

Gentiles and the Law

Vol. III - The Book of Romans

containing:

The Religious Situation Holy, Just and Good Pursue Peace

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

Behold!
My Servant whom I have chosen,
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.
Matthew 12:18

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Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)

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The English Bible in Basic English (BBE)

Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship,
Ontario, Canada, 1988-97

The Holy Bible - King James Version (KJV)

Oxford University Press,
London

The Open Bible - New King James Version (NKJV),

Thomas Nelson, Inc.,
Nashville, 1985.

Young's Literal Translation (YLT)

Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship,
Ontario, Canada, 1988-97

~ Introduction ~

I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
Isaiah 42:6-7



When we first began to write the series of articles entitled *Gentiles and the Law* (in 2003) the scope of the project was not apparent. As the project developed it became clear that a good way to address the problem was to survey every book of the Greek Scriptures (New Testament) to see if any of them taught that the "Law" had been done away, as so many claim.

Six years and twenty-five articles later the project was brought to a conclusion in *Hebrew Roots* Issue 08-3. However, it soon became obvious that it really was not at an end, for people began to express a desire to see all of the articles put into a book. The problem with a book is that *Hebrew Roots* does not have the facilities to publish anything in perfect bound book format and it is quite expensive to have a full book printed. Such a project would necessitate that we charge for the book in order to pay the printing and binding costs, which is against our stated policy that everything we produce will be made available free of charge (based upon the availability of funds) so that all who want copies may obtain them.

Therefore, the decision was made to put the articles into a series booklets which could be printed just like the regular issues. Thus, God willing, over time all of the articles will be made available for order directly from *Hebrew Roots*.

The first volume contains three articles: *Scriptural Background, Historical Background, and Which Law?* These

articles form the background information needed to more fully understand the other books of the New Testament.

The second volume begins with two articles: *Y'shua's Perspective* and *The Apostle's Perspective*. In addition there are two articles which deal with the Apostle Paul (the "apostle to the Gentiles") and his perspective of the role which the law (*Torah*) should play in the lives of Gentile Messianic Believers. They are *Paul the Pharisee*, and a survey of *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* from Issue 04-3.

This booklet (Vol. III) is devoted to the book of *Romans*. It begins with an introductory chapter (*The Religious Situation*) which provides background material about the many varied types of Messianic Believers Paul encountered in his ministry. This is followed by two chapters (*Holy, Just and Good* and *Pursue Peace*) which examine all of the passages in the book of *Romans* which pertain to Paul's view concerning the law (*Torah*) and how it applied to the Gentile Believers in particular.

As you read this material, keep in mind that these discourses are not intended to be a comprehensive commentary on everything contained within the Greek Scriptures (NT) for the books being investigated. Only those portions which pertain to the subject of the Law (*Written Torah*) will be examined in any depth.

For an excellent comprehensive Hebraic roots commentary on the entire New Testament, we suggest obtaining a copy of David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, published by Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. of Clarksville, Maryland. ISBN 965-359-008-1 (hardcover).

It is our hope that you will find this booklet helpful in both your individual studies and in your outreach to others.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2011

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ The Religious Situation ~

What advantage then has the Jew,
Or what is the profit of circumcision?
Much in every way!

Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.
Romans 3:1-2



Certain branches of Christianity (along with many Biblical scholars and much of Judaism) often characterize the Apostle Paul as being the "Founder of Christianity," or the "founder of a new religion." Along with this view, there often comes a companion teaching that this new religion (called Christianity) has replaced Israel as the Chosen People of God. This latter teaching, known as *Replacement Theology*, has been the root cause of much of the persecution which the Jews have suffered (over the centuries) at the hands of Christians. However, these views can be quickly discredited, since Paul himself made the following proclamation which clearly takes the emphasis off of himself:

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ [Messiah].'¹³ Is Christ [Messiah] divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"
(I Cor. 1:12-13)

The Apostle Paul never tried to aggrandize himself through public speaking. He taught simply and always pointed Believers toward *Y'shua* (Yeh-shoe'-ah = Jesus):

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] and Him crucified. ...⁵ that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (I Cor. 2:1-2, 5)

Not only did Paul constantly direct the Messianic Gentiles (those believing in the promised Jewish Messiah) toward *Y'shua* (Jesus), he also characterized them as being 'cut off' from the commonwealth of Israel in their previous pagan life. Clearly, the implication was that once they had become Believers in Messiah *Y'shua*, they were now joined to Israel, not replacing them:

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh ...¹² that at that time you were without Christ [Messiah], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:11-12)

The Apostle Paul made it very clear, in his letters, that he was decidedly not the founder of a new religion. Rather, he was a Jew who was given the task of proclaiming that the promised Jewish Messiah had come in the person of *Y'shua* and that not only had salvation come to the Jewish people, a path

had also been opened by which Gentiles could share in that salvation and join with Messianic Jews in the true worship of the Almighty Creator God, without having to convert to Pharisaic Judaism. This was a direct fulfillment (in type) of the prophecy which says:

"Also the sons of the foreigner

**Who join themselves to the LORD [*YHVH*],
to serve Him,**

**And to love the name of the LORD [*YHVH*],
to be His servants --**

**Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And holds fast My covenant --**

**⁷ Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.**

**Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;**

**For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all
nations.'**

**⁸ The Lord GOD [*YHVH*], who gathers the outcasts
of Israel, says,**

'Yet I will gather to him

Others besides those who are gathered to him.'"

(Isa. 56:6-8)

Vol. II explores what *Y'shua* had to say about the *Torah* and how it was the foundation upon which His disciples were to base the way they conducted their lives. This was especially emphasized in the *Sermon on the Mount* when *Y'shua* said:

"Do not think that I came to destroy [Gk. *kataluo* = to dissolve] the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [Gk. *pleroo* = complete].¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled [Gk. *ginomai* = come to pass].¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [Gk. *elachistos* = smallest or least in importance] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great [Gk. *me-gas* = great in stature or importance] in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:17-20)

Y'shua's testimony concerning the law (*Written Torah*) needs to be at the forefront of our minds as we read the *Epistles of Paul*, for the Apostle to the Gentiles never swerved from this firm conviction about the *Written Torah*:

"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12)

~ Setting the Stage ~

In preparation for an analysis of the Apostle Paul's writings in general (and the book of *Romans* in particular), it would be beneficial to review and expand more fully upon the situation which existed within the predominantly Gentile Messianic congregations. Before attempting to understand the interactions that were taking place within the congregations

which led Paul to write the Epistles, it is important to understand who all of the players were and what they believed.

To assist in understanding the situation which Paul faced in the congregations, this chapter will begin by reviewing the various categories of Resident Aliens as established by the *Written Torah*. We will then examine how those definitions had changed by the first century CE, followed by a review of the various Jewish sects which existed in the first century. In addition, we will examine another philosophy (*Gnosticism*) that had great influence during the first century on both Jews and Gentiles. Finally, we will tie all of this information together in order to establish the *Religious Situation* which faced the Apostle Paul as he worked diligently to teach truth to the Messianic congregations which God had entrusted into his care.

~ Epistle Difficulties ~

One of the most difficult things about studying the Epistles of Paul is that it is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. Often times we can only speculate concerning the situation which caused Paul to respond in the way that he did, because we do not have available to us the letters which Paul had received from the congregations. If we knew the nature of the reports which were brought to him concerning these various groups, there would be much more agreement on just what he meant when he wrote the Epistles. Also, we need to take seriously the caution which the Apostle Peter gave concerning the writings of Paul:

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."

(II Peter 3:14-16)

The writings of Paul are not easily understood. They require much study, but even more importantly they require the student to enter such study prayerfully, with a fervent desire for correct understanding, for many "untaught and unstable" people have twisted the teachings of Paul. This includes many of the English Bible translators.

What it boils down to is that many teachers do not want to come under the authority of God through the vehicle of the *Written Torah* commandments. They are especially resistant to the commands which pertain to keeping the Sabbath and the Festivals, and abstaining from unclean foods. They commonly use a misinterpretation and "twisting" of Paul's writings as the reason for their *antinomian* (against law, i.e. against *Torah*) position.

~ Resident Aliens ~

The *Torah* speaks of three different classifications of Gentiles who lived in Israel.

- ◆ The *zur* (zoor #2114) or *nokri* (nohk-ree' #5236 & #5237).
- ◆ The *Ger* (gehr #1616).
- ◆ The *Ger Toshav* (gehr toe-shahv' #8453).

There is some inconsistency in the way these words are translated in our English bibles. The most common term used for all of them is 'stranger.' Numerous other English words are translated from all of these terms as well. However, if one looks only at the Hebrew terms using a Hebrew concordance, certain conclusions can be made concerning the classifications of the non-Israelite people who lived in the Promised Land among the children of Israel:

- ◆ *Nokrim* or *Zarim* - are Gentiles who were in Israel on a purely temporary basis, either visiting or working. In most cases they probably were not there long enough for their idolatry to become a major problem. In the *Gentiles and the Law* series we refer to such people as *Temporary Aliens*.
- ◆ *Ger Toshav* - are Gentiles who were in Israel more or less permanently. Thus they would have had to forswear idolatry and, by doing so, they became eligible to receive many of the blessings afforded to the children of Israel. We refer to these people as *Sojourning Aliens*.
- ◆ *Ger* - are Gentiles who were in Israel on a permanent basis and who were willing to accept all of the religious practices of Israel except circumcision. They were eligible to receive all of the blessings except the right to eat the most sacred meal of the year, the Passover Lamb; plus, they had restrictions placed upon them concerning access to the Tabernacle/Temple. We refer to these people as *Permanent Aliens*.
- ◆ *Proselytes* - are *Gentiles* who went all the way and accepted circumcision, thereby becoming one with the children of Israel. Therefore, proselytes were eligible to perform all of the Temple rituals as though they were native born, including the eating of the Passover Lamb.

Passover Lambs could only be slaughtered at the Temple and had to be eaten within the city walls of Jerusalem. However, an uncircumcised alien was prohibited from eating the Passover Lamb because this Temple ritual specifically required the partaker to be circumcised:

"And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD [YHVH], let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it." (Ex. 12:48)

Written Torah does not restrict an uncircumcised Gentile from attending a *Seder*, as long as he does not eat of the Passover Lamb. In the Diaspora this was not even an issue,

since lamb could not be served because it could not be ritually slaughtered at the Temple. (See the booklet *Passover in Egypt and Jerusalem* -- SPPEJ.)

~ First Century Application ~

By the time of *Y'shua*, the application of these Resident Alien classifications had changed considerably. This was a direct result of centuries of judgments which became *Oral Torah* (dogma), also known as the "traditions of the fathers." Some of these traditions came to have a direct bearing upon the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Most important was the change in the meaning of the Hebrew word *Ger*, which had, by the first century, come to carry the connotation of *Proselyte* or convert to Judaism. This would mean, in first century understanding, the *Ger*, or *Permanent Alien*, and a *Proselyte* were one and the same. This point needs to be remembered as we discuss the relationship of Gentiles and Jews in the Messianic Community.

In the first century CE, the orthodox Jews (*Pharisees*) wanted little to do with ordinary Gentiles (*Nokrim* or *Temporary Aliens*) who were not willing to make a commitment to Judaism. However, Jews were willing to work with the *God Fearer's* (those who were in the process of converting to Judaism). If, in the first century, the *Ger* was considered to be a *Proselyte*, then the first century *God Fearer* would have been equivalent to a *Ger Toshav* or *Sojourning Alien*, one who was probably going to stay with Judaism but had not yet made the full commitment by undergoing circumcision.

Cornelius was in the *Ger Toshav* or *God Fearer* status when Peter came to him at Caesarea:

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always." (Acts. 10:1-2)

Even someone as righteous as Cornelius (who prayed always, was devout, and gave generous alms) was not allowed to have full social contact with the Jews for fear of rendering the Jews ritually impure, for, by the first century, ritual purity had become extremely important in the *Pharisaic* world. According to Tim Hegg, in his book on the Apostle Paul called *The Letter Writer*:

"... over 67% of the halachic rulings attributed to them [the Pharisees] in the extant Rabbinic literature deals with the issues of table-fellowship and purities." (p. 54)

These same views were also prevalent among the Messianic Jews (many of whom had been trained by the *Pharisees* prior to their acceptance of *Y'shua* as Messiah). We know this because Peter was criticized for going into Cornelius' house and eating a meal with him and his household:

"Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,³ saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:1-3)

In first century Judaism, unless an alien (Gentile) became a full fledged *Proselyte* Jew through the conversion process, he was considered to be, at best, a second class citizen, and at worst, a virtual outcast from Jewish society. This societal separation became a "wall of division" (Eph. 2:14) between Jews and Gentiles until after the conversion of Cornelius and his household, when Messianic Gentiles came to enjoy full membership in the Messianic Community through the ritual of baptism alone.

~ The Various Sects ~

It is also important to remember that a majority of first century Jews (perhaps the majority) did not live within the strict guidelines of the *Pharisees*. However, if a first century Jew wanted to attend Synagogue, he would most likely be confronted with *Pharisaic* teachings, because the vast majority of Synagogues were run by Rabbis who were of that sect.

The main Jewish sects of the first century included the following:

- ◆ The *Sadducees* were made up primarily of the Priests and Levites who controlled Temple worship. They accepted only the *Torah* (first five books of the Bible) as God-breathed Scripture. However, some Priests and Levites were Pharisees -- like Josephus the Jewish historian.
- ◆ The *Pharisees* were primarily 'lay' men, well schooled in both *Written* and *Oral Torah*. They accepted the *Torah*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings* (the entire 'Old Testament') as being inspired by God. However, they also believed the *Oral Torah* was inspired by God and handed down orally from the time of Moses. Therefore, they considered *Oral Torah* to be of equal weight with *Written Torah*.
- ◆ The *Essenes* were a communal group or brotherhood which is believed to have existed from the second century BCE through the first century CE. They lived in monastic type communities and many did not marry. They believed the Priesthood was corrupt and therefore did not participate in Temple worship in Jerusalem. They looked for a "Teacher of Righteousness" to come and teach the Jewish people correct doctrine and proper worship.
- ◆ The *Am HaEretz* (Ahm Hah Eh-rehtz') were the "People of the Land." These were the common people who did not belong to any of the sects. They were said to be careless about the keeping of the commandments and did not support the aims of *Pharisaic* Judaism. John the Baptist and *Y'shua* directed their ministries primarily towards the *Am HaEretz*.

While these were the main groups found in first century Judaism, there were numerous smaller sects as well. (One writer mentioned twenty-four different sects in existence prior to the fall of the Temple in 70 CE.)

~ Another Philosophy ~

There was yet another popular teaching extant within first century Judaism. Although it cannot be characterized as a sect, however later on it did provide the foundation for a number of different Christian sects. This teaching was actually a pagan religious philosophy that found its way into many different belief systems. In modern religious scholarship this philosophy is called *Gnosticism*, although it was never known by that name in the first century.

The Greek word *gnosis* means "knowledge." Thus the people we call *Gnostics* claimed to possess special (often mystical) 'knowledge' about God which others did not have. The *Gnostic* systems were syncretistic; that is they were a mixture of various pagan magic beliefs along with a smattering of Jewish theology and, at times, even Scripture. The *Gnostics* believed their "special knowledge" gave them the 'real' truth about spiritual matters, making their belief system superior to the Jews who depended on the *Torah* for their religious practices.

This "special knowledge" or *Gnosticism*, was popular among the *Hellenized* Jews; those who had abandoned the strict lifestyle of orthodox Judaism and became enamored with the Greek (and later Roman) culture of the time.

~ Dualism ~

Along with the Greek (*Hellenistic*) culture came certain *Gnostic* beliefs which were clearly derived from paganism. Central to most *Gnostic* beliefs was the acceptance of *Dualism*. While there were many divergent understandings of *Dualism*, in its most elemental form it stated that everything earthly or physical was created by an evil god called the *Demiurge*. Meanwhile, the true god ruled in the heavenlies over all things spiritual. Thus, in the *Gnostic* belief system, the human body was considered evil while the human spirit was considered to be good.

Dualism, which emphasized the continuing conflict between the pagan gods, was definitely not inherent to Judaism which taught the 'oneness' of God. *Dualism* actually originated among the Persians in a religion called *Zoroastrianism*. From there it spread (in one form or another) to all of the eastern oriental pagan religions, finally invading certain Jewish sects, and from there it entered Christianity.

Although some Jewish *Gnostics* used the Genesis creation account in their teachings, the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) were not generally a part of the Pagan *Gnostics* 'special knowledge.' The *Gnostics* believed their 'knowledge' came to them in a supernatural fashion, because the 'good' god (the one who supposedly only ruled the spiritual world) was said to manifest Himself to the soul rather than the intellect. For this reason, the *Gnostics* claimed to receive their "special knowledge," or mysteries, through their emotions.

~ Dueling Lifestyles ~

Interestingly, *Dualism* led to two totally different lifestyles among those who followed *Gnostic* teachers:

- ◆ One *Gnostic* teaching said that men should endeavor to deny the flesh of all its evil desires. These people followed an extreme form of asceticism. They fasted frequently, did not marry, or in any way indulge in sexual matters. Some even flagellated themselves in order to afflict their 'evil' flesh. Their goal was to live as much as possible in the 'spiritual' realm and to take no enjoyment at all in the physical.
- ◆ However, there were others of *Gnostic* understanding who took an opposite tack. They indulged in every form of fleshly desire as a means of satisfying the *Demiurge*. They believed it did not matter what one did in the flesh. In their eyes, as long as their 'spirits' remained pure, that was all that really counted.

Those who followed *Gnostic* philosophy considered the God of the Hebrews to be the *Demiurge*; the evil god who created the earth and physical man. Therefore, they totally rejected the *Torah* (as well as the rest of the Old Testament) as an inferior set of laws established by the Jews 'evil' god. Later, when *Gnosticism* began to invade the congregations of the *Messianic Believers*, they taught that the God of the Old Testament was evil, and that Jesus was the good, spiritual God.

The historical view that *Gnosticism* invaded the Messianic Community very early is based upon the story of Simon Magus and his subsequent life, as told by various Church fathers:

"But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*]. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' ²⁰ But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be

forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.'

²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.'" (Acts 8:9-24)

Later Church writers claimed an oral tradition which taught that Simon Magus initiated the first Christian Gnostic Sect.

~ Enter Paul ~

Armed with the knowledge of the social and religious situation that existed between Jews and Gentiles of the first century, we can now see where Paul fits in.

Of all the sects extant during the first century, Paul was especially conversant with the one major Jewish sect which was on the rise at that time; the *Pharisees*. Paul was himself a *Pharisee*, as well as the son of a *Pharisee*. He had studied under Gamaliel, the leader of the Hillel school of *Pharisaic* understanding:

"They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.'" (Acts 26:5)

"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.'" (Acts 22:3)

The *Pharisaic* model of Judaism (on which Paul stood prior to meeting *Y'shua* on the road to Damascus) was a marvelous system of works that had been built upon both the *Written* and *Oral Torah*. This system was built to assist people in their worship and honor of God by keeping them as sin free and ritually pure as possible.

Oral Torah included all of the fences which the Sages had added in order to keep the people from ever getting close to actually breaking the *Written Torah* commands. For example, many prohibitions were added to the *Written Torah* commands concerning the observance of the Sabbath. However, these added rules (Rabbinic ordinances or dogmas) became a burden to the common people and sometimes actually drove people away from a desire to be *Torah* observant:

"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?'" (Acts 15:10)

Under the *Pharisaic* system, when an individual committed a sin, as defined by their *halacah* (which included the *Oral Torah* commands), they were instructed to follow the *Written Torah* commands and bring an offering to the Temple. There were two types of animal offerings (depending on the type of sin committed) which could be brought to the Temple in order to effect expiation. In English, these offerings are commonly called *Sin Offerings* and *Trespass* or *Guilt Offerings*.

According to *Written Torah* (see Lev. 4:2 and 27 below) the above offerings were only effective for expiating unintentional sin. If a sin had been committed intentionally, the sinner was required to first do *teshuvah* (teh-shoe'-vah =

repentance and return to God). Only after *teshuvah* had been accomplished, could the proper offering be acceptable to God.

~ Defining Sin ~

One of the major problems the first century Jews had was the same problem many Messianic Believers experience today; trying to come to an understanding of what constitutes sin. The various Jewish sects (and schools within the sects) could agree on most of the basics as found in the *Written Torah*, but they often disagreed on the proper application of those basics. This controversy is visited several times in the Gospel accounts. For example:

"And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. ³ And He said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Step forward.' ⁴ Then He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they kept silent. ⁵ And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.'" (Mark 3:1-6)

Not all first century *Pharisees* would have sided with these members of the strict school of *Shammai* who took issue with *Y'shua* over healing on the Sabbath. Many *Pharisees* would have sided with *Hillel*, who taught that the command to love your neighbor, and do good by healing him, took precedence over the command not to work on the Sabbath day. *Y'shua* declared many of *Hillel's* teachings to be correct by His actions.

~ What is Sin? ~

What then is sin? The way a person answers this question has a great bearing on what they believe about the 'Law.' Mankind's first sin is recorded in Scripture:

"And the LORD God [YHVH Elohim] commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.' ...

¹⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.'" (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6)

What was the essential factor in this very first sin? It can be summed up in one word: DISOBEDIENCE! Actually, one of the basic meanings of the Hebrew word for sin, *chatah* (hah-tah'), is "to miss the mark." This definition is evident from the following passage:

"Among all this people were seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss [*chatah*].'" (Judg. 20:16)

#2398 חָטָא chata' {khaw-taw'}

Meaning: "1) to sin, miss, miss the way, go wrong, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to miss 1a2) to sin, miss the goal or path of right and duty 1a3) to incur guilt, incur penalty by sin, forfeit 1b) (Piel) 1b1) to bear loss 1b2) to make a sin-offering 1b3) to purify from sin 1b4) to purify from uncleanness 1c) (Hiphil) 1c1) to miss the mark 1c2) to induce to sin, cause to sin 1c3) to bring into guilt or condemnation or punishment 1d) (Hithpael) 1d1) to miss oneself, lose oneself, wander from the way 1d2) to purify oneself from uncleanness."

This Hebrew definition for *chatah* (sin) matches very closely with that of *hamartia*, the Greek word for sin:

#266 ἁμαρτία hamartia {ham-ar-tee'-ah}

Meaning: "1) equivalent to 264 1a) to be without a share in 1b) to miss the mark 1c) to err, be mistaken 1d) to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong 1e) to wander from the law of God, violate God's law, sin 2) that which is done wrong, sin, an offence, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act 3) collectively, the complex or aggregate of sins committed either by a single person or by many."

~ Scriptural Definitions of Sin ~

It is fine to use a lexicon or dictionary definition for Greek and Hebrew words, but it is even better to find a word defined in the Scriptures. Thankfully, there are several definitions for 'sin' in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Such definitions take the guess work out of trying to figure out what constitutes sin. The first three are all related and are found in the book of Leviticus:

"Now the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, ²Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a person sins [*chatah* #2398] unintentionally against any of the commandments [*mitzvah* #4687] of the LORD [YHVH] in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them, ..."" (Lev. 4:1-2)

This verse states that sin is the breaking of the commandments. This concept is reiterated a few verses later:

"If anyone of the common people sins [*chatah* #2398] unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments [*mitzvah* #4687] of the LORD [YHVH] in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, ..."" (Lev. 4:27)

And again in the next chapter:

"If a person sins [*chatah* #2398], and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments [*mitsvah* #4687] of the LORD, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity."" (Lev. 5:17)

These passages clearly state that sin is the breaking of the commandments (*mitzvah*) of God, even if the person committing the sin is not aware that it is a sin. Thus, sin can be

identified as that which opposes the commandments found in the *Torah* in particular, as well as in the Scriptures generally. This concept is fully supported by the Apostle Paul:

"... for by the law [*Torah*] is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20b)

Another definition of 'sin' in the Hebrew Scriptures has to do with one's attitude:

"A haughty look, a proud heart, And the plowing of the wicked are sin." (Prov. 21:4)

Sin is not limited to one's actions, but even one's thoughts can be classified as sin if they are evil:

"The devising of foolishness is sin, And the scoffer is an abomination to men." (Prov. 24:9)

~ New Testament Definitions of Sin ~

There are five definitions of sin in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament). The first of these tells us that if we believe committing a certain act constitutes a sin, even if the Scriptures teach that not to be the case, it is still sin to the one who believes it to be so. Thus, if someone truly believes that breaking certain elements of *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) is sin, for that person it is so:

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

Sexual immorality is specifically identified in the New Testament as sin, not just against God and others, but also against ourselves:

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." (I Cor. 6:18)

Having undue respect for persons is also considered to be sin:

"... ⁹but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." (James 2:9)

The Hebrew concept that performing *mitzvot* (meets-vote' = commandments) is equivalent to doing good deeds, is supported in the New Testament. To fail in performing a good deed, when one knows that it should be done, is considered to be sin:

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)

Finally, the Scriptures come full circle, for the final definition of sin in the Greek Scriptures exactly matches the first one found in the Hebrew Scriptures:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (I John 3:4 KJV)

The *Bible in Basic English* has an interesting way of expressing this verse:

"Everyone who is a sinner goes against the law, for sin is going against the law." (I John 3:4 BBE)

Sin, in its most elemental form, is "missing the mark" of perfection found in God's law. Just like *Adam* (Ah-dahm') and *Chava* (Hah-vah' = Eve) discovered, SIN IS DISOBEDIENCE to God's direct commandments.

Orthodox Judaism has identified 613 commandments in the *Written Torah* alone. Interestingly enough, Finis Jennings Dake, the compiler of *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, claims to have identified a grand total of 1050 additional commandments in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament). Of course many, if not all, of these New Testament commandments correspond with and enhance the 613 *Torah* commandments.

As we have just seen, there are other actions (or lack thereof) and attitudes which also constitute sin. Both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures teach that just dutifully following the *Written Torah* commands is not enough if the heart is not right with God, for God wants more from His people than obedience to rules (as important as they are):

**"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
¹⁷Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow.
¹⁸Come now, and let us reason together,'
Says the LORD [YHVH],
'Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.
¹⁹If you are willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land;
²⁰But if you refuse and rebel,
You shall be devoured by the sword;
For the mouth of the LORD [YHVH] has spoken."
(Isa. 1:16-20)**

What does God want from His people?

- ◆ Personal purity (v. 16)
- ◆ The forsaking of evil or sin, which is the breaking of the commandments (v. 16, see also Lev. 5:17, I John 3:4)
- ◆ To do good (v. 17, see also James 4:17)
- ◆ Being obedient to God's way of life as expressed in His Law (v. 19, see also Lev. 5:17, I John 3:4)

~ The Situation ~

The way we understand the Religious Situation which existed in the Messianic Congregations (Synagogues) to whom Paul ministered is summarized below.

Natural Born Messianic Jews: Every Congregation had a contingent of natural born Jews who had accepted *Y'shua* as the Messiah. All of the men in this category would have been circumcised since the eighth day following birth. Some (but not all) of these Jews would have been schooled in the *Pharisaic halachah* (hah'-lah-chah = the way one walks) of the *Oral Torah* ordinances (traditional dogmas). Many of those who agitated to have all Gentile Messianic Believers circumcised would have been from this group. Those, among the Pharisaic sect, were the ones Paul must have been referring to when he spoke disparagingly in several places about:

"... those of the circumcision, ..." (Titus 1:10)

Common Messianic Jews: A second group of circumcised Jews would have been those who were not brought up or trained in the *halachah* of the *Pharisees*. These were the *Am HaEretz*, or People of the Land, who had returned to the Faith as a result of hearing the teachings of John the Baptist, *Y'shua* Himself, or one of the Apostles. Their religious training would have come primarily from Apostolic teaching.

Hellenistic Messianic Jews: Another group of Messianic Jews were the *Hellenists* who were steeped in Greek and Roman culture but had now found their way back to the Faith through *Y'shua* and His sacrifice. It is evident from Scripture that a sizable body of *Hellenistic* Jews were Messianic Believers very early on:

"Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews [orthodox] by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." (Acts 6:1 NKJV)

It is quite likely that the philosophy of *Gnosticism* first entered the Messianic Community through some of the Jews who were from a *Hellenistic* background.

* Non-Messianic Jews *

Another category of native born Jews would have been those Jews who did not accept *Y'shua* as the Messiah. History shows that in many cases, during the first century, both Messianic and non-Messianic Jews worshipped together in the same Synagogue. However, by the end of the first century this shaky camaraderie was on the wane and by the time of the *Bar Kochba* revolt in 132 CE, the non-Messianic Jews no longer tolerated Messianic Jews in their midst.

* Proselytes *

Another category of Jews would have been the *Proselytes*. They were former Gentiles who had converted to Judaism by accepting circumcision and the 'yoke' of the *Oral Torah* ordinances (traditional dogmas). Like the native born Jews, some of the *proselytes* believed in *Y'shua* while others did not.

Among the *proselytes* who accepted *Y'shua*, it is quite possible that many of them were part of the "Circumcision" faction and may have been the ones who were crying the

loudest to have all Gentile Messianic Believers circumcised and forced to follow the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma). Often times the ones who are most zealous about their faith are the ones who have converted to it. Also, there may have been a bit of jealousy among the Messianic *Proselytes* when they saw new Gentile Messianic Believers being accepted into full fellowship without having to go through the painful rite of circumcision and without taking on the "yoke" of *Oral Torah* ordinances (traditional dogmas).

* Messianic Gentiles *

Last, but not least, were the Gentiles who had come to faith in *Y'shua*. Originally, this group would have been made up exclusively of Gentile *God Fearers*, those who were taking the pre-*Proselyte* training program required by the *Pharisees*.

After the vision of the unclean creatures, which God gave to Peter at the house of Simon the Tanner (Acts 10), the Messianic *God Fearers* received the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Rue-ach' Hah Koh-desh' = Holy Spirit) and were immersed (baptized) in the name of *Y'shua HaMashiach*. This gave them full entry into the Messianic Community, thereby breaking down the social wall which had previously separated them from their Jewish brethren:

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ..."

(Eph. 2:14)

Later on, as the Messianic faith grew and spread, other Gentiles began to enter the Messianic Congregations merely by accepting *Y'shua* as their personal Savior, being immersed (baptized), and agreeing initially (at the very least) to abide by the four *Oral* commands of the Messianic Community during their *Written Torah* Training Program:

""Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.""

(Acts 15:19-20)

These four dictates were given because the Gentile Believers would be attending Synagogue every Sabbath where the *Written Torah* was read and expounded. By observing Sabbath and learning the *Written Torah*, the Gentiles would eventually come to know all of the *halachah* as set forth in the *Written Torah* and as lived by The Great Rabbi, *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

""For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.""

(Acts 15:21)

It is our opinion that baptized Gentile Believers became like the ancient *Gerim* of the *Written Torah*. They kept all of the God given laws of Israel (the *Written Torah*) but they were not physically circumcised.

Being uncircumcised did not mean that a *Ger* could not go to the Temple in Jerusalem. What it did mean was that he could not go beyond a certain prescribed point and he could not eat of the ritually offered Passover Lamb.

However, the *Ger* (Gentile), who was 'in' Messiah *Y'shua*, did not need to go to the Temple for Passover, nor did he need to eat of the physical Passover Lamb, for he was circumcised in heart and his Passover was none other than *Y'shua* Himself. Notice what the Apostle Paul wrote to all members of the Corinthian Congregation; both Jew and Gentile:

"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ [*Messiah*], our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (I Cor. 5:7-8)

~ More Gnosticism ~

With the increase of Gentile Believers (*Gerim*), came also an increase in people from a pagan background. It is our opinion, that even though *Gnostic* beliefs first crept into the Messianic Community via the *Hellenistic* Jews, that philosophy increased as more and more Gentiles from pagan backgrounds were brought into fellowship. Most of the Messianic *Gerim* (Gentiles) probably gave up their pagan ideas, but there were undoubtedly others who held certain pagan (*Gnostic*?) beliefs, even as they accepted *Y'shua* as their Savior.

The Apostle John makes this very clear when he attacked a typical *Gnostic* belief that still exists in some quarters today:

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] has come in the flesh is not of God."

(I John 4:2-3)

It was a common first century *Gnostic* teaching that *Y'shua* did not come in the flesh but was instead a spirit that assumed the appearance of flesh.

It has already been noted how *Simon Magus*, a teacher of the Samaritan occult, came to be baptized into the Faith. There can be little doubt that if he came into fellowship with Messianic Believers in the very presence of two of the Apostles, so others of similar background did likewise.

~ Summary ~

The Religious Situation within first century Judaism was both varied and complex. In addition to the various Jewish sects (*Pharisees*, *Sadducees*, *Essenes*, etc.), there were the *Am HaEretz* (the common people), and the *Hellenists* (adherents of Greek and Roman culture).

While the orthodox Jews (*Pharisees*) had tight control over the Synagogues in Jerusalem, their degree of control seems to have been considerably less in the cities of the Diaspora, where a large contingent of Messianic Gentiles were to be found. It was primarily toward these predominantly Gentile congregations that Paul's ministry was directed.

Because they came from pagan backgrounds, the Messianic Gentiles had two problems to overcome which the Messianic Jews did not have to face. They had to unlearn all of the pagan teaching in which they had been reared, and they had

to replace that pagan learning with an understanding of the *Written Torah*.

As one studies the Epistles of Paul, it is important to realize that the Messianic Gentiles were being pulled from several different directions at the same time. They had their new found faith in *Y'shua* as their Savior; the One through whom their sins were forgiven and about whom they needed to learn more, but they still had certain 'pagan' (*Gnostic*) ways of looking at things which they had to overcome. In addition, they had to deal with those of the 'circumcision' faction. This faction consisted of the Messianic Jews and *Proselytes* who wanted the Gentiles to become circumcised Jews and take on the 'yoke' of the *Oral Torah*, and they seemed to be teaching that all Messianic Gentiles needed to 'earn' their salvation by keeping the commandments. No doubt, the 'commandments,' which they said had to be kept, included all of the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma).

It is easy to see that Paul had his hands full trying to combat these divergent streams of thought. It is also easy to see how Believers who do not understand all of these variables can misunderstand Paul's writings.

With this background information fresh in our minds, we are now ready to begin an examination of the book of *Romans* to see what his perspective concerning the *Written Torah* commands might have been when it came to the *Gerim* (the Gentile Messianic Believers).

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~ Holy, Just and Good ~

Therefore the law *is* holy,
And the commandment holy and just and good.
Romans 7:12



Having become familiar with *The Religious Situation* (the previous chapter), our attention may now be turned to the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the *Messianic Community* meeting in the several Synagogues of Rome (there may have been as many as eleven) in which Messianic Jews and Gentiles fellowshipped together along with the non-Messianic Jews.

This letter, to the Messianic Community in Rome, is where Paul clearly states his perspective concerning the *Written Torah* and its application to those in the Roman Messianic Community, whether Jew or Gentile.

~ Jewish Privilege ~

The city of Rome was the capitol of the Roman Empire and was therefore the central location where all of the various pagan religions of the Empire existed together. At the time Paul wrote his letter to the *Romans* (c. 55-57 CE), Judaism was the only religion who's adherents possessed the right to live according to their own ancestral laws, even being exempt from paying annual homage to the Emperor. This privilege had been granted by Julius Caesar (c. 100-44 BCE) to all Jews in the realm because the Jews had existed prior to the establishment of the Roman Empire but especially because of Jewish assistance to Caesar during the civil war which took place in the Maccabean period. According to Mark D. Nanos, in his book *The Mystery of Romans*:

"These legal privileges ... included the authority to interpret the Law and customs for the community, exemption from [pagan] worship and civic cults, the right to collect and distribute the Temple tax for Jerusalem, exemption from military service, protection of Sabbath observance including nonappearance in court, and the right to function as independent organizations without specifically seeking authorization to do so." (pp. 44-45)

Since Judaism was the only religion in the Roman Empire which was granted exclusion from pagan worship, it is highly probable that the Messianic Believers (both Jew and Gentile) either met together in Synagogue with the non-Messianic Jews, or met separately while still remaining under the auspices of the overall Jewish Community through the citywide *Beit Din* (Bait Deen = House of Judgment or court system).

If the Messianic Believers had not been a part of the Jewish Community, they would have been liable for arrest because of their refusal to bow down to the pagan idols of Rome or participate in Emperor worship, for only the Jewish Community, among all the many religions of Rome, had

received a complete exclusion from participation in the minimum annual pagan worship required of all subjects in the realm.

Because of Paul's comment at the end of this letter, it is possible that the Messianic Believers (Jew and Gentile) did meet separately on some occasions, perhaps midweek if not also on the Sabbath:

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua], ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches [ekklesia or gatherings] of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church [ekklesia or gathering] that is in their house." (Rom. 16:3-5a)

The Greek word *ekklesia* (church) does not mean a building, rather a "gathering or assembly of people." Thus, a sect of Messianic Believers who came together regularly, even within a generally non-Messianic Jewish Synagogue, could be termed an *ekklesia* or gathering of those who held that *Y'shua* was the promised Jewish Messiah.

According to Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, the statement concerning the *ekklesia* that was in the home of Aquilla and Priscilla could merely mean their immediate family. Thayer writes that this phrase means:

"... the company of Christians belonging to a person's family; others less aptly understand the phrase of the Christians accustomed to meet for worship in the house of some one." (p. 196)

However, Paul addressed this letter specifically to the Messianic Community:

"To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: ..." (Rom. 1:7)

The context found in certain passages of the letter (especially chapters 9-11) indicate that the Messianic Believers were meeting, on a regular basis, with the non-Messianic Jews. This is important information because it helps to explain some of the tension that was apparent between the factions, which Paul addressed within the text of this letter.

~ A Little History ~

The Epistle to the *Romans* arrived at a time when the Messianic Community enjoyed a peaceful relationship with the Roman government because of their direct affiliation with Judaism.

At the time this letter was written (c. 55-57 CE), the Emperor Nero was still a teenager and just one to three years into his term of office. (Nero was born Dec. 15, 37 CE, became Emperor in 54 CE, and died June 9, 68 CE.) It was not until 59 CE that Nero's brutality began to outwardly express itself, when he had his own mother, Agrippina, put to death. He followed up this barbarous act in 62 CE when he ordered the murder of his wife, Octavia, so that he could marry Poppaea Sabina.

Then, in 64 CE (five to seven years after the book of *Romans* was written) there was a Great Fire which nearly destroyed the city of Rome. Nero accused the sect of the Christians of starting the fire. However, according to the

Encyclopedia Britannica 2003, while the 'Christians' were known to be a distinct sect within Judaism at that time, they were still considered to be a part of the Jewish community when the fire occurred:

"According to the Annals of the Roman historian Tacitus and to those of the Roman biographer Suetonius, Nero in response [to the accusation that he had started the fire himself] tried to shift responsibility for the fire on the Christians, who were popularly thought to engage in many wicked practices. Hitherto the government had not clearly distinguished Christians from Jews; almost by accident, Nero initiated the later Roman policy of halfhearted persecution of the Christians, in the process earning himself the reputation of Antichrist in the Christian tradition." (*Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 CD-Rom Version*)

Thus, we see, from secular history, that the Messianic Believers (both Jews and Gentiles) were still a part of the Jewish Synagogues in Rome when the great fire of 64 CE occurred.

The date for the imprisonment and subsequent death of Paul is greatly contested, however, most scholars agree that Paul was martyred prior to the death of Nero, which took place on June 9, 68 CE. In all likelihood, Paul arrived in Rome, as a prisoner, prior to the Great Fire, which occurred in 64 CE. It is possible that he was martyred prior to that date as well, although dates for his death vary from 62 CE all the way to the spring of 68 CE.

~ A Little Scripture ~

Further confirmation of the joint worship of the Messianic Believers with the non-Messianic Jews can be discerned from the account given in the Book of Acts concerning Paul's arrival in Rome as a prisoner:

"Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

¹⁷ And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, ¹⁸ who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. ¹⁹ But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. ²⁰ For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.'

²¹ Then they said to him, 'We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. ²² But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.'"

(Acts 28:16-22)

This passage clearly identified the Messianic Believers as a sect of Judaism. Apparently, the leading Jews of the Synagogues in Rome had not had any particularly bad experiences with the sect of Messianic Believers in their congregations up to that time, but they had heard rumors that there had been trouble in other areas. Therefore, they wanted to hear more from Paul about what exactly was being taught in those other areas, that might be of particular concern to them:

"So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus [Y'shua] from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. ²⁴ And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved."
(Acts 28:23-24)

As usual, Paul's message was met with a mixed reaction among the non-Messianic Jewish leadership. Those who did not accept Paul's teaching concerning *Y'shua*, were especially offended when Paul said:

""Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

""²⁹ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves."

(Acts 28:28-29)

Paul's proclamation resulted in a great dispute among the Jews, but those who did not believe apparently did not press to have Paul excommunicated from contact with the general Jewish population of Rome:

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach] with all confidence, no one forbidding him."
(Acts. 28:30-31)

~ Synagogue Authority ~

It must be understood that within the Jewish Synagogues of Rome (not just in the city of Rome but throughout the Empire), the leaders yielded great authority over the members. According to Nanos:

"The Synagogue governed the Jewish community in religious, moral, legal, administrative, educational, and virtually every other aspect of social interaction necessary in the life of a community." (p. 45)

The Synagogue served as an island of Jewish independence in the middle of foreign countries. It was a place of refuge where Jews could worship the one true God in the manner defined by the *Written Torah* and the *Halacah* (hah'-lah-cah = the way one walks or the rules by which one lives) of the *Oral Torah*, as interpreted by the Rabbis.

Each of the eleven Synagogues in Rome would have been autonomous, however, they all had the same structure and form of worship, and they all associated with each other. When issues developed which mutually affected all of the Jewish Synagogues, they would convene a citywide *Beit Din* (House of Judgment or court) in order to deal with the problem.

If a member refused to follow the dictates of their leaders, they were appropriately punished. If the offense was severe, they could even be banned from fellowship in the Jewish community. It is possible, that in some areas outside of Rome, this practice had already forced the Messianic Believers (both Jews and Gentiles) to form their own Synagogues, totally separate from the non-Messianic Jews, thereby taking their chances with the Roman authorities. However, this does not seem to have been the case in the city of Rome prior to the death of Paul.

After the 'Christian' sect within Judaism was blamed for the Great Fire of 64 CE, the entire situation began to change and the Messianic Believers were eventually forced out of the Jewish Synagogues of Rome as well. This began to occur when the Roman government started to persecute the Messianic Believers. As a result of this persecution, the non-Messianic Jews, not wanting to jeopardize their privileged relationship with Rome by continuing to associate with them, began to separate themselves from the Messianic Believers. While it is difficult for the historians to determine the extent of this separation during the remainder of the first century, it is clear that by the middle of the second century Roman Christianity had become a distinct religion separate from Judaism.

~ The Book of Romans ~

When this Epistle was written, Paul had not yet visited Rome, so the Messianic Believers there were not the product of his evangelizing efforts. Nevertheless, Paul seems to have known a number of people in the Roman Messianic Community, for he lists them in Chapter 16, including at least five with Jewish names.

It is not known exactly what prompted Paul to write this letter, but it could have been the result of a report which was made to him by someone who had previously journeyed from Rome to Corinth, for it is generally believed that the letter arrived via courier from Corinth, sometime between 55-57 CE.

The attitudes of the people, in the first century Messianic Community, were little different from what is found in today's Messianic Community. Whenever 'religious' people gather together, they tend to split into factions of one sort or another, based upon their personal understanding of the tenets of the sect of which they are a part and colored by the background from which they came. This was true during the 1st century as well. Thus, Messianic Jews would, no doubt, have had a much greater affinity for both the *Written* and *Oral Toratot* (pl. form of *Torah*) while the Hellenistic Jews and the Gentiles, who were coming out of *Gnosticism* and paganism, would have been less inclined to place high value on the *Toratot*.

~ The Issues ~

Some of the issues which Paul addressed in this letter include:

- ◆ The anti-Jewish bias on the part of some Messianic Gentiles which led them to believe they had 'replaced' the non-Messianic Jews as God's 'chosen' people.
- ◆ A spirit of antinomianism (against Law) among some Messianic Gentiles and perhaps also among some of

the Messianic Hellenistic Jews, which, if followed, would have led to additional sin (transgression of the Law) on the part of those who acted out such practices.

- ◆ The tendency of some Messianic Hellenistic Jews and Messianic Gentiles to bring certain *Gnostic* and/or pagan practices into the worship of the one true God.
- ◆ The problem created by those who wished to impose the strict rules of *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) and circumcision upon the new Gentile converts.
- ◆ The need for all (both Jew and Gentile) to accept the true righteousness which comes only from God the Father through faith (trust) in the sacrifice of His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach*.
- ◆ The proper and loving application of God's righteousness in the lives of all Messianic Believers, including proper teaching on how to lovingly treat one another when disagreement over certain rules of behavior occurred.

~ The Focus ~

The focus of this chapter is a careful examination of those passages pertaining to the 'Law' (Gk. *nomos*) and how that 'Law' specifically related to the Messianic Gentile Believer. In our opinion, the key verse, from the book of *Romans*, which identified Paul's attitude toward the *Written Torah* is:

"Therefore the law [Torah] is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12)

Clearly, this is the statement of someone who thought that the 'Law' (the *Written Torah* delivered by God to *Moshe*) was perfect.

In order to put all of this into the proper perspective, we must start at the beginning of *Romans* and see how Paul built his case concerning the 'Law' (*Written Torah*) and its role in the proper *Halacah* (the everyday walk) of the Messianic Believers.

~ The Indictment ~

Paul began his message by issuing an indictment against all men everywhere, both Jew and Gentile. Chapter 1 is devoted primarily to a stinging rebuke of the paganism of the Gentiles which had led them into idolatry:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ... ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." (Rom. 1:18, 23)

It must be remembered that pagan idolatry is in direct violation of the *Written Torah*:

"You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth

beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁵ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them." (Ex. 20:3-5)

Because the Gentiles had previously chosen not to follow God's way of life:

"God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ..." (Rom. 1:28)

What followed (Rom. 1:29-31) was a laundry list of filthy sins in which those involved in paganism often found themselves immersed. However, Paul contended that the pagans knew that people who indulged in such vile practices were:

"... deserving of death, ..." (Rom. 1:32)

What is it that causes death?

"The soul who sins shall die." (Ezek. 18:20)

And what exactly is sin? As pointed out in the previous chapter (*The Religious Situation*), the primary definition of sin in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is clearly stated:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law [Torah]: for sin is the transgression of the law [Torah]." (I John 3:4 KJV)

Thus we see that Paul's indictment of Gentile paganism and its revolting practices, can be viewed as being in direct violation of the *Written Torah* commands.

~ The Indictment Continues ~

Not only were the Gentiles guilty of breaking the commands of the *Torah*, the Jews were as well, for Paul continued his indictment by bringing both parties into the picture. Based upon what the *Torah* teaches, it was easy for the first century Jews to see the excesses of Gentile paganism and correctly judge that those who practiced such evil were worthy of death:

"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, ... saying, "Let us go after other gods" -- which you have not known -- "and let us serve them," ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, ...

"⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD [YHVH] your God, ..." (Deut. 13:1-3, 5)

However, Paul was quick to point out that those who judged too harshly may also have been guilty of breaking the *Written Torah* commands:

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." (Rom. 2:1)

In other words, while the Jewish sins may not have been exactly the same as the pagan Gentile sins, the fact of the matter was that:

"... there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ..." (Rom 2:22b-23a)

However, Paul made it clear that the judgment of God is based not just upon faith, but also upon works:

"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who 'will render to each one according to his deeds:' ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath, ..." (Rom. 2:5-8)

Does this mean that works are more important than faith? No, not at all, for faith and works are not mutually exclusive actions, rather they are complimentary:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26)

The main point Paul was attempting to make is that both Jew and Gentile stand condemned before God because of their sins:

"For there is no partiality with God. ¹² For as many as have sinned without law [*Torahless Gentiles*] will also perish without law [*the Torah*], and as many as have sinned in the law [*Torah pursuant Jews*] will be judged by the law [*Torah*]..." (Rom. 2:11-12)

Paul drew a distinction between the Gentiles who did not have the *Written Torah* to guide them, and the Jews who did. He stated that even though the Gentiles did not have the *Torah* they still knew they were guilty of sin because their sins were so gross that even their conscience should have condemned them. (Sin is sin, whether one has the code book in front of them or not.)

Paul then went into a fairly lengthy discourse about how important it was for both Jews and Gentiles to keep the law:

"... (for not the hearers of the law [*Torah*] are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law [*Torah*] will be justified; ¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law [*Torah*] by nature do the things in the law [*Torah*], these, although not having the law [*Torah*], are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law [*Torah*] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their thoughts* accusing or else excusing them) ¹⁶ in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], according to my gospel." (Rom. 2:13-16)

Paul expounded on the concept that the active 'doers' of the *Torah* would be considered righteous before God. It is obedience to the *Torah* that counts, not whether one is a Jew and has the written document. Having possession of the *Written Torah* is a very great blessing because it contains all of the commandments by which God desires His people to live. Therefore, those who have the *Written Torah* are able to receive the full blessings which can come as the result of

complete obedience. On the other hand, a written law is of no value if one chooses not to live by its precepts.

Paul ended this discussion with a discourse on the value of physical circumcision in contrast to the keeping of the *Torah*. Paul concluded that it was far more important for a Gentile to follow the precepts of the *Written Torah* than to be physically circumcised. He also hinted that the circumcised Gentile Believer, or *Proselyte*, would probably feel obligated to keep the traditional dogma of the *Oral Torah* as well as the *Written Torah*, thereby placing an unnecessary "yoke" or burden (see Acts 15:10) upon himself:

"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." (Rom. 2:25-29)

The point Paul made throughout these introductory chapters was that no man, Jew or Gentile, can brag about his personal righteousness, for all have sinned and all are in need of a Redeemer to buy them back from the slavery of sin:

"For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin [*guilty of transgressing the Torah*]. ¹⁰ As it is written:

¹¹There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹There is none who understands;

There is none who seeks after God.

¹²They have all turned aside;

They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one."

(Rom. 3:9-12 cited from Psalm 14:1-3)

~ The Jewish Blessing ~

Paul began Chapter 3 by making sure the Messianic Gentile reading his letter did not become puffed up over his indictment of the Jews. For this reason Paul asked them a rhetorical question:

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?" (Rom. 3:1)

After reading Chapter 2 one might be inclined to reply, "None at all!" However, Paul's reply was:

"Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." (Rom. 3:2)

Paul clearly stated that the greatest blessing the Jews have is the Instruction Book (*Torah*) of God. He then went on to point out to the Messianic Gentiles that everything concerning the Jews is in God's hands and therefore, they were not to judge:

"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar."

(Rom. 3:3-4a)

It seems incredible that Paul would imply that it did not matter if some of the Jews did not believe that *Y'shua* was the Messiah. However, he said, the important thing for them to remember was that God is faithful and He had a plan for all of His people, even those who, at that time, did not exhibit faith in the atoning sacrifice of *Y'shua*. As Paul pointed out later in Chapter 11, in the end God will be pronounced totally faithful because He will corporately save Israel:

"And so all Israel will be saved, ..." (Rom. 11:26)

~ The Purpose of the Law ~

Because there were so many complicated issues that needed to be addressed, Paul took great pains explaining (in different ways and on multiple levels) the true purpose and function of the *Written Torah* as it applied to the lives of the Messianic Believers, and its proper relationship to God and His righteousness.

Before addressing the issue of God's righteousness, Paul again emphasized that everyone, everywhere, stands guilty when their works are judged against the righteousness of God's *Written Torah* precepts. But first he directly addressed his Jewish brethren, both Messianic and non-Messianic:

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under [Gk. en = in] the law, ..." (Rom. 3:19a)

This is an important verse when it comes to understanding Paul's theology concerning the 'Law' or *Written Torah*. First of all, this particular phrase, usually translated "**under the law**,"* comes from the Greek phrase *en nomos* and it literally means "in the law."

The Greek word *en* is a primary preposition used 2782 times in the New Testament. It is translated as the English preposition "in" a total of 1874 times (67% of the time). *Young's Literal Translation* renders this verse:

"And we have known that as many things as the law saith, to those in [*en*] the law it doth speak, ..." (Rom. 3:19 YLT)

David Stern, in his *Complete Jewish Bible* renders it this way:

"Moreover, we know that whatever the *Torah* says, it says to those living within [*en*] the framework of the *Torah*; ..." (Rom 3:19 CJB)

Another way of translating this passage would be: "...it says to those who are subject to the *Torah*."

This phrase (*en nomos*) is clearly a reference to all Jews (both Messianic and non-Messianic) who were expected (from birth) to follow the precepts of the *Written Torah*, solely

because they were Jews and the *Torah* had been given to them through their fathers. In other words, Paul said that the *Written Torah* applied directly to all Jews. But not to the Jews only for the verse goes on to say:

"... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19b)

When taking the entire verse into consideration the question must be asked: How can the *Written Torah* cause the entire world to have their tongues stopped and become guilty before God if the *Written Torah* applies only to the Jews?

The answer, in our opinion, is that the *Torah* is really for all people everywhere, and the day will come when all the world will have the opportunity to learn the precepts of the *Written Torah*. Then all people everywhere will recognize their sins (the breaking of the *Torah* commands) and acknowledge their guilt before God.

Given this understanding, Paul's statement concerning the true function of the *Written Torah* becomes clear:

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law [*Written Torah*] is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20)

There, in a nutshell, is God's true purpose for giving the *Written Torah*. It has been given so that mankind generally, and the Jews in particular, will understand that they stand accused and guilty before God, because no mortal can keep the precepts of the *Written Torah* perfectly.

Except One!

~ The Righteousness of God ~

Having clearly established that the purpose of the *Written Torah* was not to bring salvation:

"For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ..." (Rom. 3:22b-23)

Paul then established the source of true righteousness:

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law [*Torah*] is revealed, being witnessed by the Law [*Torah*] and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], to all and on all who believe." (Rom. 3:21-22)

A person who does their best to keep the commands of the *Written Torah* possesses a certain measure of righteousness, as long as they continue in obedience. Nevertheless, that person is still susceptible to sin because of the *yetzer hara* (yet-zehr' hah-rah' = their Evil Inclination or carnal nature). Therefore, if there is to be any hope for mankind, it must come from God Himself, for all humans are powerless to totally resist sin for a lifetime and therefore all (both Jew and Gentile) are subject to the death penalty.

The bottom line is that everyone, both Jew and Gentile, needs the righteousness of God applied to them so their sins can be forgiven. God accomplished this miraculous feat through the life and sacrificial death of His very own Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

* There is another Greek phrase also translated "under the law" in most English bibles which will be addressed more fully later. These two phrases, while the same in English, have very different meanings in the Greek.

" ... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*],²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus [*Y'shua*]." (Rom. 3:24-26)

Through this magnificent plan another 'Law' (*Torah* or instruction) of God is recognized; the "Law of Faith:"

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." (Rom. 3:27)

Paul taught that the Law of Faith was separate from the Law of Works. Nevertheless, these two Laws are complimentary to one another. The Law of Works tells the individual when he has strayed from the righteous path by committing sin. The Law of Faith demonstrates the power of God to release the sinner from his sin through "justification" (rendering righteous,) "redemption" (paying the ransom through *Y'shua's* blood), and "propitiation," (effecting the appeasement of God through *Y'shua's* voluntary sacrifice). These are all positive actions which the Law of Works does not have the power to perform.

Does that mean the Law of Works (*Written Torah*) is defective? No, not at all, for it was never the purpose of the *Written Torah* (Law of Works) to bring about forgiveness of sins through "justification," "redemption," and "propitiation." The purpose of the *Written Torah* (Law of Works) was twofold; to give mankind the opportunity to practice a degree of righteousness and to show all people their need for forgiveness by identifying death causing sin:

"Do we then make void the law [*Torah*] through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law [*Torah*]." (Rom. 3:31)

Thus, the Law of Works (*Torah*) is firmly established because if it did not exist, there would be no need for a Law of Faith to bring about the Righteousness of God:

" ... for where there is no law there is no [knowledge of] transgression." (Rom. 4:15)

The Law of Works and the Law of Faith work in concert. The Law of Works (when properly understood) shows men the reason for their condemnation, while the Law of Faith (when properly exercised) releases them from the penalty of that condemnation. Thus, God gets all the glory!

~ The Father of the Faithful ~

In chapter four, Paul used the example of our father *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-hahm = Abraham) to show that the promises of God were given as the direct result of *Avraham's* faith, not because of his works:

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Rom. 4:2-3)

Even though *Avraham* performed good works, those works were the direct outgrowth of his faith. In other words, *Avraham's* good works came about as a result of his faith, not vice versa.

In this chapter, Paul directly addressed the issue that constantly recurred in the first century Messianic Community; whether a Gentile who had been forgiven of his past sins (through acceptance of and faith in the atoning blood of *Y'shua*) also needed to be physically circumcised, as some among the Messianic and non-Messianic Jews insisted. Paul answered this claim by showing that *Avraham* received the promises when he was still uncircumcised:

"For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." (Rom. 4:9-10)

It was later on, many years after the promises had first been given, that *Avraham* was commanded to become circumcised. This physical cutting of the flesh became the identifying sign of the land covenant which the physical descendants of *Avraham* were to receive. In this manner *Avraham* became the father of the Circumcised.

However, *Avraham* also became the spiritual father of the Uncircumcised (Gentiles) by receiving God's promises while still uncircumcised:

"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law [*circumcised*], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." (Rom. 4:16)

Avraham believed God when the initial promises were made to him. Because he believed, without doubting, God imputed righteousness to him. Paul taught that the same form of imputed righteousness (through faith) is also available to all, both Jew and Gentile, who believe in *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus [*Y'shua*] our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." (Rom. 4:23-25)

~ Abundant Grace ~

In Chapter five Paul briefly discussed the peace which Messianic Believers have with God because of their relationship with *Y'shua* (vs. 1-2). He then talked about how joy can be found, even in the midst of tribulation (vs. 3-8). Paul then launched into a discourse about how sin entered the world through one man (*Adam*) and how sin was overcome by one man (*Y'shua*):

"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one

Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

(Rom. 5:18-19)

There was much sin in the world prior to the giving of the *Written Torah* at Mount Sinai. However, once the *Written Torah* was brought forth, the knowledge of sin multiplied, because men were then made aware of sins which they had been committing but had not realized were sins:

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law [*Written Torah*]. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law [*Written Torah*] had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Rom. 7:7)

Nevertheless, no matter how much sin there is, it cannot overcome God's grace:

"Moreover the law entered that the [*knowledge of the*] offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] our Lord." (Rom. 5:20-21)

Does this mean that Messianic Believers should go out of their way to sin (transgress the *Written Torah*) so that God's grace can be shown to be even more powerful than sin? Paul's answer is swift and to the point:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2)

This English version of Paul's reply ("Certainly not!") comes nowhere near the forcefulness which is found in the original Greek or its companion word in Hebrew. The Greek words here are *me genoito*. In the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) this phrase is used to translate the Hebrew word *chalilah* (hah'-lee-lah) which means something like "A curse on such a thought."

Clearly, when Paul used the word "we" in this passage, he was referring to all Messianic Believers, both Jew and Gentile. He seemed astonished that someone could even consider such an idea to be true, for all Messianic Believers had their sins removed when they were buried at baptism and therefore should not consider sinning (transgressing the *Torah*) thereafter:

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ [*Messiah*] was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

(Rom. 6:3-4)

After a brief discussion on what it meant to be spiritually buried in baptism so that one's sins could be removed, Paul made a clear and straightforward statement concerning sin:

"Therefore do not let sin [*the transgression of the Torah*] reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." (Rom. 6:12)

~ Under the Law ~

Paul went on to emphasize his complete revulsion against the idea that it was permissible for a Messianic Believer to sin:

"And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law [*hupo nomos*] but under grace." (Rom. 6:13-14)

Despite Paul's continued emphasis concerning the evils of sin in the lives of Messianic Believers, the phrase 'under law' (or "under the law" in most versions) has created a great deal of doctrinal confusion in the Christian world.

In this passage the phrase "under law" is derived from the Greek words *hupo nomos*. As you may recall, a previously cited passage in Rom. 3:19 contained the Greek words *en nomos* which, as explained, did not mean "under the law" but instead really meant "in the law" or "subject to the law." That passage referred to all of the Jews who had been given the *Written Torah* at Mount Sinai and were subject to all of its precepts from that time forward.

However, in this current case, the translation "under the law" is quite correct. But what does it mean to be "under the law." Our friend Daniel Botkin, who publishes *Gates of Eden* magazine,* wrote an article in his Sept/Oct., 2003 issue entitled *You Are Not Under the Law.* In his article, Botkin points out that to be "under the law," in a legal sense, means that a person has:

"(a) been arrested because someone has accused you of a crime and/or the police have reason to suspect you of a crime; or (b) you have been indicted, i.e., the court has determined that there is enough evidence to warrant putting you on trial.

In other words, if you are 'under the law,' you have been accused of breaking the law and you are waiting to see if the court will find you guilty or not guilty. If you are declared guilty, you will be punished; if you are declared not guilty, you will not be punished."

Using this definition for the phrase "under the law" let us look again at Rom. 6:14:

"For sin [*transgression of the Written Torah*] shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law [*no longer under arrest and/or indictment for breaking the law*] but under grace [*having received favor in God's sight*]."

(Rom. 6:14)

In other words, because of God's magnificent Grace, Messianic Believers have been totally forgiven for breaking the commands of the *Written Torah* and are no longer facing its ultimate punishment, which is death. Does this mean the law (*Torah*) has been "done away" and no longer needs to be followed? Not at all:

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"What then? Shall we sin [continue to break the Torah commands] because we are not under law [no longer under arrest and/or indictment for breaking the law] but under grace [having received God's favor]? Certainly not! [A curse on such a thought]." (Rom. 6:15)

Messianic Believers (both Jew and Gentile) have been set free from their sins and no longer need to look over their shoulders waiting for the penalty of the Law (which is death) to come upon them:

"What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now having been set free from [past] sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit [works] to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] our Lord." (Rom. 6:21-23)

Hallelujah!!!

~ Dead to the Law, Alive to God ~

In Chapter 7 Paul used the analogy of the marriage covenant as a *Midrash* (Meed'-rahsh = teaching tool), to show how Messianic Believers have been set free from sin by accepting the death of *Y'shua* as full payment for their own death sentence, which had come upon them as the result of breaking God's *Torah* commands.

Paul began by speaking directly to those who "know the law." In our opinion this referred to all the Messianic Believers (not just the Jews), for Paul addressed them in the general term as "brethren:"

"Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" (Rom. 7:1)

Some might argue that the Gentile Messianic Believers were not included here because they did not "know" the law, having come from a pagan background. However, many of those Gentile Messianic Believers would have already been *God Fearers*, as noted in the previous chapter, before becoming Believers and would have already been in the process of learning the *Written Torah* commands. It is also clear, from Scripture, that it was the custom to teach *Torah* to the Gentile Messianic Believers every Sabbath in the Synagogues:

"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:21)

All have sinned. Thus, all are under the death penalty. In short, all mankind is on death row. But once a person has died, that penalty has been paid and death no longer has dominion over them. Because Messianic Believers have died spiritually with *Y'shua*, the death penalty has been removed and the second death no longer has dominion over them:

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ [Messiah], that you

may be married to another -- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." (Rom. 7:4)

Because Messianic Believers have been delivered from the death penalty of the law, they are instructed to walk a better way; in the newness of the Spirit:

"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. ⁶ But now we have been delivered from the law [the death penalty of the law], having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

(Rom. 7:5-6)

What Paul was communicating here is that Messianic Believers should no longer live their lives in order to satisfy their fleshly desires. Rather, they should live according to the Spirit of God, which now dwells within and has been joined to their spirit:

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! [A curse on that thought!] On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Rom. 7:7)

Once again, Paul pointed out that the problem was not with the *Written Torah*, the problem was with the nature of sin and with sinful man's nature:

"And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."

(Rom. 7:10-11)

Then came Paul's greatest defense of the holiness of the *Written Torah*:

"Therefore the law [Torah] is holy, and the commandment [mitzvot] holy and just and good."

(Rom. 7:12)

Paul did not condemn the *Written Torah*, rather he condemned the sinful nature of man:

"Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! [a curse on that thought]. But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom. 7:13-14)

The *Written Torah* is a spiritual law, given to man through the very mouth of God who changes not:

"For I am the LORD [YHVH],

I do not change;

Therefore you are not consumed,

O sons of Jacob."

(Mal. 3:6)

Paul went on, in this very important chapter, to relate how he himself struggled with sin. He showed how every one has, within them, the *yetzer hara* (the Evil Inclination or sin nature) that keeps pulling them toward sin. Yet there is also another

nature called the *yetzer hatov* (yet-zehr' hah-tov') or the Good Inclination. Paul struggled with these two conflicting pulls deep within his being.

Paul wanted to have the *yetzer hatov* control his life, but too often the *yetzer hara* got in the way and pulled him into sin (the transgression of the *Torah*). However, Paul did not take this very human problem of his and blame it on the *Torah*. Instead, he confirmed yet again that the *Written Torah* is good:

"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law [Torah] that it is good." (Rom. 7:15-16)

Yes, the *Torah* is good. It is mankind that is the problem, and Paul clearly indicated that he (the Apostle to the Gentiles) was no exception:

"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." (Rom. 7:17)

The *yetzer hara* has taken up residence in mankind's very flesh:

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." (Rom. 7:18)

As *Y'shua* said:

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41b)

The *yetzer hatov* desires to do good, but the *yetzer hara* of the flesh too often wins out:

"For the good [yetzer hatov] that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil [yetzer hara] I will not to do, that I practice." (Rom. 7:19)

This is why all mankind stands guilty before God, for it is not possible for man to live the righteous *Torah* observant life as long as the *yetzer hara* continues to dominate through the fleshly nature. However, God has made a way:

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God -- through Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach] our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (Rom. 7:24-25)

~ Walking According to the Spirit ~

In the original Greek manuscript of this epistle there were no chapter breaks. This is one of the places where it would have been better if the chapter break had not occurred, for Paul continued right into verse one of Chapter 8 by showing how Messianic Believers must learn how to walk in the righteousness of the Spirit of God rather than in the sinfulness of their old fleshly nature:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua], who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law [Torah] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [Messiah

Y'shua] has made me free from the law [Torah] of sin and death." (Rom. 8:1-2)

What is the *Torah* of the Spirit of Life? According to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) it is loving God, obeying the commands of the *Written Torah*, and clinging to Him. What is the *Torah* of Sin and Death. According to *Moshe* it is not loving God, not obeying the commands of the *Written Torah*, and not clinging to Him:

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰ that you may love the LORD [YHVH] your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD [YHVH] swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (Deut. 30:19-20)

There is no condemnation of Messianic Believers when they no longer walk according to their *yetzer hara*. When the Messianic Believer is able to follow his *yetzer hatov*, (through the power of the Spirit of God) then he no longer comes under the penalty of death which comes from sinning (transgressing the *Torah*).

Messianic Believers must walk according to the Spirit, which comes only through *Y'shua HaMashiach*. Only then, can the *yetzer hara* (Evil Inclination) be overcome. Again, Paul was quick to point out that the *Written Torah* was not designed to bring man redemption, rather its purpose was to identify sin and point out the need for a Redeemer.

The entirety of the *Torah* points toward the redemption of Israel through the Jewish Messiah, *Y'shua*.

~ The Source of Weakness ~

The *Torah* itself is not weak, rather it is man's fleshly nature that is weak, for it too often gives in to the *yetzer hara*. Therefore, what the *Torah* could not accomplish (because it was not designed to accomplish redemption) was accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of *Y'shua*:

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin [transgression of the Torah] in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

(Rom. 8:3-4)

(Note that once again, we see the *Torah's* commands being called righteous.)

Paul kept hammering on the same theme; that the person who succumbs to his *yetzer hara* (Evil Inclination of the flesh) is not able to be *Torah* observant:

"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the

flesh [following their yetzer hara] cannot please God."
(Rom. 8:6-8)

The clear communication in verse eight is that carnally minded people cannot please God because they are unable to obey *Torah*. However, when spiritually minded people (Messianic Believers) let the Spirit of God lead them, they can please God because they are able to obey *Torah*:

"And if Christ [Messiah] is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."
(Rom. 8:10)

What is righteousness? First and foremost, God is righteous:

**"Righteous are You, O LORD [YHVH],
And upright are Your judgments." (Psalm 119:137)**

Because God is the epitome of righteousness, it follows that all of His commandments are also righteous:

**"My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments are righteous." (Psalm 119:172)**

According to Paul, it is very important how spiritually minded people (Messianic Believers) live their daily lives:

"For if you live according to the flesh [the yetzer hara] you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body [and live by the yetzer hatov], you will live. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."
(Rom. 8:13-14)

What follows in Chapter 8 is a discourse about how the Spirit of God assures the Messianic Believer of the personal glory that is to come in the future to those who hold fast. However, our Father even helps in the task of holding fast to the faith, for Paul wrote that nothing could separate the Messianic Believer from God's love:

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] our Lord."
(Rom. 8:38-39)

~ Replacement Theology ~

Once Paul had dealt thoroughly with the respective roles of the *yetzer hara* versus the *yetzer hatov*, and the respective roles of the *Written Torah* and the Spirit of God, he turned his attention to the subject of *Replacement Theology*. Since we are dealing exclusively with the subject of the Law (*Torah*) as an instrument of guidance for the Gentile Believer, we will primarily address those verses which apply directly to the subject of the Law.

Paul began this discourse by listing all of the positive attributes that belong to Israel because they were chosen by God to be His model nation and people:

"... Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and

the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ [Messiah] came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."
(Rom. 9:4-5)

The *Torah* was given to the Jews through *Moshe* on Mount Sinai. However, despite all of the blessings that Israel received from God, they did not obtain righteousness because they were trying to achieve it solely through the keeping of the *Torah* commands. Rather than let the *Torah* condemn them for their sins so they could identify their need for the Redeemer, some Jews tried to earn their redemption by attempting to keep the *Torah* in their own strength. For this reason, the *Pharisees* added a myriad of additional rules and made them a part of the *Oral Torah*, also known as the Traditions of the Fathers. While this was an admirable endeavor, for it showed their heartfelt desire to obey the commandments, it did not fully take into account that complete righteousness cannot be obtained by attempting to keep the *Torah* perfectly, because the "**law of sin**" (7:23), which exists in every person through their *yetzer hara*, condemns each person to death. Therefore, man's only hope, was for those *yetzer hara* sins to be expiated. That way is achieved only through faith by accepting the atoning sacrifice of *Y'shua*. This path to righteousness was not exclusive to God's Chosen People (Israel a.k.a. the Jews) but was open even to the Gentiles who had not previously been given the *Righteous Torah* to guide them:

"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law [oral tradition or dogma]. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:

**"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (Rom. 9:30-33 cited from Isa. 28:16)**

~ The End of the Law? ~

In Chapter 10 we find Paul writing about his own people, the children of Israel, who seemed to be ignorant about how to obtain the righteousness which comes only from God through His Son *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

"For they [Israel] being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness [through Oral Torah], have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ [Messiah] is the end [Gk. *telos*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."
(Rom. 10:3-4)

What did he mean, "The end of the Law?" Did Paul suddenly have a change of heart after all of his forceful words about the *Written Torah* being a Spiritual Law and one that was holy, just, and good?

This difficulty is the result of translation choices. The Greek word *telos* can mean 'end,' as in the termination of something, but it can also mean 'completion' or 'goal.' How a translator chooses to render this word may depend upon their

theology. Since both Catholic and Protestant theology demands the abrogation of the *Written Torah*, all of their versions translate this verse so it looks like the *Torah* (Law) has come to an end, and no longer needs to be obeyed by Believers.

But this interpretation is totally contrary to all that Paul taught up to this point. Therefore, it must mean something else. What we believe it means is that *Y'shua* 'completed' or 'finished' the *Torah* by teaching His disciples how to properly observe its commands and also by fulfilling the prophecies concerning Himself. Therefore, He was the 'goal' toward which it pointed, for He said:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [complete]."
(Matt. 5:17)

A paraphrase of Romans 10:4 might be:

"For Messiah has finished (or completed) the Torah by bringing righteousness (through forgiveness of sins) to all who believe."
(Rom. 10:4)

The remainder of chapter 10 and all of chapter 11 are devoted to the issue of *Replacement Theology* and the eventual saving of all Israel (Rom. 11:26).

~ Responsibility ~

The next two chapters (12 and 13) are devoted to the responsibilities of the Messianic Believer. There are four general responsibility themes:

- ◆ Rom. 12:1-2 - Responsibilities toward God.
- ◆ Rom. 12:3-21 - Responsibilities toward Society.
- ◆ Rom. 13:1-7 - Responsibilities toward Authority.
- ◆ Rom. 13:8-14 - Responsibilities toward Neighbors.

All of the instruction given in these two chapters is totally compatible with the *Written Torah* and in no way abrogates or supersedes it.

This is not the end of the letter, however it seems appropriate to place the remaining portion of the letter into a separate chapter (*Pursue Peace*), which follows.

~ Summary ~

Judaism was unique among the various religions which existed during the Roman Empire, for it was the only one whose adherents were excused from the obligatory annual pagan worship of the Emperor. Because the Messianic Believers (both Jew and Gentile) worshipped in the Jewish Synagogues of Rome, they were provided with the same protection from idolatrous pagan worship as were the non-Messianic Jews.

The key verse in *Romans* which expresses most clearly Paul's attitude toward the *Written Torah* is found in Romans 7:12. It is clear that Paul was including all Messianic Believers (both Jew and Gentile) when he said:

"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."
(Rom. 7:12)

Paul began this Epistle by bringing an indictment against all mankind. He accused the Gentiles of having been so deeply immersed into paganism that they had been given over to all sorts of vile idolatrous acts, in direct violation of the *Written Torah* commands. The Jews too were under indictment because they had been given all of the instructions of God in the form of the *Written Torah*, but did not follow them.

Paul said that it was important for all mankind to observe the precepts of the *Written Torah*, and that only:

"... the doers of the law will be justified; ..."

(Rom. 2:13)

According to Paul, observance of the *Written Torah* was more important than being physically circumcised, which (at that time) would only result in bringing the new *proselyte* into subjection to the *halacah* of the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogmas). His conclusion was that, because of their sins, all men had come under condemnation (they were "sold under sin") and all were in need of a Redeemer. The purpose of the *Written Torah* was to bring knowledge to each and every individual. The knowledge it brought was that all have sinned. Because all have sinned, there needed to be a way for man to become righteous, otherwise all mankind is lost. The kind of righteousness needed comes only through faith in *Y'shua HaMashiach*. Paul referred to it as "His righteousness," or the Righteousness of God.

Paul identified two contrasting but compatible laws. He called them the Law of Faith and the Law of Works. Each has its own function. The Law of Works identifies sin, the Law of Faith shows the Messianic Believer how to be forgiven for sinning against the Law of Works. Forgiveness is the direct result of God's grace. However, even though Messianic Believers can be forgiven for their sins, Paul emphatically warned Messianic Believers to do their utmost to avoid committing sin.

Because God has chosen to forgive the Messianic Believer of their sins, those who have been forgiven are no longer under indictment because of their past transgressions. Therefore, as Paul explained, Messianic Believers are no longer "under the law" but "under grace." For this reason they turn their walk into a walk of righteousness; a *Torah* observant walk. This is true for both the Messianic Jew as well as the Messianic Gentile.

The *Torah* is indeed a spiritual set of commands. According to Paul, the only way a Messianic Believer can overcome the *yetzer hara* (Evil Inclination) and instead follow the *yetzer hatov* (Good Inclination) is to walk that spiritual walk of faith:

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began²⁶ but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith --²⁷ to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] forever. Amen."
(Rom. 16:25-27)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Pursue Peace ~

Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace
And the things by which one may edify another.
Romans 14:19



Chapter 14 of the book of *Romans* addresses a problem that is similar in nature to many which crop up within the modern Messianic Community. What should be the attitude and practice of Messianic Believers when disagreements arise over issues of purity and practice? Paul's treatment of this issue directly reflected what *Y'shua* said was one of the two Great Commandments:

"And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."" (Matt. 22:39)

~ The Strong Versus the Weak ~

In this chapter, Paul identified two groups of people. The first were the so-called "weak in the faith" who, for reasons to be revealed, were eating only vegetables when they gathered together to share meals:

"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only vegetables*." (Rom. 14:1-2)

This passage is often erroneously used to 'prove' that Paul taught it was permissible to eat all kinds of animal flesh, including what the *Written Torah* specifically designated as 'unclean':

"For I am the LORD [YHVH] who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. ⁴⁶ This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, ⁴⁷ to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten." (Lev. 11:45-47)

In contrast to the 'weak,' the other group was not directly called the 'strong' until the beginning of chapter 15:

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Rom. 15:1)

The 'strong' were the people who believed it was permissible to "... eat all things, ..." (Rom. 14:2). Paul included himself among these so-called 'strong,' possibly as a way of encouraging them to emulate his own righteous behavior rather than to allow their *yetzer hara* (yet-zehr' hah-rah' = the Evil Inclination or carnal nature) to hold sway. This seems to be the case, since Paul addressed the entire chapter (14) to the way the 'strong' were mistreating the 'weak.'

Most writers consider this controversy to be merely a disagreement among Messianic Believers, where the 'strong' Gentile Messianic Believers were showing the Jewish Messianic Believers that they were no longer required to "keep the law" and therefore could eat anything they wanted, including the flesh of unclean animals. These same writers say the 'weak' were those Jewish and Proselyte Messianic Believers whose faith had not yet matured to the point where they could bring themselves to eat unclean meats in defiance of the *Written Torah*. However, this point of view does not square with the Scriptures, because Paul considered himself to be among the 'strong,' yet he made the following statement near the end of his life:

"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, ...'" (Acts 28:17)

If Paul had never done anything contrary to the "customs of our fathers," then he certainly never ate food that was Biblically unclean.

Once again it must be noted that Paul did not use the term 'strong' in the sense of a compliment, rather, it is the 'strong' to whom this corrective chapter was written. Paul told the 'strong' they needed to be careful about how they related to this other group of people called the 'weak.'

We believe those whom Paul identified as being "weak in the faith," were primarily the non-Messianic Jews. It was the non-Messianic Jews who did not possess the 'faith' to accept *Y'shua* as their Savior and Messiah. Paul had already identified the non-Messianic Jews with lack of faith earlier in this Epistle:

"... but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, ..." (Rom. 9:31-32)

In this passage, Paul identified those Jews who did not believe that *Y'shua* was the promised Messiah (the One who could deliver them from their sins) as being "weak in the faith." In like manner, we believe they were also the ones whom he referred to as 'weak' in chapter 14.

Since the non-Messianic Jews were the ones who were most adamant about keeping the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma), it stands to reason they would not want to eat meat unless they could certify that it not only came from clean animals, but that it also had been slaughtered in a strict *kosher* manner. In addition, they would have required that tithes had been paid upon the meat in question in order for it to be considered acceptable for food.

The issue was not whether it was permissible to eat meat that God had declared unclean (Lev. 11), but whether or not to eat meat which did not meet the Rabbinic *kosher* standards of the day. In order to avoid this conflict with their conscience, the non-Messianic Jews chose to eat only vegetables when having 'potluck' meals at which Gentile Messianic Believers were present.

Mark Nanos, in *The Mystery of Romans*, points out that it was a long standing tradition for Observant Jews to refrain from both meat and wine when sharing a meal with Gentiles:

"The insistence of the 'weak' on eating vegetables when with gentiles (and in many cases even when not with gentiles) rather than pagan meat is consistent with a long tradition in Diaspora cities of Jews refusing to eat meat that might have been offered to idols, or been improperly butchered so that the animal strangled or suffocated on its own blood, ... The ostensible refusal to drink wine when with gentiles is also consistent with Jewish practice (it is still sometimes practiced), when it is feared that the wine was associated with libations (which would have been common if not always the case), and thus with idolatry." (p. 106)

The issue in Romans 14 was not whether the food was 'unclean' in the sense of being from an unclean animal (Lev. 11) such as a pig, but whether the meat was 'common.' Common food was Biblically clean food which had not come from a *kosher* source. Paul made this fact abundantly clear in the Greek Scriptures, but it has been veiled in most all English translations:

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus [Y'shua] that there is nothing unclean [koinos] of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean [koinos], to him it is unclean [koinos]." (Rom: 14:14)

The Greek word *koinos* means "common." In Peter's vision of the unclean creatures, this same word (*koinos*) is directly contrasted with another Greek word which does mean "unclean," (*akathartos*):

"But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common [koinos] or unclean [akathartos].'" (Acts 10:14)

In this instance, Peter, some ten or so years after the resurrection of Y'shua, was telling God that he was an Observant Jew and had never eaten anything that was common (according to the *Oral Torah* traditions of the *Pharisees*), or unclean (according to Lev. 11).

A correct translation of Rom. 14:14 would read like this:

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Y'shua that there is nothing common [koinos] of itself; but to him who considers anything to be common [koinos], to him it is common [koinos]." (Rom: 14:14)

Paul was telling the Roman Messianic Believers that it was permissible for them to eat the 'common' meat which was sold in the markets:

"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶ for 'the earth is the LORD's [YHVH's], and all its fullness.'" (I Cor. 10:25-26)

However, if someone else (i.e. non-Messianic Jews) considered such food forbidden, the Messianic Believers needed to honor their practice and not despise them for it. Likewise, Paul encouraged those who believed that it was not

permissible to eat 'common' meat, not to judge those who did eat it:

"Let not him [Messianic Gentile] who eats despise him [non-Messianic Jew] who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him." (Rom. 14:3)

The way in which Paul phrased this verse is very interesting. He cautioned the *Messianic Gentile Believers* not to despise the non-Messianic Jews for not eating 'common' food. The implication is clear, that Paul considered the non-Messianic Jews as still being acceptable to God:

"Concerning the gospel they [non-Messianic Jews] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." (Rom. 11:28)

Paul stated that the Jews were still God's Chosen People (even those who did not believe that Y'shua was the Messiah) and that God is committed to take away their sins at some future time:

"For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:27)

Having already said this, Paul told the Messianic Gentiles not to pass judgment on the eating habits of the non-Messianic Jews, for their eating habits did not in any way conflict with the commands found in the *Written Torah*. The non-Messianic Jews were following the strict *kosher* commands of *Oral Torah Halacah* as a way to honor God:

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." (Rom. 14:4)

On the other hand (in Rom. 14:3), Paul also told the non-Messianic Jews not to judge the Messianic Gentile Believers because God has indeed accepted them into the Jewish Community of Believers.

~ One Day or Another? ~

Next, we find another controversial passage:

"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." (Rom. 14:5)

It must be remembered, the subject of this chapter is food. So what did the observance or non-observance of special 'days' have to do with food? Quite a lot. During the first century it was the custom of many *Pharisees* to fast two days each week:

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'" (Luke 18:11-12)

It is evident that the issue Paul addressed in Rom. 14:5 concerned fasting. It was a common practice, during Second Temple times, for Pharisees to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. However, some might have chosen different days for personal

reasons, while others might have fasted only occasionally. Paul went on to show that the important thing was that whatever was done, whether eating 'common' meat, or vegetables, or fasting, it needed to be done with proper respect and thankfulness toward God:

"He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:6-8)

~ Do Not Judge ~

Paul followed up this passage with several verses condemning the judging of one another about the manner in which the different groups were serving God:

"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." (Rom. 14:13)

Remember, Paul was primarily reprimanding the so-called 'strong' who understood that they were permitted to eat Biblically clean meats categorized as 'common.' Nevertheless, he was adamant that the 'strong' be willing to refrain from publicly eating the 'common' meats, if doing so might become a stumbling block to the 'weak':

"Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ [*Messiah*] died." (Rom. 14:15)

Two important points are made in this verse. First of all, Paul called the 'weak' (non-Messianic Jews) 'brothers' of the 'strong' (Gentile Messianic Believers), thereby implying the 'weak' (non-Messianic Jews) were not irrevocably 'lost.' Secondly, Paul told the 'strong' not to be arrogant in the 'liberty' they had in their food choices, for doing so might cause the 'weak' to stumble in their acceptance of *Messiah Y'shua*.

How might such a tragic result have occurred? If a non-Messianic Jew saw the *Messianic Gentiles* eating food which they truly believed was forbidden by God to be eaten, it might have caused them to blaspheme *Y'shua*:

"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who serves Christ [*Messiah*] in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." (Rom. 14:16-19)

Rather than eat 'common' food in such a situation, Paul recommended that the *Messianic Gentiles* "**Abstain from all appearance of evil.**" (I Thess. 5:22) so that no one would become so offended by what they were eating, that they refused to even consider that *Y'shua* might be the promised Messiah of Israel:

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things [*common foods*] indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹ It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak." (Rom. 14:20-21)

This did not mean that the *Messianic Gentiles* were forbidden to ever eat 'common' meat. Paul clearly stated that it was permissible to eat it, but not in a public situation where it might cause someone (who did not understand that the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) was not binding upon *Messianic Believers*) to blaspheme *Y'shua*. Therefore, Paul said it was permissible to eat it in private, or with other *Messianic Believers*, but not in front of *Orthodox Pharisaic Jews*:

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." (Rom. 14:22)

Paul said that if the *Messianic Believers* had faith that the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) was not binding, then it was permissible to eat 'common' meat. However, the person (whether Messianic or non-Messianic) who still believed that the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) was binding, should eat only *kosher* meats or vegetables, just as their conscience dictated:

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats [*common meat*], because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

~ Practicing Liberty ~

In chapter 15, Paul continued his discourse about how the Messianic Believers should not let their liberty and release from the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) become a club used to beat the non-Messianic Jew over the head to the point that they become so angry they blaspheme *Messiah Y'shua*:

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples [*asthenema*] of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification." (Rom 15:1-2)

In the Greek it is clear that Paul did not approve of the position which the 'weak' had taken concerning their unwillingness to eat 'common' food. This was apparent by his choice of the Greek word *asthenema*, which means: "*infirmity or error arising from weakness of mind.*" In other words, Paul said that the *Pharisaic* Jewish belief (based upon *Oral Torah*) that 'common' meats could not be eaten was truly unfounded. He made this clear when he said that he too was free to eat 'common' meat:

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*] that there is nothing unclean [*koinos* = common] of itself; ..." (Rom. 14:14a)

However, in very strong language, Paul told the Corinthians that he would become a vegetarian before he would eat a 'common' food that might cause someone else to stumble spiritually:

"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

(I Cor. 8:13)

Everything a Messianic Believer does should be to the glory of God and of *Y'shua HaMashiach*, and not to the craving of one's own flesh:

"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], ⁶ that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]."

(Rom. 15:5-6)

Paul's conclusion was that God was the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles:

"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ [*Messiah*] also received us, to the glory of God. ⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, ..."

(Rom. 15:7-9)

~ Summary ~

Theoretical discussions about doctrine are fine, but the bottom line is that if doctrines cannot be put into loving action they are virtually useless:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

(I Cor. 13:1-2)

In chapters 14 and 15 of the book of *Romans*, Paul put the doctrine concerning the permissibility of eating 'common' meats into loving action by teaching that it was more loving to forego this 'liberty' if it might, in any way, cause another person to reject *Y'shua* as the Messiah.

Yes, it is true that the Messianic Believers were not obligated to keep the *Oral Torah* (traditional dogma) of the *Pharisees*. However, for those Jews (Messianic and non-Messianic) who believed that the *Oral Torah*, in its entirety, came from the mouth of God, it was imperative they refrain from 'common' meats as a matter of conscience.

Paul pointed out that the issue was not whether it was permissible to eat 'common' food, but whether it was an act of love to eat it in front of someone who considered it to be a sin. Paul's clear answer was: "Don't do it, for it might cause one of the non-Messianic Jews to blaspheme *Y'shua*."

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."

(Rom. 14:23)

Beloved, let us practice loving one another!

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