" standing for "What would Jesus do?" What I find strange is that when I actually began to follow Yeshua the Messiah in my personal life, listening to His teachings and imitating His example, many people found it strange, odd, and even sometimes heretical. I do not understand how following our Messiah in *anything* could even begin to be heretical. Do you honestly believe that the heavenly Father is going to throw a person in hell who made it a practice in their life to live as Yeshua lived?

# 4

## Overlooking Bible Verses

I have often come to the wrong conclusion by overlooking pertinent pieces of information on the given subject or issue I am evaluating. Just the other day I was doing some work for a woman and spoke to her about what she needed to do to solve the problem she was having. The problem with me was that I was speaking to her before I had really even looked at what I needed to look at. I was going ahead and forming a conclusion before looking at the problem. After I laid my eyes upon the problem, I had to back track and explain to her that what I had just explained to her was the wrong explanation. Sound confusing? I bet I sounded confused to her, but I could have refrained from sounding like I was ignorant if I had just taken the time to examine everything needed for that particular job.

Why is it that we are quick to answer questions without listening sometimes to the entire question or without examining all the evidence? Sometimes it is because of pride issues in our life. We want to be seen by others as a person who "knows all the answers to life's problems." We want to make sure that we can answer the question quicker than the person standing next to us who may be inclined to give an answer as well. Throw in a few big words and make things sound fancy and we have just made ourselves out to be the biggest dunce the questioner has ever come across. Really, this is what we do when we fail to listen intently to the complete question.

People do this with the Scriptures. Believers often arrive at believing in doctrines that appear to be Biblical, but are not, by only using the set of Scriptures that seem to agree with their already established system of thinking. People are prone to establish what they want to believe first and then go to the Scriptures and try to find a few verses that agree with what they have already decided they will believe. This is doing nothing more than deceiving your self. I know we all have biased minds to a certain extent, but we must always approach Scripture in the most unbiased way possible. Never should

we begin with the conclusion. We should formulate our conclusion by looking not just to Scripture alone, but to the *sum* of God's word.

Have you ever heard someone say the words "*sola scriptura*"? It's a good phrase and is one that is spoken in the Latin language. Latin was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church for over 1,000 years and thus when the Protestant Reformation began heavily in the sixteenth century, many reformers already accustomed to speaking Latin and reading Latin, would respond to the claims of Rome in the Latin language. Rome believed that authority for belief was to be found in the Scriptures, but they did not believe that Scripture was *sufficient* to establish doctrine and practice. The authority of the church was to be *coupled* with Scripture and only then could one arrive at a proper Scriptural conclusion.

The Reformers believed that Scripture *was* sufficient for all matters of faith and morale, and thus the slogan "*sola* (alone, by itself) *scriptura* (Scripture, the Bible)" was coined. I believe in the slogan myself, but that's not the main point I am seeking to make. There was another phrase the Reformers used that is not as well known as the former. This phrase is "*tota scriptura*" meaning "all of Scripture." We must not just look to Scripture alone, we must look to *all* of Scripture. If we do not look to all of Scripture, but cut snippets out as we see fit, we will still come to an erroneous conclusion on doctrinal matters even though we believe in "*sola scriptura*."

This is what has happened in regards to the subject matter at hand. Yahweh's law should be paramount to the believer, but churches today, for the most part, never quote the numerous Scriptures that show the Torah to be just, holy, perfect, etc. They only quote the Scriptures that appear on the surface to be saying that we do not have to keep the law anymore under the New Covenant. Let me be a little clearer here. I am not here even speaking of Old Testament Scripture. I am focusing only upon the writings of the New Testament in this chapter. That's right, there are many New Testament passages that clearly show the law to be in force, but because people choose to only quote snippets from the New Testament, the false doctrine of the law being abolished in Christ continues widespread in pulpits. Listeners in turn do not study or examine what they are hearing from their Pastors so they actually do not really know what the New Testament has to say in the positive sense towards the law of God. All they know is that they are *under*

*grace*. Not long ago a dear friend of mine relayed to me a conversation he had with some people about Yahweh's law. He told me that one of the first things out of their mouth was, "That was under the Old Testament, we are under grace now." Whether they realize it or not they were telling my friend that they know the law was to be obeyed under the Old Testament but now under grace they are free to disobey. This is a very incorrect concept of *under grace*.

The Bible does tell us that we are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14), but what does this mean? Why do people even need grace? The reason a person needs grace or mercy is because they have done something wrong and do not deserve grace, but grace is given to them to forgive them of their wrong doing. Do people need grace today? Are people still saved by grace through faith? If your answer to these questions is yes then that would have to imply that there must still be a law that is wrong to disobey. When a person disobeys this law they are acting sinfully for sin is the transgression of the law (First John 3:4). Grace then is given to this person based upon the work of Christ, but the grace given proves that the disobedience to the law was wrong; it was not a good thing that the law was disobeyed.

You cannot have grace if there is no law to obey. You take away the law, you in turn take away sin; you take away sin, then you in turn do not have anything to be forgiven of, thus you do not need grace upon your life.

What did Paul mean when he wrote in Romans 6:14 that we are not under law, but under grace? It is highly likely, based upon Romans chapters 3 through 6, that Paul was speaking of not being under *the penalty* of the law. Now, I do not believe every occurrence of "under the law" means under the penalty of the law, but this understanding fits very well here in light of Paul's writing to the church at Rome. Paul speaks of justification heavily in Romans 3 and 4 and declares that no flesh should be justified by the law because everyone has fallen short from the perfection of God's glory (Romans 3:21-23). He continues in Romans 5 to speak of those who are in Adam and those who are in the Messiah. Those who are in the Messiah have been forgiven from the penalty the law demands, death. Eternal life is theirs (Romans 5:21). All this leads one to believe that not being under the law, but rather under grace in this context means that we are not under the penalty of death the law

demands. We have been given grace by the Father because of the obedience of the Son.

If I violate the speed limit here in my local town and get pulled over by a cop, odds are he is going to write me a ticket. Let's say I go to pay the fine of around one hundred dollars, but I then run into a problem, I do not have the money to pay the penalty. A friend of mine feels compassion upon me and decides to give me the one hundred dollars to pay the fine. My fine has been paid by another, and therefore I am not under the law, but rather under grace.

Does anyone honestly believe that this means I am at liberty to go right out and break the law again? How would my friend feel? It would be like slapping him across the face wouldn't it? He would wonder "How in the world could he do this to me?" Grace given was not a license to go back out and do the same thing again, getting myself in the same predicament. The grace relieved me from being under the law, i.e. under the penalty the law demanded. The grace wasn't saying "okay" to what I had done.

So, this is the proper understanding of Romans 6:14, and just in case anyone wants to use Paul's statement here to justify disobedience to the law Paul continues by stating Romans 6:15, "What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Absolutely not!" *This* is one of those overlooked verses. Paul unequivocally states that grace does not imply that a person can continue to sin against God's law. Let me remind you that the law Paul speaks of here is the same law that he has labored to show we are not justified by in Romans chapters 3 through 5. We are not justified by this law, but we shouldn't violate this *same law* because of grace.

We also hear a lot of talk about loving God these days in Christian circles. I have another good friend whose wife was talking to someone about keeping the law of God. This person's response was, "Well, I guess that's okay, but I think our focus should be on loving God rather than worrying about keeping the law." Once again, this response comes from someone who has overlooked all that the Bible has to say. For starters, First John 5:3 tells us, "For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden." For most people, loving God means lifting up your hands or crying during a worship service. Please do not misunderstand me, I believe it is Scriptural to lift your hands in

praise to God and to even cry tears of repentance or joy in worship towards God, but this is not how we show God we love Him. We show Him our love by obeying His law.

I recently listened to a sermon preached by the late Dr. D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries. This man was prominent on both national radio and television and will probably continue to be for many years even though he has fallen asleep (in death). After hearing the sermon, I sent off for the transcript by mail and received the complete sermon in a small pamphlet format. The title of the sermon is "This Bleating of Sheep." On page seven of this pamphlet Dr. Kennedy remarks:

May I remind you of something that many people don't seem to realize – that there is nothing you can do that will please God other than obeying His commandments. I have asked numerous classes and individuals: "Name one thing you could do that would please God other than what He has commanded you to do." There is nothing.

It sounds to me like Dr. Kennedy has read First John 5:3. He's likely also familiar with John 14:15 where Christ says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." He probably also knows John 15:9-10, "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love." Truly, love is fulfilling the commandments of the Father (Romans 13:10).

What about *knowing* the Father and the Son? Have you ever heard anybody talk about wanting to get to know the Father more intimately? I do desire to know the Father in a special way myself, but I have met many people who claim to have a knowledge of the Father and His Son, but I know that there is no way that they really could because of what First John 2:2-4 says. We read in this passage that the person who claims to know Him but does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. When is the last time you heard that passage quoted by a televangelist? These type verses are all through the New Testament but they continue to go unnoticed because such verses are not going to win anyone a

popularity contest. Preaching obedience to the law of Yahweh is not going to get people to send money to their ministry. Promising them their best life now or something similar, will.

There are many other verses in the New Testament that uphold the law. Why don't you take the time to get out a concordance of the Bible and look up words like law, commandment, ordinance, etc. in the New Testament? Examine all the evidence before you arrive at your conclusion. Remember, consider Scripture alone, but make extra sure you are considering *all* of Scripture.

## 5

# The Tradition of the Elders

I have five children. That's difficult for some people to believe when they see me or when I tell them how old I am. I like to see the looks on people's faces when they first learn this about me. I like to answer the question "Do you have any children?" with "Well, we *only* have five." Yahweh has blessed me so much to be able to father five little ones and I've learned a lot about children in the past 13 years.

One thing you learn quickly is that you do not treat a baby like you treat a toddler. My wife gave birth to our youngest child, David, on October 6, 2008. This was our first baby in 5 years and we had kind of gotten out of the "swing of things" if you parents know what I mean. We once again were rocking a baby, changing diapers, making sure the others were quiet when it was nap time for the littlest one, etc.

When dinner time came my older children learned that David couldn't eat the same things that they ate. It pretty much came as natural knowledge. Of course he can't eat this broccoli, he's just a baby. Mommy has to feed him. He had to be fed the milk and not the meat, so to speak. Eventually he would have to be weaned, but for now he cannot handle solid foods.

So far in this book we have covered some pretty basic elements of Biblical law and I have tried to make them as "milky" as I can. I think there has been some meat in the pages you've read, but most has been basic. What follows in this book is going to be more "meaty." I would encourage you to re-read the introduction and chapters 1 through 4 if you still feel like you do not have a complete grasp at how to view Biblical law. If you are ready to be weaned from the milk, on the other hand, then here we go.

I have met professing Bible believers over the years that actually believe Yeshua the Messiah broke the Sabbath day and also declared that it was now okay to eat things like pork, catfish, etc. They believe

that He came to show us a "new and living way," and this way is defined by them as being apart from the "harsh law" that existed during the Old Testament. If you have read the previous chapters in this book you should know that viewing the law as being harsh or as being bondage is entirely inappropriate. Such people begin with a crooked foundation. To build upon such a foundation results in a rickety structure that teaches Yeshua broke the aforementioned laws or at least paved the way for others to see that these laws are not in effect any longer. One of the reasons (among others) that people arrive at this erroneous conclusion is by having little if any knowledge of *the traditions of the elders* that existed during the time of Yeshua.

When we read in Scripture we find that the law of Yahweh exists in that which was *written down* by Moses. Yet there are those today (as there were those in Yeshua's day) who insist that there is another Torah (law) in addition to the written Torah. These same people explain to us that the Torah they speak of is not a Torah that was written down in the days of Moses, but was rather given *orally* to Moses on Mount Sinai and then Moses passed it down orally as did the succeeding generations after him. Thus, people refer to this "Torah" as the "Oral Torah" that is, the oral law. This is not to say that these people do not believe this "Oral Torah" is written down now, but it is only to say that they believe it was not *initially* written down, but only at a much later time codified.

The ancient Judahite historian Flavius Josephus records for us how that the party of the Pharisees<sup>13</sup> believed in this so called "Oral Torah" when he writes:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our

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<sup>13</sup> The term Pharisee stems from the Hebrew word *perushim* meaning "separated ones." The Pharisee's considered themselves to be the strictest sect within the Judahite faith, over the Sadducees and Essenes.

forefathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees<sup>14</sup> are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.<sup>15</sup>

Notice carefully that while Josephus records the Pharisees belief in a Torah *in addition to* that which was written down by Moses, he also records for us that the Sadducees rejected such a notion. They believed that only those things that were *written down* in Scripture are obligatory on the believer in Yahweh.

Modern day rabbinic Jews are the continuance of the Pharisees, believing that God not only gave Moses a law that he wrote down, but God also gave Moses an oral law that was then handed down orally to Joshua, the prophets, and eventually the Pharisees. Even this oral law had to be codified (in the second century A.D.) because it came to be so large. Today this document is known by the basic title "Talmud" which is a Hebrew word that literally means "study." The Talmud consists of a very detailed and exhaustive commentary on the written Torah. Basically put, rabbinic Jews today believe that you cannot understand the Torah without the Talmud. The Talmud gives the specifics; the Torah just gives broad overviews.

A good friend of mine was walking through a grocery store once in preparation for Yahweh's Passover festival. This particular grocery store was one located in a Jewish community so they actually had a Kosher deli, a Kosher fish department, and even a Kosher Chinese restaurant (which is very good by the way). As my friend was stocking up on things for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a Jewish man approached him and marveled after he found out that my friend was Torah observant. The Jewish man then began to ask my friend about the Talmud. "Do you study the Talmud?" My friend replied in the negative and the response from the Jewish man

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<sup>14</sup> The term Sadducee literally means a "Tsadokian." It may also be related to the Hebrew word for just or righteous, *tsaddik*. The priesthood at the time of Yeshua was made up of Sadducean men claiming descent from a Priest during the time of David named Zadok.

<sup>15</sup> *The Works of Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 13.10.6*

was a very serious one, "Friend, you cannot understand the Torah without studying the Talmud."

According to a modern Orthodox Jewish scholar by the name of H. Chaim Schimmel, the Jewish people "...do not follow the literal word of the Bible, nor have they ever done so. They have been fashioned and ruled by the verbal interpretation of the written word ..."<sup>16</sup> As stated by Rabbi Z. H. Chajes, a leading Jewish authority in the 1800's, the Talmud indicates that the words "that were transmitted orally" by God are "more valuable" than those transmitted in writing. Chajes goes so far as to say that: "Allegiance to the authority of the said rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel... and he who does not give adherence to the unwritten Law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel..."<sup>17</sup> Maimonides', one of the most prestigious sages in the faith of Judaism, in his introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, and also the Babylonian Talmud, (Yebamot 102a) declares that if 1,000 prophets of the status of Elijah and Elisha declared the Torah to mean one thing and yet 1,001 sages (rabbi's) declared the Torah to mean something different, that the final ruling is to go in accordance with the 1,001 sages. It is truly amazing when we look at the amount of weight that the Jewish people of today and the Pharisees of Yeshua's day gave to this "oral Torah." It was as though it really did not make much of a difference what the written Torah said. What mattered most to the Pharisees was this: "What does our tradition teach?"

Why is there such a problem with this "oral Torah" thing? For starters there is no mention of an "oral Torah" in addition to the written Torah in Scripture. Secondly, we are firmly commanded against adding to or taking away from the *written Torah* in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. Therefore if we find a case in the "Oral Torah" that adds to or takes away from that which is written, then we must discard the "oral" in light of the written. This brings us to the third point. There are cases where the "oral Torah" contradicts, violates, or makes void the written Torah. The Rabbi's in Judaism even claimed to have the right to change the written Torah if necessary. What was their scriptural support for this? They cited

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<sup>16</sup> *The Oral Law: A Study of the Rabbinic Contribution to Torah She-Be-Al-Peh* (rev. ed., Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim, 1987)

<sup>17</sup> H. Chajes, *The Student's Guide Through the Talmud*, translated and edited by Jacob Schacter (New York: Feldheim, 1960)

Psalm 119:126, "It is time for the LORD to act, for they have broken Your law."

Your response to the misuse of this verse is probably one that is wondering, why in the world would they quote this? How does this verse teach that it is okay to neglect or abolish any of Yahweh's laws? You are correct in this mindset, but what happened is that the passage was completely misinterpreted to mean this: "Sometimes, in order to act for the Lord, it is necessary to dissolve His Laws."<sup>18</sup> This is nonsense, but it is true. It is a shame that people can deny all the Scriptural texts that speak of a written Torah only, and do not in the slightest way imply some kind of "oral Torah" in addition to the written.<sup>19</sup>

All of this talk about Jewish oral tradition is similar to many of the traditions in Christianity. A tradition is viewed as absolute truth, and when you come against a tradition it is looked down upon more than if you would have come against the Scriptures. Oftentimes the tradition *violates* the commandments. Not all traditions are bad or sinful, but when we violate Yahweh's commands with our traditions it is sin. When we exalt mere traditions to the status of commandments it is also sin.

Yeshua certainly upheld the Torah of Moses, but did He uphold the oral traditions? Well, we must answer this in two ways. If an oral tradition did not violate a commandment of the written Torah, then Yeshua could have kept the tradition and not be involved in anything sinful. This is not to say that He did keep the tradition, only that such a tradition would not be sinful in and of itself to keep. However, we can be assured that if a tradition ever contradicted the written Torah, Yeshua would not have followed the tradition in the least bit. Likewise, if a tradition of the Pharisees was being exalted to the "status quo" of the written Torah, Yeshua would not be pleased.

The most famous case of Yeshua speaking against an aspect of the "oral Torah" is found in Matthew 15:1-2. We read:

Then came to Yeshua scribes and Pharisees, which  
were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples

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<sup>18</sup> The Babylonian Talmud, Berakot 54a.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 24:7-8; Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 28:58-59; 30:9-10; Joshua 1:8; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:13; 2 Kings 22:13; 23:3,21; 1 Chronicles 16:39-40; 2 Chronicles 30:5; 31:3; 35:26-27; Ezra 3:24; 6:18; Nehemiah 10:28-29; 13:1; and Daniel 9:13.

transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

It appears that the Pharisees were speaking of a well known “tradition of the elders.” Commentator Adam Clarke comments on this phrase “tradition of the elders” in this way:

Among the Jews Tradition signifies what is also called the oral law, which they distinguish from the written law: this last contains the Mosaic precepts, as found in the Pentateuch: the former, the traditions of the elders, i.e. traditions, or doctrines, that had been successively handed down from Moses through every generation, but not committed to writing. The Jews feign that, when God gave Moses the written law, he gave him also the oral law, which is the interpretation of the former.

So what we have here in Matthew is the Pharisees asking Yeshua why His disciples did not keep the (so called today) “oral Torah.” Part of this “oral Torah” was that a person must wash his hands before he eats. We are not talking here about your Mother asking you to wash up before you come to the dinner table. That’s not in view at all, and I’m sure that the disciples did this many times. We are speaking of a specific, traditional, ritual washing of the hands prior to eating, consisting of many observances that had to be done in a specific manner and exact order. The following description (taken from *beingjewish.com*) gives us a realization of what was probably meant by the Pharisees of Yeshua’s day.

#### Washing Hands for Challah

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1. Make sure your hands are clean and dry.
2. Grasp the washing cup with your right hand.
3. Transfer the washing cup to your left hand.
4. Make a loose fist of your right hand.
5. Pour water over your right hand -- enough to wet both the inside and outside of your right fist.
6. Repeat.

7. Transfer the washing cup to your right hand.
8. Pour water over your left hand -- enough to wet both the inside and outside of your left fist.
9. Repeat.
10. Loosely cup your hands, palms upwards, as if to "accept" the purity, raise your hands and recite:
 

Ba-rooch Attah A-doy-noy,  
E-lo-hay-noo Melech ha-olam,  
asher ki-di-sha-noo bi-mi-tz-vo-sav,  
vi-tzee-va-noo al ni-tee-las ya-da-yim.  
(Blessed are You Hashem (the Master) our G-d  
(Source of our strength) Ruler of the universe, Who  
has made us holy (special to Him) through His  
commandments, and commanded us concerning  
washing (our) hands.)
11. Dry your hands perfectly.
12. Do not speak until after eating bread, except to recite the blessing over the bread, or to answer again.

You should now be able to see that what the disciples were not doing was not a violation of the written Torah. There is nothing in the Torah that would command us to wash our hands in this fashion before we eat. Yet, to neglect to do so in the eyes of the Pharisees (and many Jewish sages and rabbi's ever since then) was tantamount to blasphemous. For example, Rabbi Jose says, "Whoever eats bread without washing of hands, is as if he lay with a whore: and, says R. Eleazer, whoever despiseth washing of hands, shall be rooted out of the world."<sup>20</sup> Christian Commentator John Gill (Matthew 15:2) gives us some eye-opening history as it pertains to this tradition being observed.

And to fright people into an observance of this tradition, they talk of Shibta, a sort of an evil spirit, that hurts such as eat without washing their hands: they say, he sits upon their hands, and upon their bread, and leaves something behind, which is very dangerous; and it is recorded, to the praise of R.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sota 4b

Akiba, that he chose rather to die, than to transgress this tradition; for being in prison, and in want of water, what little he had, he washed his hands with it, instead of drinking it. Eleazar ben Chanac was excommunicated for despising the tradition concerning washing of hands; and when he died, the Sanhedrim sent and put a great stone upon his coffin, to show, that he died in his excommunication, the Sanhedrin stoned his coffin.

We also see that Yeshua did not see it necessary to observe this tradition Himself by examining Luke 11:37-41. Yeshua was invited to dinner by a Pharisee, but when the Pharisee saw that Yeshua did not perform the ritual washing before dinner he marveled. Yeshua went on to explain that it was not needful to wash the outside of the cup in this manner. Yeshua directly violated the traditions of the elders. Yeshua did not believe in this aspect of the "oral Torah;" to Him the idea was nothing more than fiction.

Yeshua even went on to tell the Pharisees (Matthew 15:3-9) that they made void the commandments of God for the sake of keeping their tradition. He told them that this constituted vain worship. The word vain carries with it the meaning of something being "useless or worthless." Imagine someone thinking they are worshipping the Creator, but that worship being completely for naught.

With this background in mind we can see that when Yeshua was being scathed by the Pharisees or the Jewish leaders of His day for "violating the Torah," it was not the actual Torah that He was violating, but rather the "Torah" in the minds of the Pharisees; the traditions of the elders. This explains what a passage like John 5:18 actually means when it says that Yeshua broke the Sabbath. He broke it – *in the eyes of the Pharisees* that saw Him heal the cripple man and then tell this man to pick up his bedroll and walk. A similar situation takes place in Luke 13:10-17 where Yeshua heals a daughter of Abraham that had been disabled by a spirit for some eighteen years. Yeshua healed this woman on a Sabbath day and the leader of the synagogue responded to him that there are six days to work so she and anyone else can come and be healed on these six working days. Yeshua was showing in these two cases that it is lawful to do good (heal, bind, and mend) on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath was made to

bless man, and what better day to receive even a physical healing and be loosed from the bondage of a recurring sickness or incurable disease.

Many Judahites of that day had taken things entirely too far and people do the same thing today. I met a very nice Jewish man once whose wife would make sure to tape the little switch inside the refrigerator just before the Sabbath came about. Why? Well, when you open the refrigerator up, the light automatically comes on. Seeing that God commanded us to not kindle a fire on the Sabbath day (Exodus 35:3) she wanted to make sure that the refrigerator light did not come on. While it is not in the scope of this book or chapter, I can assure you that refrigerator lights were not in view when this law was given in Exodus, but this is where tradition has brought many people.

The account of the washing of the hands also answers another question for us. There are those who take the parallel account found in Mark 7:1-23 and say that Yeshua was teaching that all the unclean animals were now made clean. I cannot begin to even imagine such an interpretation, but there are ministers in the world today that will say such. *If they are correct, then Yeshua would have been a sinner and unable to be the Savior, for in this time frame (Mark 7) Yeshua was speaking under the Old Covenant and not the New Covenant.* Modern Christian theology (on this issue) teaches that the law (specifically the dietary law) was abolished in the New Covenant but certainly not in the Old. So this one point completely thwarts such an idea that Yeshua was permitting his followers to eat swine and the like. *What was he meaning then?*

We can know that Yeshua was speaking of food in the context of first century Hebraic faith. Unclean animals like pig, camel, and skunk, would not even enter into Yeshua's mind nor the minds of those listening to him. We can also learn by the context that Yeshua was talking about eating without ritually washing your hands (that which we have been speaking about). Yeshua was saying that eating food (clean animals) without ritually washing your hands (obeying the tradition of the elders) prior to eating does not defile a person. When this food enters into the stomach it goes through the digestive process keeping out that which the body doesn't need and protecting the nutrients. That which the body does not need is eliminated or goes into the draught (KJV), purging all meats. Yeshua wasn't saying

that all animals are clean and fit for consumption, but rather that the digestive system cleanses your body of anything that it does not need from the food you are eating; your digestive system purges all meats.

Yeshua never violated Yahweh's law. He always kept the Sabbath, as His custom was (Luke 4:16), and He always ate clean. However, Yeshua did violate the man-made laws of the Pharisees. He did not consider the so called "oral Torah" to have any lasting validity. These traditions of men could not condemn a person for it was not Almighty Yahweh that gave them. Understanding this background will help us understand other writings in the New Testament Epistles. There are some who feel that Apostle Paul contradicted the Torah in numerous places in his writings and thus liberated us from the bondage of the Torah. With this chapter fresh in our minds let us now venture into one particular portion of Paul's writings and see if we can correctly understand that which Paul originally intended.

## 6

## Let No Man Judge You

**H**ave you ever heard someone “rake” their fingernails across a chalkboard? To tell you the truth it really doesn’t bother me, but it must bother a large percentage of English speaking people because we have accepted the idiom in our language of “That’s like fingernails on a chalkboard!” This is what a person says when they hear something that they just cannot take any more of. It’s like hearing a sour note on the piano or the sound of a child who just will not stop crying while you’re standing in the long line at the grocery store.

There are some things that make me grit my teeth (I must confess) when I hear them being talked about in the “theological world.” One such passage that I just cannot stand to hear most preachers talk about is Colossians 2:16. Oh, it just makes me tremble. Don’t get me wrong, I do not start throwing sharp objects across the room, but I tend to put my face into my hands and then rub my hands into my hair in utter disgust. It never fails.

This just happened to me a few days ago. I listen to numerous religious sermons and podcasts, and this day I *made* myself listen to one that I knew was going to speak against keeping the law of Moses under the New Covenant. I knew that it was going to upset me and I’ll be quite honest with you, I was getting hot flashes when I was listening to it; my head even began to ache. It bothers me so much to hear Yahweh’s law mocked, and brought down so low like it is some kind of local ordinance book or outdated piece of literature. I believe that it hurts Yahweh the Father too, as well as His Son Yeshua the Messiah.

There were many things said during the broadcast that upset me, but I knew before my listening time was up I was going to hear it. I just knew it was coming. The writings of Paul were beginning to be breached and then, not to my surprise, Colossians 2:16 was brought into play. I want you to understand something. I *love* Colossians

2:16. I love the entire book of Colossians. It is “music to my ears.” What I do not like to hear is this particular passage being taken out of its original context and setting and manipulated to say something that Paul never intended it to mean when he penned it approximately 2,000 years ago.

I want to briefly hearken back to our last chapter concerning the traditions of the elders. You must understand that Paul was very aware of such tradition. He was very aware of the so called “oral Torah” that the Pharisees believed God gave to Moses on an oral only basis. Paul spoke of being schooled in the traditions of his people in Galatians 1:13-14.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.<sup>21</sup> (KJV)

When Paul was persecuting the Messianic believers he was also involved in the religion of Judaism, which (if you remember) was based primarily not on the Torah, but upon the traditions of the elders, i.e. the “oral Torah.” Paul states in these verses that he was above many in the area of obeying tradition as he speaks of being exceedingly zealous for such tradition. We must realize that Paul was a Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-6) before becoming a follower of the

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<sup>21</sup> *Abbot's Commentary on the NT* – “Ga 1:14. *And profited in the Jews' religion*; went forward ardently and zealously in it.--*The traditions of my fathers*. There was a large body of doctrines and precepts held as of divine authority by the Jews, which had come down from the fathers by tradition,--not being recorded in the word of God. Our Savior often alluded to these traditions in his conversations with the Pharisees.”

*Barnes' Notes on the NT* – “*Of the traditions of my fathers*. Of the traditions of the Jews. Cmt. on Mt 15:2. A large part of the doctrines of the Pharisees depended on mere tradition; and Paul doubtless made this a special matter of study, and was particularly tenacious in regard to it. It was to be learned, from the very nature of it, only by *oral* teaching, as there is no evidence that it was then recorded. Subsequently these traditions were recorded in the *Mishna*, and are found in the Jewish writings. But in the time of Paul they were to be learned as they were handed down from one to another; and hence the utmost diligence was requisite to obtain a knowledge of them.”

*John Wesley's Notes on the Bible* – “Verse 14. Being zealous of the unwritten traditions - Over and above those written in the law.”

Messiah. He was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers as he sat at the feet of one, Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:1-3). Paul knew of the oral tradition that had been handed down, and as a good Pharisee he would have abided by the traditions of the elders in a strict fashion. All of the traditions, from the washing of the hands, to the numerous laws of the Sabbath day, to how to tie the tassels.<sup>22</sup> Paul would have been quite aware of all of these things. Why is it that I labor to bring this up in relation to Colossians 2:16? It should become apparent to you as we go through the text.

- Colossians 2:8 – “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” (KJV)

We could actually venture all the way back to Colossians 1 here, but I do want to keep some kind of limited focus on chapter two, so we will begin here. The first point to recognize in this verse is that Paul is warning the Colossian brethren of those who would seek to *spoil* them, meaning to seduce or lead them away. The English Standard Version of the Bible translates this word nicely when it states, “See to it that no one takes you captive.” How would these “any men” take the Colossians captive? There isn’t a need for us to wonder much because the text mentions four ways that are very intertwined in the process whereby men take captive those who have placed their trust and hope in the Messiah. The first way mentioned is through philosophy. I believe that Henry Joseph Thayer gives us a very good definition of what is meant by this word *philosophy*.

Once in the N.T. of the theology, or rather theosophy, of certain Jewish-Christian ascetics, which busied itself with refined and speculative inquiries into the nature and classes of angels, into the ritual of the Mosaic law and the regulations of Jewish tradition respecting practical life...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Numbers 15:37-14; Deuteronomy 22:12; there is no law in the Torah that requires the tassels to be tied in a certain manner. Tradition teaches that there is a particular way the tassels *must* be tied.

<sup>23</sup> *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, 1977. #5385, page 655.

Mr. Thayer points this out to us in his commentary: certain people were leading away the Colossian Christians by imposing upon them their own ideas and idiosyncrasies about various Biblical practices. This ties in very well to what we have already been concerning ourselves with – traditions that are not directly found in the Law of God itself. When one reads the entirety of verse 8 in Colossians 2 we see this to be exactly what was happening, for the text mentions vain deceit, traditions of men and rudiments of the world. *This is the key.* The men leading the people astray were not leading them astray by teaching them the Torah. They weren't telling them what the law of Moses said and by doing so damaging their life in the Messiah. These men were robbing them of their life in Messiah by imposing upon them extra-biblical practices; practices that were not in line with the Messiah; practices that drew one away from the Messiah.

- Colossians 2:9-13 – “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” (KJV)

This is why Paul seeks to go into the completeness of their forgiveness in Messiah rather than various human, man-made regulations. The Colossians found their full and total forgiveness in the Messiah. The men of verse 8 were not teaching “after Messiah.” The Colossian Christians were complete in the Messiah (vs. 10) and should keep in remembrance that He was the head of every rule and authority (vs. 10). It was in the Messiah that they had obtained the circumcision made without hands, and they were buried with the Messiah in water immersion (vss. 11-12). Then in verse thirteen Paul shows that although these Colossians were dead in their sins, Yeshua the Messiah made them alive by forgiving them of all their trespasses (sins). Paul is focusing on how their sins were forgiven. A man's sins

are not forgiven by submitting to various non-biblical philosophies and traditions of human concoction. A man is forgiven by placing his faith in the finished work of Yahweh's Messiah, Yeshua.

- Colossians 2:14 – “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

Here is where many people make a strong attempt to point out that the law has been nailed to the cross of Christ. I've actually heard preachers say this very thing: “The Bible says the law has been nailed to the cross and has been abolished in Christ.” I'm going to do my best to show you why this verse is not saying that at all. This was not even in the mind of Paul as he penned these words in verse 14.

Verse 14 has to be read first and foremost within the contextual frame of verse 13. The last phrase in verse 13 states that God has, “forgiven you of all your trespasses,” and then verse 14 begins by saying, “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us.” Putting the two together causes us to see that the way in which God forgave us of our trespasses (sins) is by blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us and contrary to us. So the blotting out of this “handwriting” is pertinent to explaining the removal of sin in the life of the Colossians, and in the life of a believer today. So, what is this “handwriting?” The Greek word for handwriting here is *cheirographon*, meaning a written agreement or certificate of debt.<sup>24</sup> This is why many Bibles today translate the phrase as pertaining to the blotting out of a debt that is owed.

- He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations – HCSB
- Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances – ASV
- He cancelled the written bond of our sins – Lamsa
- By canceling the record of debt – ESV
- Cancelled the record of debt – RBV
- He cancelled the unfavorable record of debts – TEV
- Having cancelled out the certificate of debt – NASB
- God wiped out the charges that were against us for disobeying the Law of Moses. – CE

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<sup>24</sup> Moulton – Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 1929, pg. 687.

*The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* has this to add concerning this particular Greek word:

*Cheirographon*

1. A document is written in one's own hand as a proof of obligation, e.g., a note of indebtedness.
2. The meaning in Col. 2:14, then, is a "promissory note." God cancels the bond that lies to our charge. This bond is not a compact with the devil... It is the debt that we have incurred with God. The forgiveness of sins (v. 13) through identification with Christ in his vicarious death and resurrection means that this note is cancelled; God has set it aside and nailed it to the cross.<sup>25</sup>

Also consider this excerpt from the book entitled *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, concerning this term in ancient literature.

Most commentators interpret the cheirographon either as the "certificate of indebtedness" resulting from our transgressions or a "book containing the record of sin" used for the condemnation of mankind. Both renderings, which are substantially similar, can be supported from Rabbinic literature and apocalyptic literature. "In Judaism," as stated by E. Lohse, "the relationship between man and God was often described as that between a debtor and his creditor." For example a Rabbi said: "When a man sins, God writes down the debt of death. If the man repents, the debt is cancelled (i.e. declared valid)." {Tanhuma Midrash 140b; cf. SB III, p. 628} In the Apocalypse of Elijah is found the description of an angel holding a book, explicitly called a cheirographon, in which the sins of the seer are recorded. On the basis of these and similar examples, it is quite obvious that the cheirographon is either a

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<sup>25</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in One Volume, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985, page 1309.

“certificate of sin indebtedness” or the “record-book of sins” but not the law of Moses, since the latter, as is wisely pointed out by Weiss, “is not a book of records.”<sup>26</sup>

What is taking place in Colossians 2:13-14 is that God has forgiven the Colossian believers of their sins by erasing the debt that they had incurred decreeing<sup>27</sup> them to be worthy of death. God took this out of the way, nailing it to the cross of Christ. Our Messiah, Yeshua, paid the full penalty for sin when He hung upon the tree at Calvary, cursed of God, with the sins of the people of God (Matthew 1:21) laid upon Him (Isaiah 53:6). The notion that what is being blotted out is the Law of Moses is completely out of context and only comes about through a pre-conceived bias against the law of Yahweh in the first place.

- Colossians 2:15 – “*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*” (KJV)

This passage is simply stating that Yahweh, through the death of His Son, made a mockery of all earthly tyrants and authorities, openly showing them His authority and power by punishing sin and at the same time resurrecting His Son to eternal life. This goes right along with the *forgiveness of sins motif* that Paul has discussed since verse 9.

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<sup>26</sup> *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pg. 349-350. The comment made by Dr. Bacchiocchi to Weiss is a comment from Harold Weiss’ “The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians” *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 34 (1972), pg. 294-295. It states the following: “It would seem to me that indeed cheirographon is to be interpreted in terms of the context provided by the Apocalypse of Elijah. In it a book containing a record of sin is used for the condemnation of mankind. This would mean that it is not correct to identify the cheirographon with the law of Moses, which is not a book of records.”

<sup>27</sup> It is also interesting to look at the Greek term *dogma* translated as “ordinances” in Colossians 2:14. This word is used in the LXX in Daniel 3:8, 12 to refer to the *dogma* of Nebuchadnezzar concerning the bowing down to the golden image. It is also used to refer to the *dogma* of Darius (Daniel 2:9) which stated that no one was to pray to any mighty one or man for thirty days, save himself. What this shows is that the word *dogma* does not always refer to the commandments of Yahweh.

- Colossians 2:16-17 – “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.” (KJV)

These verses bring us back full circle to verse 8. Here in this text, Paul is not condemning anyone for observing the sacred days of Yahweh commanded in Torah. Paul is admonishing the Colossians to not let any man (the men of verse 8) judge them in their meat and drink (eating and drinking), or in their sharing in (regard to) the holydays, new moons, or Sabbaths. How would others judge them in regards to these things? How about by philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, and rudiments of the world? We have seen how the “tradition of the elders” was in practice during the lifetime of Yeshua, and how that Paul was a practicing Pharisee, observing this tradition before coming to the Messiah. Paul is here warning the Colossian Christians about those who would seek to impose their non-biblical practices upon their sharing in the holy times of Yahweh. This is also seen in the verses following the text.

- Colossians 2:18 – “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (KJV)
- Colossians 2:20-22 – “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?” (KJV)

Do you see how Paul continues on in the chapter mentioning again and again the ways of man and not the ways of the Torah of Moses? Paul does not hesitate for one second to warn the Colossians of how damaging it will be for them to let others rob them of the purity of the Torah and the awesomeness of seeing the Messiah in the holydays, by allowing these others to come in and impose upon them a man-made way of observing these set apart times.

I should also point out that Paul makes it clear in verse 17 that these days *are* shadows of things *to come*. Focus on the words “are”

and "to come." Paul does not say that these celebrations *were* shadows of things that have *already come*, but he rather uses terminology that reveals a continuation of the days listed rather than a termination.

Sometimes we tend to think that if something is a shadow it must be a "bad" thing, but in Hebrew thought a shadow is a precious replica of an original.<sup>28</sup> We may liken it to looking at pictures of your family while on a trip. I love to be with my wife and children, but if I am away ministering I also love to take a picture, or might I say a "shadow," out of my wallet and look at my family.

It is also interesting to note briefly that in a *Kingdom* prophecy (Isaiah 66:22-23) we see worship on the Sabbaths and New Moons taking place. Isaiah prophesies about the Kingdom, and even in the Kingdom (new heavens and new earth) their will be such worship. It is thus evident that these days have not been abolished for the Messianic Kingdom of Heaven.

I have tried to deal with some of the highlights of this text in this chapter. I have read some very excellent material on this verse (Colossians 2:16) elsewhere and I want to encourage you to continue to study this text of Scripture from the perspective of others. I believe I have done justice with the text in its historical, contextual, and linguistic setting. You must ask yourself the question: is there really any reason for me to hold to the view that the passage does away with the Law?

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<sup>28</sup> Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 8:5, and Hebrews 9:23-24 teach that the earthly tabernacle was a copy or shadow of the heavenly tabernacle. The Exodus text shows that the earthly tabernacle was even a shadow during the days of Moses. Did this mean that the earthly tabernacle was of no use or unimportant to those Israelites? Of course not. Also think about this. The festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths have *always* been shadows of things to come. They were shadows during the Old Covenant, but Israel kept them and kept them with all their heart because they viewed shadows and copies as things special, representing things of great value. Imagine an Israelite walking up to Moses and saying, "I don't think we need to keep the Passover. It's *just* a shadow of something to come."



# 7

## Peter's Vision on the Roof

Sometimes you can guess what people are going to say before they ever say it. I've been married now for almost fourteen years and it is truly amazing to actually be able to know what my wife is thinking at times. She can do the same with me. There have been times when we were together quietly and then at the spur of the moment we both spoke at the exact same time and said the exact same thing. I guess this just comes with being around your spouse and getting to know them more and more as the years progress.

I believe that I have gotten to know people, to some degree, when it comes to certain areas of the Bible. I witness to people frequently about Biblical faith, and about following the teachings of Scripture. Sometimes there are subjects that are breached and I'll be able to think of what the person is about to say just from experience. It appears to me that people have been trained to give certain responses to certain questions without ever having thought critically about the response they are giving. They just rattle off a patterned answer and they've never really taken the time to examine their answer to see if it is one based upon a systematic or critical study of various pertinent texts in the Holy Scriptures. Let me explain.

I keep the Biblical dietary laws. Does that sound strange to you? For most people it does. When I tell someone that I follow the laws of Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14 they begin to look at me like I'm from the Stone Age. Some do not, but most do. One common response I get from people is, "Oh, you keep the Jewish law?" Or sometimes, "Are you Jewish?" I have to constantly answer these type questions by explaining to people that the laws in Scripture are Yahweh's Law. Yes, He gave His law to the people of Israel, but the law is His law. Israel was to keep His law so that many of the surrounding nations would observe how wise and understanding of a people Israel was. The response of the nations would be something like this: "This nation is a wise and understanding people. What nation has a god so near to them as Yahweh is to His people? What

nation has such a great set of righteous statutes and ordinances as the people of Israel?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-7)

I think that most people when asking someone like a Preacher, Elder, or Pastor about the issue of the dietary laws get a common response. I honestly do not believe that much time and effort has went into this response, but it sounds good on the surface and it allows folks to have something to say in objection to myself (or others) when the subject of the dietary law is brought up for discussion. "What about Peter on the rooftop?" is what I hear just about every time I talk to someone about Leviticus chapter 11. This question stems from Acts chapter 10, but it is odd that most of the people who give this objection do not know where the objection stems from. This is why I think that they are repeating something that they have heard in a quick, concise manner. They are not asking because they have studied the text in question concerning the Apostle Peter, but only because they've heard someone who is *supposed* to have greater Biblical knowledge, mention the objection in passing.

I want to be careful here. I'm not trying to be rude or degrading. I want you to understand that there was a time in my personal life when I didn't even know Peter ever went up on top of a house and had a vision. I knew (at that time) about Acts chapter 10 in about the same manner that I knew how to speak Chinese. I am merely pointing out something that *we all* need to constantly examine in ourselves. When we object to what someone is telling us or trying to teach us, are we objecting because we have truly studied what the Bible has to say on the topic, or are we objecting because we just don't want to hear what the other person has to say?

I have found that you can spend days, weeks, months and years studying on a topic and then make an honest attempt to show someone else what you have learned and it will blow up in your face. Why do I say this? It is because people are prone to answering a matter before they *hear* that matter. Not only that, they are subject to answering a matter before they *study* the matter out. I speak of myself here too because I almost did this just the other day, but I caught myself. I'm not sure if what I was being told was true, but someone was telling me something they believed about a certain text of Scripture, and I almost immediately contradicted them, but I had to back up for a second. I quickly thought to myself, "Matthew, have you really studied that text out enough to make such a quick,

negative response?" My answer was *no* so I held my peace. It did feel good, and I am thankful to the Father in heaven for His grace upon my life that enables me to grow in knowledge in this area. It makes so much more sense to wait until you have studied to respond.

Well, what about Peter's vision in Acts 10? People usually say something like this: "Peter had a vision in Acts 10 where God told him that he didn't have to keep the dietary laws anymore." That's the most common understanding of the vision today, but I want to tell you that I do not believe it is the correct view. I hope that by the end of this chapter you will understand why I believe such.

I would like to begin with a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment (Acts 10:1). The Bible tells us (Acts 10:2) that he was a devout man and that he feared God along with his entire house. This included giving much alms to the people of Judah and constant prayer to Yahweh God. Cornelius was not from the House of Judah, thus you could say that he wasn't Jewish (a Judahite) – that's the way most people would say it today. The understanding is that he wasn't a descendant from the tribes in the House of Judah, which were predominantly Judah and Benjamin, the two southern tribes in the nation of Israel. This, as we see here, did not mean that Cornelius was a rebel towards God. Not at all; he was a pious man, very reverent and dutiful in the things that he knew to do as a God-fearer.

The word *devout* in the text of Acts 10:2 carries with it the meaning of being dutiful in whatever area you are charged with. The same word is used a bit further down in Acts 10:7 where it speaks of a devout soldier. This does not necessarily mean that the soldier was a servant of Yahweh (a God-fearer like Cornelius), although he may have been. It probably means he was a man who did what he was commissioned to do as a soldier. We must note however that the word is used of Ananias in Acts 22:12 in reference to following the law of Moses and there are also some translations that translate the word as *godly* in Second Peter 2:9. I believe, based upon the statements in Acts 10:2 that Cornelius was dutiful in reference to his following of the God of Israel. He did what he knew to do and he did it carefully, wanting to please God in whatever way possible. From this it follows that Cornelius was not a heathen idol worshiper or someone who went about stealing, murdering, pillaging, etc.

We read in Acts 10:3-8 that Cornelius had a vision in which an angel from Yahweh spoke to him. The angel explained to Cornelius that his prayers and his charitable deeds had come up before Yahweh as a memorial offering. This is encouraging to me. We must always remember that when we serve, worship, and pray to the Mighty One of the heavens and the earth in the way He has prescribed, it is not in vain. He sees our every move and He takes all righteous deeds into account. Psalm 34:15 tells us that Yahweh's eyes are upon those who are righteous, and His ear is open to their cry.

This angel then tells Cornelius to send men to the city of Joppa and call for a man named Simon Peter. Cornelius, just after the angel left him, immediately sent men to Joppa to contact this man named Peter. The very next day (Acts 10:9-16) Peter went up to the house top where he was staying, to pray around midday. He was not aware that men had been sent to him at this time, but the men were traveling towards Joppa and nearing the city. You may be thinking now that up on a roof is not the best place for praying, and you would be right if you are thinking in terms of the rooftops of our day and time. In the time in which Peter lived (and before in Biblical history) many people had flat roofs. Yahweh even gave a commandment in the law that when you built a new house to make sure and place fencing around the roof of the house so that you will not be responsible if someone falls off the top of your house (Deuteronomy 22:8). Many roofs in the land of Israel today are flat roofs on which people can eat, pray, fellowship, etc.<sup>29</sup>

While up on top of the house, Peter became hungry but fell into a visionary state while those down inside of the house were preparing food. While Peter was in this state he saw the heavens open up, and a sheet descend from heaven that was knit at its four corners. Inside of this sheet were all kinds of animals; four footed beasts, reptiles of the earth, and birds of the sky. While Peter looked at what was inside of the sheet he heard a voice call out to him saying, "Arise Peter, kill and

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<sup>29</sup> Yeshua also makes reference to this in the Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24. He states (Matthew 24:17) that at the time of the abomination of desolation any man on his housetop must not come down to get things out of his house, but must rather flee quickly into the wilderness because of the great tribulation that is coming upon the earth. What would the man be doing on his housetop? Let me assure you that Yeshua wasn't talking about the man putting new shingles on his roof. He was speaking of a common place that people went to spend time in the land of Jerusalem, Israel as well as the surrounding areas.

eat!" Peter responded by saying, "No Lord! I have never eaten anything common or unclean!" The voice then called out to Peter again and said this time, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." The Bible tells us that this happened three times total and then the sheet was taken back up from where it came.

This is where people say to me, "See Matthew! It is so plain that God has cleansed things like pork, shrimp, and catfish." I maintain that it is not so plain at all.

For starters, I want you to recognize that this is a *vision* that Peter is having. Oftentimes in Scripture we see people having a vision or dream in which there are characters or objects seen that are meant to stand or represent something different in reality. Remember the dream that Pharaoh had, but could not get any of his wise men to interpret? He had dreamed of seven scrawny cows that ate seven plump, fat cows and he had also dreamed of seven scrawny stalks of grain that devoured seven plentiful stalks of grain (Genesis 41). What was the meaning of this dream? Was it to literally take place? Not at all; the text rather tells us that the seven scrawny cows and stalks *represented* seven years of famine and the healthy cows and stalks *represented* seven years of plenty. There would be seven years of plenty in Egypt, but the seven years of famine would come after, and devour everything that had been plentiful.

Here's another one you're probably familiar with. When Joseph was young and dwelt in his father's house he dreamed that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him (Genesis 37:5-11). This was looked upon by his father as meaning not the literal sun, moon, and stars, but rather that Joseph's father, mother, and eleven brothers would bow down to Joseph in obeisance. The point in all of this is that dreams and visions can stand for something different in reality.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, let's carefully notice Peter's response to the voice that told him to kill and eat. Peter said that he had *never* eaten anything common or unclean. Please think back with me to chapter five of this book where I briefly mentioned a text in Mark 7 that some people, including some theologians, have used to say that Yeshua was

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel 7 records visions that Daniel had while lying in his bed. The visions included four beasts which are described as a lion, bear, leopard, and then one which was not able to be described by a known animal. When studying the interpretation or understanding of these beasts we see that they represented four kingdoms or kings that would arise out of certain areas of the earth. (Daniel 7:15-27).

declaring all animals to be clean for consumption. Surely Peter was aware of Yeshua's encounter with the Pharisees (recorded also in Matthew 15). Did Peter understand Yeshua to mean that it was now permissible to eat unclean animals? Not according to Acts 10:14. Peter walked with the Master; he learned directly from the voice of Yeshua. Evidently, Yeshua never taught Peter that it was permissible to violate the laws of diet found in the Torah.

To take this matter a step further we must note that Acts 10 is probably quite a while after the ascension of Yeshua into heaven. I don't know exactly the time span in between the ascension of the Messiah and the vision of Peter, but assuredly some time had to elapse between the two. Peter had still not *in all this time* eaten anything common or unclean. He did not believe the law was abolished at the cross as so many teach today.

Thirdly, notice what the voice spoke to Peter the second time (Acts 10:15). The text reads, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." The voice does not speak the word *unclean* here, as Peter did in Acts 10:14; the voice only speaks the word *common*. This is significant because two different words came out of Peter's mouth before: common *and* unclean. The word unclean refers to any of those animals listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 that are said by Yahweh through Moses to be unclean to eat. The word common carries with it another meaning. Greek lexicons define it as "common, ceremonially profane, ordinary, and unhallowed." Something that is common can be something unclean, but it doesn't have to be. A piece of clean meat can become common as well.

The mindset of Peter was that he hadn't even eaten anything that was common. He hadn't to his knowledge eaten any clean meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol or come into contact with a ritually unclean person (like a leper). He hadn't eaten any clean meat that may have become common by contact with unclean meat. What the voice was telling Peter was this, "What God has declared to be ritually clean, do not call common." The voice was not saying that God was declaring something unclean to now be clean. I should note here that the meaning of the phrase, "What God has made clean you must not call common" in Acts 10:14 does not carry with it the meaning (as stated in the NASB) "*no longer* consider it unholy." The word or the idea for inserting the word *longer* into the text is missing. This quaintly insinuates that God is changing His mind in regards to

His law. That is not the intention of the text at all. The voice has Yahweh giving a statement of fact. "Peter," God says, "What I pronounce to be clean, do not call common." Peter saw in the sheet all manner of animals, both clean and unclean. The vision was that those clean animals in the sheet were not to be considered common even though they were in the presence of the unclean animals.

Hopefully you have seen thus far that there is a lot to be considered in this text that usually goes completely unnoticed. This is because people usually just quote one verse in Acts 10 and think that this gives them "freedom" to go have a ham sandwich, pork chops, or shrimp scampi. This being said, there is still a lot more to consider.

Let's deal with Acts 10:17. This verse tells us what happened with Peter after he had the vision. It tells us that Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen should mean. How is it that Peter, the one having the vision, was *deeply* perplexed by the vision, yet people living today seem to be able to immediately pronounce with certainty that God is telling Peter to violate the Torah? Do you know why Peter was perplexed? The obvious reason is that he knew God *wasn't* telling him to break His Torah. Peter knew that all of Yahweh's commandments are sure and stand fast forever and ever (Psalm 111:7-8). Peter was contemplating on what the meaning of the vision was. This verse (17) then tells us that as Peter thought about the vision, the men that Cornelius had sent previously were out standing by the gate. Talk about Yahweh at work! The account continues (Acts 10:18-27) by telling us that as Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit spoke to him and said, "Three men are looking for you." Do you remember how many times the vision given to Peter took place? *Three* times (Acts 10:16). The Spirit then tells Peter to go downstairs and accompany the men with no doubts at all for I have sent them. Yahweh was involved in all of this, as you well know.

When Peter approaches these men he asks them why they have come, and why do they want to speak to him. The men respond by telling Peter that Cornelius had been directed by a holy angel to call Peter to his house and listen to the message Peter had for him. I have to point out here that the men talking to Peter speak well of Cornelius. I know that we have already seen this back in verse 2, but here it is said that Cornelius is upright and has a good reputation

among the whole Judahite nation. Synonyms for the word upright are just and righteous. The word is used elsewhere in the book of Acts to speak of an action being right in the sight of God (Acts 4:19) and of the resurrection of those who are righteous (Acts 24:15). We are talking about a non-Judahite man who has a good reputation, that is, a good name among the entire nation of Judah.

The next day Peter got up and (with some brothers) went from Joppa to journey to Cornelius' house. The following day Peter entered Caesarea where Cornelius lived. Cornelius was expecting Peter to come all along, so he had called together some of his close relatives and his friends. Peter finally entered the house and Cornelius fell down at his feet and began to worship Peter. Evidently the worship Cornelius was attempting to give Peter was inappropriate for Peter exclaims to him that he is just a man like Cornelius. Peter then began to converse with Cornelius and others.

We then come to a very pertinent verse in the chapter, verse 28. In this verse Peter explains to those in the house that they all know how it is an unlawful or forbidden thing for a man that is a Judahite to keep company with a foreigner or one of another nation, but God had showed Peter that he should call no man common or unclean. Here we have the understanding of the vision given by Peter himself. Peter, through all of this, finally realized what was going on. The vision wasn't about food, it was about Cornelius, the non-Judahite. Peter was not to call Cornelius, or the other men like Cornelius, common or unclean, but wait just one second. We must not overlook Peter's first statement. I remember explaining this entire text to someone years ago and their response to verse 28 was this: "Okay, Peter's vision may not have been about food, but God was telling Peter to violate His law wasn't He?" Why such a comment? It is because of the comment of Peter in the first portion of verse 28. Reading from the KJV we see this: "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..." So was God telling Peter to break *this* law now? Was it unlawful according to Yahweh before, but now permissible? Did God change His mind? What we should do is examine the Torah to see if it truly was unlawful for a Judahite or Israelite to keep company or visit one of another nation. What we find in the Torah is something entirely different from what we seemingly find Peter saying in verse 28. Allow me to give a few

examples. In Exodus 18:12 we find that Jethro, Moses' father in law, was permitted to bring a burnt offering and sacrifices to Yahweh God and then eat a meal in the presence of Yahweh with Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel.<sup>31</sup> Jethro was a *Midianite*, a descendant of Abraham through one of Abraham's wives named Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). Jethro was not an Israelite, yet Moses and Aaron were keeping company with one of another nation.

Let me also mention Exodus 22:21 which states, "You must not exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." Couple this with Leviticus 19:33-34 which says, "When a foreigner lives with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You must regard the foreigner who lives with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God." We can know that Yahweh was talking about non-Israelites here because of the opposite example that He gives to Israel. He tells them that *they* were *foreigners* in the land of *Egypt*, meaning that they were not Egyptians. So with this in mind they should treat the foreigners (non-Israelites) living in their land in a courteous manner.

With all of this in mind what do we make of Peter's statement in Acts 10:28? Hopefully this will be less than difficult for you to see with the background of the last two chapters in mind. When Peter said that it was an *unlawful* thing for him to associate with one of another nation, he was speaking of the cultural mandate of the people of Judah overall. The mindset of the Judahite people at that time was to regard certain people as ritually unclean, thus common, and interacting with such people would render those in Judah as ceremonially unclean.

We see something similar taking place in Luke 15:1-2 where Yeshua was teaching tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees and the scribes were complaining about this and probably shouting, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!" Such a proclamation was surely aimed at Yeshua to make Him look like He was a sinner. Yeshua instead recognized that lost people need to be found, and sick people need to be healed. Consider Matthew 9:10-11. Yeshua had tax

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<sup>31</sup> The eating of the meal mentioned in Exodus 18:12 implies that the sacrifices Jethro brought were probably peace offerings, sometimes called fellowship offerings. The peace offering is described in Leviticus 3 and is the only sacrifice that the worshiper is allowed to share in eating with the Priests and Yahweh Himself.

collectors and sinners "over for dinner" with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees saw occurrences like this and asked Yeshua's disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The point is that the mindset of the Judahite people (generally speaking) was that they were not to associate with non-Judahite people as well as "steer clear" of people like tax collectors, prostitutes, and thus sinners. We even see Yeshua ministering to the Samaritans during His lifetime. This would come as quite a shock to the Judahites living during that time. When Yeshua asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water in John 4, her response was, "How is it that you, a Judahite, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan?" Why would the woman speak to Yeshua like this? The Samaritans were looked down upon by the Judahites because they were descendants of the Israelites that had intermarried with the Assyrians, a non-Israelite people. When the northern tribes of Israel were taken away captive in the land of Assyria, many Assyrians migrated to the northern portion of the land of Israel. Because of the mixture of Israelites and Assyrians in both locations, marriages eventually took place between the two nations of people. There existed animosity between the Samaritans and the Judahites specifically because the Samaritans had built their own temple upon the mountain called *Mount Gerizim*. Samaritans would cite Deuteronomy 11:29 and 27:12 in support of their efforts. We see that the Judahite people of Yeshua's day looked down upon the Samaritans not only from John 4 but also from passages like John 8:48. Here the Judahite men Yeshua was rebuking commented to Him that He was a Samaritan and was demon possessed. Not a compliment in their eyes to say the least. We do see that Yeshua ministered to the Samaritans. John 4:39-40 tells us that many Samaritans began to believe on Yeshua because of the saying of the "woman at the well." Yeshua then stayed with them for two days because of their asking Him to.

My point in mentioning all of this is that there were groups of people in the first century A.D. that were looked upon as being common or unclean by the Judahites. It was considered as being "unlawful" to associate with such people. Unlawful here though does not carry with it the meaning of "against the law of Yahweh," but rather against the traditions of the elders. "But," one might ask, "didn't Cornelius have a good reputation among the entire nation of Judah?" The answer is yes, but the next answer is this: we must

understand that Cornelius was *uncircumcised*. Cornelius had not adhered to the law of circumcision; much less to all the trappings that men in first century Judaism had placed upon the law of circumcision. Thus, although Cornelius was an upright man, one who feared the God of Israel, he was an uncircumcised non-Judahite. We see this most clearly in Acts 11:1-3 where Peter is relating to those in Jerusalem about his encounter with Cornelius. Their immediate response was that of argumentation. They chastised Peter for visiting uncircumcised men and eating with them. Did this mean that it was truly unlawful for a man like Peter to associate with an uncircumcised man like Cornelius? I do not believe so. What those first century Judahites in Jerusalem were forgetting was the history of their father Abraham. I will not take much space for now to comment on how Abram was declared to be righteous, but I will say that his declaration of righteousness was *prior* to his circumcision. Abram was not circumcised when Yahweh declared him to be righteous (Genesis 15:1-6; 17:1-14). I believe that the men of Judah (including Peter) were not fully remembering this vital part of the Torah at this time in history. Thus it was looked upon in their culture as being unlawful for a Judahite person to associate with an uncircumcised person, even if he was a God-fearer and an upright man in the other areas of Torah observance.

What we see in Peter's vision is Yahweh showing Peter that Cornelius could obtain salvation in the Messiah in his uncircumcision. Peter could associate with Cornelius and bring the message of salvation to him without doing anything against the written Torah of Moses. This is the true meaning of the chapter contrary to the popular opinion that it is placed in Acts to teach people that we can now, under the New Covenant, eat anything that doesn't eat us first. You might want to think about all of this the next time you are about to eat those pork chops, shrimp, or lobster.



## 8

## The Jerusalem Council

As a child I loved when the school year came around. Most children do for at least the first few weeks of each new school year. New clothes, new school supplies, a new teacher, and seeing friends you had not seen all summer.

I also remember the part of school that seemed very burdensome to me, the work. After a few weeks or months of school it began to dawn on me why I did not place going to school on the top of my "best things to do" list. I know, I know, it is wonderful to learn how to do things like add and subtract, but I'm just being honest. I'm speaking the truth that is in everyone's mind that has ever went to school.

At school I learned a great deal. My favorite subject was History. Historical figures and settings were very interesting to me. It fascinated me to think about how these people, though dead and gone now, actually did live lives just as me. They accomplished great feats, invented awesome inventions, and left legacies that I learned about as a child, sitting in a school room. Each year as I progressed from grade to grade I would learn more and more about facts in History. I also learned a lot in the area of Arithmetic, which was *not* one of my most favorite areas of learning. One of the funniest memories I have of school was trying to learn something called postulates and theorems. Please do not ask me what these are and how to come up with them in a math problem; I do not remember and probably *could not* remember to save my life. My teacher in this subject (and she was about as good as they come) tried and tried to explain to me how to work out these problems. I remember sitting there listening diligently for days and weeks until finally, I got around to understanding how to work out these seemingly "impossible to work out" problems.

What helped me overcome my learning problem with the postulates was addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. I

eventually realized that if I had these basics down, and applied these basics accordingly, a great deal of my frustration would vanish. Imagine trying to do such problems without knowing the basics. Before I learned about theorems I had to learn how to add and subtract. I am very appreciative towards the people who built my school curriculum. I am thankful they didn't start me out by trying to cram everything on my plate at one time. I am glad that I learned how to write my name before writing essays and how to add two and two before dividing four and five digit numbers. As with many things in life I learned a little at a time, beginning with the basics, and then growing into more and more knowledge. I'm learning this more and more in my current life as a Father.

I am the Father of five wonderful children, and what I am talking about is unfolding right in front of my eyes. My latest child began to talk between the ages of 1 and 2. My wife and I were constantly speaking very small words to him. We would show him a cup and then ask him to say "cup." He started out saying something that didn't sound much like "cup" but after a while he got the hang of it. He says it quite well now, but I don't get upset with David if he doesn't pronounce words properly, or if he can't say the word "flabbergasted." This is because he is an infant, not quite three. He has to be taught; he doesn't already know how to talk. The same thing goes for when he could only crawl. I did not spank him for not walking, that is something he had to learn over a period of time. What seems like simple principles here in the natural become rather complicated in most individual minds when it comes to Biblical, spiritual matters. We have a tendency to want to cram the entire Bible down someone's "throat" even though they've only been familiar with Scripture for a week or so.

I must admit, I fall short in this area. I speak to individuals about the Torah, and in doing so a lot of Hebrew words tend to come out of my mouth. I'm using words like *Torah*, *mitzvot*, and *vayikra*<sup>32</sup> and the person I'm talking to is looking at me like I'm from a very distant planet. I've forgotten here that what is familiar to me, and easy for me to grasp, is brand new to them. What do I need to do? Well, it is

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<sup>32</sup> I've explained the meaning of the word Torah previously (teachings, instructions, laws) but the word *mitzvot* is the common Hebrew word for commandments, and the word *vayikra* literally means "to call or summon" and is the Hebrew name for the book of Leviticus.

easier said than done, but I have to start with the basics, speaking of the "two plus two" things in Scripture before I try to shove a Hebrew lesson into their life. You know what happens frequently along with this? Those that are quick to place the entire "kit and caboodle" upon people at one time often place their "take" on what they are explaining. They are quick to mix into the truth certain traditions or heart felt "stuff" in their explanations. I'm learning more and more not to do this or at least explain to others that what I'm about to say is a personal conviction. I feel like I have grown tremendously in this area and I feel quite liberated in not adding to or taking away from the Torah (Deuteronomy 4:2). Just letting Yahweh speak is much safer than me trying to add or subtract from what He has spoken.

I believe that what I have explained is what took place in Acts 15. Here we have a chapter in Acts that many people have used to abolish the Torah. "What do you think about Acts 15?" is a question I've heard dozens of times in explaining the relevance of the law to the New Covenant believer. You may be asking that same question currently as this whole subject may be completely new to you. Let me do my best to explain the chapter in simplified terms. I'll try to give you the "two plus two" version. We begin our study in Acts 15:1 where we see the subject immediately introduced. The text tells us that there were some men who came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers. The men doing the teaching here are identified in verse 5 as *believing* Pharisees. This means that they were of the party of the Pharisees, but they had accepted (thus believed in) Yeshua as the Messiah, Son of Yahweh. What were these brothers teaching? They were teaching that unless you are circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Verse 2 tells us that Paul and Barnabas got into a major dispute with these believing Pharisees, and there were arrangements made for this controversy to be settled in Jerusalem.

The controversy arose because Paul and company had been traveling through many towns and teaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Messiah to those they met. Many of the people they met in their travels were not Judahite people. These people were rather called Gentiles, or in other words, people who were not from the *House of Judah* and thus had not been taught to obey the Torah of Yahweh (as Judahite children would have been). These Gentiles who were accepting the Messiah were birthed and raised by parents who

did not serve Yahweh. Obviously then, the parents would not have circumcised their male children on the eighth day of the child's life per the commandment (Genesis 17:10-14; Leviticus 12:1-3).

If you remember with me back to the last chapter, we discussed the issue of Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile man who was a "God-fearer," but he was not circumcised. The Bible even refers to him as being upright and having a good reputation among the entire Jewish nation. In Acts 10 Cornelius received salvation in Yeshua the Messiah *without being circumcised*. This was evident in the fact that the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and others while Peter was speaking to them the message about Yeshua. The Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and company in the same way that it had fallen upon the Apostles back in Acts chapter 2. Peter asked those circumcised believers standing there, "Can any man forbid the waters of baptism to these men who have received the Holy Spirit in the same way as we at the beginning?" None forbade and Peter baptized them into Yeshua (Acts 10:34-48).

Evidently there were some amongst the circumcised believers who were not there in Acts 10 when this happened with Cornelius. It must have been these guys who caused such a disturbance in Acts 15 concerning being circumcised in order to be saved. According to Acts 15 these believing Pharisees were telling Paul and Barnabas that it was necessary to circumcise the believing Gentiles and command them to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). We must understand a couple of things here.

First off we need to recognize that it was the believing *Pharisees* that were making this bold statement. Do not forget that the Pharisees were not only believers in the written Torah, but they also believed in an oral Torah, i.e. the traditions of the elders. To the Pharisee the phrase "law of Moses" comprised both the written and the (fictitious) oral. The Pharisees weren't *merely* discussing whether or not the Gentiles needed to submit to the circumcision given to our father Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14), they were saying that the Gentiles needed to fall up under circumcision as *they* prescribed it to be done. The Pharisees had added so many other laws to the written law in the area of circumcision, much like they had done with the Sabbath day and many other commandments in the Torah. Secondly, notice that these Pharisees were saying that the Gentiles *couldn't be saved* unless they were first circumcised (Acts 15:1). In other words, circumcision

comes first and salvation comes second, thus salvation hinges upon whether or not a person is circumcised. This not only flies in the face of the example we see of Cornelius receiving salvation prior to circumcision (Acts 10), but it also undermines what is taught in the Torah. Abraham was justified while he was uncircumcised (Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:9-11). We do know that Abraham received the sign of circumcision when Yahweh gave him the commandment (Paul even calls it a seal of righteousness in Romans 4:11), but the fact remains that it was *before* Abraham was circumcised that he was justified in Yahweh's eyes. So we see that these believing Pharisees were getting the "cart before the horse." People quickly remark here how that circumcision has been abolished along with the law of Moses, and anyone who tries to teach others to walk in the law of Moses is committing the same fallacy as those Pharisees in Acts 15. Is that the idea you get from Acts 15? It certainly is not the picture I've gotten from studying the chapter. It wasn't the teaching that the Torah is for us today that was rebuked by the apostles, it was rather the teaching that (1) circumcision preceded salvation, and (2) that the entire Torah needed to be placed upon believing Gentiles all at one time.

Let's move along and continue to see this. In Acts 15:6-9 we see Peter standing up and making it known that Yahweh used his mouth to first teach the Gentiles (non-Judahites) the message of Yeshua. He explained that Yahweh, who knows the heart, testified to the Judahite brethren that He had purified the hearts of the Gentiles by giving them the same Holy Spirit received by the Judahites back in Acts 2. He cleansed both groups the same way, purifying their hearts by faith. This is the exact same way Abraham was purified, by faith. As a matter of fact this is how every man since Adam has ever been declared innocent in Yahweh's eyes; by placing their faith in Him, His words, His promises, and not in their selves. There is not a perfectly just man on the earth that continually does good and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Therefore, if Yahweh kept track of iniquities who would be able to stand in His presence (Psalm 130:3)? This has to mean that all men throughout time have to be declared innocent by some other way than their obedience to Torah. This is what we learn from the story of Abraham that Paul lays out so clearly in Romans 4. We are declared innocent by trusting in Yahweh's work through His Son Yeshua.

Peter goes on to declare to the believing Pharisees in Acts 15:10, "Why are you testing Yahweh by placing a yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" This verse is where a lot of people go haywire with Torah. What most people do here is say, "See! The Torah is a yoke of bondage! You shouldn't place people up under the Torah!" Whenever someone speaks these words to me I gently ask them if they are familiar with Psalm 119, because if they were, they would not be calling the Torah a yoke of bondage. David certainly did not refer to the Torah in that fashion in Psalm 119.

- Psalm 119:14 - I rejoice in the way revealed by Your decrees as much as in all riches.
- Psalm 119:18 - Open my eyes so that I may see wonderful things in Your law.
- Psalm 119:27 - Help me to understand the meaning of Your precepts.
- Psalm 119:35 - Help me stay on the path of Your commands, for I take pleasure in it.
- Psalm 119:45 - I will walk freely in an open place because I seek Your precepts.
- Psalm 119:47 - I delight in Your commands, which I love.
- Psalm 119:48 - I will lift up my hands to Your commands, which I love, and will meditate on Your statutes.
- Psalm 119:60 - I hurried, not hesitating to keep Your commands.
- Psalm 119:96 - I have seen a limit to all perfection, but Your command is without limit.
- Psalm 119:112 - I am resolved to obey Your statutes to the very end.
- Psalm 119:117 - Sustain me so that I can be safe and be concerned with Your statutes continually.
- Psalm 119:128 - I carefully follow all Your precepts and hate every false way.
- Psalm 119:131 - I pant with open mouth because I long for Your commands.
- Psalm 119:136 - My eyes pour out streams of tears because people do not follow Your instruction.
- Psalm 119:166 - Yahweh, I hope for Your salvation and carry out Your commands.

That is just the "tip of the iceberg." Can you honestly read those verses and believe that the Torah is a yoke of bondage?

So, what *was* the yoke that Peter was speaking of in verse 10? I believe it must have been two-fold. It referred to both the traditions of the elders (i.e. the Pharisees way of keeping the Torah) as well as trying to say that a persons salvation was based upon their own works. I have shown in this book how that even with the ritual washing of the hands there were numerous, un-scriptural practices that the Pharisees believed had to be accomplished by a person. This is just one aspect of their traditions. The number of laws added to Yahweh's law by the Pharisees is in the *thousands*. I recently heard that some who follow the oral Torah today do not even tear toilet paper on the Sabbath when they are going to the bathroom. Talk about a yoke of bondage.

I also believe the yoke includes the fact that the Pharisees were teaching salvation by something the *person did* rather than salvation by what *Yahweh has done* through His Son Yeshua. Whether it's circumcision or any other commandment in the Torah, a persons salvation is not dependant upon their ability to obey. That truly is a yoke which neither we nor our father's were able to bear. What do I mean you might ask? Well, if you ask yourself, "Have I kept Yahweh's law?" You must answer in the negative, for you are a sinner. What about your father and grandfather? Have they kept Yahweh's law? No, they were sinners too. The list goes on and on down through your ancestry. Even if you stopped transgressing the law of Yahweh right now and lived perfectly for your remaining days you would still not be able to say that you've kept Yahweh's law, for you have sinned prior to your "perfection." To try and bear the weight of your own sin is impossible.

There is a difference between being a follower of Torah and being sinless. I look at myself and my family as being Torah observant, but that doesn't mean we are perfect in the Torah. There are times when I am short with my wife or when I catch myself thinking thoughts that I know should not be going through my head. If you are honest, you are the same, as is everyone, minus one person, Yeshua the Messiah. He was the sinless Son of Yahweh that we must put our trust in if we are to ever have the hope of eternal life with the Father. This is what Peter mentions in Acts 15:11 when he speaks of all people being saved through the grace given in Messiah. This means that Adam,

Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and Cornelius were all saved by grace through faith. Not one of these men were saved by their obedience to the Torah. Their obedience rather flowed out of a heart that was first changed by the grace of Yahweh.

After this declaration by Peter, Paul and Barnabas began to describe all the miracles that Yahweh had accomplished through them among the Gentiles and then James stood up and began to give his judgment on the matter. Notice carefully that James was the presiding overseer there in Jerusalem. Even after Paul, Barnabas, and Peter gave their assessment, James still speaks up at the end to give his judgment and also give a conclusion to the matter.

James hearkens back to the word of the prophets. This is good. He understands that unless a person speaks according to the law and the testimony there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20). James quotes (Acts 15:16-17) a passage from the book of the prophet Amos and James' quotation is taken from the Greek Septuagint translation when consulting the origin of the citation. The Septuagint text quoted is Amos 9:11-12:

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me saith the Lord who does all these things. (LXX)

James' point here is that the prophet speaks of a Messianic time when there will be Gentiles who are attaching themselves to Yahweh in spite of them being uncircumcised. James goes on to speak a judgment in regards to this entire matter based upon the passage he has just quoted in the prophet Amos.

He says that they should not cause any difficulties for those who were *turning* to Yahweh from among the Gentiles. This is another point you should not miss. Notice that the judgment was given for those who were (1) turning to Yahweh (2) from among the Gentiles. These Gentiles had not been raised in a Hebraic, Torah practicing lifestyle. To tell them that they needed to be circumcised before they can be saved and then plop the entire Mosaic law down upon them at

one time, as though this is what made them right with God, would be a very big difficulty. It's like teaching those postulates before teaching how to add and subtract. Instead James suggests that a letter be written to them that instructs them to abstain from certain activities. These being (1) pollution of idols, (2) sexual immorality, (3) things strangled, and (4) blood.

I want you to ponder upon this for a second. If the purpose of Acts 15 was to teach that the law of Moses was abolished for the Gentiles, why in the world did James pronounce four laws - straight from the law of Moses - upon the Gentiles? In that mindset, wouldn't the Gentiles have been correct to respond to this letter by saying, "Why are you putting this yoke of the Torah upon us!"(?)

Here's the answer to the "dilemma." This is NOT the purpose of Acts 15. What we see here is James issuing this letter to the Gentile assemblies, instructing them to stop committing their most detestable sins. Sins that they had been steeped in because of their upbringing and culture.

Are we to look at these four things as being the *only* things the Gentiles needed to be obedient in? Such could hardly be the case. For starters consider the command to abstain from sexual immorality. This is an extremely broad heading that covers all sexually immoral acts mentioned through the 18th and 20th chapters of the book of Leviticus. Sexual immorality would include everything from incest, taking a neighbor's wife, laying with a woman during her menstrual impurity, and several other "sub-laws" that can be categorized under "sexual immorality." What we see then is that there was more to the four laws given in Acts 15:20 than just four "bare" laws.

We should also ask ourselves about things like taking Yahweh's name in vain, honoring parents, not stealing, and not coveting. All of which are missing from the letter written to the Gentiles in Acts 15. Are we to assume that the Gentiles need not be concerned with living lives of obedience to *these* commands found in the written Torah?

This is why James concludes his statement of the four laws by stating what he did in Acts 15:21. "For since ancient times, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, and he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath day." James point is this: "The Gentiles can stop the sins they are most steeped in for now. As they attend synagogue service on the Sabbath they will hear the law of Moses being read aloud. This will help them learn the Torah and Yahweh

will work on their lives little by little, growing them into a Torah obedient people." The Gentiles were *turning* to Yahweh; to place the entire Torah upon them all at once would sound to them as though it was the Torah that was saving them. However, to instruct them to stop their most heinous practices at once and then learn and grow each Sabbath in the synagogue made perfect sense.

I explained it to a friend of mine in modern terms like this. Suppose a drug user and dealer entered our church and the power of the Holy Spirit came upon him, delivered him, and saved him. He was so excited and really became a new creature. He then soon asked me what he needed to do in the area of living the Christian life. I would be foolish to drop the entire Torah on him at once, for he is a babe in Christ. What I would tell him is, "Look man, you need to stop using and dealing drugs. You'll learn other aspects of the Christian life as you come to church and listen to sermons every week."

## 9

## Our Problem With Morality

I recently ran across a podcast that was dealing with the issue of the Torah. The title of the show was "Does it Matter to God if Christians Keep the Dietary Laws?" By now you should know that this type of a title was right "up my alley." I downloaded the show and listened as soon as I got the time.

What I heard was not enjoyable to put it lightly. The host of the show answered the title question with the words "absolutely not." He went on to explain that if you wanted to follow the laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 for health reasons or personal reasons that was fine. However, it did not matter to God one iota if you kept or did not keep the dietary laws in Scripture.

If you take the time to *actually read* the primary text concerning the dietary laws you will see that it certainly *does* matter to Yahweh. Leviticus 11:44 has Yahweh saying that Israel was to obey these laws, consecrating themselves in this area of holiness because He, Yahweh, was a holy God. They were to be holy because He was holy. Of course the common objection is that Yahweh was speaking directly to Israel, and I have no problem with this statement as it stands. To make the assertion though that because Yahweh was speaking to Israel it doesn't matter if we as Christians keep the dietary laws is where I take issue. The entire Torah was given only to Israel (Psalm 147:19-20), but they were to be a light to the surrounding nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-7). If one from among these nations joined himself to Yahweh, the laws given by Yahweh to Israel then applied to this person in the same fashion (Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:16). If one did not choose to join himself to Yahweh the person was still considered as sinning against Yahweh. This is evidenced by the fact that Yahweh commissioned Jonah to go to the Assyrian, non-Israelite city of Nineveh, commanding repentance from sin. Yahweh even encourages the non-Israelite that joins himself to Yahweh to keep the Sabbaths faithfully and cease doing evil (Isaiah 56:1-8).

Listening to this podcast really got my mind going. My wife always teases me about calling into radio shows and "stirring up the pot." Well, I just had to call this gentleman hosting the show so I could get a chance to speak with him about this issue. I found time one Friday to call into a show he was doing where he took random questions from callers. I was the first guy on the phone that day and I immediately explained to him that I was very disturbed by his saying that it did not matter to God if we keep the dietary laws. I explained further that I was most disturbed by the mentality this gentleman took towards the entire Torah.<sup>33</sup>

The first response I got was that he wanted to ask me a question. I told him sure. He then asked about how I, and the congregation I was part of, felt about evangelizing and missionary work. I responded by saying that we believed it was Biblical and we encouraged everyone to be witnessing about Yeshua every day to those who are in need of the salvation that exists only in Him. I get these type questions a lot. It seems that people feel that you cannot keep Torah and at the same time witness about Yeshua. I say that you cannot witness about Yeshua without at some point witnessing about His teachings which include a call to be Torah observant (Matthew 5:16-19).

After the commercial break he asked me if I felt a person was sinning if they did not keep the dietary laws. I answered with a "yes." He told me that this is what he had a problem with. I then briefly told him that in keeping the law there was liberty (Psalm 119:45) and that Yeshua our Messiah taught us to be keepers and teachers of even the *least* of the commandments (Matthew 5:19). At this point there was much more that I would have liked to say, but I was cut short by a few statements from him that I am very used to getting from people who really are against the Torah. I know people like this radio host would never say the words, "I am against the Torah" but their life style speaks much more loudly than their words.

This man claimed that he just opened up randomly to the Torah and found Deuteronomy 23:1. I'm not calling the man a outright liar, but I honestly do not believe his asking me about Deuteronomy 23:1 was happenstance. I really do believe it was strategic. Why do I say this? It is because he knew that his listeners would have a difficult time "swallowing" what this verse says, and here lies a problem.

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<sup>33</sup> Anyone wanting to listen to this discussion can visit the audio section of our website and listen to the sermon titled, "My Brief Discussion with Dr. Michael Brown."

People have problems with Yahweh's morality; Yahweh's guidelines. The host made it sound like it was me he was disagreeing with, but it wasn't me at all. It was Yahweh he had the problem with for it was Yahweh who inspired Deuteronomy 23:1 to be written. What people do though is read a verse like this and use *their* judgment instead of Yahweh's. They think that *they* are the basis of what is moral and ethical rather than letting Yahweh decide ethics and morality. In other words, *they* are their own standard.

This type of reasoning leads to chaos and anarchy. What is right in my mind may be wrong in yours and vice versa. You may believe spanking your child is not ethical, and I may believe it is. How are we to decide who is correct? Some people believe the phrase "to each his own," but I believe that is just politically correct talk. To the Christian, the truth is found in the Scripture. We cannot say it is okay to sit on the fence on issues as these. Yahweh has spoken the truth in His law and His law is the standard by which we are to live our lives. If Yahweh says something is a sin, then it is a sin. If He doesn't say something is a sin, then it is not a sin. We don't make those decisions. If you reject Yahweh's morality then you have no choice but to replace it with something else. Any one of these "something else's" is going to be the law of the creature; the law of man.

What does Deuteronomy 23:1 say? It reads, "No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose penis has been cut off may enter Yahweh's assembly." Don't you see how those listening to the podcast for the most part would be completely turned off from listening to anything I had to say if I told the host that I believed this law? I believe this was the intent of the host. He tried to grab the law that seemed the most primitive and blast away at me. When I heard him cite the verse I couldn't keep from smiling for I've been blasted with texts like this many times by those who do not love Yahweh's law. He asked me, "Do you practice this in your congregation?" I responded by saying that I did believe in the law, but we would have to properly define what is meant by the word "assembly" or in some translations "congregation." I personally do not think it refers to a church service, but I could be wrong. Nonetheless, the point is that I *do believe* in this law and I believe it should be followed by those who are followers of Yahweh. The law of Yahweh is perfect (Psalm 19:7); this is true for Deuteronomy 23:1. A person that has a problem with this text has a problem with the Creator.

The host then began to cite Deuteronomy 22:18-21 by asking me if I believed in stoning disobedient and rebellious teenagers. My answer was yes, but I wasn't given a whole lot of time to explain. I can only imagine the look on peoples faces across America when I answered in the affirmative to this question. They probably envisioned me throwing stones at my children when they were disobedient to me and their mother. In their mind they saw me hurling a rock at my two year old who was "pitching a fit" in the grocery store. There is really no telling what people thought or said about me, and all because I said that I agree with Deuteronomy 22:18-21. I ask you this, what was this man trying to do by citing this text? He acted as though I was ridiculous in my thinking for believing the verses. Notice though that it is the SCRIPTURES that I believe. His problem is thus not one with me, but with the Creator. He has a problem with the morality and ethics of Yahweh, not Matthew Janzen.

This is what many people say when they find out that you are a believer in the Torah. "Well if you believe in the law then you have to believe in things like stoning adulterers and murderers!" As though Yahweh did not know what He was doing when he laid down the law for Israel. Who do we think we are to say that ANY of Yahweh's law is not just? What nerve do we have to speak harshly against the holiness of the One who created us? Far be it that we should EVER try to attribute Yahweh with bad thinking or a lack of ethical knowledge. Whenever we speak evil of the law we are speaking evil of Yahweh, for it is He who gave the law. His mind produced the law. This would have to include the judgments for breaking the law. As Psalm 19:9 says, the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether.

Now, let me balance all of this out to some degree. I did have the chance to *very briefly* mention on the radio show that I did not believe in carrying out capital punishment on a personal level. That was about as deep into my position as the host would let me get. I would have loved to explain my position more fully, but at this point the host was just not going to let me say very much. I did ask him a few times if he believed in capital punishment. His answer was this - *potentially*. What kind of an answer is that? He explained that sometimes because of a lack of proper judicial inquiry or witnesses, innocent people get put to death. I don't have a problem with his point here. My point was not about putting innocent people to death.

My point was about convicting a person of let's say murder, and being *sure* that they had committed the crime. Should *this* man be put to death? To answer with the word *potentially* here is not Biblical. The Biblical answer should be "yes" but there are so few people who are willing to stand up for Yahweh's word in this area. They would rather speak as most politicians speak, with a forked tongue.

Back to what I was saying about the personal level. It is not the job of individuals to execute capital criminals on an individual level. This is the job of the God ordained government. Romans 13 in describing the governments of the earth says that they are (1) ministers of God, (2) are to be a terror to bad conduct, (3) are Yahweh's servant, and (4) are an avenger that brings wrath upon the person who does wrong. It explains that if a person does what is wrong they should be afraid for the government does not bear the sword in vain. The "sword" here stands for the penalties that the government will carry out upon a person. It hearkens back to Psalm 147:6-7 where the two edged sword is in the hand of the judges of Israel. The sword is said to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, binding kings with chains and iron shackles when carrying out the judgments decreed against the evil doers. Does that sound strange? It is only because people are selective when reading their Bible. This passage is among a host of others that show Yahweh's penalties are to be seen as righteous judgments.

I realize that most governments of the world today are far, far away from enacting penalties against criminals in accordance with God's law, but this is the way that things should be done. I would even say that many governments are no longer a terror to bad conduct but rather praise bad conduct. For example, we have a government today in America that in a large part considers homosexuality to be an alternate lifestyle and not a capital crime. A similar stance is made on adultery. Our government does not punish cases of adultery, they instead allow for divorce in these situations while often letting the adulterer just walk as if they had not committed any crime against a person or most importantly, against the holy God, Yahweh.

When governments go in this direction they are not falling under the headship of Yahweh. Governments are not free to make their own decisions and laws. It is not just individuals who have to cease from sin, but governments too. They are just as guilty for violating the

Torah as me and you are as individuals. Yahweh has specific guidelines for government that must be followed if society wishes to exist in any type of decent, orderly fashion.

In a righteous society if a man was guilty of murder against a member in your family you would not have the right as an individual to sneak over to his house and start throwing rocks at him. However, you should contact the local authorities, have the man placed in incarceration, and then tried for murder in a speedy fashion. When he is convicted (found guilty), he should then be put to death. This is what Yahweh says (Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 21:14), not me. I do not speak here of the man living in prison for fifty years with color television, three meals a day, and then finally put to death. No, the trial is speedy, the conviction is speedy, and the death penalty is likewise speedy.

I know of a situation here in Georgia (my home state) that took place years ago where a man shot and killed several people in a court room during a hearing. There were more than two witnesses to the shooting and the event was all caught on camera. I believe it has been over five years since this happened and the man has yet to be put to death. This type of judicial system does not deter crime, it encourages criminals.

Yahweh requires for the government He has ordained to carry out judgments against those who have broken His holy law. Governments do not have the right to decide how to punish violations of the Torah, but this is what is happening today. More and more crimes either go unpunished or punished incorrectly and iniquity abounds in the land. Criminals are not deterred because they know there are not any harsh consequences for committing crimes. Adulterers are ignored and even hard core serial killers get to live life in an air conditioned prison, eating three meals a day, watching television, and lifting weights, and this is supposed to be a better plan than what Yahweh has laid out in the Torah?

Once again people object by first acting like it is absurd to actually believe in putting certain criminals to death. People speaking against capital punishment scream out that putting a criminal to death is just as much murder as the murderer has committed himself. To the Christian though *Yahweh* is the standard. Capital punishment is not murder for this reason: Yahweh has sanctioned capital punishment, but He has denounced murder.

Then there are those like the host of the radio program who for some odd reason feel like Yahweh made a mistake when He ordered that disobedient children be stoned. I'll explain this in more detail later, but the point here is that Yahweh doesn't make mistakes. This host would have us think that Yahweh gave this law at one time, but then decided that it was too harsh and changed His mind deciding to go another route. Is this the immutable God that Scripture speaks of? Does our Creator and Sustainer make mistakes? This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I pity the person who "serves" a god that changes, because if He changed one time then whose to say that He will not change again? People, please do not be fooled by those around us who try to poke fun at ANY of Yahweh's law.

You've also got people who say that such judgments of the law were only for the nation of Israel. Let me say this, if Yahweh gave His law and the judgments for breaking His law to Israel, who are you to say that they are unjust? Even if they were only to be followed by Israel, how can you stand on the premise that they weren't good judgments?

However, when you admit to them being good judgments given by Yahweh for Israel I will push you further by asking you this: if they were good and just for Israel why would they not be good and just for America or any other nation in the world? At what point do they become not good or unjust? At what geographical location does capital punishment cease to be a good way to judge capital criminals?

Deuteronomy 4:5-7 teaches us that Yahweh gave laws to Israel to be their wisdom and understanding in the sight of the surrounding peoples. When the non-Israelite nations heard about the great law code of the Israelites they would say, "This great nation is indeed a wise and understanding people." In other words the nations would acknowledge that Israel's law code was perfect. Israel was a light to others when they followed the perfect law of their Creator. This means their light shined to others showing them the path to take in the area of ethics and morals. It wasn't only good for the Israelite government to execute adulterers and murderers, it was likewise good for the Egyptian government or the Midianite government. Sin is a reproach to *any nation* of people (Proverbs 14:34).

It is liberating when you begin to see that Yahweh's law is perfect. You cease to wrestle with Scripture and instead you submit to it. You cease to make arguments that speak in such a way as to make

fun or make trivial the mind of Yahweh found in His holy law. What matters most to you is that you submit to His morality, you follow what He has said, even when it contrasts greatly with your current culture. You really do learn to love His law. You train your mind to think like the Creator.

What about the law in Deuteronomy 21:18-21? Should we stone disobedient children? Let's look at it.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or mother and doesn't listen to them even after they discipline him his father or mother must take hold of him and bring him to the elders of his city, to the gate of his hometown. They will say to the elders of his city, This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he doesn't obey us. He's a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of his city will stone him to death. You must purge the evil from you, and all Israel will hear and be afraid.

The first thing to point out here is that this child is stubborn, rebellious and has been disciplined according to the instructions of Yahweh. The child has been brought up under the supervision of his parents. The parents have trained the child (Proverbs 22:6) and even spanked the child accordingly (Proverbs 23:13-14). We are not talking here about little two year old children. My son David (almost three) disobeys me sometimes and I discipline and instruct him, I don't stone him. Likewise, I have older children that disobey the instructions of my wife and I at times. I discipline them and instruct them, I do not stone them. Yahweh wants parents to make every effort to train up their children in the way that they should go, obeying Yahweh's Torah.

Next notice how that this child mentioned has received proper discipline for their entire childhood. The text says, "even after they have disciplined him." Then take note that the parents bring this son of theirs to the governing authorities. Remember what we learned from Romans 13. It is the job of the godly authorities to carry out the penalties against those who commit crimes.

What do the parents say to the Elders of the land? They say that the son is stubborn and rebellious. This must be understood as

ongoing stubbornness and rebellion that just will not stop. They go on to say that the son is a glutton and a drunkard, so we are seeing here that this isn't a twelve year old boy we are talking about. This is a son well into his teenage years that will not stop eating meat and drinking alcohol. If you have ever known a drunkard then you know what this means. A drunkard is not a person who drinks wine or beer in moderation. A drunkard is not even a son who got drunk one night at a party he should not have been to. A drunkard is rather a person who is addicted to alcohol, an alcoholic. This person wakes up and drinks, drinks all day long, and then goes to bed when they pass out from drinking. They cannot hold a job down and when they do work they work only long enough to get just enough money to go spend on more cheap, quick liquor. You can beat this type person and they will not feel it. This person may lay down with a harlot and not even know it. They are a menace to society because they are a servant to the bottle. Go read Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35. This is a good depiction of what a drunkard really is.

It is this type of son that the law in Deuteronomy is referring to. It is this type of son that Yahweh says to stone, put to death, so as to purge the evil from the nation of Israel. Once again, I didn't come up with this, Yahweh did, and I believe He knows what is best. I agree that this would be an extreme situation and would probably be a judgment that would not be carried out often. However if the situation did arise, and the righteous Elders and Judges of the land, through due process of law, determined that this penalty needed to be carried out, then by all means they should follow Yahweh's instructions here.

What I find very interesting is that the only time Yeshua spoke of capital punishment, He was referencing disobedient children. In Matthew 15:3-4 He dealt with the traditions of the elders and reprimanded them for holding fast to their traditions yet ignoring the commandments of Yahweh. The text reads as follows:

He answered them, And why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition? For God said: Honor your father and your mother; and, the one who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.

Yeshua is here referring to Exodus 21:17 where Yahweh says, "Whoever curses his father or his mother must be put to death." This law ties in with Deuteronomy 21:18-21. So much for the mentality that teaches Yeshua was in opposition to the Torah. Yeshua upheld the Torah, even the penal sanctions of the Torah.

Yeshua likewise upheld the law of restitution, which is another righteous penalty taught in the law of Yahweh. Do you remember Zacchaeus? He was the guy who was too short to see Yeshua teaching the crowds so he climbed a sycamore tree to see the Master (Luke 19:1-4). Upon seeing Zacchaeus, Yeshua told him to come down for He was going to stay at his house. Those who heard Yeshua and saw what was taking place remarked that Yeshua was going to lodge with a sinful man. You see, Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and tax collectors often stole from others. After Zacchaeus met with the Master, he stated these words (Luke 19:8), "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!" What was Zacchaeus doing? He was making restitution. The law taught that the penalty for theft was to repay the person(s) you stole from (Exodus 22:1-14).

What was Yeshua's response to Zacchaeus? Did He tell him, "Oh no Zacchaeus, don't be legalistic and worry about that old Mosaic law!" Not at all, Yeshua rather said (Luke 19:9), "Today salvation has come to this house." Yeshua saw Zacchaeus' willingness to obey *even the judgments* of the law as an evidence of the salvation of Zacchaeus.

We have got to learn here something much more than the fact that Yahweh teaches the death penalty for stubborn, rebellious teenagers. What we've got to learn is that we cannot decide what is moral and ethical in our own minds. We cannot make up what is sin and what is not. I just heard a man the other day say that it was wrong for women to shave their legs. Do you know what this man has done? He has decided to determine what is right or wrong based upon what he thinks, not upon what Yahweh says. This leads to chaos. We should instead seek to submit humbly to the instructions of our Designer. When a person does this they will find rest for their soul (Jeremiah 6:16). When a family does this it will be the greatest marital and parent to child relationship in the world. When a nation does this, they will be blessed with liberty and freedom and a peaceful society wherein righteousness dwells.

# 10

## The Ceremonial Law

Consistency is a jewel amongst thinkers today. When you find a person that is consistent when they argue for a Biblical position, you find an honest person. Sometimes believing one thing forces you to believe another thing. You must be consistent at these junctions.

I have heard several preachers on television say something to the effect of, "We are not governed by the Old Testament Law." However, this is a sentence that only comes out of one side of their mouth. The other sentence goes something like this, "If you pay your tithes in obedience to God, you will be blessed." How can it be that we are not obligated to obey God's law, *except* when it comes to the law of tithing? It just doesn't make sense, it is *inconsistent*. There are though certain ministers today who will tell you that they do not believe tithing to be a law under the New Covenant. Here we have someone who is at least consistent. I believe they are consistently wrong, but at least they recognize that if they are going to teach that we do not have to obey the Torah then they must teach that we do not have to tithe. I personally *do* believe in the law of tithing as found in the Torah. I do not believe it applies in the way most preachers preach it today, but nonetheless it is still a law of Yahweh that is to be kept under the proper circumstances.

In my journey of keeping the Torah I started by obeying the Sabbath and then soon after that, the dietary laws. I *say* that I started here, but I guess I started as a child, because I was taught growing up that it was sinful to steal, bear false witness, worship idols, etc. I speak though in the context of my adult life. When I grew to an age where I could really begin to study the Bible personally, I saw verses that led me to keep the Sabbath day holy and eat only those animals that Yahweh deemed clean for consumption. At this point though, I did not believe the entire Torah was in effect.

Another truth I walked into early in my "Torah-walk" was the belief in the Sacred Name of God, Yahweh. This led me to fellowship with other groups that felt the same way as I did concerning God's

name. There were, to my surprise, several groups I didn't know existed, that believed it to be a commandment to call upon the name of Yahweh, sing praises to the name of Yahweh, and pray to God using His personal, proper name. It felt very encouraging and edifying to hear others use His name during a Sabbath or Festival meeting.

At the same time I also heard many in the "Sacred Name Movement" say that while laws such as the Sacred Name, Sabbath, Festivals, Dietary Laws, etc. were still for us today there were a set of laws that we did not have to abide by, the ceremonial laws. I heard the word *ceremonial* thrown around quite a lot but I wasn't quite sure what exactly it meant the first few times I heard it. I knew it sure sounded like the word ceremony, but my knowledge about a ceremony didn't extend much past a wedding ceremony. As I continued to listen to others teach and talk I found out that what they meant by the ceremonial law was the numerous laws in Scripture that spoke about animal sacrifices or various other types of offerings like drink offerings and grain offerings. I didn't know of anyone who performed such things so I believed that this teaching was probably correct. It seemed right in my mind to make a difference between the moral law and the ceremonial law.

Along with this came the teaching that the Levite priesthood had been replaced with the Melchizedek priesthood. The Levite priesthood was placed under the category of ceremonial because it was the Levites that offered up all of those animal sacrifices during the Old Covenant. I continued to hear brethren teach how that other laws like circumcision, the wearing of tassels, ritual uncleanness, and the like, were all ceremonial and had been done away with.

I don't remember at what point in my journey I began to question this teaching, but I know that there was a point in my studies where I became bogged down with hearing the word *ceremonial*. It was almost like this: any law that someone had a problem with or aversion to, was placed under the category of ceremonial. If you were reading the Torah and you came across a commandment that seemed outdated or ritualistic just write it down in the column labeled "ceremonial" and don't worry about it any more. This was the mindset I was getting from the majority of "Torah-keepers" I conversed with.

The very first definition of the word ceremonial in Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary reads like this: "Relating to ceremony, or

external rite; ritual; according to the forms of established rites; as ceremonial exactness. It is particularly applied to the forms and rites of the Jewish religion; as the ceremonial law or worship, as distinguished from the moral and judicial law." This is where one really must begin at defining ceremonial because the word cannot be found in the KJV Bible, nor to my knowledge in the Bible I use mostly, the HCSB. From reading this definition in Webster's we are led to believe that it has to do with a law performed during some type of a ceremony, or a law that has to do with external rituals. Noah Webster distinguishes it from the moral and judicial laws, and I believe he is correct. I really don't have any problem at all with the definition he gives for the word. I also do not see any error in making the distinction between the ceremonial, moral, and judicial law. The moral laws would be laws like do not murder and do not steal. The judicial laws would be laws that dealt with judgments or penalties which specifically would be doled out to those who violated the moral law (persons who committed capital crimes). Then we would have the ceremonial law which would cover things like animal sacrifices, purifications rituals, and Priesthood laws. I don't have a problem with categorizing the laws like this. I do however have a problem with *minimizing* the ceremonial law as if it wasn't really that big of a deal. I now believe that even the ceremonial law *has not been abolished* under the New Covenant. I believe this is the *only* consistent position that can be taken if one truly wants to hold to the Torah not being done away with.

I'll start with a passage that I've mentioned earlier in this book. If you will recall, we dealt with Matthew 5:17 where Yeshua taught His listeners (followers) to not even think that He came to destroy the law or the prophets, but rather to fulfill. We won't again deal with this text in detail but suffice it to say that every person I've ever met that believes in the validity of the Torah today will use this verse in their defense. They will state firmly that Yeshua didn't come to destroy the law and that not one jot or stroke will pass from the law until all is accomplished (verse 18). After this though comes the inconsistency. What I mean is that when you ask them (those that claim to believe in the Torah) if the ceremonial law has been done away with, they will answer yes. If this is correct then how could Yeshua have said not one jot or stroke will pass until heaven and earth pass away? Was He only

talking about not destroying *some* of the law? Did He destroy certain portions of the law, but confirm others?

Sometimes I get this response: "Well, Matthew, Yeshua is speaking of the moral law of God. He is saying that He didn't come to destroy the moral law." That does sound good on the surface, but it is not correct. Yeshua is talking about much more than the moral law as found in the Ten Commandments.

I know this from reading the context of His saying when I continue to look at Matthew 5:21-24. Keep this in mind, Yeshua just got through saying that He didn't come to destroy the law, and that not one jot or stroke would pass from the law. The first law he deals with after His strong statements in favor of the Torah is the law against murder. He states that they had heard it said of old, "Do not murder." He then goes on to say, "But I say unto you," and His point is not to do away with the sixth commandment here. It's not like He is replacing what was said of old with what He is saying now. He is specifically dealing with how the scribes and Pharisees interpreted the law. Look back to Matthew 5:20 where Yeshua says, "Unless your righteousness goes beyond the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Yeshua then goes on in the remainder of Matthew 5 to compare the scribes and Pharisees' *interpretation* of the law with His interpretation, and His is the *correct* interpretation. In this case they were quoting the law, "Do not murder" but teaching that the commandment only applied to the physical act of murdering someone. Yeshua explained, beginning at Matthew 5:21, that murder could also be committed in the heart of a man. A person can hate someone else within his heart, and this hatred is equivalent to murdering someone physically. There is an application in the letter of the law, but it goes deeper than that. There is also an application in the spirit of the law.<sup>34</sup>

Next Yeshua says that if a person says to someone they hate, "Raca!" they will have to go before the Sanhedrin. The word *raca* means an empty headed or worthless person. It is an Aramaic word that has been transliterated into Greek and then into our English

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<sup>34</sup> There are those who believe that Yeshua was setting a higher standard, "raising the bar" so to speak. This is not accurate for Yeshua could not add to or take away from Yahweh's law (Deuteronomy 4:2). It was just as much of a sin to hate in your heart or to commit adultery in your heart in the days of Moses as it was in the days of Yeshua (Leviticus 19:17; Exodus 20:17). Yeshua was simply correcting the various misinterpretations of the Torah in His day.

Bibles. One who uses such speech is in danger of the council (KJV) or the Sanhedrin (HCSB). The Sanhedrin was the supreme council amongst the Judahite people in Yeshua's day that consisted of 70 (or 71) members patterned after the 70 elders of Moses (Exodus 24:1, 9).<sup>35</sup> This was basically a Judahite court of justice in Jerusalem and Yeshua recognized its authority to punish those who committed evil. This would be what we would call the judicial or civil law. The law that had to do with the execution of righteous judgments upon the law breakers of the land.

But what about the ceremonial law? Did Yeshua have the ceremonial law in His mind when He uttered the words recorded in Matthew 5:17-18? Let's continue to read in Matthew 5:23-24.

So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

When Yeshua speaks of "offering your gift on the altar" He is speaking of a sacrifice, oftentimes an animal sacrifice. Hebrews 8:3-4 speak of the *gifts* offered by a priest; Hebrews 9:9 and 11:4 also speak of animal sacrifices as *gifts*. We see another place where the English word gift is used in relation to an animal sacrifice right in the book of Matthew 8:1-4. Here a leper comes to Yeshua and kneels before him saying, "Lord, if you are willing You can make me clean!" Yeshua

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<sup>35</sup> *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* gives us this information about the Sanhedrin, "A council in Jerusalem that functioned as the central judicial authority for Jews. The Sanhedrin is mentioned in the New Testament as the body that sought Jesus' arrest (Matt. 26:47; RSV "elders"; John 11:47-53; RSV "council") and before which Jesus (Matt. 26:57-27:2) and some leaders of the early Church (Acts 4:5-21; 5:21-40; RSV "council," "Senate"; 6:12-15; 22:30-23:10) were tried. Ideally at least, the Sanhedrin had seventy members, actually seventy-one when the president was counted among the members. The high priest was the Sanhedrin's president in the New Testament period (cf. Matt. 26:57). The council's members were drawn mainly from the leading priestly families and the religious instructors known as "scribes" or "teachers of the law." (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987, page 912)

reaches out, touches the leper, and says, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately this man's skin disease was gone. The next words out of Yeshua's mouth was a commandment to the leper. He told the leper not to tell anyone about this happening, but instead go and show himself to the priest and offer the *gift* that Moses prescribed as a testimony to them. Yeshua was telling this leper to make sure and observe the ceremonial portion of Torah. Yeshua didn't tell him, "Well you're clean so don't worry about offering the sacrifice prescribed in the Torah. I'm going to do away with that later anyhow." No, Yeshua upheld the Torah, ALL of the Torah.<sup>36</sup> We can read about this particular gift prescribed by Moses in the Torah portion of Leviticus 14 which deals with the laws for a cleansed leper. Here they are mentioned as gifts. More on this in a moment.

The point I am laboring to show is this. When Yeshua said He did not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill, and that not one jot or stroke would pass from the law until heaven and earth pass away, He was speaking of the entire Torah. This included the ceremonial parts of the Torah. Yeshua did not come to do away with the animal sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. This may be the first time you've ever heard this and if so I know it is probably very difficult for you to cope with. I remember the first time I thought about it being a possibility. I would think "no way" and then later think "but it must be." I struggled with it for a long time, but have finally come to trust the words of the Master and quit thinking that He came to do away with even the jots and strokes of Torah. The animal sacrifices are a lot bigger than jots and strokes.<sup>37</sup>

What were the purpose of the sacrifices? One popular view is that the animal sacrifices took away sin, but if that's the case then why did Yeshua have to shed His blood? If we could be forgiven for our sin by

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<sup>36</sup> Try to place yourself in this "former lepers" place. Imagine being told by the Master to make sure to offer the gift commanded by Moses. You then went and did just that, but later in your life you met someone who tried to explain to you that all of that "ceremonial stuff" was now done away with. If you were the leper who would you believe? Yeshua or the person attempting to teach you not to keep the law of offering gifts? Yeshua never gave the leper the slightest insinuation that the law He was commanding him not to forget, would later be abolished.

<sup>37</sup> The only reason I had this struggle in my mind is because my mind was trained to think that animal sacrifices were barbaric and that somehow God changed His program, or the method of worship, now that Yeshua had come and died. I had never studied the issue diligently. I had never considered what Yahweh Himself had said in the Torah concerning the sacrifices.

the blood of an animal it doesn't make much sense to have the Son of God die upon the cross. Hebrews 10:4 says very plainly that it is *not possible* for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. While it is certainly true that the blood of Messiah was shed to take away our sin, it cannot be equally true that the blood of bulls and goats does the same thing. Only one or the other is needed.<sup>38</sup>

Here's something else we commonly hear today concerning animal sacrifices. We hear teachers say that they *foreshadowed* the Messiah. I can see Scriptural truth in this belief. The Apostle Peter even mentions (First Peter 1:18-19) the sinless Yeshua as likened to a perfect animal sacrifice when he writes, "For you know that you were redeemed... with the precious blood of the Messiah, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish." It is true that when a sacrifice was brought to Yahweh it had to be complete. You were not to bring Yahweh a blind, lame, sick, or stolen animal for sacrifice. These perfect animals did foreshadow the sinless lamb of God, the Messiah. All this being said, was this the only thing that the animal sacrifices were for?

A key to understanding the meaning behind the sacrifices is found in a common Hebrew word translated sacrifice in our English Bibles, the word *korban*. The meaning of this word literally means "something brought near" or "a sacrificial present." This takes us back to how Yeshua spoke of these offerings as "gifts" in both Matthew 5:23-24 and 8:3. When a person comes near to God it is not an event done haphazardly. It costs a lot to come near to Him. The many animal sacrifices offered up by the people of God throughout the ages teach us just that. Coming before God is costly. He is a Great King and is worthy of great honor, praise, adoration, and gifts. Since the fall of

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<sup>38</sup> What is often missed is that there are five categories of sacrifices mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus 1-5). The first three (burnt, grain, and peace offerings) have nothing to do with sin. They are rather voluntary offerings brought by worshipers desiring to draw near to Yahweh in worship and honor. The final two categories (sin and guilt offerings) were definitely related to sin, but they did not remove sin. They were rather apologetic gifts brought to Yahweh as an outward sign of the remorse that a person felt in their heart and mind. Furthermore, sin offerings were sometimes offered up for the purpose of ritual purification. This is seen most readily in studying Leviticus 12:1-8 where a woman, after bearing a child, was not only required to bring a burnt offering (a year old lamb) but also a sin offering (a young pigeon or turtledove). Had the woman committed a sin by obeying the commandment to be fruitful and multiply? Of course not, the sin offering was commanded as a means to ritually purify the woman in her flesh.

man into sin, Yahweh has required and accepted animal sacrifices as a way in which His people could draw near to Him on an earthly level.

We see this as early on as Genesis 4:1-4 where we read that Abel offered up the firstling of his flock and the fat portions to Yahweh. Hebrews 11:4 speaks of this sacrifice as being better than Cain's, an accepted gift by God. We see a bit later in Genesis where the very first act towards Yahweh that Noah did after exiting the ark was to offer to Yahweh a sacrifice (Genesis 8:20). After Noah's act of obedience the Bible says, "When Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma, He said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, even though man's inclination is evil from his youth. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done... (Genesis 8:21)'" The strong implication here is that the animal sacrifices pleased Yahweh and prompted His statement of peace to the living creatures of the earth. Other places that speak of the sacrifices as a soothing aroma to Yahweh are numerous (Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5, 16, etc.)<sup>39</sup>

There are just so many places I could go to in Scripture that speak highly of sacrifices but please allow me to jump ahead thousands of years later to an occurrence that took place *after* Yeshua's death, resurrection, and ascension. We find a record of the account in the book of Acts 21. In Acts 16-20 we read much about the various places that Paul journeyed to in order to preach about Yeshua as the Messiah, Son of God. These places were largely Gentile in population rather than being Judahite, that is, descendants from the House of Judah. At the conclusion of these journey's Paul traveled to Jerusalem and upon his arrival the brothers there welcomed him gladly (Acts 21:17). The day after his arrival Paul began to share with James and the Elders who were present about the things that Yahweh was doing among the Gentiles through his missionary efforts. Next we read in Acts 21:20 the following:

When they heard it, they glorified God and said,  
"You see, brother, how many thousands of Judahites

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<sup>39</sup> It is truly unfathomable to believe that what Yahweh once loved He now hates. Yahweh made a covenant with Noah and gave him a sign for that covenant based upon Noah's offering of animals. Are we to think that Yahweh would now consider the exact same worship as being blasphemous? It doesn't make the smallest Scriptural sense.

there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law."

I want you to take some time to think about this verse; really meditate upon it carefully. You may even want to read it in various English translations of Scripture. The setting finds Paul in Jerusalem with thousands of other Judahites who had believed. Believed in what? The answer is believed in the Messiah. The word believed here is used as shorthand for those who had come to faith in Yeshua; those among Judah who had accepted that Yeshua was the Messiah promised about in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is interesting to check out this word "thousands" in the Greek New Testament. It is the Greek word *urias* and is defined by various Greek lexicons as "ten-thousand, a myriad, an indefinite number, an innumerable multitude, an unlimited number, many thousands, etc." So in reality the author of Acts (Luke) was not really telling us that there were exactly 1,000 Judahites there who believed in Yeshua. He was rather relaying to us that there was a multitude of believers there in Jerusalem, possibly too many to even count!

We must not stop here though with Acts 21:20. Take careful note of the next way these Judahite believers are described, zealous for the law. They are Judahites so what law do you believe they are zealous for? It could be none other law than the law of Moses, and we will see from the following context that the law of Moses in undoubtedly what Luke was referencing here. Luke writes this here without batting an eye and he writes it in a very positive pronouncement. He is not saying that their zeal for the law is a bad thing, but rather he is speaking of their zeal of the law as a positive thing because of what comes next.

But they (the Judahites which are zealous for the law) have been told about you that you teach all the Judahites who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses by telling them not to circumcise their children or to walk in our customs. So what will be done? They will certainly hear that you've come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have obligated themselves with a vow. Take these men, purify yourself along with them, and pay for them to get their heads

shaved, Then everyone will know that what they were told about you amounts to nothing, but that you yourself are also careful about observing the law. (Acts 21:21-24)

There is so much "meat" in here so let me attempt to unpack it carefully. First notice that the Judahites that believe in the Messiah and are zealous for the law had been told that Paul is teaching them to abandon Moses. The phrase "abandon Moses" is here used to mean forsake the law of Moses, i.e. the law of Yahweh through the mouth of Moses. If you have gotten to this chapter in this book you should know by now that it is Scripturally acceptable to refer to Yahweh's law as the law of Moses and the reason for doing so is that Moses was the primary agent Yahweh used when codifying His law at Mount Sinai. Thus it is clear that these Judahites had been told that Paul was teaching contrary to Yahweh's law specifically in the area of circumcising children. Acts 21:21 also mentions "walking in our customs" and here this is not to be confused with the traditions that I've written about previously, but rather a phrase which simply means following the customs of Moses as written in the Torah.

Next we have a decision from James and the other Elders. The decision includes something they desired for Paul to participate in. They speak of four men in Jerusalem who had obligated themselves to a vow and they would like for Paul to take these men and purify himself along with them and pay for their sacrificial animals and for them to have their heads shaved. Now that sounds extremely odd if you are not familiar with certain details of the Torah. What the Elders are making reference to here is the law or vow of the Nazarite found in Numbers 6:1-21. The word Nazarite is the transliteration of a Hebrew term that literally means, "consecration, devotion, and separation." Some people were called to be Nazarites for their entire life (like Samson) and others took the vow of a Nazarite for a certain period of time.<sup>40</sup> The requirements for a person during the vow were

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<sup>40</sup> We know from the writings of the early church historian Eusebius that James himself (the Elder making the request of Paul in Acts 21) was a Nazarite. We read in *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) Book 2, Chapter 23 the following: "James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles. This apostle was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from

that they could not cut the hair of their head at all, they had to abstain from any and all alcohol, as well as from any vinegar, grapes, grape juice or anything produced from the vine. The Nazarite was also given a command to avoid contact with a dead body.

For Nazarites who took the vow for a certain period of time (other than their entire life) they would eventually come to the end of the vow. For example, one might vow to be a Nazarite for ten years, and obviously there would come a point in their life when the ten year time frame would be over. Yahweh gave specific instructions for what a person was to do at the completion of a Nazarite vow. These instructions are found in Numbers 6:13-20 and include offering a perfect year old male lamb, a perfect year old female lamb, a perfect ram, a grain offering, a drink offering, a basket of unleavened cakes made from fine flour mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers coated with oil. Numbers 6:18 tells us that the Nazarite is to shave his consecrated head at the entrance to the tent of meeting, taking the hair of his head and putting it on the fire under the fellowship sacrifice (peace offering). Now you see the pieces of the puzzle coming together. The four men on the vow in Acts 21 were coming to the end of their Nazarite vow, thus the request given by the Elders to Paul for him to pay for them to get their heads shaved.

My point in bringing all of this up concerns what we were talking about earlier in relation to the ceremonial law of animal sacrifices. If animal sacrifices had been abolished at the death of the Messiah why did Ya'akov (James, the brother of Yeshua) and all of the Elders in Jerusalem want Paul to participate in laws that had been "nailed to the cross"? If Paul himself did not believe in animal sacrifices this would have been the perfect time for him to speak up, but when we read the account we see that he made no objection to the request. Why did he make no objection? The text tells us. The Elders said that when Paul participated in these particulars of the Torah everyone will know that the speech circulating about Paul amounted to nothing, and that Paul himself was also careful about observing the law (Acts 21:24).

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animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woolen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camel's, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God."

I have heard many men make drastic attempts to bypass the contextual and exegetical interpretation of this passage that I have just presented. One very common attempt is this: "Paul was becoming all things to all men that by all means he might win some." This is usually what I hear when I explain to others what you have just read in this book. They loosely quote First Corinthians 9:19-22 in order to justify Paul's actions in their mind. To them, Paul was only going to follow through with the request of James because he became all things to all men.

On the other hand these same people believe that it is sinful or blasphemous to offer an animal sacrifice. Logically then they would have to believe that Paul was committing sin and blasphemy in order to win others. Is that *really* what you think Paul was doing here? Why would James, a fellow believer in the Messiah, ask Paul to participate in something that had been abolished, done away with, nailed to the cross, and was now sinful to participate in?

Do you know why this interpretation just will not work? It is because the text explains to us the reason why Paul complied with the request from James. Verse 24 tells us it was because Paul was also a careful observer of the law. All this talk going around that said Paul taught the Judahites to abandon Moses was nothing more than a huge rumor. Paul, through his actions here, would show others the fallacy of all this talk circulating about him and his teachings.

Acts 21:26 tells us that the following day Paul took the four men, having purified himself with them, and entered the temple announcing the completion of the purification days when the offering for each of them would be made. The length of the purification days is specifically found in Numbers 6:9-10, and amounts to seven days of purification. This is exactly the number of days we read of in Acts 21:27. Notice though that Paul had went through the purification ritual of becoming ritually clean with the four men for the purpose of offering the animal sacrifices commanded for the conclusion of the Nazarite vow.

I know I have heard it said, at least a couple of times, that in Acts 21:27 certain Judahites seized Paul out of the temple and thus Paul did not have the chance to offer the sacrifices. They then say that by God's providence Paul was kept from committing the blasphemy of offering animal sacrifices after the death of the Messiah. I do not know if I have ever heard a greater example of eisegesis in my entire life. That

sounds as far reaching as the time I heard a man tell me that the Son in Mark 13:32 was actually the "son of perdition." These are cases where people read into the text of Scripture what they wish for Scripture to say instead of actually exegeting the text; interpreting the text based upon the information given to you within itself. The fact is this, when we look at the evidence in Acts 21, James, the Elders at Jerusalem, the thousands of believing Judahites in Jerusalem, and even Paul himself, we find that they did not believe that animal sacrifices had been abolished after the death of the Messiah. Nothing tells us that it was God "rescuing" Paul from committing the "sin" of offering the animal sacrifices.

I know that this has been a long chapter but allow me to briefly comment on the issue of the Levite Priesthood. Along with the idea of the abolishment of animal sacrifices comes with it the teaching of the abolishment of the Levite Priesthood and thus the Temple and its services. This mostly comes from the book of Hebrews, which I do believe in wholeheartedly. However, people who interpret Hebrews this way interpret it with the presupposition that the Torah is no longer binding today rather than with the presupposition that the Torah has to be binding today, and this would include the time the author of Hebrews wrote his letter.

We must first come to recognize that Yahweh established the Levites as a Priestly tribe unto Him. This choosing dates back to the book of Exodus where Yahweh specifically designates Aaron and his sons to serve Yahweh as Priests (Exodus 28:1). We see also in Exodus 32:25-29 that it was the Levites (descendants from Israel's son Levi, of which Aaron was) who stood on Yahweh's side during the incident of the golden calf. It was also the Levites who were designated by Yahweh to be the teachers of the Torah to all Israel (Leviticus 10:10-11; Deuteronomy 33:8-11). It is very clear in reading all of these passages (and many others) that Yahweh had a special place and plan for the Levites and in particular the descendants of Aaron.

In studying the book of the prophet Malachi we see that although there was a time in Israel's history when the Levite Priests began to go astray from their God given duties (Malachi 2:1-9) there would be a cleansing of the Levites with a refiners fire and cleansing soap. The sons of Levi would again be purified and made able to present offerings to Yahweh in righteousness. These offerings in righteousness would please Yahweh as in the days of old and years gone by

(Malachi 2:1-4). In studying the text of Malachi here we begin to see that there is yet a time to come when these Levite Priests will be offering sacrifices to Yahweh that are pleasing to Him.

This agrees heartily with a text from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah prophecies about the Messianic age (33:14-22) and within his prophecy he quotes Yahweh as saying, "Look the days are coming - Yahweh's declaration... (when) the Levitical Priests will never fail to have a man always before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices." He goes on to say that if someone can break His covenant of day and night then the covenant with Levi will be broken. The implication here is that the covenant of day and night *will not be broken* and thus the Levite Priesthood will continue to be valid in the plans of Yahweh. Ezekiel also speaks of a time (Ezekiel 40-48) when the sons of Zadok (descendants of Aaron) will minister in the temple of Yahweh offering animal sacrifices in a proper way unto the Most High. This time period has yet to come, but will most certainly take place in the future, just after the return of Yeshua to this earth to establish the first stage of the Kingdom of Yahweh, the 1,000 years of Revelation 20.

These verses I have briefly discussed are not read very often in most pulpits across the globe. I would even venture to say that many people do not even know such verses exist. However, for those who do know they exist they are just swept away by one giant eraser that has this phrase upon it, "That's Old Testament." It is because of the false dispensational notion that there exists disharmony between the covenants and that Yahweh changes His mind and has differing plans for differing people, that these ideas permeate the majority of professing Christians today. It is high time that we instead learn the true mind of our Creator by recognizing that what He proclaims throughout the entire Bible is truth. He established animal sacrifices as an appropriate way to come near to Him and He established the Levites as an everlasting Priesthood to Him.

What about us living today? Should we be like James, the Elders, and Paul in Acts 21 and begin to offer animal sacrifices today? There is a difference between them and us in this respect. The events we've discussed in Acts 21 took place while the Temple of Yahweh still stood in Jerusalem and while the Levite Priesthood was still active. There are proper parameters to follow when offering the animal sacrifices unto Yahweh and many of those parameters involve the

Temple and the proper Priesthood. Leviticus 17:1-9 teaches us that the Levitical sacrifices must be done by a Levite at the entrance of the Tabernacle or Temple. To attempt to offer one of these sacrifices apart from following the particular details of the Torah is actually a violation of Torah. So in reality, our "neglect" to offer such sacrifices today is not a transgression of Torah, we are *keeping* the Torah when we follow Yahweh's teachings in Leviticus 17:1-9.<sup>41</sup>

Think about it in light of the man in Scripture named Daniel. A thorough study of the book of Daniel reveals Daniel to be a very righteous follower of Yahweh who lived the majority of his life as an exile in Babylon. There was no Temple of Yahweh in Babylon and there was no active Levite Priesthood in Babylon. For 70 years those Judahites dwelling in captivity in Babylon would not be able to adhere to the entirety of the Torah because of their circumstance in living. Did this mean that those portions of Torah had been abolished? Not at all, they were just not applicable because of their current circumstance. When Israel would be placed back in their land and the Temple would be rebuilt, the laws pertaining to the land, Temple, and Priesthood would be activated once again.

We should look for and long for the day that these things come to pass. The prophets spoke of them often and the prophecy's will be fulfilled. If we go ahead and accept and study these aspects of Torah now, we will be ready and willing to participate in these particulars of Torah when the time of the Kingdom arrives.

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<sup>41</sup> It is my belief that the Passover sacrifice can still be offered today. The Passover is a sacrifice that originated in the land of Egypt, and was offered by the heads of the households among the Israelite families (Exodus 12:1-3, 21). This sacrifice was also allowed to be done in Egypt (Exodus 12) and in the wilderness (Numbers 9). The Judahite historian Philo also comments upon who is allowed to kill the Passover in his work titled *The Special Laws*, II, XXVII. (145) - "...the passover, which the Hebrews call pascha, on which the whole people offer sacrifice, beginning at noonday and continuing till evening." He also states in *The Decalogue*, XXX. (158) - "...which the Hebrews call, in their native language, pascha, on which the whole nation sacrifices, each individual among them, not waiting for the priests, since on this occasion the law has given, for one especial day in every year, a priesthood to the whole nation, so that each private individual slays his own victim on this day." Currently, this is the only sacrifice that I have offered although there may be more that are acceptable, as seen in the book of Genesis, prior to there being a Levite Priesthood and a Tabernacle or Temple. Caution should be taken by the worshiper in this area because of the strict command found in Leviticus 17:1-9.



# 11

## Is Yeshua a False Prophet?

I believe in using only the Scriptures and all of the Scriptures for the standard of belief and practice. Two ways that I have found to be absolutely wonderful in determining the true intent of a Biblical text is to (1) examine both the author and original audience, and (2) examine the context and life setting very carefully. So many absurdities can be avoided in Biblical interpretation if just these two rules are meticulously followed.

While we should always use the Scripture as our foundation and while we should always use proper methods of Biblical interpretation there are certain watershed passages in Scripture, pertaining to specific subjects, that we can judge other "grey" passages by. What I am saying is that some passages are easy to dissect, understand, and believe, while others can be somewhat "fuzzy and grey," and not so easy to understand at first glance. Peter writes about certain things being "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16) and I must say that I have to agree with him! Sometimes I study the Bible and then find myself scratching my head thinking, "Whatever does that mean?" We should not give up though, but instead press on and spend more time studying those passages that are not readily apparent to us.

One huge way to help a person understand the "not so easy to understand" passages, is by comparing passages that pertain to the same subject and *are* easy to understand. This follows a very simple rule in Biblical hermeneutics (the study of the Scriptures): *interpret the unclear in light of the clear; interpret the difficult in light of the easy*. If you have 100 clear verses that all agree with each other in saying the same thing and you run across a handful of verses that seem to say something different do not dismiss the 100 clear verses. You should instead interpret the unclear ones on the basis of what you learn from the clear ones.

This method will help you out tremendously with the subject at hand. There are just so many texts of Scripture that speak of the perpetuity of the Torah of Yahweh. I've brought this point up

previously in this work, but please go and revisit Psalm 119. Here we have 176 verses in our English Bibles that do nothing but lift up, praise, extol, and speak highly of the law of the Creator. These verses are very, very clear and thus Psalm 119 should be one of those "watershed" chapters when it comes to the position a believer in Scripture should take in regards to the law of Yahweh.

I have come to the point now that when anyone begins to question me about the law or about a passage in Romans or Galatians I take the time to explain to them that before we go to these texts in the Apostolic Scriptures we must first be knowledgeable with previous revelation given by Yahweh to his servants like Abraham, Moses, David, etc. Only by having a good handle on the Hebrew Scriptures can we even begin to grasp what certain verses in Galatians are speaking of. This is being a good Berean (Acts 17:10-11).

I also make sure to mention a text found in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Here we have a passage in the Torah concerning a prophet, or someone who has dreams, rising up from among the people of Israel. This prophet has the ability to perform signs and wonders, and speak of things that actually do come to pass. So what we have here is a man who claims the office of a prophet, can perform miracles, and can even predict future events that take place before our very eyes. However, the message of this prophet is one which seeks to follow other gods (vs. 2), and one which veers people away from the commands of Yahweh (vs. 4). Moses tells the people of Israel not to listen to the words of this prophet because Yahweh is testing your heart for Him as to whether you really love Him (vs. 3).

Now, let's get practical with this. I'll use me for an example. Let's say I lived during the time when Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Moses tells "Elder Janzen" these words and then I, in obedience to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, teach these words to my children. I make an extra effort to stress to my Hebrew children that they should not allow the "fluff and drama" of such a prophet to deceive them. While he may appear to them to be quite the prophet because of his signs, wonders, and fulfilled predictions, he cannot be a man of Yahweh because of his message. I tell my children this, "The moment a prophet attempts to teach contrary to the commands of Yahweh, you can be assured that although he is a prophet, he is a *false* prophet."

So my children grow up and teach it to their children, which in turn teach it to their children, which in turn teach it to their children. You get the picture. As my descendants continue to multiply in the earth the same message that stemmed from Grandfather Janzen, during the days of Moses, continues to permeate the "Janzen tribe."

One day in the future, descendants from the Janzen tribe are dwelling in first century A.D. Judea. These descendants are still adhering to what their ancient ancestor, Grandfather Janzen, had taught them from the Torah, now hundreds if not over a thousand years ago. Parents in this tribe are still reminding their children daily to not follow any proclaimed prophet if he seeks to veer you away from the commands of Yahweh found in Torah.

Then along comes a man named Yeshua. He claims to be Yahweh's own Son and He can do signs, wonders, and even predict the future. But think about it; what if, just what if His message was contrary to the commands of Yahweh? What if He taught the Hebrew people that they did not have to revere the Holy Name, keep the Sabbath, follow the dietary laws, and honor their father and mother? What if he proclaimed that the animal sacrifices were done away with, and that the Levite priesthood was now null and void? What would be the appropriate reaction from the descendants of the Janzen tribe? Would it be to realize that Deuteronomy 13:1-5 was just to remain true up until the time of Yeshua? Would everything that Moses had said and that had been relayed diligently by Grandfather Janzen, and by all the Janzen fathers throughout the history of the Janzen tribe, now be meaningless? Would that be the way to view this new prophet that had come on the scene? Or, would it be to reject this prophet and realize that Yahweh is testing you to see if you will love Him with all your heart?

People who believe that Yeshua came to "do a new thing," by teaching contrary to the Torah, must believe that Yeshua was a false prophet based upon Deuteronomy 13:1-5. And let me say this, if Yeshua would have taught contrary to the Torah in the first century A.D. then the Judahites who rejected Him would have been correct in their rejection of Him. However, studying the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we find that Yeshua practiced and taught all the commandments of Yahweh; from the least to the greatest (Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 3:35; Luke 4:16; John 15:9-10; etc.).

Someone may object by saying that Yeshua would not fit into the Deuteronomy 13 category because He did not speak in the name of another god, but rather came in the name of the one true God of Israel. That objection would be baseless because Scripture teaches us that false prophets can at times come in the name of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Jeremiah 29:8-9, 20-23). Sometimes false prophets masquerade as true prophets by using the name of the God of Israel, but they in turn speak things contrary to what the God of Israel has spoken.

Do you believe Yeshua is a false prophet? If you are a professing Christian reading this book I doubt that you believe this. You probably profess belief in Yeshua with all your heart. What you need to recognize is that if you also believe that He taught and lived contrary to Torah, then you are placing your faith in someone who the Scriptures call a false prophet. This is not to say that Yeshua actually is a false prophet, but the belief that you hold in Him is an incorrect and contradictory belief. You should continue to believe in Him, but change the mindset that you have concerning His teachings and life as it pertains to the Torah of His Father. Either accept Him as an observer and teacher of Torah, or reject Him for teaching contrary to Torah.

If you are not a professing Christian but are an adherent to another religion you may have been told by others previously that Yeshua came to start a new religion. Someone may have shared with you that Yeshua did things like break the Sabbath and teach others it was permissible to eat unclean. I am sorry that this false information has been given to you. You need to realize that if you have rejected Yeshua based upon these false statements, then you have not rejected the real Yeshua, but only a Yeshua that is made up in the minds of carnal men. The real Yeshua was a faithful, righteous Judahite man, who loved Yahweh His God and Father, observed the Torah with all of His heart, and taught others to do the same.

This brings us back to the questions I often hear about passages in Romans and Galatians (among other books) that appear on the surface to teach contrary to Torah. What I have just explained about Yeshua applies equally to Peter, James, Jude, John, and yes, even Paul. In reading, let's say the book of Galatians, you need to be of the mindset that if Paul contradicted the Torah in his writing, then Deuteronomy 13:1-5 classifies Paul as a false prophet (or in this case a false apostle).

You must begin a study of the book of Galatians with the paradigm that causes you to read it in light of the previous revelation given by Yahweh through all His holy prophets and apostles prior to Paul. I personally do not believe that Paul was a false apostle. He wrote statements like "we establish the law" (Romans 3:31) and "the law is holy, just, and good" (Romans 7:12). Paul even gives a list of transgressions of Torah in Galatians 5:19-21. He then sums the list up by saying that those who practice such violations of Torah will not inherit the kingdom of God. Much more could be said about the statements of Paul that uphold Torah, but for now I just want to make a few more comments.

There are people who have gone so far as to say that Paul did not uphold Torah and therefore he is to be regarded as a false apostle. This is because they read certain passages where Paul makes statements which at first glance sound like he is against physical circumcision or is against keeping the holydays of Yahweh.<sup>42</sup> They reason that because he is teaching people to go against the written Torah he is to be rejected based upon Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Do you know what? They are correct in their reasoning, but wrong in their foundation. When we exegete the writings of Paul, recognizing the audience he was writing to, and examining his writings based upon the context and life setting of his day, we can be assured that Paul upheld the Torah. All of his statements that appear to be in contradiction to Torah are actually statements that also appear throughout the Tanak (Hebrew Scriptures).<sup>43</sup> Paul was schooled in the Tanak and taught nothing contrary to the Tanak, and thus nothing contrary to the Torah. We will examine some of these statements in our final chapter.

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<sup>42</sup> Consult Appendix I for a Torah based explanation of many of these passages. It is amazing to see the true intent of many passages in the Apostolic Scriptures when they are read in (1) light of the Torah, (2) recognizing the original audience, (3) and considering diligently the life setting and context of the writings. This does not only hold true for the epistles in the New Testament, but also for the entire Scriptures. So much can be "lost in translation" if we are not diligent researchers of what the original authors intended to convey to the original audience.

<sup>43</sup> Herein lies a key that few people are familiar with. Many things that Paul wrote originate in the Hebrew Scriptures. Some are direct quotations from the Tanak, while others are found loosely in the Tanak. The point is that *you can even read the Tanak out of context* and in doing so make an attempt to teach against circumcision, animal sacrifices, and Sabbath observance.

A main point in this chapter is for us to realize how we must interpret Scripture. Later revelation can *never* contradict previous revelation. Yes, it can make previous revelation *fuller*, building upon what has already been revealed, but that which comes second or third will never contradict that which came first. If it does contradict then it is not true revelation from Yahweh God. If Yeshua really is the Messiah, Son of God, and if Peter, James, John, and Paul really are the true Apostles of Yeshua, then they had to be in line with Yahweh's Torah; every single letter.

# 12

## Justification and Torah

I have talked with a lot of people who have attended a certain type of church or denomination, only to find out later in their spiritual journey that this particular fellowship didn't have all of their doctrine in order. They realized that some of their teachings were not really Biblical, but rather were simply man-made commandments. What they believed in so strongly and adhered to so strictly turned out to be nothing more than something that a man or men made up in their mind. These people have expressed to me that it is very disheartening to find out that a Pastor they trusted in so heavily turned out to be someone who was more interested in his opinion than the word of the Lord.

What generally happens with these people? Well, some of them leave church altogether expressing that they are tired of church and hypocrisy; they are tired of having men peddle the Bible around like a traveling salesman. Do I believe that men that do such are treading on dangerous ground? You better believe I do. I believe that teachers of the Bible ought to recognize the seriousness of standing behind a pulpit and teaching a group of people. It should be a practice of reverence, fear, and awe at the words of Yahweh in Scripture. Men should tremble before the Lord when they take upon themselves the monumental task of teaching His word to people. This is why James gives us an admonition in his epistle (3:1), "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that you will receive a stricter judgment."

At the same time we need to be reminded here that this is a two way street. It is not just the Preacher that has done wrong. The people are guilty for taking a man's word for something without studying it out themselves. They just sat there week after week submitting to the authority of this man's ministry, and shaking their head while giving the occasional "Amen" to the things coming out of his mouth. People are upset with Preachers when they find out they've been taught wrong, but so often they do not find out they've been taught wrong

for years on end because they are not students of the Bible. They did not examine the words coming out of the Preachers mouth by the Scriptures, to see if what he was saying was true (Acts 17:10-11). In the words of Yeshua we have blind leaders of blind followers. If the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:14). In the words of a Christian music artist, "Oh cause' it's a dangerous place, here where the blind lead the blind."

Here's another problem I have found with people who have feelings of hurt towards a Preacher that has led them down a wrong path. These people try to find a church that is the polar opposite of what they've previously been hearing from the pulpit. I will say that many times I have found that the opposite of what is taught in many modern churches is where you will find the truth, but this should not be your deciding factor on what to believe and what not to believe. For example I do not believe the Roman Catholic Church is the true Assembly of Yahweh. However, Roman Catholicism takes a very hard stance against abortion. Does this mean I need to believe the opposite of Rome concerning abortion? You see what I am saying; sometimes going to the opposite extreme can get you in serious trouble.

Here's another quick example. There are some denominational churches who take a very extreme position in regards to outward adornment. Some churches require that people wear only long sleeves, and that the women not wear pants. They would also say that women should not wear any jewelry or make-up, and some go so far to say that women should not braid their hair.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes people leave churches that teach these things because they have found that some of these teachings are not really found in the Bible but stem from tradition. What then happens? People leave this type of a church and then go "hay-wire" when it comes to their outward adornment. Instead of looking to what *Scripture* has to say about things like clothing, jewelry, etc. they only want to get as far away from what they were once a part of. This is a place where many people go astray from the truth.

If you find out that something you have previously believed is incorrect, you do not need to jump to conclusions and throw any and everything you know out the door. The proper response is to make sure that you've identified the errors in your thinking and then begin

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<sup>44</sup> For a detailed study in regards to outward adornment please consult our online publications titled "Modest Apparel: for Men and Women" and "Outward Adornment."

to do a diligent study of the Scriptures to make sure that this next time you are actually following what God says rather than man.

I have labored in this work to explain to you why we should be loving the law of Yahweh rather than saying that it was just bondage that was done away with at the cross. We should be attempting to keep it with our whole heart rather than saying that it is outdated and not relevant for us any more. I hope that what I've written has helped you see the truth concerning the perpetuity of God's law. There truly is a great reward in the keeping of Torah (Psalm 19:11).

Let me now though give a word of caution to all those reading. I know people personally who have begun to see the things that I've discussed in this book and have moved on to do things like reject Paul as an Apostle, reject Yeshua's sacrificial death, believe that a person can be declared righteous by their own obedience, and sometimes reject Yeshua as Messiah altogether. I believe these people have done the exact same thing as those I mentioned earlier that were hurt by a church. They have moved from one extreme to the other extreme. They went from believing that Yeshua did away with the law to not even believing in Yeshua. In doing so they have placed themselves in a terrible position; under the condemnation of the law of Moses. They will never be saved from the wrath of the Almighty if they do not genuinely place their faith in the Son of God (John 3:36). Sound like strong words? They are meant to sound strong. Let me spend the rest of this chapter explaining to you the seriousness of what I speak about.

God is holy. We read in Scripture where winged immortal creatures called *seraphim* cry out to Yahweh, "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth. (Isaiah 6:3)" In Scripture words are repeated for the purpose of emphasis. Thus God is not just holy or even holy, holy, but He is holy, holy, holy. Theologians sometimes call Him the thrice holy God.

The word holy carries with it the meaning of set-apart. When I teach my children the definitions of Scriptural words I teach them to answer my question, "What does holy mean?" with the statement, "To set apart for a specific use." In this case God is completely set apart from us and all creation. While an entire book could be written concerning all the aspects of His holiness, I just want to center in on the aspect of Yahweh's perfection. One way He is set apart from us is

that He has never transgressed the law; His own law. Not only has He never transgressed the law, it is not even possible for Him to do so.

We sometimes only think of the great and numerous possibilities of God, quoting the angel Gabriel's declaration, "With God, nothing is impossible. (Luke 1:37)" We fail though to realize that Gabriel was talking about Yahweh's ability to perform the miraculous, in this case to cause a woman to conceive without every having sexual relations with a man.<sup>45</sup> We often though do not see the awesomeness of Yahweh in His *impossibilities*. Did you know the Bible speaks of certain things that are impossible for God to do? Scripture says that He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18) and that He cannot die (1 Timothy 1:17). Likewise, He cannot commit sin. It is outside of the realm of who He is. The Biblical definition of sin is to transgress God's law (1 John 3:4). This is something that He cannot do.

For us to have pure fellowship with God then we must be sinless. We see this taught in the first book of Scripture. Adam and Eve enjoyed a special relationship with the Father in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve lost this relationship with Yahweh when they did what? When they disobeyed His command to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-24). A single transgression caused the perfect relationship once held between Yahweh and His human creation to be destroyed. This is because Yahweh is holy, holy, holy and man is unholy, unholy, unholy.

The prophet Isaiah understood this holy/unholy difference in Isaiah 6. In the vision he had of Yahweh's holiness he proclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips (6:5)." Isaiah recognized that when compared to Yahweh, he was ruined and undone.

King Solomon understood this in his opening prayer at the dedication of the Temple. We read in First Kings 8:46 where Solomon says that there is no one on earth who does good and does not sin. Solomon echoes this statement in the book of Ecclesiastes (7:20) when he says, "There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins."

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<sup>45</sup> I speak here of the miraculous virgin conception and birth of Yeshua, spoken about in both Matthew 1 and Luke 1. Please consult our online publication titled "The Virgin Birth: Fact or Fiction?" for a detailed study concerning the validity of this doctrine.

How do we reconcile this with the Scriptures that speak of righteous men? Men like Job, Daniel, and Noah are described as being righteous in Scripture. In the Apostolic Scriptures the Apostle James has been given the title "James the Just" meaning "James the Righteous." What do we make of this?

I remember talking to a woman on the phone one time that was interested in coming to visit the assembly where I teach weekly. Somehow or another we got into discussing the writings of Paul and she explained to me how that she believed Paul to be a false apostle. I asked her to turn over to the book of Romans and she said that she could not turn there because she had taken a pair of scissors and cut Paul's epistles out of her Bible. I was amazed to say the least.

I asked her to give me some reasons why she believed Paul was not a true Apostle and the first reason she gave to me was that Paul wrote in his letters that there was none righteous, no not one, but when she read through the Tanak (Hebrew Scriptures) she found many people who were called righteous. I asked her if she knew where Paul got his idea from. She did not have a clue that Paul was *quoting from the Tanak*, specifically Psalm 14:2 and 143:2. Paul did not make up the teaching, he was pulling it directly from inspired Scripture.

In the Psalms passage David is saying that Yahweh looked down on humanity to see if there was a wise person who sought after God, but He did not find any. In other words what Yahweh found was people who had committed sin; He found sinners. I've heard some people object to using this passage because Yahweh is talking about the wicked in contrast with the righteous. For instance, Psalm 14:5 says, "...for God is with those who are righteous."

I would agree that there is a difference between someone who practices righteousness versus someone who practices sin. At the same time, a thorough examination of the Psalms shows that David understood that there truly was *no man* on earth who was perfectly righteous, who never committed sin. David was not only speaking of practicing sinners, but also of those in Israel who had transgressed the holy law of the holy God of Israel. This is exactly what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:20. David and Solomon knew that there were men in Israel who lived righteous lives, striving to live by the Torah. Where these men sinless though? Had they *never* transgressed the Torah? Of course not. This is seen in David's writings in Psalm 143:2, the other

passage Paul was pulling from in Romans 3. David is praying to Yahweh here and he says in this text, "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one alive is righteous in your sight." David is speaking of the fact that *he* has sinned against Yahweh's Torah, and *everyone* who has sinned against Yahweh's Torah, even if (hypothetically) it was only one time, has violated the holy law of the thrice holy God.

David speaks about the same thing in Psalm 130:3 where he says, "Yahweh, if you considered sins, Lord, who could stand?" David's point here is that if Yahweh never forgave anyone for their sins (130:4) there would be *no one* who could stand in His presence, because all have sinned.

People generally think that concepts like this are only found in the New Testament, particularly the writings of Paul, but we are seeing that they are found quite readily in what's often called the Old Testament. This is what Paul was speaking about in Romans 3 when he wrote things like, "...we know that whatever the law says speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment. (3:19)" The picture here is that you are standing before the Judge of all the earth and He asks you, "Have you violated my law?" You must answer, "Yes," seeing that you have not kept His law. That's as far as your mouth can go, you are speechless because you are guilty.

Paul follows this with what he writes in Romans 3:20, "For no flesh will be justified in His sight by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin." There are people who read this verse and completely ignore all of the other Scriptures we have walked through in this book. They read the verse and declare, "See, we do not need to keep God's law!" They miss the fact that the very reason we are under the judgment of God is because we have broken His law. Had we obeyed His law we would not be judged, but seeing we've disobeyed His law we have come up under the penalty of His law. Disobedience was a bad thing, not a good thing.

Daniel also realized that the reason his people, the people of Judah, were in Babylonian captivity was because they had been a rebellious, stubborn, stiff-necked people. Before Daniel prays his great model prayer for us to learn by, we read that he had been studying the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2). In reading, he had come to understand that the sojourn for Judah in Babylon would be

seventy years. Why seventy years? When we study Scripture we see that it was because the Israelites had violated the Sabbath rest for the land of Israel for over a 490 year time period (Jeremiah 25:1-12; 29:1-11; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Leviticus 26:27-43). Israel's disobedience led to their punishment of a destroyed city, a destroyed Temple, and captivity in a foreign land. Daniel prays to Yahweh by saying, "We have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from Your commandments and ordinances. (Daniel 9:5)" Daniel makes it very clear that he is not petitioning Yahweh based upon the people of Israel's righteousness but rather based upon the God of Israel's compassion and mercy (Daniel 9:15-19). Daniel asks Yahweh to act not for the sake of the Israel people, but for the sake of His great and holy name. Daniel realized that sin separated people from Yahweh.

People need to begin to see that recognizing our sinful state as a person, and recognizing our need for salvation outside of our own selves, does not just begin in the Apostolic era. It is something all of Yahweh's people have understood from the beginning of time. Yahweh could have destroyed Adam and Even back in the beginning. It was an act of mercy to even continue to let them live *outside* of the Garden of Eden. The only reason we are even alive here today, the only reason I am able to write these words today, is because Yahweh has been gracious to a sinner like me. I have read the Torah and I know what it says. I also know that I have violated the Torah and still violate it in my actions and thoughts. I am an evil person except by the grace of Yahweh. I am thankful that I can say today that my mind has been renewed by Yahweh, and that Yeshua has saved me from my sins. I can say today that my deepest desire is to keep His law, and that my over all lifestyle finds itself in accordance with Yahweh's law. However, that doesn't mean I am perfect, it doesn't mean I've never sinned, and it doesn't mean I will not sin even today. If I had to rely on my obedience to be justified, to be declared innocent in Yahweh's court, I would never make it to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Paul goes on in Romans 3 to speak of how righteousness is obtained. He writes in Romans 3:21, "But now, apart from the law, God's righteousness has been revealed - attested by the Law and the Prophets." Paul speaks of a righteousness that comes apart from the law but he says that this righteousness - which comes apart from the law - is written about (attested to) *in the Law and the Prophets*. Paul is

telling us that the teaching of justification apart from the law is taught *in the law itself!* Once again, Paul is not making all of this up, he is pulling from the Torah.

Paul speaks of a righteousness that comes through faith, through faith in the person of Yeshua. The reason our faith needs to be placed in Yeshua is because He never transgressed the law. Yahweh's standard for justification was perfect obedience to the law; Yeshua met that standard, but we did not. Therefore we must place our faith in the one who met the standard, in order that we might be justified (declared innocent) by our faith in Him. Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but this "all" does not include the man Yeshua. He is excluded from the "all" because the "all" must believe *in Him* for justification. He lived perfectly, earning our salvation for us, died as a substitute in our place on the cross, and then rose victorious over death on the third day. His perfect life, along with his substitute death, and victorious resurrection, is how we are able to be declared righteous in Yahweh's court of law. Our sins are imputed to His account and in turn His righteousness is imputed to our account. Yahweh accepts our faith in Yeshua and this double imputation because Yahweh accepts Yeshua's payment as a fulfillment on our behalf. It can be illustrated like this. We owed a debt that we had no way of paying, but Yeshua came and paid that debt off for us. I do not mean to oversimplify the doctrine of substitution I am only trying to speak of it in a way that people can begin to grasp and then build upon.

Paul goes on in Romans 4 to speak about Abraham as an example of justification by faith. He does this by quoting Genesis 15:6 (from the Septuagint) that says, "Abraham believed God (placed his faith in God) and it was credited to him for righteousness." What was counted to Abraham for righteousness? None other than his faith. A simple trusting in the words and promises of God. Paul brings up this point to show that this righteousness by faith was found in the story of Abraham prior to the law of circumcision given later in Genesis 17:10-14. Abraham did receive the sign of physical circumcision when it came to him (Romans 4:11), but he was declared righteous by faith *before* being circumcised. Obedience is always the *fruit* of justification, and never the *root* of justification. Notice that in the midst of all this teaching about justification by faith, apart from the law, Paul never

does away with the "fruit," "Do we then cancel the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:31)"

When you begin to realize that the Torah has not been abolished and that you need to begin to put it into practice in your own personal life, and the life of your family, never "swing" to the extreme of believing that you can somehow justify yourself, or earn a special place with God, by what you are doing. Even if you started today and from this point on never sinned again you would still have fallen short of God's perfect glory because of the previous sins in your life. You must always keep the Torah in its proper perspective. It is a way of life, the way that you express your love towards God. It is not the means of obtaining perfect righteousness nor the means whereby God looks at you personally and says, "Well, because you did ten good things this week and only nine bad things I justify you." No, God has to punish sin, and punish it He did on the cross of Messiah at Calvary.

Have you ever thought about how the holiness of God's law is seen in the cross? We usually think of the cross as showing the grace and mercy of the heavenly Father. Not very often do we realize that the very reason the act of the cross had to happen was because of our violations of the holy law of God. God's wrath had to be poured out upon His own Son because our transgressions of Torah were placed upon His back. When Yeshua was being tortured, spat upon, mocked, ridiculed, beaten, and nailed into, it was the wrath of the Almighty from heaven coming down against sin; not the personal sin of Yeshua, but the sins of you and I and everyone else that had violated Torah. We see in the cross just how atrocious sin against Yahweh God really is. At the same time we see just how important it is to obey the Torah. Yeshua never sinned against the Torah. Yahweh's standard was perfect obedience to Torah, and Yeshua obeyed perfectly. Yahweh did not let down His standard. He didn't see us not living up to the standard and then say, "Well, I'll keep letting my standard down little by little until they are able to keep it." No, Yahweh gave the standard of perfection and sent His Son Yeshua to live up to that standard of perfection. Yeshua kept the Torah flawlessly and thereby earned our salvation. We are made to be the righteousness of God in Yeshua (2 Corinthians 5:21).

I thank Yahweh for His Son Yeshua. I am so thankful that Yahweh has made a way of escape for me whereby I can obtain peace with Him through faith in His Son. In obtaining that peace I am so very

thankful that Yahweh did not save me to continue in my sins, but rather from my sins. I am thankful that He put a new heart within me and wrote His holy law upon my mind. My hope and prayer is that He will do the same for you.

## I

# Harmonizing Scripture

There exists a paradigm in the minds of so many people today that the writings labeled "New Testament" in our English Bibles can flatly contradict what has been written in the writings labeled "Old Testament." This has led a host of New Testament passages to be interpreted in such a way as to dismiss prior revelation in the Torah (or Tanak as a whole). What follows is an aim to address a good number of texts that I have heard or seen used in attempt to abolish the Torah. In my studies I begin with the opposite paradigm of most people, and that is this: the New Testament *cannot* contradict the Old Testament. This is based upon passages as Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Psalm 111:7-8, Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 5:14-19, and Acts 17:10-11 among others.

I have dealt with the following passages in a brief, yet (I feel) exhaustive manner. My hopes is that this section of the book will aid as a type of "spring board" off which to "jump into" further, deeper study of each text. I hope and pray that the understanding I have gained through studying will be a blessing to the reader. Please take extra care to study each of these texts yourself based upon sound, exegetical principles such as examining the author, original audience, context, and life setting.

## **MATTHEW 5:17**

I always point people to this verse to show them that Yeshua said He did not come to destroy the law. A common response I get is this, "I agree with you, but He did come to *fulfill* the law." In peoples minds they believe that fulfill somehow means the Torah is no longer applicable. If this is the case then the text is self contradictory. Fulfill must mean the opposite of destroy for the text to make logical sense. If fulfill meant destroy or was synonymous with destroy Yeshua would be saying, "I came not to destroy the law, but rather to destroy the law" which is self contradictory.

It seems people have in their minds that Yeshua fulfilling the law is like a prophecy being fulfilled. In other words the prophecy is given, and in the future it is fulfilled. This is not the context of Yeshua's words. Yeshua is rather speaking to an audience about *their* obedience to Torah. Notice Matthew 5:16 just before has Him saying to the crowd, "Let *your* light so shine among men so that others may see *your* good works." A bit later (Matthew 5:19) He explains that based upon His statements in verses 17-18, *whoever* breaks even the least of the commandments and teaches others to do so will be least in the kingdom of heaven. However, the one who practices and teaches the commandments will be great. So the entire context begins with the Torah being kept by the *students* of Yeshua.

In what sense did Yeshua fulfill the law? He fulfilled the law in that He perfectly obeyed the law. He calls us to strive for obedience too (Matthew 5:16, 19). He also fulfilled the law in the sense that He accurately handled and interpreted the law. During the first century it was common for people to listen to the teaching of various Rabbi's in the Judahite faith. If a Rabbi accurately interpreted the Torah, he was said to have fulfilled the Torah; if a Rabbi misinterpreted the Torah he was said to have destroyed the Torah. This fits perfection in the context of Matthew 5. Yeshua is teaching the people not to think He came to give a misinterpretation of the Torah, but rather to accurately teach them the Torah. He goes on in Matthew 5 to challenge the various interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20) contrasting what they say with what He is now saying.

#### **MATTHEW 5:43-48<sup>46</sup>**

In the sermon on the mount there are several sections in which Yeshua states, "You have heard that it was said... but I say unto you." These statements made by Yeshua are often interpreted by people in a way which places Yeshua in opposition to the Law of Moses. "Moses used to say this, but now I am telling you something different" is how most people read these verses.

If we take note of the context Yeshua has just finished telling his listeners to be holy examples (Matthew 5:13-16) and not to even

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<sup>46</sup> For a fuller examination of the "but I say unto you" texts please consult our online audio section for a verse-by-verse teaching of the entire fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

*think*<sup>47</sup> that He came to destroy the law or the prophets (Matthew 5:17), even the minutest portion (Matthew 5:18-19). Why would Yeshua teach His listeners to not think such if in the very next six subjects in Matthew 5 He is going to overturn the Torah? The answer is that He was not teaching His listeners this at all, He was rather contrasting the scribes and Pharisees interpretation of the Torah with the true interpretation of the Torah.

Let's take one example. Matthew 5:43-44 tells us, "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." While many who read these verses believe the Torah taught that it was permissible to hate your enemy such is hardly the case. Exodus 23:4-5 taught the Israelites that if they came upon their enemy's stray animal, they were required to return it to them; if they saw their enemy's animal in danger, they were required to help the animal. Yahweh was teaching His people to love their enemy as well as their neighbor. Likewise Proverbs 25:21-22 also shows that the proper treatment of ones enemy is to give him bread if hungry and water if thirsty. The man David, when Saul was on a hunt to kill him, did not harm Saul although he had the perfect opportunity to do so (First Samuel 26:7-23).

When we show common grace upon our enemies<sup>48</sup> we are imitating our Father in heaven. Even He makes the sun to shine on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

While the scribes and Pharisees had read "Love your neighbor" in the Torah, they had interpreted that as also meaning "Hate your enemy." Yeshua corrected their interpretation, calling attention to how we, if claiming to be His children, should follow the example of our Father in heaven.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Take careful note here that we are commanded by our Lord not to even let the *thought* enter our mind that He came to destroy the Torah. In today's churches, people not only think it, but they preach it and thus promote the idea.

<sup>48</sup> It is true that in certain instances in Scripture Yahweh commanded the Israelites to slay the enemies of Yahweh. The key here is that they were specific enemies *of Yahweh* rather than just an enemy of a person in Israel. Yahweh has the right to command the riddance of *His* enemies because He is the Almighty Sovereign Creator. In such cases where He gave Israel a direct command to execute His judgment upon people, they were to obey. In all other cases they were to follow the directive of showing love for their own enemies.

<sup>49</sup> This helps to interpret Matthew 5:48 properly. Sometimes Torah-keepers read Matthew 5:48 and believe or teach that we are supposed to live perfect, sinless lives.

**MATTHEW 15:1-20 & MARK 7:1-23**

These passages are parallel, so I would like to use Mark as a base seeing it is the one most people attempt to use to abolish the Torah's teaching on diet.

The context of the passage deals with the disciples of Yeshua eating bread without first washing their hands ritually. We are not here talking about when our Mother's taught us as children to wash up before dinner. Here we have a tradition that had been elevated to the status of a commandment in the eyes of some Pharisees. The Pharisees had asked Yeshua why His disciples did not live according to the tradition of the elders. Yeshua responded by reprimanding them for exalting traditions of men to a commandment status, and also violating the Torah by their own traditions. He goes on to tell them (Mark 7:7-13) that their little sneaky way of getting around honoring their parents was a violation of the fifth commandment. The Pharisees had come up with the idea of dedicating all of their belongings to the temple so that they would not have to honor their parents by taking care of them in their elderly age. Yeshua rebukes them pointedly, and says that they revoke God's commandment by their tradition.

In this context Yeshua makes His remarks in Mark 7:14-23. He tells the crowds that things coming from outside of a person do not defile the person. His point is this: not keeping the *tradition of the elders* (the ritual, traditional washing) does not cause a person to be defiled when they eat food. He is speaking to Judahites in a completely Hebraic setting. His listeners would understand him to be talking about eating food the Torah taught was permissible, but eating this food with ritually unwashed hands. This did not defile a person.

Yeshua goes on to say that the food doesn't go to the persons heart but rather to his stomach, and then is eliminated, purging all meats. His point is that the body takes in the nutrition needed from the food, but the digestive system purges out the toxins when a person relieves their self (goes to the bathroom).

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While I do believe we should be obedient, striving for perfect obedience, this is not what Yeshua was teaching in this text. The word perfect is to be understood as meaning "complete." We are perfect/complete when we love not only our neighbors (friends), but also our enemies. Just loving one's neighbor is incomplete or imperfect.

Many of the newer Bible versions, although great translations for the most part, completely miss Mark 7:19 by saying something to the effect of, "As a result, He made all foods clean." If this verse is teaching that Yeshua was okaying crab legs, catfish, and pork then He would have been a sinner and unable to be the perfect Lamb of Yahweh to die for our sins, because He would be teaching it was okay to break Yahweh's law. Also, if Yeshua was teaching His disciples that every animal was clean for food, why then, many years later, had Peter not gotten the message? In Acts 10:14 Peter remarks to Yeshua that he had never eaten anything common or unclean. Peter did not understand Yeshua's teaching in Mark 7:19 to be permitting the eating of what the Torah forbade.

#### **MATTHEW 22:34-40**

I have encountered several people who seek to explain to me that Yeshua taught that there were *only* two commandments to keep, now that He had arrived as the Savior. I do agree that in one sense there are two commandments. I disagree though with the implication that most people I've met believe is taught in this text.

What Yeshua is doing is answering the question of an *expert* in the law (vs. 35). Yeshua would have never gotten away with telling an expert in the Torah that there were only two commandments, and that was it. This expert asked which commandment in the law was the greatest (vs. 36)? Yeshua responded by *summarizing* the law under two headings or categories. The first category was a man's love for Yahweh, the second was a man's love for his neighbor. Yeshua ended by saying that all the law and the prophets depend upon these two commandments.

The word depend here carries the meaning of hang, as a door hangs upon hinges. The hinges are there, but something else is hanging or depending upon the hinges. The two commandments are there, but something else hangs upon the two commandments.<sup>50</sup>

Picture the two commandments Yeshua gave in your mind. Now picture chains hanging off of the first greatest commandment. At the

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<sup>50</sup> *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) states on page 523 the following definition for the Greek word *kremannumi*, translated as "hang" or "depend" in our English Bibles: "...in Matt. 22:40, of the dependence of 'the Law and the prophets' (i.e., that which they enjoin) upon the one great principle of love to God and one's neighbor (as a door hangs on a hinge, or as articles hang on a nail)..."

end of those chains hang other commandments like, do not have other gods besides me, and do not make an idol for yourself. Do not take the Lord's name in vain, and remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Each of these commandments hang upon the great commandment of loving Yahweh with all your heart and soul. The same applies for the second greatest commandment.

### **LUKE 6:1-11**

Here we have two cases of Yeshua's actions on the Sabbath. Remember that in Luke 4:16 we learn that Yeshua's custom was to go to synagogue<sup>51</sup> on Sabbath. In Luke 2:41-43 we learn that during Yeshua's childhood He kept the annual festivals as well. His parents were avid keepers of Torah, even the ceremonial aspects (Luke 2:21-24, 39).<sup>52</sup> They surely taught Him the Torah from early childhood (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

In the grain field incident in Luke what we have is an exceptional case. Human need always takes precedent over Sabbath regulation. For example, if one of my children were to fall into a well on the Sabbath, I would not wait until after the Sabbath to remove them from the well thinking I am some kind of pious person in doing so. If I had a flat tire on the way to the synagogue on Sabbath, I wouldn't just sit there and not change the tire until Sabbath was past.

This is the point Yeshua is making to the Pharisees. They ask Him why His disciples are doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath, but He responds by telling them that if they really understood the Torah (Matthew 12:7; Micah 6:8) they would know that the disciples were guiltless. Yeshua used the example of David eating the sacred bread in the temple which was not normally allowed to be eaten, but for

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<sup>51</sup> The word synagogue, found in Luke 4:16, is taken from the Greek word *sunagoge* (soon-ag-o-gay) and carries the meaning of an assemblage of persons, but specifically a Judahite assembly. This was a place where Judahite people in the first century met for prayer, worship, and the teaching of the Scriptures on Sabbath. The word is translated as assembly (KJV) or meeting (HCSB) in James 2:2, showing that the early believers in Yeshua worshiped in synagogue fashion.

<sup>52</sup> I have heard it said that Yeshua never participated in animal sacrifices, but such is hardly the case when looking at these Scriptures in Luke. Luke 2:41-42 shows that His family would go to Jerusalem every year for the Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread. During this Festival there were numerous sacrifices offered to Yahweh (Numbers 28:16-25). One which Yeshua most certainly would have ate of, was the Passover lamb, a peace offering.

David an exception was made which was lawful, because of the surrounding circumstances (First Samuel 21:1-6).

In Matthew's parallel account (Matthew 12:1-8) Yeshua also gives the example of the Priests in the temple who violate the Sabbath but are blameless. His point is that the priests have to continue working on the Sabbath, really even more so because the offerings are more numerous on the Sabbath than the regular working days (Numbers 28:1-10). Why were they blameless? They were doing the work of Yahweh for the good of the people of Yahweh. This was Yeshua's entire point, and His point was valid at the time He made it, and also thousands of years before He made it.

The next instance in Luke 6 is similar to the grain field incident yet different to some degree. The scribes and Pharisees were watching Yeshua closely in order to see if He would heal a man with a paralyzed hand on the Sabbath.

Where does the Torah forbid that? It does not, but in the minds of the Pharisees (who upheld not only the written Torah, but also the traditions of the elders; Matthew 15:1-2; Mark 7:1-5) Yeshua was breaking the Sabbath. Yeshua violated such traditions because they were exactly that, traditions of men which had *nothing* to do with the proper understanding and interpretation of the Torah.

When Yeshua healed the man's hand in Luke, He wasn't violating the Torah, He was actually *keeping* the Torah and bringing a glimpse of the Kingdom of Yahweh to this man. Yeshua was teaching us that according to Yahweh's Torah, it was (and still is) lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

#### **LUKE 11:37-41**

Some have used this text to teach that Yeshua overturned the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, but this passage is clearly related to both Matthew 15 and Mark 7 in that we see how Yeshua did not perform the "ritual washing before dinner. (Luke 11:38 HCSB)" This was looked upon as transgressing the tradition of the elders, seeing he was at the home of a Pharisee for this dinner (Luke 11:37-38). The verse used by some in attempt to destroy the Torah is verse 41b, "...and then everything is clean for you." This verse is ripped from its immediate context by those who try to teach that the dietary regulations are no longer binding under the New Covenant.

Yeshua's point here is to teach the Pharisee that true holiness begins first on the inside of a person, this is why He tells him that the Pharisees are so meticulous about cleaning the outside that they forget to take care of cleaning the greed and evil on their inside. Yeshua goes on to say that Yahweh created both the outside and the inside of a man, and that man should begin by making sure the inside is clean.

Verse 41 is teaching us that when a person gives charity (love) to the inside, then everything will be clean to that person. In other words, their love towards the inside (heart, mind) will be revealed in how they live their life and actions on the outside. Both the inside and the outside (everything) will be clean.

#### **LUKE 18:18-21 & ROMANS 13:8-10**

I have heard some people bring up both of these texts to insinuate that when Yeshua and Paul mentioned the commandments they did not really mean each and every commandment in Torah.

In Luke 18, a rich young ruler comes to Yeshua and asks Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Yeshua responds by telling this man that he should keep the commandments. Our Messiah then goes on to mention five commandments total: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and honor your parents. Was Yeshua, in quoting only these five, implying that the other five of the ten commandments are not important?

I really do not believe that most people using this argument think it through completely. I realize that they are for the most part attempting to by-pass the fourth commandment (concerning the Sabbath) but in doing so are they also saying that commandments against idolatry and blasphemy (second and third commandment) are not important? What about the first commandment of the ten (Exodus 20:1-17) that teaches a man to not have other gods besides Yahweh; is that important?

We should realize that Yeshua was not giving the young man an exhaustive study of the Torah in ten seconds. He was only beginning to quote a few commandments of Torah to briefly explain what He meant by saying, "You know the commandments (verse 20)." It is possible (but we can't be for sure here) that as Yeshua was naming off the commandments, the young man interrupted him in verse 21 by saying, "I have kept all these from my youth." In other words while

the young man listened to Yeshua name off commandments, he hurriedly explained to Yeshua that he knew all of the commandments so there was no need to go through them.

It is similar with the Pauline text in Romans. Paul is discussing man-to-man relationships therefore he specifically names commandments that deal with this horizontal plane. Paul is not saying that there aren't other commandments, he is only giving a short list and then telling his readers that all the man-to-man commandments can be summarized by loving ones neighbor as yourself. If you truly love your neighbor as yourself then you won't do things like steal from him or give a false testimony against him.

### **JOHN 8:3-11**

The motive of the scribes and Pharisees in bringing the woman caught in the very act of adultery was not one which longed for righteous justice to take place. Their motive was rather one which looked for any reason whatsoever to accuse Yeshua (John 8:6) because they hated Him. This is evidenced by the fact that they did not bring the man with whom the woman committed the adultery with, to Yeshua. The Torah says that both the man *and* the woman, justly accused of adultery, are to be put to death (Leviticus 20:10).

What is often missed by those reading this account is that Yeshua told those bringing her to stone the woman. Granted, he added the words, "He that is without sin," but what followed these words was a direct command to stone the adulteress.

I do not think that Yeshua was commanding this according to the Torah precisely, but then again He was. He knew the law said to stone an adulteress, but He also knew the law said that the adulterer had to be stoned with her. He used wisdom by combining the phrases "he that is without sin" and "cast the first stone."

After the men listened to the words of the Master they began to leave one by one, beginning with the older men in the crowd. Why did these men leave? We are not told specifically but the implication is that they were guilty of the exact same sin or crime they were trying to convict her of. The statement made by Yeshua, "he that is without sin," convicted them to the degree of causing them to walk

away from the situation knowing that they were guilty before the Most High God.<sup>53</sup>

When Yeshua stood up after kneeling down He asked the woman where her accusers had gone and she answered that no one was there to accuse her. Without two or more witnesses to a capital crime a person could not be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 17:6). It was also the eyewitnesses that had to be the first people to cast the stone (Deuteronomy 17:7). Without eyewitnesses, capital punishment could not be carried out.

Sometimes readers tend to think that when Yeshua said, "Neither do I condemn you" that He was violating the Torah. On the contrary, He was simply explaining to the woman that He had no lawful grounds to condemn her by the Torah if there were no witnesses to her crime. Did Yeshua know she had sinned? I believe He did because of the final statement He makes in verse 11, "Go, and from now on do not sin any more." However, His internal knowledge of the sin did not classify as two or more *eyewitnesses* that were required by the Torah. Yeshua was showing grace and mercy to the woman, but the grace and mercy shown did not contradict the boundaries of the perfect law of Yahweh (Psalm 19:7).<sup>54</sup>

### **Acts 10:15 & 11:9**

The context here is referring to the man Cornelius whom Luke calls a devout man that feared God (Acts 10:2). We also learn that he was

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<sup>53</sup> This does not mean that the people who carry out the penalty of stoning must be sinless. We see at least three cases of *just* stoning in Scripture (Leviticus 24:10-23; Numbers 15:32-36; Joshua 7:16-26).

<sup>54</sup> While this text is extremely useful in explaining the Torah's relevance and proper use, it is very likely that it was not originally part of the Gospel according to John. Consider this brief quote: "The story of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11) involves a number of verses and clearly represents a substantial variation. Almost all recent translations by varying devices mark this account as textually uncertain ... Why have these later translations looked with suspicion on these verses? The answer is simple: no early manuscript, except one, and practically none of the early versions have the story of the adulterous woman in them. The one early manuscript which contains the story is the very one (Codex Bezae) that is known for its peculiar readings, as we have seen above in the case of Luke 6:5. Otherwise it is necessary to come down to manuscripts of the eighth century and later before the story is found again. In addition, some of the manuscripts that have it also have notes of doubt in the margin concerning it; others put it at the end of the Gospel of John; and still others insert it in the Gospel of Luke, after Luke 21:38. Certainly, there were grave doubts all along concerning the passage." [*How We Got the Bible*, by Dr. Neil R. Lightfoot, 2003, pages 98-99]

considered upright (Acts 10:22) which is a word used of Joseph (Matthew 1:19) and the righteous "sheep" of Yeshua (Matthew 25:37). Yahweh was even hearing the prayers of Cornelius for they had come up as a memorial before Him (Acts 10:4). So we know Cornelius was not turning his ear from hearing the Torah, or else his prayer would have been an abomination (Proverbs 28:9).

Basically put, the issue was that Cornelius was uncircumcised and the vision given to Peter was to assure Peter that it was perfectly okay to go to Cornelius and witness to him about the salvation that existed in the Son of God.

The vision given to Peter (Acts 10:9-16) was a large sheet that contained all sorts of animals - clean and unclean. The voice in the vision tells Peter to get up, kill (sacrifice) and eat. Peter's response to the voice, "No Lord! I've never eaten anything common or unclean!"

The voice then talks back to Peter and says, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." A more accurate, technical translation here is, "What God deems to be clean, you should not call common." The point is not that Yahweh is cleansing something "anew" here in Acts 10, but that Peter should not deem common what God deems clean. Notice that the voice *never* tells Peter to call something unclean, clean. The voice specifically uses the word "common" when correcting Peter. There is a difference between something common and unclean.

And unclean animal would be like a camel or pig. However, something common would be a cow that had been strangled or not slaughtered properly. The animal itself is not unclean, but is considered common, in this case, because of improper slaughter. Yeshua is telling Peter, "The things that God considers clean, don't refer to them as common."

Acts 10:17 tells us that Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean. I ask you, why? Almost everyone I talk to seems to interpret the vision very quickly and readily by saying we are allowed to eat unclean animals. Peter, however, knew that Yeshua, the sinless Son of Yahweh, was not telling him to violate the Torah. This is why Peter was perplexed. He knew that there must be another meaning to the vision.

While Peter thought about the vision (Acts 10:19) three men showed up at his house looking for him. I believe this corresponds to the three times the events of the vision happened to Peter (Acts

10:16). These men come into Peter and explain to them what had taken place back at Cornelius' house and Peter travels to meet with Cornelius.

In Acts 10:28 we get the climax of the story. Peter speaks to Cornelius and tells him, "You know it's forbidden for a Judahite man to associate with or visit a foreigner." Now, let's stop here for a second. What did Peter mean by "forbidden?" Was Peter saying that the Torah of Moses forbade such? I do not believe so. The Torah of Moses welcomes the stranger and teaches to treat them as one born among Israel (Exodus 18:12; Numbers 15:14-16; Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:33-34).<sup>55</sup>

Peter was learning in his vision that just because Cornelius was uncircumcised did not mean he was common. Peter's ancestor Abraham was called in un-circumcision, and even justified (declared innocent) *before* he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:9-11). God showed Peter that he shouldn't call any un-circumcised man common or unclean for salvation (Acts 10:28).

### ACTS 15

Concerning Acts 15 I see it two-fold. Firstly the issue is whether or not a Gentile had to be circumcised in order to receive salvation (Acts 15:1). Secondly, the circumcision being insisted upon by the Pharisees was not even "Abrahamic" physical circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14), but circumcision based upon the tradition of the elders or what is now known as the oral Torah.

These Gentiles were *turning to God* and did not need to come up under such circumcision to receive salvation. This is akin to the story of father Abraham who was counted righteous before Yahweh by faith, before he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6).

The council did place four necessary laws (from the written Torah) upon the Gentiles for the time being. If the Torah itself was a yoke of slavery *why place these four laws upon the Gentiles?* Let me further point out that there were many more commandments that fell

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<sup>55</sup> Peter's mentioning of forbidden is a reference to the traditions of the Elders of the Judahite people of the day (Matthew 15:1-2). The Pharisees of Yeshua's day believed that Moses not only received the Torah from God (that he wrote down), but also received a list of regulations from God that he passed down *orally*. They believed that Moses then taught them to the 70 elders orally, and then from generation to generation, these laws were passed down by word of mouth all the way to the Pharisees. (*The Works of Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 13.10.6*)

up under these four headings. It wasn't just four laws and that's it. These four contained within in them many other "sub-laws." Take for example the issue of sexual immorality. This would cover all the laws in Leviticus 18 and many in Leviticus 20. All these commands needed to be obeyed by the Gentiles.

Another point that many people miss is Acts 15:21. Directly after the four laws are settled upon, James continues by saying, "For since ancient times, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, and he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath day." This verse is rarely commented upon by those who use Acts 15 to teach the "no law for the Gentile" doctrine. James' point is that the Gentiles will begin with these four laws, and as they attend synagogue service on Sabbath, they will listen to the reading of Moses (Torah) and grow in grace and knowledge in their walk with God in the commandments. This verse then shows that the Gentiles would be observing the Sabbath.

It should be obvious that the four laws given to the Gentiles here were not the only laws they needed to obey. Nothing is said here about coveting, honoring one's parents, taking God's name in vain, theft, etc. Surely we don't believe that the Gentiles were free to disobey these aspects of Torah?

I believe the yoke (Acts 15:10) refers to both the traditions of the elders and the weight of your own sin. All have sinned, both Judahite and Gentile, and to try to tell a man they have to keep the law in order to be saved is a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. There is no way that the yoke of slavery is the law by itself. All one needs to do is read Psalm 119. To think that David thought the law was a yoke of slavery is wishful thinking. The yoke of slavery is rather the many traditions of men added to the Torah which includes when a person tries to tell someone that they must keep the law in order to have salvation. Scripture teaches a person is saved by grace through faith apart from any works at all (Genesis 6:8; 15:6; Ephesians 2:8-9). We should teach obedience to the law to others in this way: obedience is a loving response one gives to the Mighty God who saved them by His grace.

What the council decided was that the Gentiles must stop the practices they were most steeped in, but they would continue to hear the remainder of the Torah taught by attending synagogue service on Sabbath and listening to Moses' writings being read (Acts 15:21).

**ROMANS 2:25-29**

In this text Paul is not speaking against physical circumcision but rather those in Judah who believed that their physical circumcision somehow purchased them a "one-way non-refundable ticket" to the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul's upholding of the law of circumcision is seen in verse 25 where he says that, "circumcision benefits you if you observe the law." He goes on to explain that circumcision does not benefit you at all if you are a law breaker. What does Paul mean by calling a circumcised man a law breaker? He is showing that there were those in Judah in the first century who although they were circumcised in the flesh, they were not true, heart-felt followers in many other matters of Torah.

Paul goes on to say how that someone can be uncircumcised in their flesh (like Cornelius in Acts 10) and yet be a keeper of the Torah in many other aspects of the Torah. This man, though physically uncircumcised at this time in his life, is actually a judgment upon the man who bears the mark of physical circumcision, but it means nothing because the man's heart is not with Yahweh. This is why Yahweh through the prophet Ezekiel stresses *both* physical circumcision and circumcision of the heart (Ezekiel 44:6-9).

Paul ends by saying that a true Judahite is one who has been circumcised of the heart; like, might we say, Yeshua. Yeshua was a Judahite who was circumcised in the flesh, but He was also circumcised in His heart. His heart and mind were solely for Father Yahweh rather than for the praise of man.

Many Judahites of that day sought for the praises of man rather than the praises of Yahweh. While they were able to show the fleshly mark of circumcision to others in Judah, they were not able to bring a clean heart to the Father.

This does not mean that an uncircumcised man should not obey the law of circumcision at some point in his life. Paul goes on in this epistle to talk about how Abraham was justified by faith *before being circumcised* (Romans 4:1-10). At the same time, Paul does not fail to make mention of how when the law of circumcision came to Abraham he obeyed (Romans 4:11). Paul calls circumcision "a seal of the righteousness that he (Abraham) had by faith." When an uncircumcised man receives circumcision, he should consider it as a seal, as loving obedience to his father. He should not ever think that he is doing it to be declared innocent or justified.

The basic obedience to the law of circumcision as given in Genesis 17 is not what is being discussed here in Romans. Paul is rather discussing a particular view of circumcision and motive for circumcision that existed in the first century A.D. among some sect or sects within the Judahite faith.

**ROMANS 6:14**

I've heard this phrase time and time again when discussing with people about obeying the Torah: "But we are not under the law." To most people, not being under the law means that we are not obligated to be obedient to the law. On the contrary, not being under the law actually means not being under the law's penalty or curse. Paul, in the book of Romans, labors to show salvation by grace through faith apart from works (Romans 2-5). He does this on the basis of the work of Yeshua; His perfect life, substitute death, and victorious resurrection. Yeshua's works free us from the penalty of the law and therefore sin has no dominion over us any longer for we are not under the law, but under grace.

If you've ever been caught speeding you know what the phrase "under the law" can refer to. The moment the policeman turns on his blue lights and gets behind you, you know that you have broken the law and are therefore under the law. If by grace someone pays the fine for you, you are then released from the penalty because it's been paid. You are no longer under the law. Should you continue to do wrong because you're under grace? God forbid; go read Romans 6:14-15.

**ROMANS 14**

Romans 14:1 begins by contrasting the weak and the strong brother. The stronger brother is to accept the weaker, but not for the sake of arguing about secondary issues. Paul's use of weaker brother here is echoing his use of the same verbiage in First Corinthians 8:7-12. In both contexts he is dealing with brethren who are not inclined to eat meat out of fear that it has been offered to an idol. Paul explains in First Corinthians that idols are nothing and therefore one may eat meat and ask no questions about whether or not the meat had been sacrificed to an idol.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> It is true that Exodus 34:15 teaches against covenanting with idolaters and thereby committing spiritual prostitution with their gods and eating the meat of

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 14 as well. The stronger brother eats all things (veggies and meat) while the weaker brother eats only veggies (Rom. 14:2). The "all things" mentioned here should not be looked at as including all things in the sense of dogs, cats, poisonous creatures, etc. Rather it is understood as meat *on top of* a veggie diet. The stronger brother realizes that in and of itself an idol is nothing, so therefore he eats *asking no questions*.

This understanding filters down to verse 14 where Paul states that nothing is common of itself. Most translations will read here that "nothing is *unclean* of itself," but that is not the most accurate translation from the Greek. It would be better to translate this Greek word as "common" as is done in Acts 10 and 11 where Peter explains that he's never eaten anything common *or* unclean. Peter uses two different Greek words for two different categories of animals. Something common does not necessarily mean it is unclean.

What Paul is saying in Romans 14:14 is that he is persuaded by the Lord Yeshua that there is no clean animal common of itself, but if a person esteems such a clean animal to be common, then to *them* (because it's been sacrificed to an idol) it is common, but not to everyone.

Some people attempt to combat this understanding by citing Romans 14:20. Romans 14:20 is simple. It falls on the heels of what I've already explained. The word clean used in the verse is used in many instances by Paul and other authors in the New Testament to describe purity and cleanliness *without reference to the dietary laws*. A quick glance in an Englishman's concordance will show this.

So in context Paul is speaking about all foods (both meat and veggies) being pure or clean in spite of being offered to idols, but to the man that eats thinking the idol is something (with knowledge of the idol) this man defiles his conscience.

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animals sacrificed to their gods. Paul also echoes this in First Corinthians 10:14-22 where he says (in part), "...what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons." To harmonize these texts with what Paul also writes in Romans 14 (and First Corinthians 8) we must understand something. There is a difference between participating in the worship of an idol (sacrificing to it and eating the meat), and buying meat that may have been offered to an idol and eating it in your home. The first action directly violates Exodus 34:15, while the second action does not. In the second action you are cooking kosher meat and thanking Yahweh for eat, for the earth is His (First Corinthians 10:26). These texts also teach us that we should not even eat meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol in our homes if it is causing our weaker brother to stumble (First Corinthians 10:25-30).

Concerning the days mentioned in Romans 14 there isn't even a hint that the Sabbath, Feasts, and New Moons are under discussion. The most likely understanding is that it is talking about observing certain "fast days." Romans 14:5 says that one person considers one day to be above another while someone else considers every day to be the same. Verse 6 expounds further by saying, "Whoever observes the day, observes it to the Lord. Whoever eats, eats to the Lord since he gives thanks to God, and whoever does not eat, it is to the Lord that he does not eat, yet he thanks God." Notice how these two contrasted are described:

- (1) One person observes the day to the Lord
- (2) The other person eats to the Lord and gives thanks.

This entire chapter has nothing to do with observance to the Torah, but rather to non-essential practices that may differ from one believer to another. The Torah never commands a person to be a vegetarian or abstain from wine (Romans 14:21). This had to do with personal preferences.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 7:18-19**

Paul begins by saying that if anyone was called while already circumcised he should not undo his circumcision. This seems odd. We often think that about an uncircumcised man cutting off his foreskin, but can a circumcised man "sew on" foreskin? True enough, there were some during the B.C. era that attempted to do just that. In the second century B.C. there was a large Hellenization of the Judahite peoples insomuch that a Grecian gymnasium was built in the land of Israel and some Judahite men wished to participate in the games at the gymnasium in the nude. In order to have the appearance of the Grecian peoples, the men would undergo some type of "surgery" whereby the foreskin was reattached to their penis. They were circumcised men but were attempting to become Greeks by performing un-circumcision (First Maccabees 1:10-15; Second Maccabees 4:7-9).

Paul follows this thought by saying this, "Was anyone called while uncircumcised? He should not get circumcised." Admittedly, this is a difficult phrase for the Torah-keeper, but we must somehow interpret it in light of the law and the prophets (Isaiah 8:20).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> I do not use the word "difficult" here to say that it is non-understandable for the person who believes the Torah is binding today. What we must do here is interpret this

Paul could be saying that those called to Yeshua while in uncircumcision should not receive circumcision for the *wrong reason*. You should not receive circumcision out of pressure from the Pharisees, or for declaring you innocent and righteous in the sight of God. Remember, Paul did not compel Titus (a Greek) to be circumcised, *because of the false brethren* (Galatians 2:3-4). Paul saw it best to leave Titus uncircumcised because to circumcise Titus at that time (in that context) would give Titus the impression that Paul was caving in to the false circumcision doctrine of the believing Pharisees. For a person to be circumcised simply out of a desire to be obedient was and is an entirely different issue. As a matter of fact the phrase "did not compel Titus to be circumcised because of the false brethren" implies that if it were not for the false brethren Paul *would have* circumcised Titus.<sup>58</sup>

This interpretation gains weight when reading the next verse (7:19). Paul writes that, "Circumcision does not matter and uncircumcision does not matter, but keeping God's commandments does." What does Paul mean here? Circumcision is most definitely a commandment of God (Genesis 17:9-14; Leviticus 12:1-3), and Paul says here that keeping God's commandments does matter. What did not matter was what was going on at that time concerning people trying to be Greeks and other people trying to gain the approval of the Pharisees. These types of scruples or idiosyncrasies do not make a bit of difference. It is the simple obedience to the Torah of Yahweh that does make a difference.

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verse in light of the hundreds of verses that speak of the continuance of the Torah. We should specifically interpret it in light of the previous revelation about the law of circumcision as found in the Torah itself. To tell Abraham that obedience to God in the area of circumcision was nothing, after he heard God speak to him directly in Genesis 17:10-14, would have gotten nowhere with Abraham. God just told him that to disobey this covenant would constitute a cutting off of a person from His people; a breaking of the covenant. Remember also that Paul did not teach the Judahites to forsake Moses by ceasing to circumcise their children (Acts 21:15-27). That was nothing more than a false rumor going around about Paul to discredit his ministry (Acts 21:24).

<sup>58</sup> Some may point out Acts 16:3 where we read that Paul had Timothy circumcised because he wanted Timothy to go with him in his witnessing efforts to the Judahites in those areas. The situation is different here though. Timothy was not being pressured to be circumcised by these Judahites. They weren't telling Timothy, "You need to be circumcised in the manner we prescribe, or else." Paul was simply "heading off" any questions that the Judahites he would witness to would have about Timothy. He saw it best to circumcise Timothy before going to witness, and this proves that Paul did not believe all circumcising of uncircumcised men was erroneous or heretical.

Recognize as well that Yahweh, in the Tanak, speaks negatively of circumcision in certain contexts. He even speaks of a day where He will punish the circumcised along with the uncircumcised (Jeremiah 9:25-26). When we read these passages in the Tanak we are forced to interpret them in a way that does not contradict God's direct commands. We should read the Apostolic Scriptures in the exact same way, recognizing that any interpretation that contradicts Torah is an incorrect interpretation.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-22**

Paul is not bound to anyone, but he acts as a servant to everyone in hopes of winning more people than not.

To the Judahites Paul became like a Judahite. Paul was a Judahite himself, so it's curious here as to why he says he *became like* a Judahite. I take it as meaning he adopted the culture and practice of the Judean people (so long as it did not violate Torah) in order to blend in with them in hopes of them listening to him in a more inquisitive fashion. Then Paul mentions "to those under the law." I don't see how "those under the law" are any different from the Judahites he just mentioned. He says he becomes as one under the law, even though he is not one who is under the law. I agree with Paul here who is probably speaking about him being under grace rather than law (Romans 6:14-15). Paul's statement about not being under the law does not mean that he continues in sin (which is defined in First John 3:4 as transgression of the law; see Romans 6:1) but rather that he is not under the law in the sense that those without Messiah are; under the *penalty* of the law.

Next Paul mentions those outside the law, and I take this to mean those who are not Judahites and are not under the law. This would be non-Israelites or the Israelites from the 10 northern tribes that had been divorced by God and scattered among the heathens (Hosea 1). Paul says he becomes like one outside the law but he does not mean that he has disregarded Yahweh's law for he states he is under the law to the Messiah. In other words, he adopts the culture of the those that do not know God but not to the extent of making void God's law.

Then Paul mentions becoming weak to those who are weak and concludes by saying that his purpose for becoming all things to all men is in hopes of winning some of them to the faith.

I do not see anything in these verses that would lead me to believe that the "law of Christ" is a different law than the "law of Moses." Paul is simply talking about how he, to the best extent possible, makes an effort to "get on the level" of differing persons.

#### **GALATIANS 2:16 & GALATIANS 5:1-6**

If you are fully aware of the deadness of man in sin and the need to be declared innocent by means other than your own works, then you will be equipped to understand large portions of the book of Galatians. For now I will take the time to briefly cover a few texts in this often misunderstood book.

In the first text we have a general statement declaring that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah. There are some here who make a giant leap and try to teach that the "works of the law" are not the written Torah of Moses but only the traditions of the elders. I do not think that a systematic reading of the book of Galatians allows for such an interpretation. When you follow through with Paul's words in this epistle you come across blatant texts like Galatians 3:10-13 which clearly refer to the *written* Torah, and the curses for disobedience to the Torah (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26).

Paul is rather combating a belief system that seeks to declare one's self to be righteous in Yahweh's presence by his own obedience. A man cannot "work his way into the Kingdom" because even *one sin* removes you from earning the Kingdom of Heaven. Your justification must come through your faith in the one who did keep Yahweh's law perfectly, Yeshua the Son of Yahweh.

This is what is also going on in Galatians 5. Paul is not telling his readers in Galatians 5:2 that any man who gets circumcised cannot be attached to the Messiah. If that is the case there are many men who for medicinal reasons have gotten circumcised throughout history. Did this medical procedure alienate them from ever coming to Yeshua? Of course not. Even Paul took Timothy and circumcised him before going to preach the Gospel to the Judahites (Acts 16:3). Was Paul forever condemning Timothy?

Paul was talking to those people who thought they were declared innocent in "Yahweh's Court" by their one act of physical circumcision (Galatians 5:4). This is why he tells such people that they are a debtor to do the entire law (Galatians 5:3). What Paul means

here is this: if you think that your obedience is what justifies you in God's sight, you are obligated to perform every letter and stroke of the law to perfection, because God not only said to be circumcised, He gave every other commandment in the Torah as well. It is in this vein of thought that Paul writes that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything. People take Paul's words here in Galatians 5:6 and run wild with them without carefully considering the context. Circumcision does benefit. It is a covenant in the flesh of Abraham's descendants (Genesis 17:1-14), it allows a person to keep the Passover fully (Exodus 12:43-49), and Paul says that it benefits you if you are a Torah keeper (Romans 2:25). Paul is saying here that the view of those in Galatia concerning justification by the law of circumcision accomplishes nothing. There will be many Judahites who are circumcised in their flesh but will die in their sins because of the heart of stone that exists inside of them. The fact that their parents cut the fore-skin off of their flesh when they were eight days old doesn't mean anything when it comes to whether or not they will be justified in the sight of the holy God.

#### **GALATIANS 3:17**

This verse is used by *some* to teach that any law that came 430 years after the promises were given to Abraham is a law that has been abolished. They teach that only those laws in existence prior to Mount Sinai are still applicable.

This is incorrect by simply noticing the immediate context. Galatians 3:10 specifies what law is being spoken of. It makes a point to mention *everything* written in the book of the law, and that is a direct quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26. In Deuteronomy 27 we have a list of laws given and it is said that those who violate these laws will be cursed. We see here that the entire law is in view, and not just laws that came individually, at a later time than Genesis.

When Paul mentions the law that came 430 years after the promises were spoken to Abraham he is not contrasting the (1) laws in existence in Genesis with the (2) added laws at Mount Sinai. He is mentioning the entire law being codified or written down and thus added as a whole in that form. Many laws of Yahweh existed prior to Mount Sinai, but none of them were codified (added) until 430 years after the promise made to Abraham.

Furthermore, those espousing such a teaching do not even believe their own teaching for the most part. For example, both animal sacrifices and physical circumcision existed before Mount Sinai, yet when questioning adherents to this view they do not believe that either of the two aforementioned laws are binding New Covenant laws.

Last but not least, this view flatly contradicts Yeshua's words in Matthew 5:17-19 concerning not a jot or stroke of the law passing away until all is accomplished. This view wipes out jots, strokes, and many complete laws.

### **GALATIANS 3:24**

Paul here refers to the law as being our schoolmaster, guardian, or in some translations tutor. People often say that we are no longer under the schoolmaster and this must mean that we do not need to bother ourselves with obeying the Torah.

The Greek word used here (*paidagogos*) translated as "schoolmaster" literally means "to lead a child." In Greek culture this was a very trusted and well educated servant of the family that would supervise a child in the family from the age of six to sixteen. This person would constantly train the child, help him in moral development, assist him in his studies, etc.

Paul is referring to the law in a way that those in the Greek culture would understand. The law was our guide, guardian, and tutor so to speak. We looked at the Torah and it showed us right and wrong, pointing out our sins and inabilities. This lasted right up until we exhibited faith in the Messiah. Our faith in Messiah declares us innocent in Yahweh's "court" and thus no more are we under the tutelage of the tutor. We are rather looking to Yeshua - who, by the way, always observed the Torah of Yahweh, His Father.

There would obviously come a time in the Greek child's life when this guardian would no longer be needed; this was sometime around the late teenage years. Did this mean the child now discounted or neglected all that the tutor had instructed him in up to that time? Of course not, it was just that he was grown now.

We look to Messiah to justify us from all things, by which we could not be justified by the Law of Moses (Acts 13:39). However, our freedom does not grant us a license to live any which way we desire.

The free gift of grace and faith also enables us to live overcoming lives of dedication, and thus obedience to Yahweh's Torah.

#### **GALATIANS 4:10**

Study shows that Paul's audience in Galatia were the Gaul's, a Celtic people, whom *Gal*-atia was named after. These people were steeped in paganism and even celebrated the ancient Celtic festival named *Samhain* (pronounced Soween) which is the root of the modern Halloween celebration.

It was to these people that Paul wrote to in Galatians 4:8 when he said, "But in the past when you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods." Notice Paul identifies their enslavement with a time when they *did not know* God, and then in turn mentions their enslavement to things which are not gods by nature. This would be a clear reference to idols, man-made false gods. He then in verse 9 speaks of their conversion briefly and asks them why now, after their conversion, do they want to go *back* to the weak things they involved themselves in when they did not know God?

If we say that verse 9 is speaking of Sabbath days, New Moons, annual Festivals, and Sabbatical years then we have no choice than to believe that Paul was calling all of these observances weak, beggarly, and unprofitable. Is that the view of the Hebrew people in the Hebrew Scriptures?

Ezra and Nehemiah certainly did not view the celebration of the appointed times as weak and unprofitable. Reading Nehemiah 8 teaches us that the Judahite exiles that had returned to their homeland found great joy and much profit in reinstating the Festivals of Yahweh. Nehemiah believed in Sabbath observance so strongly that he threatened to lay hands upon (or use force upon, HCSB) anyone who would try to buy and sell on the Sabbath day (Nehemiah 13:21). Psalm 42:4 also tells us that David poured out his heart to Yahweh and walked with many, who with great joy and thanksgiving, kept the holyday (KJV).

Paul then mentions observing days, months, seasons, and years (vs. 10). The observation of these times were done by the Galatians when they *did not know* Yahweh, so these times could hardly be speaking about the appointed times of Yahweh in Leviticus 23. They had to be speaking of observing some type of false pagan calendar prior to their conversion. A false calendar dedicated to the worship of

false gods fits perfectly with the description of weak, beggarly, and unprofitable.<sup>59</sup>

#### **EPHESIANS 2:15 & COLOSSIANS 2:14**

These verses come on the heels of Paul speaking about Gentiles who had been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11). These Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise, they had no hope, and they were without Yahweh. The good news towards these Gentiles was that because of *the blood of Yeshua the Messiah* they could be brought into a relationship with the Father, and likewise into a relationship with those currently in believing Israel.

Yeshua is said to be the peace that brings both groups (Gentile and Judahite) into one. Yeshua tears down the dividing wall of hostility between the two (Ephesians 2:13-14). Notice carefully that it is the *dividing wall of hostility* that is tore down, which some translations refer to as *the enmity*. This is confirmed in verse 16 where once again it is *the enmity* that is said to be slain or put to death.

Verse 15 identifies this enmity or hostility as having something to do with the "law of commandments contained in ordinances." Many people today believe this teaches the Torah has been abolished. I do believe that the Torah is what is in view here, but is the text teaching that the Torah itself is abolished and no longer should be obeyed?

When a man sins against Yahweh, he incurs a debt to Yahweh. Yeshua refers to sin as debt in the famous prayer found in Matthew 6 where he teaches to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." These Gentiles had broken the law of commandments contained in ordinances and thus had acquired a debt that they could not pay themselves. They were in a state of enmity with the Father. Thus, because they had violated the Torah, the law of commandments was like a dividing wall between them and those in believing Israel. Only the blood of Yeshua was able to wipe the debt away seeing he paid the penalty for breaking the law of commandments contained in ordinances in His death on the cross,

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<sup>59</sup> One may ask why the phrase "elemental forces" (HCSB) is also used in Galatians 4:3 to describe what those under the law (Judahites) were enslaved to. Is Paul saying in verse 4 that Yeshua redeems those under the law from having to obey the law? Not at all, Paul is referring to their need to be redeemed from their slavery to the sin they committed against the law. This truly can be considered part of the elemental forces of the world. This view causes us to see the same basic definition for elemental forces of the world in verses 3 and 9.

slaying *the hostility* that existed. This made it possible for these Gentiles to be joined together with those who were already in believing Israel, making one new man out of the two groups (Ephesians 2:15b).

This is recognized even further by noticing the parallel passage of Colossians 2:14. The book of Ephesians when read side by side with Colossians is extremely similar and parallel in nature. Colossians 2:14 is undoubtedly referring to a debt of sin against the Torah being blotted out by mentioning the Greek term *cheirographon* (handwriting) and telling us that this is what was nailed to the cross. This is where we get the practice of the receipt spike still seen in many fast food restaurants today. Once you pay the employee of the restaurant the money you owe them, they take your bill and stick it over the spike which states in a manner that the bill is destroyed because it has been paid. Yeshua *nailed a spike* through our debt owed to Yahweh when He in His body on the cross took our sins upon Him self.

### **PHILIPPIANS 3:2-9**

Paul is expressing his former life as a Pharisee verses his new life as a believer in Yeshua. He is saying that prior to his conversion, he thought that he was very pious, above everyone else, living within what was felt by many to be the strictest sect in the Judahite faith. However, when Paul met the Messiah for who He really was, he had to acknowledge that he needed a Savior, someone to pay the penalty for even *his* sins. Being a Pharisee and being circumcised on the eighth day didn't make Saul of Tarsus righteous. He too like all of us fell short of Yahweh's perfect glory (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23). He realized now that his righteousness was based upon faith in the Messiah and not upon his performance of any laws. He recognized that even sinning one time eliminated a person from being able to enter the kingdom based upon their own good deeds. This is something we must all recognize least we grow into thinking that somehow we are earning salvation by our works rather than by coming to him with an empty hand of faith in His Son.

None of this, however, violates believing that the Torah is the way of life for the people of Yahweh. True heart-felt Torah keeping is the fruit of justification, but it is *by no means* the root, cause, or means of justification.

**HEBREWS 7:12**

Because of previous revelation in the Tanak (Ezekiel 40-48 and Jeremiah 33:17-22) I do not believe the author of Hebrews is saying that the Torah has been abolished. The prophet Jeremiah clearly says in his prophecy that the Levite ministers, and the covenant with David, will not be abolished. Ezekiel's prophecy clearly shows Levite Priests ministering in a physical temple during the first stage of the future Kingdom of Yahweh.

Hebrews 7:12's mentioning of a change in the law can be justly translated as a *transference* in the law. The point the author is making in Hebrews 7 is that the Melchizedek Priesthood is superior to the Priesthood of Levi, which of course is not contrary to the Torah for Melchizedek's Priesthood is found even before the Levitical (Genesis 14:17-20). The Levite priesthood has its place in God's plan, but the Priesthood of the Messiah - the Melchizedek Priesthood - is obviously better when we "weigh the two" so to speak. Furthermore, the transference the author speaks about is not a transference which has already taken place. It is a mistake to view the New Covenant as being *completely* fulfilled in the current heavens and earth. While the New Covenant has begun, being inaugurated by the Master (Matthew 26:28), there are several aspects of the New Covenant that have yet to be fulfilled. The final fulfillment of the New Covenant will be realized at the descending of the new heavens and new earth, spoken of in Revelation 21, when the first heavens and first earth pass away. When the New Covenant has its *complete* fulfillment we will no longer teach one another to know Yahweh (Jeremiah 31:34), and there will be a total restoration of the city of Yahweh that will never be uprooted or demolished again (Jeremiah 31:38-40).

In reading Hebrews one must keep in mind that there are two tabernacles, or realms spoken of; the earthly and the heavenly. Yeshua officiates in the heavenly tabernacle as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, while the sons of Aaron officiate in the earthly tabernacle. Hebrews 8:4 even makes the point that if the Messiah were on earth at the time the author of Hebrews was writing He would not be a Priest. This is because according to the Torah, the earthly tabernacle is ministered in by men who are descendants from Levi. Yeshua is instead from Judah (Hebrews 7:14). The earthly temple and the earthly Priests do have a vital part in Yahweh's plan.

Think about this. Hebrews 9:13-14 states, "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of the Messiah... cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?" The author here is making an argument from the lesser to the greater. He is arguing like this: if this is true then how much more is this other thing true? If the animal sacrifices purified the flesh then how much more does the sacrifice of Yeshua purify the conscience? The argument would not hold weight unless the first thing was actually true, i.e. animal sacrifices offered by the Levite Priests, in the earthly Temple, really do purify the flesh.

### **HEBREWS 8:7-8**

It is often said that the first Covenant, the Old Covenant, was with fault. Those making the argument believe that this means Torah observance is no longer required under the second, New Covenant.

I once spoke to a gentleman about this issue. I turned to Hebrews 8 in my Bible and asked if he would read verses 7-13 for me. He began to read verse 7, "For if that first covenant had been faultless" and he stopped. He said this, "You see, that first covenant, that old covenant was not faultless." I completely agreed with him, but I asked him to continue to read the passage to see where the fault was found.

You see, the text tells us in verse 8 that the fault found with the first covenant was not with the Torah, but with *the people* the covenant was made with. Verse eight begins by saying, "But finding fault with His people (HCSB)" or "For finding fault with them (NASB)." The people of Israel had pledged to keep all the words of Yahweh at the inauguration of the first Covenant (Exodus 19:1-8). They failed to keep their end of the Covenant, so fault was found in them.

So what does Yahweh do? Does He change His law? Does He lower His standard and then see if the people can live up to the lower standard? No, He doesn't change His law, He changes the hearts and minds of His people. Hebrews 8:9-12 goes on to speak of how Yahweh would write the Torah on the hearts and minds of His people Israel under the New Covenant. Ezekiel 36:26-27 speaks of a day when Yahweh will cause us to walk in the Torah because He has changed our hearts and minds. Yahweh's Torah is perfect. Our sins against the Torah is where the fault is found.





## Study Resources

In my studies I have found a few books that I believe will help anyone gain a much better understanding of how to properly view the Torah. While I do not agree with every single point presented in these works, the overall theme of the (1) perpetuity of the law (2) love we should have for Yahweh's law and (3) putting the law to practice, are enough for me to suggest that you obtain these works and study them yourself. As with all man-written works (including this one by me) you should always check what you read with the Scriptures, making sure to only rely on the Scriptures for your standard.

1: **The Law and Grace** (Examining the Relevance and Application of the Torah to All Believers), by Todd D. Bennett | [shemayisrael.net](http://shemayisrael.net). This is probably the best book I have ever read on the subject of the Torah for all believers. Mr. Bennett's writing style is both enjoyable to read, but at the same time is very explanatory and exhaustive. Tons of information is found in the extensive endnote section. I highly recommend that you stop what you are doing, and purchase this book right now.

2: **Restoration** (Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus), by D. Thomas Lancaster | [ffoz.org](http://ffoz.org). Here is another great work for understanding the continuing relevance of the Torah for today. Lancaster does a wonderful job discussing matters which few people venture to tackle, such as the epistles of Paul and the "difficult" matters of Torah.

3. **What About the Sacrifices?** by D. Thomas Lancaster | [ffoz.org](http://ffoz.org). Yet another masterful work by Lancaster. While many people believe that the sacrificial system is obsolete Lancaster argues for its continuing relevance and in doing so shows how Yeshua really did mean what He said in Matthew 5:17-19. This book discusses the true purpose for

the sacrifices, the life of the followers of Yeshua prior to A.D. 70, and the book of Hebrews.

**4. Yeshua** (A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church), by Ron Moseley | [messianicjewish.net](http://messianicjewish.net). This book is not as pro-Torah as the first three I've given, but it is an invaluable resource to understand many things in the teachings of Yeshua that you will not understand without knowing the life-setting and culture of the Judahites living at that time. The chapter discussing the oft misunderstood sayings of Yeshua, is worth getting this book.

**5. By This Standard**, by Greg. L. Bahnsen | [americanvision.org](http://americanvision.org). Here we have a book that is so well written and systematically put together. I could not put it down for about the first 100 pages. Bahnsen argues for a continuance of God's law in most areas, and centers in on how they should be sought for on a civil and judicial level in society today. Bahnsen does dismiss certain laws, but his work is still worth the read. When you read the first 100 or so pages in this book you will think that he believes in the complete Torah. I believe the logical conclusion of his argumentation leads one to believe in all the Torah, but he failed to see this in his work.





