

Gentiles and the Law:

Vol. I: Introduction

containing:

Scriptural Background
Historical Background
Which Law?

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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The Scriptures used in this booklet are:

- The Bible in Basic English* (BBE),
Cambridge Press,
London, 1949/1964
- The Complete Jewish Bible* (CJB)
Jewish New Testament Publications
Clarksville, Maryland, 1998
- The Holy Bible - King James Version* (KJV)
Oxford University Press
London
- The New International Version* (NIV)
Zondervan Publishing House,
Grand Rapids, 1984.
- The Open Bible*
New King James Version (NKJV),
Thomas Nelson, Inc.,
Nashville, 1985.
- The Stone Edition Chumash* (SEC),
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~ 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 a series of articles entitled *Gentiles and the Law* (in the first *Hebrew Roots* issue of 2003) we had not yet comprehended the scope of the project. As the project developed it became apparent that one 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.

Seven years and twenty-five articles later the project was brought to a conclusion in Issue 08-3. However, we soon learned that it really was not at an end, for people began to write in expressing a desire to see all of the articles put into a book. The problem with that is that we do 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 has been made to put the articles into booklet format that can be printed by our fulfillment house just like the regular issues. Thus, God willing, they will all be made available, over time, in a series of booklets which can be

ordered directly from *Hebrew Roots* and supplied free of charge.

This first volume contains three foundational articles: *Scriptural Background* (from Issue 03-1), *Historical Background* (also from Issue 03-1), and *Which Law?* (which was first published in Issue 04-2 after we had already begun exploring the *Gospels* and the book of *Romans*). It seemed, at the time, that further clarification was necessary concerning the situation which existed in the first century that has led to a modern misunderstanding concerning the role of what Rabbinic Judaism calls the two *Torahs*: the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah* (or the traditions of the Elders). It became apparent immediately that *Which Law?* would be an excellent article to introduce Messianic Believers to the concept that two laws were thought to exist in the first century and that it is still the case within Rabbinic Judaism in the 21st century.

Which Law? will still be available as a stand alone booklet which can be used (along with *The Quiet Revival*) to introduce friends, relatives, neighbors, and people new to the Messianic Movement, to some of the basic understandings concerning the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) in general and the *Torah* (first five books of the Bible) in particular.

It is our hope that you will find this new booklet with these introductory articles to the *Gentiles and the Law* series helpful in both your own individual studies and in your outreach to others.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2010

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Scriptural Background ~

The stranger who dwells among you
Shall be to you as one born among you,
And you shall love him as yourself;
For you were strangers in the land of Egypt:
I am the LORD your God.
Leviticus 19:34



One of the basic tenants of mainstream Christianity is that the Law has been 'done away' and therefore, Christians are no longer 'required' to keep it. Over the years, we have received a number of questions and comments on this important subject. A few go so far as to say that those who follow the precepts of the Law are actually committing sin, because they are trying to "earn their salvation." One favorite Scripture used to 'prove' this point is:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."
(Eph. 2:8-9)

Of course, this Scripture is entirely true. Believers cannot boast of having earned their salvation because it is an undeserved gift. However, when these verses are taken out of context, and when all of the many other Epistle Scriptures where *Shaul* (Shaw-ool' = Saul or Paul) extols the virtues of the 'Law' are ignored, it gives the Believer a false understanding of what is proper behavior for a 'saved' person.

Over the years *Hebrew Roots* has tried to show how:

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

And that all Believers would do well to become:

"... doers of the word, and not hearers only, ..."
(James 1:22)

These verses certainly do not leave the impression that the law has been 'done away.' Instead they (along with many others like them) give the opposite impression; that Believers would do well to keep the 'law.'

James upheld the keeping of *Torah* when he wrote:

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

¹⁴ **What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ... ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."**

(James 2:8-18, 24, 26)

So what is the answer? Is observing the Law sin? Or is the Law holy, just, and good and something to be observed? Or is it holy, just, and good and something to be ignored? These are some of the questions we wish to address in this series of articles. But even more specifically, we wish to address the relationship between the Gentile Believer and the Law.

~ Messianic Believers and the Law ~

As already mentioned, many Christians believe that no one, Jew or Gentile should attempt to keep the 'Law.' However, others believe that it is permissible for a Jewish Believer to observe the Law (*Torah* commandments), but that a Gentile Believer should not even try, for that might constitute an attempt to "earn one's salvation." This attitude is prevalent in some Messianic circles as well as within mainstream Christianity. Still others believe that Gentiles should keep portions of the *Torah*, but not all of it, often dividing the *Torah* instructions into categories of 'moral' and 'ceremonial' law, the moral to be kept and the ceremonial having been 'done away.'

One of our readers specifically mentioned that Gentiles are not 'required' to 'keep' the Festivals. Our short answer is that people are not 'required' to 'keep' anything in order to 'earn' their salvation, for salvation cannot be earned. If *Abba* (our Father in heaven) chooses to 'save' someone who disregards His 'Law,' that is entirely up to Him. However, it is our opinion that we, as Believers, should 'want' to keep His *Torah* (Instructions) and meet with Him at His appointed times (the Festivals and the Sabbath) even as *Y'shua* did.

We need to remember that *Y'shua* said:

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

And,

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (John 15:10)

As far as we can tell, *Y'shua's* commandments are based on His Father's commandments and clarify the ambiguities which were caused by their misinterpretation. We hope to show clearly, in this series, the proper relationship between the Gentiles and the Law, or more properly, the Gentiles and the *Torah*.

~ Context ~

A major problem faced by 21st century Believers, is our great distance from both the time and the culture in which the Scriptures were written. Therefore, before we directly address the subject of Gentiles and the Law, we must first lay down some background information in order to put our understanding of this important subject into proper perspective. Without this background information it is extremely easy to take Greek Scripture (New Testament) statements concerning the 'law' out of the context in which they were originally written. This is especially true when studying *Shaul's* (Shah-ool = Saul or Paul) writings. Such non-contextual interpretations make the original intent of the Scriptures very difficult to understand correctly.

First of all, it must be remembered that God does not change:

**"For I am the LORD [YHVH],
I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed,
O sons of Jacob."** (Mal. 3:6)

If one accepts this Scripture as true (that God does not change), then it becomes axiomatic that the Greek Scriptures do not contradict the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Instead, the Greek Scriptures complete the Hebrew Scriptures:

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

The *Bible in Basic English* translates this verse much more accurately:

"Let there be no thought that I have come to put an end to the law or the prophets. I have not come for destruction, but to make complete." (Matt. 5:17 BBE)

Y'shua's message was not that the 'Law' (*Torah*) had been 'done away' or destroyed, but that it was part of His commission to show us how it was intended to be kept.

Thus, one of the purposes of the Greek Scriptures, in addition to telling about the wonderful gift of salvation through Messiah *Y'shua*, is to enhance our understanding of the *Torah*, *Prophets*, and *Writings* of the Hebrew Scriptures. So, when these two great works of Scripture seem to be contradictory, it is very likely because we do not fully understand what they are saying. Such misinterpretation is often the result of our being unaware of the cultural factors and/or the Hebraic idioms which were prevalent at the time the Scriptures were written.

But some might say, "The New Testament was written in Greek so it does not contain Hebrew Idioms." That is one of the major problems with the Greek Scriptures, for most, if not all of the New Testament, was originally written in Hebrew and translated into Greek, thereby losing the idiomatic Hebraic flavor. Then, when the Greek was translated into English, it compounded the problem. (See our booklet *The Quiet Revival* for more information on this subject.)

~ A Nation to Emulate ~

Israel was never an isolated nation. The children of Israel always lived among other people, even prior to their sojourn into Egypt. This was part of God's plan, so that the other nations of the world would learn about them and want to emulate the wonderful society that had been established in Israel as a result of their observing God's commandments:

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD [YHVH] my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. ⁶ Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD [YHVH] our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? ⁸ And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:5-8)

It should come as no surprise that people from other nations and cultures desired to live in Israel, for there they received fair and equitable treatment under the *Torah*. This is still true in Israel today (even though Israel, as a whole, is not currently a *Torah* observant nation), where we have seen multiple thousands of Arabs flock to Israel over the past 50 years, knowing they could get good jobs and receive fair treatment there.

~ Strangers in the Land ~

There have always been Gentiles living with the children of Israel. Even in the Exodus from Egypt, there was a 'mixed multitude' that joined Israel and received the blessings and the curses which befell their adopted nation:

"A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds -- a great deal of livestock." (Ex. 12:38)

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that once the children of Israel were settled in the Promised Land, God gave them specific instructions, in the *Torah*, on how they were to treat those Gentiles who, by choice or by chance, came to live in Israelite society.

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* (toe-shahv' #8453).

There is some inconsistency as to the manner in which these words are translated in our English bibles. The most common term used for all of them is 'stranger.' For example, *zur* is rendered 'stranger' 48 out of 77 times, *nokri* 19 out of 45 times (a companion word *nekar* 27 out of 28 times), and *ger* 90

out of 92 times. *Toshav* is usually translated as 'sojourner,' although it too is translated 3 times (out of 14) as '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.

~ Temporary Aliens ~

The *Zarim* or *Nokrim* (pl. forms for *zur* and *nokri*) were people who maintained political and social ties to their original homeland. In other words, they were foreigners who had no intention of becoming permanent residents of Israel and therefore did not come under many of the *Torah* instructions which applied to the children of Israel. For example, a *nokri* could be charged usury:

"To a foreigner [*nokri*] you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest." (Deut. 23:20)

Some of the *Zarim* or *Nokrim* must have stayed a fairly long time in Israel, since the *Torah* states they were not eligible for debt release:

"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. ² And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's [*YHVH's*] release. ³ Of a foreigner [*nokri*] you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother, ..." (Deut. 15:1-3)

They were restricted when it came to Tabernacle and Temple worship:

"And the LORD [*YHVH*] said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner [*nokri*] shall eat it.'" (Ex. 12:43)

The *Zarim* or *Nokrim* might be compared to the migrant workers of today. They would come to Israel on a temporary basis, probably to find work. In some cases they might come to escape a problem in their home country, either personal or national. If they decided they wanted to stay on a more permanent basis, they could become *Gerim* (pl.), provided they were willing to accept more responsibility concerning the customs and rituals of Israel.

~ Sojourning Aliens ~

Another major non-Israelite classification was the *Gerim* (pl. form of *Ger*). They were people who lived more or less permanently in the Promised Land.

The *Gerim* were divided into two groups. First of all there were those who were of a lower class, known as *Ger Toshav* (Gehr Toe-shahv') or (what we call in this article) 'Sojourning Aliens.' The *Ger Toshav* accepted some, but not all of the *Torah* commandments; probably just enough so that he might be allowed to remain in Israel on a permanent basis. The *Ger Toshav* had more rights and privileges than the *Zarim* or

Nokrim, but he was definitely not on a path that would lead to becoming a Proselyte (one who converted fully to Judaism). An examination of some of the Scriptures which contain the word *toshav* will help to clarify the situation.

The patriarch *Avraham* (Ahv-rah-hahm' = Abraham) is called a *Ger Toshav* during his time in the land of Canaan, even though his descendants were destined to inherit that land. He is called this because he was a 'Sojourning Alien' who did not own land and was not a permanent resident at that time. Furthermore, *Avraham* did not participate in Canaanite culture or religion:

"Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, ⁴ 'I am a foreigner [*ger*] and a visitor [*toshav*] among you.'" (Gen. 23:3-4)

It is interesting to note that, in the Promised Land, all of the children of Israel are called *Ger Toshav* because it was really God who owned the land and they too were only temporary residents:

"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers [*ger*] and sojourners [*toshav*] with Me." (Lev. 25:23)

When an Israelite lost the land God had assigned to him and became poor, he was compared to the alien *Ger Toshav*:

"If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger [*ger*] or a sojourner [*toshav*], that he may live with you. ³⁶ Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you." (Lev. 25:35-36)

In Israel the *Ger Toshav* was restricted when it came to worship. For example, they too were not permitted to eat of the Passover:

"And the LORD [*YHVH*] said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner [*nokri*] shall eat it. ⁴⁴ But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. ⁴⁵ A sojourner [*toshav*] and a hired servant shall not eat it.'" (Ex. 12:43-45)

However, the set apart food for the Sabbatical year could be eaten by a *Ger Toshav*:

"And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger [*toshav*] who dwells with you, ..." (Lev. 25:6)

A *Ger Toshav* was also given permission to flee to a City of Refuge in a case where he had caused the accidental death of another person:

"These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger [*ger*], and for the sojourner [*toshav*] among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there." (Num. 35:15)

The *Ger Toshav* who had voluntarily come to Israel seeking work could not be pressed into slavery, however if he stayed and had children, they could become bondservants:

""And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. ⁴⁰ As a hired servant and a sojourner [toshav] he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. ...

⁴⁵ ""Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers [toshav] who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. ⁴⁶ And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves.""

(Lev. 25:39-40, 45-46)

Perhaps this decree was to discourage the *Ger Toshav* from staying too long without making an even more serious commitment to the Commonwealth of Israel.

~ Permanent Aliens ~

The final *Torah* classification concerning people of other nationalities who lived in Israel is the *Ger*, without the added suffix of *toshav*.

This type of *Ger* had more privileges than a *Ger Toshav*, but still was considered a 'stranger.' He was given many of the rights of a native born Israelite with only a few exceptions.

The *Ger* was permitted to participate in ritual worship. However, unless he became a Proselyte he could not go into the Court of the Israelites at the Temple nor into the Court of the Women. Without circumcision he would have been restricted to the Court of the Gentiles:

¹⁴'And if a stranger [ger] dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD [YHVH], just as you do, so shall he do. ¹⁵ One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger [ger] who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger [ger] be before the LORD [YHVH]. ¹⁶ One law [torah] and one custom [mishpat = judgment] shall be for you and for the stranger [ger] who dwells with you."

(Num. 15:14-16)

For a *Ger* to bring an offering required that they observe the same ritual purification laws as did the native born Israelites:

"This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD [YHVH] has commanded, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come. ...

¹⁰ And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger [ger] who dwells among them.""

(Num. 19:2, 10)

The *Gerim* were also expected to follow at least some of the food laws:

""And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers [gerim] who dwell among you, who eats any

blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people."" (Lev. 17:10)

It is interesting to note that in this passage the *Ger* seems to be considered part of the children of Israel since he can be 'cut off.' This is one of the passages that has led the Rabbis to believe that the term *Ger* sometimes means Proselyte.

The *Gerim* were also expected to keep the Sabbath:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD [YHVH] your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger [ger] who is within your gates."

(Ex. 20:8-10)

And the Festivals:

""And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger [ger] and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates."" (Deut. 16:14)

Including fasting on *Yom Kippur* (Yohm Kee-poor' = Day of Atonement):

"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger [ger] who dwells among you."

(Lev. 16:29)

The *Gerim* were expected to be absolutely loyal to *YHVH*; idolatry was not permitted:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, ²Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: "Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers [gerim] who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.""

(Lev. 20:1-2)

If a *Ger* and all his family were circumcised, he could even eat of the Passover, the most sacred meal of the year:

"And when a stranger [ger] 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)

This passage seems to indicate that there was a difference between a *Ger* and a Proselyte, for the person spoken of here is called a *Ger* prior to circumcision. For this reason, the *Stone Chumash* (perhaps the definitive *Torah* translation by Orthodox Jews) renders *Ger* as Proselyte in most, but not all cases.

The original *Gerim* in Israel did not own land, because all of the land had been given to the children of Israel as their family possession. Therefore, the *Gerim* were placed in a classification with other non-land owning people such as the Levites, the widows, the orphans, and the poor. The landowning Israelites were expected to provide all of these groups gleanings of the field (Lev. 23:22), the produce of the

Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:6), and a share in the third-tithe year produce (Deut. 14:29), which would have allowed them to celebrate the Feast.

The many specific commands relating to the *Gerim* (Permanent Aliens) is a clear indication of God's love for them and His desire for the Israelites to treat them well; not as they had been treated by the Egyptians where they had been forced into bondage:

"For the LORD [YHVH] your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. ¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger [ger], giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Therefore love the stranger [ger], for you were strangers [gerim] in the land of Egypt." (Deut. 10:17-19)

The *Gerim* were not to be mistreated in any way, so they were also granted equal treatment under the civil law:

"Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger [ger] who is with him.'" (Deut. 1:16)

"You shall have the same law for the stranger [ger] and for one from your own country; for I am the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Lev. 24:22)

~ As a Native ~

It was the act of circumcision that changed a *Ger* into one who was **"as a native of the land."** (Ex. 12:48). This physical act transformed the *Ger* into what later became known by the Greek term *proselutos* (Proselyte) and thereby into a full fledged resident of the Commonwealth of Israel with almost all of the privileges and obligations thereof.

The only *Torah* passage that deals directly with the circumcision of a non-Israelite is found in Exodus 12 and it has to do with whether or not a non-Israelite could eat of the Passover lamb:

"And the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. ⁴⁴ But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it.

...
⁴⁸ **"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. ⁴⁹ One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."** (Ex. 12:43-44, 48-49)

Circumcision also allowed the non-Israelite to participate fully in Temple worship. No longer was he restricted to the Court of the Gentiles, for when a male *Proselyte* was recognized as an Israelite, he was able to proceed all the way into the Court of the Israelites. Likewise, a female *Proselyte* was allowed to enter the Court of the Women.

The *Proselyte* was "like a native" but there were still some restrictions. While a *Proselyte* was permitted to buy property, what he really received was a lease that ran out upon the arrival of the Jubilee year, for the land had all been apportioned out to each Israelite family when they first entered the Promised Land:

"And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family" (Lev. 25:10)

This was not true of a house in a walled city which could be sold on a permanent basis:

"If a man sells a house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year he may redeem it. ³⁰ But if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to him who bought it, throughout his generations. It shall not be released in the Jubilee." (Lev. 25:29-30)

~ Summary ~

In the Hebrew Scriptures we find three classifications of Gentiles:

- ◆ *Nokrim* or *Zarim* - those 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.
- ◆ *Ger Toshav* - those Gentiles who were in Israel more or less permanently. 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.
- ◆ *Ger* - those 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, Passover; plus, they had restrictions placed upon them concerning access to the Tabernacle/Temple.
- ◆ *Proselytes* - those who went all the way and accepted circumcision, thereby becoming one with the children of Israel and therefore eligible to perform all of the rituals as though they were native born.

In the following chapter we will explore the historical situation of the 1st century and what effect that had on the Gentiles who desired to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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~ Historical Background ~

You shall have the same law for the stranger
And for one from your own country;
For I am the LORD your God.
Leviticus 24:22



The first chapter of this booklet explored the way Scripture classifies the various types of 'aliens' (strangers or foreigners) who resided in ancient Israel. We saw how the *Nokrim* or *Zarim* were strictly *Temporary Aliens*, the *Gerim Toshavim* were *Sojourning Aliens*, and the *Gerim* (without the *toshav* suffix) were *Permanent Aliens*. In order to attain the two higher classifications a Gentile had to become increasingly *Torah* observant. A final classification occurred when an alien of any status submitted to circumcision and became "**as a native of the land,**" (Ex. 12:48). Later these converts became known as *Proselytes*.

The next step, in our journey, is to understand how the Synagogue Jews of the 1st century CE viewed their relationship with the Gentiles. Their practices, in this regard, had great bearing on what *Shaul* was trying to communicate in his Epistles to the various churches in the Diaspora -- churches which contained significant Gentile populations.

~ Words Change ~

Words have a way of changing meaning as they are used in common speech over the centuries. Thus, by the 1st century CE, the term *Ger* (without the *toshav* suffix) was often used to identify a Jewish *Proselyte*, even though that is not the Scriptural meaning of the word. Sometimes a 'Permanent Alien' was called a *Ger Tzadik* (Gehr Tzah-deek') to indicate that he was a "*Righteous Alien*.' This inflated meaning of the word *Ger* was based in part on the *Septuagint** translation of *Ger* as *Proselutos* (pros-ay'-loo-tos or *Proselyte* in English).

The Stone Edition Chumash (SEC) is one of modern Orthodox Judaism's definitive English translations of the *Torah*. In the *Stone Edition Chumash* the translators apparently made the same assumption as did the translators of the *Septuagint*. The problem is, however, that some passages do not lend themselves to equating *Ger* with *Proselyte*. Of course, in those instances the translators opted for much different English words. For example:

"And He said to Abram, 'Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens [ger] in a land not their own ...'"
(Gen. 15:13 SEC)

It is obvious that '*Proselyte*' would not work in this passage because the offspring of *Avram* (Ahv-rahm' = Abram) could never be considered '*Proselytes*' to the pagan Egyptian religion. However, the way *The Stone Edition Chumash*

translates the word *Ger* in this passage fits perfectly with Strong's definition:

#616 גֵּר ger {gare} or (fully) גֵּיִר geyr (gare)

Meaning: "1) sojourner 1a) a temporary inhabitant, a newcomer lacking inherited rights 1b) of foreigners in Israel, though conceded rights"

Some later passages do appear to make a connection between *Ger* and *Proselyte*. However, based on the principles discovered in the previous chapter, close examination reveals that *Ger* never needs to be translated as *Proselyte*. Here is how *The Stone Edition Chumash* renders an important verse:

"When a proselyte [ger] sojourns among you he shall make the pesach -- offering for Hashem; each of his males shall be circumcised, and then he may draw near to perform it and he shall be like the native of the land; no uncircumcised male may eat of it."
(Ex. 12:48 SEC)

Once again, the *Bible in Basic English* adds clarification to the passage:

"And if a man from another country [ger] is living with you, and has a desire to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all the males of his family undergo circumcision, and then let him come near and keep it; for he will then be as one of your people; but no one without circumcision may keep [eat = akal in Hebrew] it."
(Ex. 12:48 BBE)

It is our opinion this passage speaks about how a man could change from a *Ger* into a *Proselyte* (by undergoing the rite of circumcision) rather than 'proving' that a *Ger* equals a *Proselyte*. In fact, we believe it proves just the opposite.

Another place where *The Stone Edition Chumash* does not use *Proselyte* (or *Convert*) in their rendering of the word *Ger* is:

"You shall not taunt or oppress a stranger [ger], for you were strangers [gerim] in the land of Egypt."
(Ex. 22:20 SEC)

Obviously, *Proselyte* does not fit in this passage either, for the children of Israel were never "proselytes" to the Egyptian's religion. There are many more instances which could be cited, but space does not permit a comprehensive analysis.

~ Circumcision ~

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of circumcision to the religion of Judaism. Perhaps the greatest insult that could be cast at a member of one of the alien nations around Israel was to call them 'uncircumcised:'

"Then his [Samson's] father and mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' ..."
(Judg. 14:3)

Circumcision is the physical symbol of God's eternal covenant with the male descendants of *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-ham = Abraham):

"And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you

* The Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures translated in the 3rd century BCE.

throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you." (Gen. 17:9-11)

In future generations, this "sign of the covenant" was not voluntary on the part of the individual, but was imposed upon all male children by the parents:

"He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations ..." (Gen. 17:12a)

The command even included slave children born within a man's house:

"... he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant." (Gen. 17:12b)

The command to circumcise a male child on the eighth day is repeated in the 'law' given to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses):

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. ³ And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."'" (Lev. 12:1-3)

Any Israelite who did not have the circumcision "sign of the covenant" became *karet* (kah-reht') or 'cut off and did not share in the land inheritance:

"And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." (Gen. 17:14)

Needless to say, in the 1st century a man would not be considered a Jew or a Jewish *Proselyte* if he were uncircumcised.

~ The Covenant of Promise ~

The basis for the circumcision command did not originate with the covenant given to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, but from God's covenant with *Avraham*; the Covenant of Promise. There were two promises tied to the covenant God made with *Avraham*: 1.) Land inheritance in Israel and 2.) Promise of ancestry of the Messiah.

In the long run, the Messianic promise is by far the most important. However, to the 1st century Jewish mind, the Messianic kingdom and land inheritance were bound tightly together. Therefore, it is most important to understand that the Abrahamic Covenant (which was sealed by the 'sign' of circumcision) expressly promised the inheritance of property (i.e. the land of Israel):

"On the same day the LORD [YHVH] made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given

this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates ...'" (Gen. 15:18)

This promise of land inheritance was reiterated to *Yitzchak* (Yeets-sock' = Isaac):

"Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your [Yitzchak's] father.'" (Gen. 26:3)

And also to *Ya'acov* (Yah ah'-cove = Jacob):

"And behold, the LORD [YHVH] stood above it and said: 'I am the LORD [YHVH] God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you [Ya'acov] and your descendants.'" (Gen. 28:13)

The only way a male descendant of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Ya'acov* could have a part in that physical land inheritance was to undergo the circumcision ritual as a 'token' or 'sign' of the Covenant of Promise. Nothing else was required. The promise was made because of the faithfulness and obedience of *Avraham*, not the faithfulness or obedience of his descendants:

"And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." (Gen. 26:4-5)

"The promise that Abraham's seed should inherit the land of Canaan was bound up together with this [circumcision] covenant. The punishment for failure to observe this command was karet, to be 'cut off' from one's kind, understood by the rabbis to mean 'excision at the hand of heaven from the community.' (Encyclopedia Judaica CD-Rom Version article Circumcision.)"

The promise that a descendant of *Avraham* would be the promised Messiah also had nothing to do with the obedience of his descendants, it too was a Covenant of Promise that relied only on God, not on the obedience or works of men.

~ Written Torah ~

In the 1st century, as now, the fundamental basis for all *Halachah* (hah-lah-chah' = the way one walks, or the rules by which one lives) was the *Written Torah*. In Hebrew it is called *Torah She Bi Khetav* (Sheh Bee Kheh-tahv'). It was given to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) on Mount Sinai:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.'" (Ex. 24:12)

Notice there were two distinct parts to the *Torah* given to *Moshe*: 1.) The tablets (which contained the Ten Words) and 2.) The laws and *mitzvot* (commandments).

In its strictest sense, the *Written Torah* consists of only the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. However, today the

word *Torah* is sometimes used generically for the entire Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament).

There are said to be 613 *mitzvot* (meets'-vote = commandments) found within the *Written Torah*. It is important to understand that no one person is expected (or even able) to observe all of them, for some are only for Priests, others only for Levites, still others only for kings, or men, or women. Some *mitzvot* are not in force unless there is a proper functioning Tabernacle or Temple, while others apply only to people who are living within the land of Israel.

However, despite all of these exclusions, there is still a significant body of *mitzvot* that apply today. One of a Believer's tasks in this life is to discover which *mitzvot* apply to him/her and then to become observant of them. It is this very body of *mitzvot* that *Shaul* proclaimed, in no uncertain terms, to be both holy (set apart) and good:

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

~ Oral Torah ~

In addition to the *Written Torah*, 1st century Judaism (and Orthodox Jews today) also recognized a body of oral traditions as being given by God. These traditions became known as the *Oral Torah*, or *Torah She Be-al Peh* (Sheh Beh-ahl' Peh). It is considered to be the authoritative interpretation of the *Written Torah*.

The Rabbis taught that the *Oral Torah* was also given to *Moshe* on Mount Sinai. Its instructions were considered to be God's clarification of how the *Written Torah* commands were to be interpreted and administered. It was also taught that the statutes of the *Written Torah* could not have been fulfilled properly, even in the time of *Moshe*, were it not for the *Oral Torah*. For this reason, the *Oral Torah* became a key element, along with the *Written Torah*, in the setting of 1st century *Halachah*, the instructions which guided an observant Jew in his daily walk.

Originally, the *Oral Torah* was not written down but was passed orally from generation to generation through the Sages. This transmission process made the *Oral Torah* ripe for changes and manipulation as successive generations of Rabbis added to it, subtracted from it, or modified it. However, modern Orthodox Judaism still maintains that the *Oral Torah* has survived intact and should be viewed as authoritative as is the *Written Torah*.

It was primarily this body of knowledge (*Oral Torah*) that made up the teaching of the Rabbis during *Y'shua's* day. Young Jewish men did not go to the most learned Rabbis to become grounded in the *Written Torah*, for they would have already been thoroughly schooled in *Written Torah* beginning at age five when, in their local communities, they began their formal education by learning the book of *Vayikra* (Vah-yee-krah' = Leviticus).

Once a young man became well schooled in the local *Yeshiva* (Yeh-shee'-vah = school), those who were able (both intellectually and financially) would have gone on to study with a well known Sage in order to more fully learn the traditions (*Oral Torah*) that had been passed down from the Fathers. Armed with such advanced instruction, the young men would

have considered themselves better equipped to properly conduct their life in accordance with the instructions found in both the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah*.

The *Oral Torah* was eventually written down by a famous Rabbi, Judah Ha-Nasi, around the beginning of the 3rd century CE. This was done to insure that the information contained in the *Oral Torah* would not be lost as the Jewish people were forced further and further into Diaspora.

The written codification of the *Oral Torah* is called the *Mishnah* (Meesh'-nah). Later on, the Jewish Sages continued their work on the *Oral Torah* by writing extensive commentary on the *Mishnah*. This commentary is called the *Gamara* (Gah-mah-rah'). Together, the *Mishnah* and *Gamara* make up the *Talmud* (Tal'-mood). There are two Talmuds, the *Babylonian Talmud* and the *Jerusalem Talmud*, both of which occupy several volumes in modern book form. The *Babylonian Talmud* is the most complete of the two and is the one commonly used as the authoritative source for Orthodox Jewish belief and practice.

While we do not suggest that Believers need to follow the dictates of *Oral Torah*, we hasten to add that it does contain a great deal of instruction that can be profitable when understood in its proper context.

~ First Century Judaism ~

It is equally important to understand that Judaism, in the 1st century, consisted of many different sects. In some ways, the situation in that day might be compared, although on a much smaller scale, to modern day Christianity and its thousands of sects and denominations.

All of the various Jewish sects fell under the general heading of *Judaism* and all of them accepted the *Written Torah* as being given by God. Thus, all of them held numerous Scripture based beliefs in common, but in practice they were divided.

The three main sects of Judaism during *Y'shua's* (Yeh-shoe'-ah = Jesus) day were the *Sadducees*, the *Pharisees*, and the *Essenes*. In addition, there were numerous smaller sects including the *Sicarii* (See-car'-ee), a group of assassins within the national independent revolutionary party called the *Zealots*. Also, there was a very small but powerful sect called the *Boethusians* (Boh-ah-thoo'-zee-ahns), who were also a party within a party, for they were the ruling elite within the party of the *Sadducees*.

In brief, the major parties can be summarized as follows.

~ Sadducees ~

The *Sadducees* were composed primarily of Priests and Levites. They accepted only the *Torah* (first five books of the Bible) as God-breathed Scripture. For this reason, the *Sadducees* did not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection and, for a reason not made clear in the Scriptures, did not believe in angels:

"For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection -- and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both."

(Acts 23:8)

Because the *Sadducean* party was primarily composed of Priests and Levites, they controlled the Temple services and believed it should be the center of worship rather than the Synagogue. However, because the Temple was under Roman jurisdiction (the High Priest had to buy his office each year from the Roman Procurator), the *Sadducees* tended to be more *Hellenized* (accepting of Greek culture) than the other sects. This resulted from the political position in which the *Sadducees* found themselves (between the people and the Romans), and caused the Priestly ruling class to become very corrupt.

Not all Priests were members of the *Sadducean* party. For example, Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, was both a Priest and a *Pharisee*. Nor were they all corrupt, for Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth were considered by God to be righteous according to *Torah* standards:

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." (Luke 1:5-6)

It was the *Sadducees* who were primarily responsible for the arrest of *Y'shua*, since the Priests were indebted to Rome for their position of power and did not want a 'Messiah' rocking the boat.'

"And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.'" (John 11:49-50)

There are no extant *Sadducean* writings that have come down to the 21st century, so most of our information about them is negative, since it comes to us from their bitter enemies, the *Pharisees*.

~ Pharisees ~

The *Pharisees* were at odds with the *Sadducees* over many issues. First of all, the *Pharisees* believed both in the resurrection of the dead and in angels. However, the separation went much deeper, because what was at the root of their division was the quest for power within Judaism.

The *Pharisees* were what Christians might call 'local ministers.' They were the Rabbis who ran the local Synagogues in both Judea, the Galilee, and in the Diaspora. As a result, they exercised great influence over the common people. While some Priests and Levites were *Pharisees*, the vast majority of them were from the 'lay' population.

By *Y'shua's* day the *Pharisees* had gained greatly in power, especially among the common people, and many *Pharisees* held seats in the *Sanhedrin*, the Jewish Supreme Court. However, most historians believe the *Sadducees* continued to control the Temple services until its destruction in 70 CE, despite what modern Rabbinic Judaism teaches on that subject.

The *Pharisees* considered themselves to be the traditional followers of Ezra. They accepted all of the *Torah*, as well as the *Prophets* and *Writings*, as Scripture. In addition to the

Written Torah, they also accepted the *Oral Torah* as a major source for their religious practices, for they believed that the *Written Torah* could not be properly understood without the *Oral Torah*. The *Pharisees* taught their followers to diligently study both *Written* and *Oral Torah* and to observe all of the Jewish rituals as prescribed in their version of *Halachah*. While the *Pharisees* were not at all Hellenized (they were vociferously opposed to Jews participating in Greek culture), they were willing to submit to Roman domination as long as it did not interfere with their ability to practice their religion.

Modern day Orthodox Judaism traces their heritage back to the *Pharisees*.

~ Essenes ~

The *Essenes* were a communal group or brotherhood which is believed to have existed from the 2nd century BCE through the 1st century CE. According to Philo (a Jewish leader living in Egypt in the 1st century CE) they numbered about 4000. They lived in monastic type communities and many did not marry.

The *Essenes* were an ascetic group who lived very austere lives. They separated themselves from Temple worship because they perceived the Priesthood to be corrupt. Ritual purity was of primary importance to the *Essenes* and they spent significant amounts of time each day in purification ceremonies.

It is believed by some that a 1st century *Essene* community lived in Jerusalem in the area known today as Mt. Zion (southwest of the Temple Mount). Some believe that *Yochanan* (Yoh-chah-nahn') the Immerser (John the Baptist) was an *Essene*, or at least strongly influenced by them, and that many of the followers of *Y'shua* were either influenced by them or came directly from their ranks.

The most famous *Essene* settlement was believed to have been at *Qumran*, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the mid-twentieth century.

The *Essenes* had more in common with the *Pharisees* than the *Sadducees* because of their emphasis on personal piety and *Torah* study.

~ The People of the Land ~

The largest single group of people in 1st century Judea and the Galilee were the *Am HaEretz* (Ahm Hah Eh-retz') or the 'People of the Land.' In the first century, this term was used in a derogatory sense for those Jews whose lives were not properly regulated (according to *Pharisaic* standards) by religious observance. Some of the more 'pious' Jews considered the *Am HaEretz* to be little better than Samaritans and Gentiles. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*:

"Am ha-arez is ... a general term for all those who did not support the aims of Pharisaic Judaism and were careless about those commandments which imposed a heavy burden on everyday life."

Yochanan the Immerser and *Y'shua* primarily directed their ministries towards the *Am HaEretz*:

"And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?' ¹⁷ When Jesus [Y'shua] heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'" (Mark 2:16-17)

This passage seems to indicate that Y'shua considered the *Pharisees* to be teaching and practicing righteous living according to *Torah* standards. That is not to say that the *Pharisees* were without sin:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ..." (Rom. 3:23)

Later on, however, Y'shua made a direct reference to the *Oral Torah* of the *Pharisees* when He showed how they had added so many rules to the *Written Torah* that it made the *Halachah* of the Rabbis a burden to the *Am HaEretz* (people of the land or the common people):

"For they [Scribes and Pharisees] bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matt. 23:4)

It was His view concerning *Oral Torah* that put Y'shua in direct conflict with the *Pharisees*. This conflict was evident in the *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ 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.' ¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" (Luke 18:10-14)

Despite all of their traditions and binding of heavy burdens, when a 1st century *Am HaEretz* Jew came to desire a closer relationship with God, he would turn to the *Pharisees* for instruction.

~ Schools of the Pharisees ~

Within the party called *Pharisee* there were many different schools of teaching. Each head Rabbi had his own understanding of how the *Written Torah* should be applied using *Oral Torah*. However, despite their different approaches to portions of *Halachah*, they all basically agreed on the fundamentals. For example, they all agreed that the Sabbath should be kept, but they may have differed when it came to the manner of observance.

The largest and most famous of the *Pharisaic* schools in the 1st century CE were the *School of Hillel* and the *School of Shammai*. In modern terminology the *School of Hillel* would

be considered more liberal, while the *School of Shammai* was more conservative. However, based on our modern day definitions of liberal and conservative, we might classify the *School of Hillel* as moderate-conservative and the *School of Shammai* as ultra-conservative.

Rabbi Harvey Faulk wrote a most interesting book, called *Jesus the Pharisee*, in which he examined every encounter, recorded in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament), that Y'shua had with the *Pharisees*. His conclusion was that in every instance except one, Y'shua's teaching sided with the *School of Hillel*. The one exception was when He sided with the *School of Shammai* over the issue of divorce and even that one is debatable.

It is also interesting to note that *Shaul* (Paul) was a *Pharisee*:

"But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!'" (Acts 23:6)

In addition, it is known that *Shaul* was from the *School of Hillel* because he studied under Gamaliel, the grandson of *Hillel*.

"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)

~ Conflict ~

The basic conflict between the various sects (and the schools within the sects) centered around *Oral Torah*. Should the oral traditions be accepted? (The *Sadducees* said no, the *Pharisees* said yes.) If so, how much of it should be accepted?

Even when *Hillel* and *Shammai* agreed on the acceptance of certain oral precepts, they often disagreed on how and to whom they should be applied. For example, both Rabbis agreed that the ritual of hand washing should be practiced by the ordinary Jew even though, in the *Written Torah*, it was required only of the Priests doing service in the Tabernacle or Temple:

"You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, ¹⁹ for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. ²⁰ When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD [YHVH], they shall wash with water, lest they die. ²¹ So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them -- to him and his descendants throughout their generations." (Ex. 30:18-21)

Hillel and *Shammai* both taught that ritual hand washing was appropriate for the common Jew because they considered every man to be a priest:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to

Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Ex. 19:5-6)

However, *Hillel* and *Shammai* disagreed as to how often the people should perform the hand washing ritual. *Shammai* said Jews should ritually wash their hands before every meal. *Hillel* said it was only necessary to ritually wash one's hands before consecrated meals, such as those eaten on the Sabbath and Festivals. The hand washing ritual for the common people was not commanded in the *Written Torah* but it was commanded in the *Oral Torah* or "tradition of the elders:"

"Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus [*Y'shua*], saying, ² 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.'" (Matt. 15:1-2)

This is a clear case where *Y'shua* and His disciples followed the custom of *Hillel* as opposed to that of *Shammai*. Whether *Y'shua* went even further and did not perform handwashing on Sabbath and Festivals is debatable and only assumptions can be made in this regard. Our assumption is that He did observe the hand washing tradition for consecrated meals, but not for common daily meals.

~ Oral Torah and Shaul ~

A good grasp of the *Oral Torah*, and its relationship to the *Written Torah*, is essential if one wants to understand the teachings of *Shaul*, concerning the relationship of the Gentiles to the 'Law' and the interaction that took place between the Believing Jews and Believing Gentiles of the 1st century.

It is our opinion that many errors have been made by Christian writers who have disregarded or not known about this important interaction. This is especially true in books and articles which delve into *Shaul's* teaching concerning the 'Law' generally, and more particularly in their writings about the relationship of the Believing Gentiles to the 'Law.'

~ First Century Halachah ~

As already noted, the literal meaning of *Halachah* is, "the way one walks," and it consists of the instructions, from both *Written* and *Oral Torah*, which guide an individual in morality and proper behavior, both before God and with men. A large body of 1st century *Halachah* dealt with issues concerning food and ritual purity. According to Tim Hegg, in his excellent 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)

It was very important, to observant 1st century Jews, that they not become ritually contaminated by touching a corpse or other unclean thing. This was called Primary Uncleanness:

""Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days."" (Num. 19:16)

In addition to ritual uncleanness contracted through direct contact with a dead body, a bone, or a grave, a person could also become unclean (for a shorter period of time) by having direct physical contact with another person who was already ritually unclean. This type of contamination was called Secondary Uncleanness:

""If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.""

(Lev. 15:19)

Oral Torah takes this one step further, teaching that touching any person who has contracted Primary Uncleanness (Num. 19:16) renders a person Secondarily Unclean (Lev. 15:19).

During the wilderness wandering years people who had Primary Uncleanness were required to remain outside the camp until they had accomplished their required purification ritual:

""Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. ³ You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell."" (Num. 5:2-3)

These people were considered to be unclean and their very presence in the camp of Israel made the camp unclean.

Because of the strictness of the laws concerning ritual purity, an observant 1st century Jew would not consider inviting a Gentile into his home, nor have physical contact with him in the Synagogue (they had to sit apart), for fear of contracting Secondary Uncleanness.

~ Food Laws ~

Another source of ritual contamination was food. First of all, no observant Jew would even consider eating one of the forbidden foods listed in Leviticus chapter 11:

""For I am the LORD 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)

However, the food laws did not stop merely at the kind of meat which was forbidden. Even permitted meat had to be slaughtered in a *kosher* manner in order for it to be considered fit for consumption by an observant Jew. This required, among other things, the complete draining of all blood from the animal:

""Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; ¹⁴ for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, "You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life

of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off."''
(Lev. 17:13-14)

In addition, there were other laws which concerned all types of food, not just meat. While the Temple was standing, an observant 1st century Jew was not permitted to eat anything unless the Levitical tithe had been paid upon the increase of the field or flock from which it came. The tithe was considered to be holy to God:

"'And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's [YHVH's]. It is holy to the LORD [YHVH].³¹ If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it.³² And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD [YHVH]."'
(Lev. 27:30-32)

Food which had not had the tithe paid upon it was considered to be 'common,' as was meat that had been slaughtered by a Gentile, for Gentiles could not be expected to slaughter an animal according to the strict standards of a Jewish *shochet* (show-kheht' = *kosher* butcher).

For all of these reasons, an observant 1st century Jew would never have considered eating a meal in a Gentile home.

~ Synagogue Practice ~

While 1st century Jews did not expel from the Synagogue those who were unclean, they did make every effort to separate those who were ritually unclean from those who were ritually pure. It was assumed that an observant Jew would know when he was in an unclean state and refrain from contaminating anyone else. However, the Gentiles in their midst did not have the same lifetime of training and understanding concerning the laws of ritual purity and food. Therefore, the Rabbis made it a general rule that Jews and Gentiles were not to have direct physical contact or table fellowship (eat meals together). This meant that a Jew could not go into the home of a Gentile and eat a meal nor invite a Gentile into his home.

This rule was especially relevant in Jerusalem where observant Jews frequented the Temple, for anyone who became ritually unclean could not participate in Temple Worship without first going through a purification ritual that, in some cases, took up to a week to perform. In the *Pharisees'* opinion, it was imperative that observant Jerusalem Jews not come into close contact with Gentiles.

While this was primarily an issue in Jerusalem, under the strict guidance of the *Pharisees* it also became the norm for all observant Jews, even in the Diaspora. The negative social interaction rules that resulted from this frame of mind caused a **"middle wall of separation"** to be erected between the Jews and Gentiles of the 1st century; not a literal wall, but a psychological and social wall.

~ Proselyte ~

A Gentile could break down that **"middle wall of separation"** and obtain full acceptance in the Jewish community by becoming a *Proselyte*. In the 1st century this required a Gentile to go through a training program that lasted

a minimum of one year. Once the training was successfully completed they were eligible for circumcision. When their circumcision had healed they were immersed (baptized) and then required to bring an offering (sacrifice) to the Temple. This last requirement was not performed until they visited the Temple. For a Diaspora *Proselyte* this would probably have occurred during their first pilgrimage Festival after conversion. The required offering for a *Proselyte* was the *Olah* (burnt offering) and could be a bull, a sheep, a goat, or a bird. Therefore, if a *Proselyte* was poor, a dove or pigeon would suffice.

Once they had fulfilled this requirement, the *Proselytes* were eligible to eat of the *Kodoshim* or 'Fellowship' offerings (the holy offerings brought to the Temple that were eaten by the person bringing it and his family or friends). These offerings consisted of Peace Offerings and Thanksgiving Offerings.

Women *Proselytes* were only required to be immersed and to bring the *Olah* offering. Once a Gentile had completed the entire *Proselyte* ceremony, they were accepted as Jews (**"as a native of the land"**) and full social and table fellowship were granted. From this point on their parents were said to be *Avraham* and *Sarah* and they were no longer referred to as Gentiles.

~ Heavy Burdens ~

A Gentile had to be really dedicated to the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Ya'acov* to be willing to undergo all of the many rules and regulations imposed upon them as they converted to Judaism. For men, the final obstacle was circumcision. But if they were truly convicted by God that their old pagan worship and lifestyle was futile, they were more than willing to do whatever was necessary to enter a relationship with God as full members of the Commonwealth of Israel. Despite all the rules, many 1st century pagan Gentiles took that step and became Jewish *Proselytes*.

The Rabbis recognized the difficulties inherent in the conversion process. They called it taking on the "Yoke of the Torah." According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*:

"In rabbinic theology the yoke is a metaphor of great importance. It is the symbol of service and servitude, and in accordance with the principle that the Jew should be free from servitude to man in order to devote himself to the service of God, the 'yoke of the kingdom of man' is contrasted with 'the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.' The doctrine is fully enacted in the statement of Nehunya b. ha-Kanah: 'Whoever takes upon himself the yoke of the Torah, they remove from him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns, and whoever breaks off the yoke of the Torah, they place on him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns' (Avot 3:5)."

In the eyes of the Rabbis, the "Yoke of the Torah" included not just the *Written Torah* commands, but those of the *Oral Torah* as well. Because of the myriad number of rules or added "fences around the law," the end result was a very rule bound religion that was based upon the legalistic observance of the *Halachah* (both *Written* and *Oral Torah*) or what today we

might call 'legalism.' It was with this 'rule bound' religion that *Y'shua* often took issue:

"And He said, 'Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch [relieve] the burdens with one of your fingers.'" (Luke 11:46)

"Then Jesus [*Y'shua*] spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ⁴ For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.'" (Matt. 23:1-4)

Y'shua spoke of a different way, a better way to enter into covenant with God:

"Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'" (Matt. 11:28-30)

This had to be a direct reference to the heavy 'yoke' the Rabbis placed upon the converts, a 'yoke' that was not necessary. It is our opinion that this heavy 'yoke' was not the *Written Torah*, but rather the many 'fences' of the *Oral Torah*.

Y'shua claimed that often times the *Proselytes* became even more stringent about rule keeping than the *Pharisees* who supervised their conversion:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.'" (Matt. 23:15)

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that the rules of the *Essenes* were far more restrictive than those of the *Pharisees*.

~ Cornelius the God Fearer ~

According to the 1st century Rabbis, being circumcised and becoming a *Proselyte* was the only available method by which a Gentile could come into a completed relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During their training period these prospective *Proselytes* were known as *God Fearers* (*phobominoi* in Greek).

We believe the 'God Fearers' of the Greek Scriptures are comparable to the *Gerim* or 'Permanent Aliens' of the Hebrew Scripture (see previous chapter *Scriptural Background*). In both cases they were following all of the *Torah* commands as they learned them, nevertheless, they were not allowed to fully participate in Temple worship because they were still uncircumcised. However, the 'God Fearers' were not treated with the same favor as the *Gerim* of Scripture were supposed to be treated. Instead, they were kept physically and socially separate from the Jews and *Proselytes* of the Synagogue because of the many *Oral Torah* traditions.

The very term, 'God Fearer' is used to describe Cornelius' relationship to the Jewish synagogue prior to his immersion (baptism):

"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 [*phobeo*] God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always." (Acts 10:1-2)

It is clear that Cornelius was not yet circumcised when Peter visited him, because of the strong opposition which Peter received when he returned to Jerusalem. The story of his visit to Cornelius and his household had already spread to the Believing Jews in Jerusalem and they had a very pointed accusation to make against Peter:

"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)

Cornelius is described in positive terms as being both generous and active in prayer. He was in the process of learning the *Torah* commands, both written and oral, as taught by the Synagogue Rabbis. This meant that Cornelius was coming to understand the customs of Jewish tradition and culture as practiced in the Synagogue (the *Oral Torah*) in addition to the commands of the *Written Torah*.

The Scriptures are silent as to whether Cornelius had heard about *Y'shua*, the Jewish Messiah, prior to Peter's visit. All we know is that God chose him to be the first Gentile to be baptized without first undergoing circumcision:

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days." (Acts 10:44-48)

~ Peter's Education ~

Peter had been one of *Y'shua's* most trusted disciples. He had traveled and lived with *Y'shua* for His entire ministry. No doubt Peter heard *Y'shua* rail against the *Pharisees* about the unnecessarily heavy burdens they placed upon the people who were returning to God, burdens based not on the *Written Torah* but on the traditions of *Oral Torah*. Despite all of *Y'shua's* teaching, Peter himself continued to be an observant Jew. This fact alone is an indicator that *Y'shua* did not come to destroy the law but to complete or finish it:

"Let there be no thought that I have come to put an end to the law or the prophets. I have not come for destruction, but to make complete.'" (Matt. 5:17 BBE)

It is clear that Peter continued to be *Torah* observant because of his reaction to the vision of the unclean creatures:

"The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ¹⁴ But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.'" (Acts 10:9-14)

Here is Peter, several years after the resurrection, and he was still observing the food laws! Not only did Peter not eat unclean flesh, he did not eat anything common. That meant Peter was still observing all of the *kashrut* (kash-root') laws pertaining to the slaughter of animals, as well as the tithing laws.

This would have been a perfect opportunity for God to say to Peter, "Go ahead and eat, for the law has been done away!" Instead, this is the answer Peter received directly from God:

"And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'" (Acts 10:15)

This same scenario was repeated two more times. Then the men Cornelius had sent arrived in Joppa and took Peter to Caesarea. Peter must have mulled this vision over in his mind all the way to Caesarea, puzzling as to its meaning while traveling with the men. However, after he arrived in Caesarea the meaning of the vision became clear; God was not talking about the food laws but about the relationship of Jews to Gentiles:

"Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" (Acts 10:28)

Peter said it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company with a Gentile. However, that is not a command found in the *Written Torah* but a command of the *Oral Torah*; the traditions that had been passed down through the generations. What God was showing Peter was that all of the *Proselyte* training rigmarole that had been established by the *Pharisees* was unnecessary, and that Gentiles could be brought into full fellowship with Jewish Believers merely by confessing their faith in the Messiahship of *Y'shua*, repenting of their sins, and being immersed (baptized) in the name of *Y'shua*.

~ Lord of All ~

Because of the *Vision of the Unclean Creatures*, Peter also now understood that Gentiles could be equal to Jews in the Messianic community without undergoing pre-circumcision *Proselyte* training in the intricacies of *Oral Torah*, and, even more importantly, that *Y'shua* was Lord of the Gentiles as well as the Jews:

"Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. ³⁶ The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] -- He is Lord of all ...'" (Acts 10:34-36)

This understanding was in complete harmony with the Hebrew Scriptures and was prophesied to occur in the "latter days:"

**"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's [*YHVH*'] house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it."** (Isa. 2:2)

An even more explicit passage concerning the place Gentiles would have in Israel occurs later in the book of Isaiah:

**"³ Do not let the son of the foreigner
Who has joined himself to the LORD [*YHVH*]
Speak, saying,
'The LORD [*YHVH*] has utterly separated me from His
people;' ..."** (Isa. 56:3)

Yet, separating the Gentiles from God's people (the Jews) is exactly what 1st century *Pharisees* were doing when they would not allow Gentiles social intercourse without first being circumcised:

**⁶ '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, who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
says,
'Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him.'"** (Isa. 56:3, 6-8)

~ The New Covenant ~

Many Believers like to claim that all of these prophecies pertain to the 'New Covenant' and that the 'Old Covenant' has been "done away." Accepting that argument for a moment, let us examine what Scripture says concerning the exact composition of the 'New Covenant.'

First of all, God does not make the New Covenant with Gentiles, but with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. In other words, with all of the children of Israel:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD [YHVH], when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ..." (Jer. 31:31)

Secondly, the New Covenant does not abolish the *Torah*, instead the New Covenant establishes it:

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD [YHVH]: I will put My law [*Torah*] in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer. 31:33)

The New Covenant is nothing less than the *Terms and Conditions* of the *Written Torah*, now written on the hearts of the House of Israel and the House of Judah, not just on stone tablets.

But where does that leave the Gentiles? The same place it left them before the 'New Covenant' arrived. They must attach themselves to Israel if they want to come into a completed relationship with the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Ya'acov*. However, instead of doing this through a lengthy training program in *Oral Torah*, and then submitting to circumcision, the process now involves faith in Messiah *Y'shua*:

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified [*rendered righteous*] by faith [*confident trusting*] apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." (Rom. 3:27-31)

~ Being Justified ~

All have sinned at some time in their life, both Jew and Gentile:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified [*rendered righteous*] freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] ..." (Rom. 3:23-24 KJV)

Because all have sinned, all need to be justified or made straight with the law (*Torah*), otherwise the law will demand its just punishment which is death. This is what it means to have one's past sins forgiven. Justification can only be accomplished by faith that the death and resurrection of Messiah *Y'shua* is sufficient to cover those past sins and allow the sinner to stand before God and man free from the penalty of sin!

However, *Shaul* goes on to point out that this act of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH does not "do away" or make void the law (*Written Torah*), instead it points out that all Believers, both Jew and Gentile should be striving to OBSERVE THE LAW! Thus, the need to observe the law (*Written Torah*) is ESTABLISHED, not voided.

~ The Jerusalem Council ~

Nevertheless, there were still those Messianic Jews who insisted that the Gentiles could not be 'saved' unless they were first circumcised:

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" (Acts 15:1)

This position created such a problem in the *ekklesia* (church) it was decided that a group of elders, headed by Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem and confer with the leaders of the Messianic movement. After much heated discussion, Peter made a key statement:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ 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? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'"

(Acts 15:7-11)

The underlined statement has puzzled many Bible teachers down through the ages. Since the subject of the conference was whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved, it does not make sense for Peter to call it a "yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." Peter and all of the other Jews had been circumcised when they were only eight days old, certainly they did not remember that occasion as being a 'yoke' they could not bear. Nor could it refer to the *Written Torah*, for *Moshe* himself said the commands of the *Torah* were not too difficult for the children of Israel to keep:

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (Deut. 30:11-14)

What Peter was alluding to, in his remarks, was something that everyone associated with the Jewish Synagogues of the 1st century would have understood, but which most Believers of the 21st century do not understand at all. He was alluding to the *Oral Torah* fences around the *Written Torah* commands that made the practice of *Pharisaic* Judaism such a 'burden' or 'yoke' that many could not bear it.

When a Gentile accepted circumcision he automatically accepted all of the *Oral* traditions as taught by the Rabbis who headed that particular Synagogue or School. First century

Pharisaic Judaism was a 'works' centered religion with a myriad of rules that could be nearly impossible to keep correctly. *Y'shua* came to 'do away' with that form of religious 'law' and restore a proper balance to the instructions of the *Written Torah*. He came not to destroy the *Written Torah* but to complete it, to show His disciples how God intended it to be kept from the beginning. According to *Y'shua*, His 'yoke,' the *Written Torah* as it was intended to be kept, was easy to bear:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30)

~ The Four Abstentions ~

Nevertheless, there was still a problem concerning fellowship. The Synagogues were full of Jews, both those who had accepted the Messiahship of *Y'shua* and those who had not. Many (if not most) of the Jews had kept the *Oral Torah* commands since their youth and were not comfortable with accepting Gentiles who might not yet understand the food and purity laws of the *Written Torah* as interpreted by the *Oral Torah* fences. There needed to be a minimum standard, which the Gentile converts were required to follow, that would satisfy the most glaring problems when it came to full fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. After meeting with the full Council, *Ya'acov* (James), being head of the *Beit Din* (Bait Deen = House of Judgment), was privileged to make the announcement:

"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)

Notice that *Ya'acov* makes the distinction that the Gentile Believers are in the process of turning to God. They were not expected to have completed all of their religious training at the time of their baptism.

When the letter was finally written the wording had changed slightly:

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things [meats in KJV] offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:28-29)

It is instructive to note that all of the items mentioned can have a connection to pagan worship, the religion of all Gentiles. It is also interesting to note that three of the four items were directly related to Table Fellowship, one of the major issues concerning social interaction between Jews and Gentiles in the Synagogue. We will examine them one at a time:

Meats offered to idols. When a pagan sacrifice was performed, the leftover meat from the animal offered was sold

in the open market. This would be where Gentiles would obtain their meat.

#1494 εἰδωλόθυτον *eidolothuton* {i-do-loth'-oo-ton}

Meaning: "1) sacrificed to idols, the flesh left over from the heathen sacrifices 1a) it was either eaten at the feasts or sold (by the poor and the miserly) in the market."

Not only had this meat been offered to idols, it also had not been tithed upon. This made it a double problem for the Jewish Believers.

Blood. The prohibition against partaking of blood in meat has already been mentioned (Lev. 17:10-14). However, there are other possibilities. For example, it is forbidden in the *Written Torah* for a man to have sexual intercourse with his wife during her menstrual cycle:

"If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. ... ²⁴And if any man lies with her at all, so that her impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean." (Lev. 15:19, 24)

It is also forbidden to shed blood by committing murder:

"So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it." (Num. 35:33)

Things strangled. This prohibition was directly related to the *kosher* slaughter of animals:

#4156 πνικτός *pniktos* {pnik-tos'} **Meaning:** "1) suffocate, strangled 1a) what is strangled, i.e. an animal deprived of life without the shedding of blood."

Sexual immorality. This command not only covered illicit sexual activity generally, it also had the effect of prohibiting a Gentile convert from even attending a pagan ceremony, for often such services involved illicit sexual activity.

#4202 πορνεία *porneia* {por-ni'-ah} **Meaning:** "1) illicit sexual intercourse 1a) adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc. 1b) sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18 ... 2) metaph. the worship of idols 2a) of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols."

~ Oral Torah Revisited ~

In reality, these four prohibitions constituted an *Oral Torah* for new Gentile converts. Like the *Oral Torah* of the *Pharisees*, these four rules were also based upon *Written Torah* and they became the minimum requirements which a Gentile convert needed to follow in order to have social contact and Table Fellowship with his Jewish brethren in the Believing Community.

Some claim that these four requirements are a distillation of the seven *Noachide* Laws. We disagree. The so-called *Noachide* laws were not 'discovered' by the Rabbis until long

after the 1st century, when they were writing the *Gamara*, the commentary on the *Mishnah* or *Oral* traditions. Instead, these four requirements were the minimum requirements for fellowship in the Believing Community.

However, the story does not end there, for the Gentile Converts were expected to continue their education in the pathways of God by learning the commands of the *Written Torah* as expounded each Sabbath day in the Synagogue:

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

Preaching *Moshe* is a Hebraic idiom for teaching the commandments of the *Written Torah*. Even in the New Testament, the *Torah* commands are called both the "law of Moses" and the "law of the Lord:"

"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD [YHVH]'), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'" (Luke 2:22-24)

What this meant in the Synagogue was that the Gentiles who had come to Faith in *Y'shua* did not have to wait one full year (while they learned the *Written Torah* and the *Oral* commands) but could enjoy full fellowship immediately upon their baptism. However, they were expected to continue their lessons in *Halachah* (the way one walks), but now it was *Halachah* centered on the *Written Torah* and the teachings of *Y'shua* instead of the heavy burdens of the *Pharisees Oral Torah*.

~ Summary ~

History records that in the 1st century a great many pagan Gentiles converted to Judaism. They came to understand that the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Ya'acov* was the one true God and that paganism was really the religion of *HaSatan*, the Adversary.

Although the Jewish sects of the *Sadducees* and the *Essenes* were both well known, it was the *Pharisees* who controlled the local Synagogues and therefore had the most influence on both the Gentile converts and the *Am Ha Eretz* (People of the Land).

The *Pharisees* were very strict about ritual purity and Table Fellowship. Therefore, the converting Gentiles had to go through an extensive training program before they were allowed to be circumcised and become *Proselytes*. However, once they achieved that goal, they were accepted into full fellowship without reservation.

The *Pharisees* not only accepted the *Written Torah* as inspired and given by God, they also placed the same esteem upon the *Oral Torah*; the traditions of the fathers which were not written but passed down through the generations orally. In their opinion, these oral instructions carried just as much weight as did the *Written Torah*.

Y'shua did not agree with this position. While He no doubt accepted certain traditions as being proper and good, He did not accept others, especially those which diminished the original intent of the *Written Torah*. This position was apparent in *Y'shua's* confrontations with the *Pharisees*.

It was several years after *Y'shua's* resurrection before God revealed to Peter that Believing Gentiles no longer needed to abide by the *Pharisaic* conversion traditions in order to enter into full fellowship with the Messianic Jews in the Synagogue. This brought about a serious conflict which culminated in the Jerusalem Conference recorded in Acts 15. At that conference the leadership of the Messianic Community agreed to hold the new Gentile converts to just four simple *Oral* traditions while they were learning the *Written Torah* through their weekly attendance at Sabbath services in the Synagogues.

The bottom line is that the Gentile Believers were not obliged to follow the *Oral Torah* of the *Pharisees*, but they were expected to learn and follow, to the best of their abilities, the *Written Torah* of God as given to *Moshe* on Mount Sinai:

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

~ ~ ~

~ Which Law? ~

Let there be no thought
That I have come to put an end
To the law or the prophets.
I have not come for destruction,
But to make complete.
Matthew 5:17



One of the confusing things about studying the 'Law,' as found in the Greek (New Testament) Scriptures, is trying to understand *Which Law* the writer is referencing. This presents a problem in understanding because, in the first century, there were two major sets of 'Laws' which existed within Judaism and both carried equal weight. These two bodies of 'Law' were the *Written Torah* (the 613 commandments found in the first five books of the Bible) and the *Oral Torah* which had been handed down verbally over the centuries. This latter body of 'Law' included a number of components:

- ◆ *Oral Traditions*, which had been passed down by word of mouth from ancient times, which clarified some of the *Written Torah* commands that were open to interpretation because of their wording.
- ◆ *Case Law* that resulted from rulings on *Written Torah* commands which had, over the centuries, been decided in legitimate courts of law. **"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, ..."** (Deut. 16:18)
- ◆ *Customs* of the people that had developed over the centuries.
- ◆ *Rabbinic Interpretations* of the *Written Torah* commands.

These various components were all part of what is called the *Oral Torah*.

~ The Origins of Oral Torah ~

According to Rabbinic Judaism, the *Oral Torah* commands were given directly to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) by God when he was on Mount Sinai. A strong case can be made for this claim when it comes to certain specific portions of the *Oral Torah*. For example, there is no description given in the *Written Torah* concerning how the various vessels, which were used in Tabernacle Service, were to be constructed. According to Scripture, *Moshe* was shown a pattern of the Tabernacle accouterments which he, in turn, passed on to the men who were responsible for the actual manufacture of them:

"And see to it that you make them [Tabernacle vessels and furnishings] according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Exodus 25:40)

Today, these vessels are described in a book called the *Mishnah* (Meesh-nah'), which is the ancient *Oral Torah* in

written form. Further clarifications are to be found in the *Gamara* (Gah-mah-rah'), the Rabbinic commentary on the *Mishnah*. Together, the *Mishnah* and the *Gamara* make up the definitive text of Rabbinic Judaism, the *Talmud* (Tahl-mood'). The written version of the *Oral Torah* (the *Mishnah*) was completed about 200 CE. This was done so that the information would not be lost as the Jews were dispersed further and further away from the centers of Rabbinic learning in Israel.

However, as we have already seen, the *Oral Torah* (*Mishnah*) also contains a great deal of information from other sources, specifically the 'Case Law' rulings, the 'Customs' that had developed over the centuries, and the 'Rabbinic Interpretations' which, in *Y'shua's* day were relatively new, having only begun to be added in the first century BCE.

These latter three categories of *Oral Torah* can be referenced, as a body, by the term *dogma*. *Dogma* in English is defined as:

"1. A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative manner by a church. 2. An authoritative principle, belief, or statement of ideas or opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true."

The majority of *Oral Torah* fits this description of *dogma*. It constituted the 'doctrine' of first century *Pharisaic* Judaism, and it is usually in support of the *Written Torah*, although occasionally it does contradict the *Written*. Even when *Oral Torah* does not contradict *Written Torah*, it often adds rules and practices to the basic *Torah* commands.

~ A Problematic Situation ~

This twofold division of *Torah* 'law' created a problematic situation in the first century synagogues and it served to cause division rather than unity. A number of serious problems arose between the *Pharisaic* Jews and those Gentiles who were leaving paganism and beginning to attend synagogue. One such problem centered around the *Pharisaic* practice concerning the ritual purity and *kosher* food laws of the *Torah*. The problem was not with the *Written Torah* commands on these matters, but with the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) 'fences' which the *Pharisees* had erected in order to keep the religious Jews from even getting close to breaking a *Written Torah* command.

For example, the *Written Torah* clearly states that the children of Israel were not to eat meat classified as 'unclean' or which had not been properly bled when it was slaughtered. (Those *Written Torah* laws are found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.) However, *Pharisaic* 'fences' were built around the *Written Torah's* straightforward commands, which also forbade Jews from eating anything 'common.' Common food included all food (meats, grains, fruits, or vegetables) which had not had the Levitical tithe paid upon it. Thus, any food sold in the regular markets was forbidden, because it was impossible to know if the proper tithes had been paid. An observant Jew was therefore not allowed to eat a meal in a Gentile home because he could not know for sure whether the

food was common or not. In all probability the food was common.

Another *Oral Torah* fence (*dogma*) had been erected which forbade a Jew from keeping company with a Gentile, because if the Gentile physically touched him, the Jew might contract, what is called, *Secondary Ritual Impurity*. This status occurred when someone who was ritually unclean came into physical contact with a ritually clean person, thereby transferring the 'ritual impurity' of the first individual to the 'clean' individual. (This is a somewhat simplified example; the purity rules are actually quite complex.)

It was these types of "traditions of men" that Peter made mention of when he was commanded, by God, to go to the house of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion:

"Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" (Acts 10:28)

Peter's *Messianic Jewish* brethren back in Jerusalem expressed the same concern when he returned:

"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 11:2-3)

The command (to not have physical, or even social, contact with Gentiles), to which both Peter and his brethren referred, is not found in the *Written Torah*, rather it was part of the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*), or fences, which had been added.

~ The Pharisaic Faction ~

This divisive attitude continued to hold sway among certain *Pharisees* who had become a part of the *Messianic Community* of Believers. They firmly believed that all Gentiles were required to fully convert to Judaism (by submitting to the rite of circumcision) in order to receive salvation:

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom [*ethos* = *custom*] of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" (Acts 15:1)

Implied in this demand, by the ultra-conservative *Pharisees*, was the understanding that these new *Messianic Proselytes* would also have to keep all of the *Oral Torah* (customs or *dogma*) commands as well as the *Written Torah* commands. The *Oral Torah* commands, when observed in their entirety, made Judaism an extremely 'rule bound' religion.

Oral Torah is the practical application, or manner, in which the laws found in the *Written Torah* have been interpreted by the Jewish Sages and Rabbis, and thereby applied to the everyday life of the common Jew. It is known as *Halacha* (Hah-lah-chah' = the way one walks or one's way of life). The *Pharisees* taught that all of it taken together (*Written Torah* plus the *Oral Torah* interpretations) constituted the "law of *Moshe*," since they claimed that both sets of 'law' had been given on Mount Sinai. This is why, a few verses later, these conservative *Pharisees* referred to this entire body of "law" (*Written* and *Oral*) as the *nomos* or law of *Moshe* and not just

as the *ethos* or customs of *Moshe*, as it had been called in verse 1:

"And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them [convert them to Judaism], and to command them to keep the law [nomos = law] of Moses.'" (Acts 15:4-5)

It was not simply the rite of circumcision that was being promoted. Peter correctly understood that what the *Pharisees* were really saying was that the *Gentile Believers* should be required to become Jews and keep the "whole law," both the *Written Torah* plus its Rabbinic interpretations as found in the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) traditions. This is why, at the Jerusalem Council, Peter said that even the Jews (who had been trained from age five in the intricacies of both the *Written* and *Oral Torah*) were unable to keep the "whole law" properly. There were just too many rules to follow which interfered with normal life. Therefore, for the common Jew, the "whole law" (*Written* and *Oral*) had become a burden they were no longer able to bear:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ 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? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'" (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter went on to say that no one (Jew nor Gentile) could ever receive salvation (being saved from the death penalty which results from sin) by keeping the *Pharisees'* many rules. Nor can Believers receive salvation as a result of keeping the *Written Torah* commands, because it is the *Written Torah* that condemns the *Messianic Believer*, showing us when sin has occurred and what sin has been committed. Salvation can only be obtained through the *Grace* (favor) which *Messianic Believers* receive from God the Father as a result of repentance for having sinned, and the acceptance of *Y'shua* as their Messiah and Savior who personally paid the penalty price (death) for their sins through His shed blood, thus obtaining forgiveness for them.

~ SIN ~

At this point, let us again remind ourselves about some facts concerning the Believers big bugaboo, SIN!

SIN is what we do not want in our lives. It is what has placed all of mankind into a fallen, or sinful, condition. The ultimate 'reward' for being a SINNER (having committed SIN) is DEATH!

"For the wages of sin is death, ..." (Romans 6:23)

Personal SALVATION means being SAVED from the awful fate of eternal death, which we humans have brought upon ourselves because we have SINNED (having submitted to the call of our own evil inclination)!

Because SIN is the action which has interposed itself between us and eternal life, we need to know two things:

First of all, we need to know what constitutes SIN so that we can avoid it if at all possible. This is not a case of trying to "earn" one's salvation, since salvation has already been lost because SIN has already been committed. It is merely a matter of doing our best to avoid committing any additional SIN -- an effort which is never totally successful while we are still in the flesh.

Second, when we do fall from *Grace* (favor) and commit SIN inadvertently, we need to understand how we can be reinstated into *Favor* (grace) once more.

The answer to the first question is quite clear no matter which Biblical translation one uses:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law [anomia = without law or against law]." (1 John 3:4 KJV)

"Every one who is doing the sin, the lawlessness also he doth do, and the sin is the lawlessness, [anomia]..." (1 John 3:4 YLT)

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness [anomia]." (1 John 3:4 NIV)

"Everyone who is a sinner goes against the law, for sin is going against the law [anomia]." (1 John 3:4 BBE)

No matter how one slices it, SIN is the breaking of LAW (LAWLESSNESS).

Sometimes, English versions translate the Greek word *anomia* as "iniquity:"

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [anomia = lawlessness = sin]." (Matt. 7:21-23 KJV)

The real meaning of this Greek word *anomia* is: "*the condition of [being] without law.*" Anyone who wishes to declare that God's 'Law' has been "done away," so they do not feel obliged to obey it in its totality, is promulgating the abolishment of God's 'Law' and therefore living a life "without [God's] law" in its completeness.

This does not mean that such people are necessarily 'bad' by mankind's standards, for they may live very 'moral' lives. By the same token, many Hindus and Buddhists also live very 'moral' lives by mankind's standards, but they have not received salvation which can come only from the acceptance of *Y'shua's* sacrificial offering of Himself. It must be remembered that

mankind's standards are never in complete agreement with God's standards, although they may agree on many points. Thus, someone who is living a 'moral' life by mankind's standards will still fall short of God's standards in certain areas:

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ..." (Rom. 3:23)

Y'shua, in His own words (Matt. 7:23 above), states that He will say that He never knew those who commit iniquity or acts contrary to the law and they should depart from before His face.

That is heavy!

Despite the gravity of being in a state of SIN, God, in His mercy, has created a way to be reinstated back into righteousness when SIN reoccurs. That way is called repentance:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

(1 John 1:8-10)

There are two ways a person can say they have not sinned. One is to say they have not broken the Law, the other is to say that the Law is no longer in effect:

"... sin is not imputed when there is no law."

(Rom. 5:13)

~ Which Law? ~

The next question that needs to be asked is, which body of LAW or what combinations of bodies of LAW, if broken, constitute Biblical SIN and therefore cause an individual to be classified as a SINNER? Today, instead of having just two sets of Law from which to choose, there are no less than five bodies of Law available to complicate matters.

- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of the *Written Torah*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of the *Oral Torah*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) that were given by *Y'shua HaMashiach*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) that were given later by the Apostles (such as Peter, James, John, and Paul)?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of *Church Traditions*?

~ Written Torah ~

Probably the vast majority of Christians have been taught that the *Written Torah* commands (usually referred to as "Old Testament Law") have been "done away." Some go so far as to say that to even try and keep the *Written Torah* (Old Testament) commands constitutes SIN. However, the opinions

of men do not matter. What matters is the opinion of God and His Son *Y'shua* (our Betrothed Husband).

This series of booklets, entitled *Gentiles and the Law*, is devoted to this very question, concerning whether or not the *Written Torah* is still valid as a standard for behavior in the *Messianic Community*, and if the breaking of *Written Torah* commands constitute the type of SIN that requires the application of the blood of *Y'shua* for its expiation. We believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that to violate a *Written Torah* command, that applies to us as individuals, constitutes SIN and it does require repentance and forgiveness in order for *Grace* (favor) to be restored. Following are a few New Testament Scriptures which support this view.

Y'shua was clear about the continuing validity of the *Written Torah*. He said clearly and unequivocally that He did not come to destroy the *Written Torah*:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy [katauo = dissolve, diminish, overthrow] but to fulfill [pleroo = fulfill in the sense of completing our understanding]." (Matt. 5:17)

Y'shua said that not one portion of the *Written Torah* would be abrogated:

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass [parerchomai = pass away or perish] from the law till all is fulfilled [ginomai = come to pass]." (Matt. 5:18)

Y'shua said that anyone who broke even the least of the *Written Torah* commandments would be considered 'least' in the Kingdom:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [elachistos = smallest in importance] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:19)

Y'shua said that the righteousness (sinlessness) of the Believers had to exceed that of the *Pharisees*, if Believers were to have a place in the millennial kingdom:

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness [dikaosune = integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking and feeling] exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20)

Y'shua followed up this statement with specific examples showing how the Believer's heart (i.e. their thinking) had to be changed so that even the thought of adultery or murder was not to be held. *Y'shua* fulfilled or completed (*pleroo*) the *Written Torah* by showing it was not just a guide to right action but also a guide to right thoughts. If the thoughts are clean, so too will the actions be right. However, it is the *Written Torah* which defines right behavior. Man is not allowed to decide what constitutes SIN and what constitutes righteousness. That would be like allowing the children of a family to set the rules of the family. Only God can decide such important matters.

Y'shua clearly stated that those who practice lawlessness (*anomia*), are going to be cast into the furnace of fire:

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness [*anomia*],⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:41-42)

Remember, the Apostle John clearly said that sin equals lawlessness:

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4)

James, the half brother of *Y'shua*, said that the *Written Torah*, if followed, would actually produce true liberty:

"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

(James 1:25)

The Apostle Paul said that he believed everything written in the *Torah*:

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14)

Paul said that Believers actually establish the *Torah* through their faith in *Y'shua*:

"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

(Rom. 3:31)

Paul said the *Written Torah* was:

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

Paul said that he was still carnal flesh but that the *Written Torah* was a spiritual set of laws and they were good laws:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ...¹⁶ ... I agree with the law that it is good."

(Rom. 7:14, 16)

Paul said that Believers should not have fellowship or communion with those who are lawless:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness [*anomia*]? And what communion has light with darkness?"

(II Cor. 6:14)

The writer of the book of *Hebrews* expounded on the Scriptures which speak of *Y'shua*, stating that He hated *anomia* (lawlessness) and because *Y'shua* hated *anomia* He was given preference above all other men:

"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness [*anomia*];

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

(Heb. 1:9 from Psalm 45)

Based upon the testimony of *Y'shua*, John, James, Paul, and the writer of the book of *Hebrews*, we can only conclude that violating those *Written Torah* commands which apply specifically to us, constitutes SIN in the eyes of God. But do not despair, as was already mentioned, there is a solution to the problem of SIN. If we Confess our sins in full Repentance (turning away from them) and Accept the blood of *Y'shua* in full payment for those SINS, then Forgiveness will be granted and Restoration to a state of Grace (favor) with God will be accomplished.

~ Oral Torah ~

Most Believers would agree, in principle, that failing to follow the *Oral Torah* (dogma) commands that were added by the Jewish Sages does not constitute Biblical SIN, especially in light of one particular statement which *Y'shua* made to the *Pharisees*, which He said was indicative of a pervasive attitude:

"Now when they [the *Pharisees*] saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³ For the *Pharisees* and all the *Jews* do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

⁵ Then the *Pharisees* and scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?'

⁶ He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

**"This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.**

**⁷ And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'

⁹ He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother;" and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." ¹¹ But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban'" -- (that is, a gift to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

(Mark 7:2-13)

Nevertheless, Paul said clearly that if a Believer thought something was wrong to do (even if the *Written Torah* permitted it), it was a SIN if that person went ahead and committed such an act:

"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)

Thus, for the people referred to by Paul in Romans 14, it would be a SIN for them to eat the 'common' meat (this passage does not refer to unclean meat) because they believed it was a SIN based on their understanding and acceptance of the *Oral Torah* commands.

However, it is our understanding that Believers are not under the *Halacha* of the *Oral Torah*. Based upon the example and teaching of our Rabbi (Teacher) *Y'shua*, it is not a sin if one does not keep the *Oral Torah* (dogma) traditions unless one believes that to not do so is SIN.

~ Y'shua's Commands ~

Many Believers might say that both the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah* have been "done away" and can no longer be used as the standard by which SIN is defined. Instead, they say, SIN is the transgression of *Y'shua's* commands. But is there really any difference between the commands of *Y'shua* and the commands of the *Written Torah* when one takes into consideration the following statement?

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

Perhaps the most often quoted of *Y'shua's* commands is:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34)

Some claim that Believers no longer need to obey the *Written Torah's* rules, and that as long as we just "love" one another everything will be in accordance with God's will. Of course, that is true if we really do "love" one another with the same level of *agape* love that *Y'shua* showed towards us. Remember though, that *Y'shua's* love (*agape*) was so great, He was willing to die for us while we were still enmeshed in our SINS:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ [*Messiah*] died for us." (Rom. 5:8)

The clear implication here is that once we have accepted *Y'shua's* sacrifice as payment for our past sins, we should refrain from sin, as much as we are able. Such behavior does not constitute trying to "earn" one's salvation, it is merely being circumspect in one's life. Paul confirms that understanding a few verses later:

"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)

If we willingly continue in sin, we crucify *Y'shua* all over again:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away [*parapipto* = to deviate from the right path], to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6)

* What Is Love? *

The Apostle John defined "love" for the *Messianic Community*:

"This is love [agape], that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."

(II John 1:6)

Love is walking in 'His' commandments. Does the word 'His' refer to the Father or to *Y'shua*? It is our opinion that all members of the *Messianic Community* ought to walk in the commandments that *Y'shua* gave to them. We also teach that all members of the *Messianic Community* should walk in the commandments of the *Written Torah*. The question is: are these two different sets of Law or are they one and the same?

Many people call the 'Old Testament' commandments the "commandments of the Father," as opposed to the 'New Testament' commandments which they call the "commandments of the Son." Interestingly enough, this type of teaching often comes from the same people who believe that *Y'shua* is God Incarnate, in other words that *Y'shua* preexisted His human birth and was with the Father from the beginning. This theology is supported by a number of Scriptures including the following:

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

(Col. 1:16-18)

Since verse 18 states that the One being spoken of here is "the firstborn from the dead," it is clear that Paul is speaking of *Y'shua* and not of the Father. If *Y'shua* is the One through whom "all things were created," then it stands to reason that *Y'shua* is the One who is also the Creator of the *Written Torah*. Some may argue this point, but whether a person believes that *Y'shua* is God Incarnate or not, in either case the commandments found in the *Written Torah* are in strict accordance with the Father's wishes. Either the Father created them Himself, or *Y'shua* created them in accordance with the Father's wishes, for the Father is ultimately the One in charge:

"Then comes the end, when He [*Y'shua*] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He [*Y'shua*] must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For 'He [*God the Father*] has put all things under His [*Y'shua's*] feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He [*God the Father*] who put all things under Him [*Y'shua*] is excepted. ²⁸ Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him [*God the Father*] who put all things under Him [*Y'shua*], that God may be all in all."

(I Cor. 15:24-28)

The idea that the 'Old Testament' laws (*Written Torah*) are the laws of the Father and that they were not adequate to do the job of saving people, is an ancient one and is really a part of the *Gnostic* teachings from the first century CE. Some *Gnostics* went so far as to teach that the 'God' of the 'Old Testament' was an evil god and that *Y'shua* was the 'good god' who did away with all of the 'Old Testament' laws. While modern teachers usually do not go so far as to teach anything this absurd, there is still an element of this teaching in the idea that the *Written Torah* is now useless and is "done away" through the cross. In either case, the *Written Torah* is considered inferior. People only think this because they do not understand that the purpose of the *Written Torah* was not to save people from their SINS but to show them how they were SINNING.

Y'shua stated clearly that there was no division between Him and the Father. Instead, He said:

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

In all probability, when *Y'shua* spoke those words He was using the Hebrew language. In that case He would have said:

"I and my Father are *echad* (eh-chahd')."

The Hebrew word *echad* does mean a singular one and the first four times it is used in the book of *Genesis* it means precisely that (Gen. 1:5, 9; 2:11, 21). However, the fifth time it is used it refers to two people being united as "one flesh":

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [*echad*] flesh." (Gen. 2:24)

While *Adam* (Ah-dahm') and *Chava* (Hah-vah' = Eve) were only able to become "one" in terms of the flesh, *Y'shua* and the Father are "one" in spirit, just as we are to be "one" in spirit with *Y'shua*. He prayed about this 'oneness mystery' at the Last Supper:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20-23)

It was that same evening when *Y'shua* made another revealing statement about the commandments that He had given to His disciples:

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:9-12)

In this passage *Y'shua* equates keeping the commandments (whether of the Father or of the Son) as being an act of *agape*

love. Is it possible that these two sets of commandments can be in conflict with each other? Reason tells us that cannot be so. Love and commandment keeping are intimately tied up together. As Believers we keep the commandments because we love both the Father and the Son and want to do everything we can to please them. Commandment keeping is an act of love, not an act of fear or merely a method by which to earn something:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."
(John 14:15)

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

If these statements (of *Y'shua*) are true, then there can be no difference whatsoever between the commandments of the Father and those of the Son. If the *Written Torah* was a bad set of laws that the Son had to come and "do away with," then the Father and the Son are not *echad* (one).

Finally, *Y'shua* stated clearly that only those people who are doing the will of the Father will have a place in the Kingdom:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."
(Matt. 7:21)

The bottom line, in our opinion, is that both the *Written Torah* and the enhancement of those commandments through the teachings (commandments) of *Y'shua* are to be observed. To not observe them constitutes Biblical SIN, which, when committed, requires repentance and forgiveness in order for a state of *Grace* (favor) to be returned.

~ The Apostle's Commands ~

There is also a body of commands that were given by the Apostles and that are found recorded in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament). Are these commands to be kept today by *Messianic Believers*?

According to Finis Jennings Dake, in his *Annotated Reference Bible*, there are 1050 commands found in the New Testament. This includes both the commands of *Y'shua* and the commands (as he interprets them) of the Apostles. For example:

"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless."
(Titus 3:9)

According to Dake, in this one verse are found three commands: to avoid "foolish questions" (disputes and contentions), to avoid "genealogies," and to avoid "strivings about the law." Notice it does not say to avoid the law, but to avoid 'strivings' about the law. In other words, to avoid arguing about how a law is to be observed, not whether or not it is to be observed.

Does this passage also mean that it is absolutely forbidden for a Believer to trace their genealogy? Some people may take it exactly that way. However, another passage of Scripture sheds a little more light on the subject:

"... nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith."
(I Tim. 1:4)

There certainly are a lot of genealogies found in the Scripture, so it does not make sense to say that it is absolutely forbidden for a person to do some genealogical research. What the sense of these passages tell us is that it is not profitable for a member of the *Messianic Community* to investigate their genealogy in order to brag about it to others, thereby trying to place themselves above other people simply because they were born to a certain family line. The important thing is what each individual does with their life, not who their mother and father might have been.

Another example from F. J. Dake is this:
"... be thankful." (Col. 3:15)

This command is confirmed in another passage:
"... giving thanks always for all things ..." (Eph. 5:20)

Does this mean we are to be thankful when a loved one dies, or when a loved one experiences a terrible accident? If we are to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we need to be careful to understand what the Scriptures are really teaching. It is true that even in the midst of great adversity there is great blessing because we know that in the end God will bring us into eternal life in His Kingdom. For that we can always be thankful. But the common sense of these passages is not that we should be thankful when some great calamity befalls us or someone close to us, or even (especially?) if it happens to our enemy:

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."
(Matt. 5:44-48)

The commands of the Apostles give us great insight into how we, as Believers, should live our lives. However, they are not always the kind of direct commands that are to be found in the *Written Torah*. In at least one instance the Apostle Paul seems to be giving direct commands and then ends the discourse by stating that what he was relaying was really a 'custom.' The subject was about men's and women's hair:

"But if anyone seems to be contentious [about hair lengths], we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God."
(I Cor. 11:16)

The advice and admonitions given by the Apostles in the Greek Scriptures are extremely valuable tools for Believers to use as they learn the *Halacha* (the way one walks) of the *Messianic Community*. However, to say that everything they taught is strictly applicable to today is a mistake. For example,

Paul suggested that it would be better if Believers did not marry:

"I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress -- that it is good for a man to remain as he is: ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife."

(I Cor. 7:26-27)

If unmarried Believers never married, the early *Messianic Community* would have ended up like the American religious community known as the Shakers. They would have, in time, come to the end of the line because they did not procreate according to the commandment of the *Written Torah*:

"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

(Gen. 1:28)

However, to give Paul proper credit it is necessary to add that he said himself that what he had just written was not a command but a suggestion that took into consideration the trials of the time:

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment -- and I think I also have the Spirit of God."

(I Cor. 7:39-40)

The teachings of the Apostles are extremely important to understand. However, it is also important for the Believer to fully understand whether they are reading a command, a custom, or a judgment, before applying it to their own life. If it is a custom or a judgment, one must ask if it applies to their life situation. For this reason, we cannot say unequivocally that all the so-called 'commands' of the Apostles are applicable to us in every situation today. Pray for wisdom, so that you might know the will of God in your life and how to apply these understandings.

~ Church Tradition ~

While most Believers would probably say that the *Oral Torah* commands are no longer applicable today, many of those same people would say that the extra-Biblical teachings of their own church denomination are binding upon the Believer and to break such tradition could well be classified as SIN.

At this point it would be well to review the definition of *dogma*:

"1. A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative manner by a church. 2. An authoritative principle, belief, or statement of ideas or opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true."

Like the *Oral Torah*, many *Church Traditions* (*dogma*) are supportive of the precepts found in the *Written Torah*. However, in those places where *Church Tradition* (*dogma*)

deviates from the *Written Torah* commands, they must, in our opinion, be ignored.

In some cases, *Church Tradition* (*dogma*) may be more strict than the *Written Torah* but not in direct violation of it. For example, some Christians would argue that it is a SIN to drink fermented wine because their particular denomination prohibits the consumption of alcohol, even though *Written Torah* makes no such prohibition. On the other hand, neither does Scripture state that a Believer must consume alcohol. It is a personal choice. There is no doubt that some people should abstain from alcohol because they are addicted to it. In any event, Scripture clearly teaches against drunkenness:

"Wine is a mocker,

Strong drink is a brawler,

And whoever is led astray by it is not wise."

(Prov. 20:1)

Some of these same anti-alcohol Christians might argue that keeping an *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) command that did not violate the *Written Torah* would constitute trying to "earn one's salvation."

In other words, some teach that it is proper (maybe even necessary) for a member of their church to observe their particular denominational traditions while, at the same time, they teach that observing an *Oral Torah* command is forbidden. Many pastors might go so far as to say that to disobey a *Church Tradition* would constitute SIN and many members would, no doubt, feel like they had SINNED if they disobeyed such a strongly held *Church Tradition*. Now, if a church member truly believes that to commit a certain act (such as the consumption of alcohol) constitutes SIN, even though it is not forbidden by the *Written Torah*, then it is SIN for that individual because, as we have already seen, his own conscience condemns him:

"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)

The rules need to be applied fairly across the board. If it is acceptable for a Christian to keep his denomination's *Church Traditions*, because they believe that to not do so would be a SIN, then it should also be acceptable for a Messianic Jew to keep the 'laws' found in the *Oral Torah*, provided that he too sincerely believes that to break them would constitute SIN. If the rules are applied fairly across the board, then no Believer will condemn a brother concerning the keeping or not keeping of *Oral Traditions*, as long as those traditions do not contradict the *Written Torah*.

To say that Believers need not (some would say "must not") keep the *Oral Torah* commands of the Jewish Sages, and then turn right around and say that one must keep their particular denomination's oral commands is hypocrisy:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness [*anomia*]."

(Matt. 23:27-28)

There are other teachers who tell their congregations that tithing to their church is commanded by God and that a Believer who refuses to tithe is "stealing from God." Yet some of these very same teachers may also preach that the "law has been done away." Such contradictory teaching is hypocrisy.

Just for the record, the Jewish teaching on tithing is that it only applies to agriculture products grown in the land of Israel and only when there is a functioning Temple with a functioning Levitical Priesthood. They teach giving, not tithing, as a way to support their synagogues and charities, and most Jews are very generous in this regard.

It is our understanding that Believers are not under the *Halacha* of the *Church Traditions* and it is not a sin if one does not keep the *Church Traditions (dogma)* unless one believes that to not do so is SIN.

~ Summary ~

In the first century there were two bodies of Law which, some believed, were both valid. However, *Y'shua* and the leaders of the *Messianic Community* (James, Peter, John, and Paul) did not agree. They taught that only the *Written Torah* was to be used to define SIN, unless one's conscience would not allow them to ignore an *Oral Torah* command (*dogma*).

The teachings of *Y'shua*, and later on those of the Apostles, gave clarification to the *Written Torah* commands. In some cases, they made the commands of the *Written Torah* more stringent, because they required a heart response in addition to the keeping of the actual physical command.

Just like the *Messianic Community* of the first century, today's Believer is faced with certain choices when trying to determine which Laws, if broken, fall under the Scriptural definition of SIN. However, today there are at least five bodies of 'Law' which vie for the Believer's attention. In addition to the *Written Torah*, we must consider the ancient *Oral Torah* of Jewish *Halacha*, the teachings of *Y'shua*, the teachings of the

Apostles, and the development of denominational *Church Traditions*.

It is our studied opinion that only the *Written Torah* and the teachings of *Y'shua* are definitive when it comes to understanding what is SIN. The teachings of the Apostles, while extremely useful to the *Messianic Believer*, must be viewed carefully to see if they are actual commands or interpretations (i.e. *Oral Torah*) of the *Written* commands. Taken together, the *Written Torah*, *Y'shua's* teachings, and the teachings of the Apostles form a *Halacha* (the way one walks) for the *Messianic Believer*.

While the ancient *Oral Torah* of Rabbinic Judaism and the *Church Traditions* of Christianity can be helpful because they give us information about how others have interpreted the Scriptures, neither are binding upon *Messianic Believers* today unless one's conscience demands such adherence.

The bottom line is that we should follow the pathway of good works that was established by *Y'shua*:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

The pathway that *Y'shua* demonstrated in His life here on earth was obedience to the *Written Torah*:

" ... 'I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.'" (John 15:10)

Which Law is still in effect today?

It is none other than God's Law, the *Written Torah*!

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