

Gentiles and the Law

(From the Perspective of Paul)

Vol. IV

I Corinthians

II Corinthians

Ephesians

Colossians/Philemon

by

Dean & Susan Wheelock

To them God willed to make known
What are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles:
Which is Christ [*Messiah*] in you, the hope of glory.
Colossians 1:27

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~ Introduction ~

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

This booklet (Vol. IV) continues with the epistles of Paul and includes First and Second Corinthians, Ephesians, and a single chapter which covers Colossians and Philemon.

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

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

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

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2011

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Paul's First Epistle ~ ~ to the Corinthians ~

Do I say these things as a *mere* man?
Or does not the law say the same also?
1 Corinthians 9:8

The Apostle Paul (*Shaul*) was an observant Jew who belonged to a sect of the *Pharisees*. He received his training from *Gamaliel*, one of the finest teachers from the School 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)

Because Paul was a *Pharisee*, his emphasis tended to dwell more on behavior than on doctrine. This is not to say that Paul was not concerned about doctrine, it is merely an observation that the majority of his teaching centered around how a Gentile Messianic Believer should behave once they are reconciled to God through the shed blood of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-she'-ahk = Jesus the Messiah).

As will be seen, a careful analysis of Paul's teachings, concerning behavior, reveals that he never taught the Gentile Messianic Believers to disobey the *Written Torah*, although he did teach that some aspects of the *Oral Torah* were optional. This is an important distinction, for many times when it seems that Paul is teaching against the *Torah*, he is not teaching against the written portion that we have in our Bibles. Rather, he is teaching against the many fences (usually more stringent commands than the *Written Torah*) that were added by the Rabbis.

~ Corinth ~

During the first century CE (Common Era a.k.a. AD), Corinth was the most important city in Greece. It was located just west of Athens on a narrow isthmus between the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea. Because of its strategic location and its two seaports, Corinth became a major city, believed to have had upwards of 700,000 people, of which two-thirds were said to be slaves.

Because Corinth was a major trading center, it attracted people from many different cultures and nations. Along with this multicultural mix of people, came a myriad of pagan religious groups, many of which built shrines and temples to their pagan gods. By far the most important of these was the Temple of *Aphrodite*, the goddess of love. It was built on top of an 1800 foot promontory called the *Acrocorinthus*. There were over 1000 *Heroduli* (consecrated prostitutes, both male and female) who serviced the worshippers in their quest to please *Aphrodite*, the Love Goddess. As the commentary from *The Open Bible* puts it:

"This cosmopolitan center thrived on commerce, entertainment, vice, and corruption; pleasure-seekers came there to spend money on a holiday from morality. Corinth became so notorious for its evils that the term Korinthiazomai ('to act like a Corinthian') became a synonym for debauchery and prostitution." (p. 1156)

Needless to say, the Messianic Congregation at Corinth had many problems relating to the extreme paganism of the society which surrounded them. This societal pressure accounts for many of the issues Paul addressed in his two letters to the Corinthian Church.

The Corinthian Church was established by Paul on his Second Missionary Journey and he spent eighteen months there teaching the brethren:

"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

"⁵ When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus [*Y'shua*] is the Christ [*Messiah*]. ⁶ But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'

"⁷ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God [probably a God Fearer], whose house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

"⁹ Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.'

"¹¹ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." (Acts 18:1-11)

It is believed that Paul was in *Corinth* during the years 51 and 52 CE. After Paul left *Corinth*, *Apollos* came from *Ephesus* to minister to them.

~ I Corinthians ~

It is generally agreed that Paul's first letter to the Church at *Corinth* was written from *Ephesus*. However, there is some dispute concerning the date for its composition, ranging from 54 to 57 CE. The most likely date is 56 CE.

In this "first" letter to the *Corinthians*, Paul makes reference to a previous letter he had sent to them:

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." (1 Cor. 5:9)

This letter was prompted by a report made to Paul from *Chloe's* household concerning dissension in the *Corinthian* congregation:

"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you." (I Cor. 1:11)

In addition, a delegation of three men came to Paul from *Corinth*, seeking advice concerning the congregation's problems:

"I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied." (I Cor. 16:17)

I Corinthians was Paul's response to the report he had heard and the concerns that were brought to him by the *Corinthian* delegation. The overall theme of the Epistle is the relevance of the example and teachings of *Y'shua* to the Messianic Believer's everyday life; as such, there are few direct references to the *Torah*. However, because this letter deals so extensively with behavior, there are many indirect references. Thus, we will see the moral teachings of the *Written Torah* form the foundation upon which Paul teaches these Gentile Believers how they should conduct their lives.

Once again, because this chapter is focusing upon the relationship of Gentiles to the *Written Torah*, much of what Paul wrote in this letter will be summarized very briefly.

~ Overview ~

The first four chapters are primarily devoted to *Chloe's* report concerning division in the *Corinthian* congregation. Chapters five and six deal with the report of fornication between a man and his stepmother and what the congregation needed to do in order to rectify the situation. From chapter seven on, Paul dealt with the questions which the three man *Corinthian* delegation had brought for resolution. These included both behavioral questions as well as questions about certain aspects of doctrine; especially concerning the resurrection of the dead. Many of these questions were delineated by the introductory phrase "Now concerning," or just simply "Now."

~ Torah and the Corinthians ~

In chapter three, Paul made it clear to the *Corinthians* that they were still "babes in Christ," and they had much to learn concerning how followers of *Y'shua HaMashiach* were to conduct their everyday lives. He called them "carnal:"

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ [Messiah]. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (I Cor. 3:1-3)

Their carnality primarily manifested itself as a "party spirit;" dividing them up into factions by proclaiming themselves to be following (or as some tend to state it today; as

being 'under') a certain leader, rather than trying to establish a unity within the congregation in spite of their differences. In order to bring the *Corinthians* back into a semblance of unity, Paul felt that he had to continue to instruct them in the "milk" of the word, rather than its "meat." Paul admonished them to build their lives upon the true foundation, which is *Y'shua*:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]." (I Cor. 3:11)

This statement directly ties the foundation right back to the *Written Torah* because *Y'shua* was the 'Living Word' or, as some like to phrase it, the 'Living Torah:'

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

(John 1:1-2, 14)

In Hebrew terminology, the *Word* is directly associated with the *Torah*:

"My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word." (Psalm 119:148)

"The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." (Psalm 119:160)

In our opinion, building our foundation on *Y'shua HaMashiach* is the same as building our foundation upon the instructions which our forefathers received at Mount Sinai, with the added benefit that *Y'shua* set the behavioral example on how to actually live the *Torah*, and offers forgiveness when we fall short and sin:

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ [Messiah]." (I Cor. 10:1-4)

Y'shua's sacrificial offering for the forgiveness of our sins (the breaking of the *Torah* instructions which He gave the children of Israel at Mount Sinai) enables us to return to a right relationship with our Father, thus wanting to obey His instructions, for:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

In addition, because *Y'shua* came to earth and dwelt among mankind, we have *His testimony*. This is why Believers, at the very end of this age, are characterized as those who:

"... keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]." (Rev. 12:17)

Paul told the *Corinthians* that once the proper and firm foundation was laid, they were to build their own personal structures (their lives) upon that foundation. This personal structure became a life model to others, as they followed proper *Halacha* (Hah'-lah-cah = the way one conducts their life) for a Messianic Believer:

"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD [YHVH]."
(Lev. 18:5)

Paul characterized the options which a Believer has at his disposal to enable him to build this lifestyle building:

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."
(I Cor. 3:12-15)

It is clear from this parable that Paul wanted the *Corinthians* to build lives that had the permanence of gold, silver, or precious stones, for they are more impervious to fire than wood, hay, and straw. This directly alludes to David comparing the *Torah* to gold. He said the *Torah* was even more valuable:

"I am Your servant;

Give me understanding,

That I may know Your testimonies.

¹²⁶ **It is time for You to act, O LORD [YHVH],**

For they have regarded Your law as void.

¹²⁷ **Therefore I love Your commandments**

More than gold, yes, than fine gold!

¹²⁸ **Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right;**

I hate every false way.

¹²⁹ **Your testimonies are wonderful;**

Therefore my soul keeps them.

¹³⁰ **The entrance of Your words gives light;**

It gives understanding to the simple."

(Psalm 119:125-130)

Paul considered many in the *Corinthian* congregation to be 'simple' in their understanding of the word. He said they needed milk not meat. The *Written Torah* (which is more substantial in the quality of endurance than gold) is what the *Corinthians* needed in order to gain wisdom so that they could live in unity within the congregation.

Since *Corinth* was a very *Hellenized* city (following the culture and customs of the Greeks), they were probably fairly well versed in Greek philosophy. Paul made a point of telling them such manmade "wisdom" was but foolishness in the sight of God:

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,

"He catches the wise in their own craftiness;"

²⁰ and again, 'The LORD [YHVH] knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" (I Cor. 3:18-20)

A very important point is made in chapter four where Paul begins to show them how they have misunderstood his ministry:

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other."
(I Cor. 4:6)

It would be much easier to understand what Paul is driving at if we only had a copy of the report which had been given to him by the household of *Chloe*. However, it is possible to read between the lines when one has a knowledge of the cultural situation that existed during that time period in cities such as *Corinth*. Paul had already made reference to the uselessness of the "wisdom" of men. In verse six he cautions them once again not to accept teachings unless they are firmly based upon what is written. What was this written text they were to adhere too? It seems to us that it could only be that series of scrolls which formed the basis for Jewish theology, the *Torah*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings* (collectively known as the *Tanakh*). Paul certainly would not be suggesting to them that they base their understanding upon the writings of the Greek philosophers, nor of any pagan writings which might have existed at that time. The only written text which the Messianic Believers had at that time was the *Tanakh* (the Old Testament).

Paul went on to instruct the *Corinthians* to imitate him in their understanding and behavior towards one another:

"Therefore I urge you, imitate me." (I Cor. 4:16)

Later on in this same Epistle, Paul instructed them to:

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ [Messiah]."

(I Cor. 11:1)

How did *Y'shua* conduct His life?

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

It is clear that Paul expected the *Corinthians* to make every attempt to conduct their lives in as sinless a manner as possible.

~ Immorality ~

Chapters five and six address an issue that is clearly dealt with in the *Written Torah*. It had to do with the case of a man in the *Corinthian* congregation who was apparently living with his stepmother:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles -- that a man has his father's wife!"
(I Cor. 5:1)

The *Written Torah* is clear about this type of sin:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, ²Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the

LORD [YHVH] your God. ³ According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. ⁴ You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God. ⁵ You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD [YHVH].

"⁶ None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the LORD [YHVH]. ⁷ The nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother you shall not uncover. She is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness. ⁸ The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness."⁹ (Lev. 18:1-8)

There is some debate whether the woman in question is the man's actual birth mother or his stepmother. In either case, the *Torah* is clear; a man is not to have sexual contact with either one. The penalty for such an act is also clear:

""For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."" (Lev. 18:29)

The *Torah* punishment for these wicked acts is the very one Paul commanded the *Corinthian* congregation to place upon the man in question:

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach], when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach], ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus [Y'shua]." (I Cor. 5:4-5)

Paul also took this opportunity to teach a lesson about sin which centers around one of the commanded Festivals of the *Torah*:

"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ [Messiah], our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (I Cor. 5:6-8)

Paul painted a word picture when he used the unleavened bread associated with Passover to teach them a lesson about associating with immoral people. Notice that he also clearly instructed them to **"keep the feast"** of Passover.

He further instructed the *Corinthians* to separate themselves from anyone who called himself a brother but was living an immoral life:

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person." (I Cor. 5:11)

Every one of these "sins" is condemned in the *Written Torah*. In other words, Paul was using the *Torah* as the moral bedrock of his teaching concerning immorality; whether it be sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry, the evil tongue, drunkenness, or an extortionist (one who takes money from unsuspecting brethren).

~ Torah Courts ~

Another problem that had been reported to Paul was that some members of the *Corinthian* congregation were suing their brethren in public courts, rather than resolving their differences within the court system that had been established by God and was set forth in the *Torah*:

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (I Cor. 6:1)

The *Torah* makes it clear that a court system was to be established so that God's people could be judged by the *Torah* and not man made laws of dubious validity:

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD [YHVH] your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment." (Deut. 16:18)

In the first century this command had developed into a court system that included, in each *synagogue*, a *Beit Din* (Bait Deen), or local court, composed of a minimum of three "elders." Any disputes between brethren were to be brought to the *Beit Din* for resolution. *Y'shua* confirmed this system:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:15-18)

"Telling it to the church" did not mean getting up in front of the congregation and telling everybody about the disagreement. Instead it meant taking it to the three member *Beit Din* for resolution. Once again, the punishment for someone who did not abide by their ruling was to be "cut off" from fellowship in the Body of Messiah. (Above all things, the Scriptures are consistent.)

~ Sexual Immorality ~

The next section of chapter six concerns a warning to the *Corinthians* to refrain from sexual immorality. This was a huge problem among the general public in that city due to the licentious rites that occurred in the pagan temples. Sometimes teachers take the first two verses out of context in an attempt to show that the food laws of Leviticus had been abrogated. The *New International Version* (NIV) shows that two of the phrases

Paul uses in this passage are really quotes from popular sayings of the time:

"Everything is permissible for me' -- but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me' -- but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food' -- but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

(I Cor. 6:12-13 NIV)

These two sayings come straight out of the *Gnostic* teachings that were beginning to creep into the Messianic Community. "Everything is permissible." "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." In other words, *Gnostic* philosophy taught that it did not matter what you ate, or who you slept with, as long as you kept your mind "spiritually pure." (See the chapter, *The Religious Situation*, in Volume III of this series for more information on the *Gnostic* heresy.)

Paul was making a parody on these sayings, probably because the Corinthians had thrown them up to him as a means of trying to justify their slide into *antinomianism* (lawlessness a.k.a. *Torahlessness*). Paul's response was that they might think everything was permissible, but that did not make it beneficial. In other words, since they did not want to hear that the *Torah* was still in effect, Paul tried to show them that even if it was "done away," the effects of immorality on their personal lives would eventually be devastating to their moral character.

~ Circumcision ~

In chapter seven Paul expounded on the principles which apply to the marriage covenant between a husband and wife. Then he went on to teach principles which applied to the unmarried Believers of that day. In the midst of Paul's sound advice, he injected a brief passage concerning how the Believer should abide in their calling:

"But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. ²⁰ Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called."

(I Cor. 7:17-20)

Here Paul made a big point concerning the relative importance of Gentile circumcision versus the keeping of the *Written Torah* commands that apply to both Jews and Gentiles. The command to circumcise was given only to the descendants of *Avraham*, through *Yitzhak*, and *Ya'acov* (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and it was directly related to the holding of land in the nation of Israel; something Gentile Proselytes could not do:

"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. 17:10-11)

Again, some would twist the passage (I Cor. 7:17-20) to say that Paul had done away with the law of circumcision for everyone, including the Israelites who have the *Torah* command to circumcise their children:

"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. 12:2-3)

This was a charge which was often leveled at Paul by his enemies, but it simply was not true. This is evident from what *Ya'acov* said to Paul:

"You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ²¹ but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." (Acts 21:20-21)

Ya'acov suggested that Paul show his obedience to the *Written Torah* by not only paying the expenses to have his Nazarite vow ended (fulfilled), but that he also pay the way for four other Believers who were also under that same vow. Obviously (from the context of the passage), *Ya'acov* knew that the charge against Paul (that Jews should not circumcise their children) was patently false.

~ Do Not Muzzle the Ox ~

In chapter nine, Paul specifically referenced the *Written Torah* in relationship to whether or not he should be allowed to receive support as a minister:

"For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about? ¹⁰ Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" (I Cor. 9:9-11)

Although Paul used the phrase "law of Moses," that is merely a synonym for 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] ...'" (Luke 2:22-23)

The "law of Moses" and the "law of the Lord" are one and the same law. It is all the *Written Torah*.

~ Under the Law ~

In the context of Paul's dissertation on his rights as a minister, he makes a statement that is often misunderstood:

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰ and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those

who are under the law [*hupo nomos*], as under the law [*hupo nomos*], that I might win those who are under the law [*hupo nomos*]; ²¹ to those who are without law [*anomia*], as without law [*anomia*] (not being without law [*anomia*] toward God, but under law [*en nomos*] toward Christ [YHVH]), that I might win those who are without law [*anomia*]; ²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (I Cor. 9:19-22)

The key to properly understanding this passage is the contrast between the words *hupo nomos* (which means "under the law") and *en nomos* (which should be translated "in the law").

Hupo nomos (under the law) refers to someone who knows the *Torah* commands but has "broken" them, thus committing sin and is therefore under indictment. In other words, Paul was speaking here to those people who were still in an unforgiven state for their sins. In order to win them to Messiah, he would show them that he too had once been in a sinful state, but had been freed from his "indictment" and was no longer "under the law" (*hupo nomos*) because his sins had been forgiven. Forgiveness (which is offered to all) is received from the Father when we accept the shed blood of His only begotten Son, *Y'shua*, in payment for the penalty of our sins.

Meanwhile, when dealing with Gentiles who did not have the benefit of knowing the laws (*Torah*) of God, Paul apparently would speak to them initially as one who also did not know the *Torah* but would approach them as a common Gentile. This approach probably gave him an "in" so they would begin to listen to him rather than rejecting him as just another Orthodox Jew. Then he would use that opportunity (from the confidence he had gained) to show them their dire need to not only know the *Torah* of God, but to come to a knowledge of what *Y'shua* had done for them, as well as for the Jews. However, Paul was quick to mention, to the Believers in Corinth, that he was not really "without law" (*anomia*); rather he was *en nomos* (in the law) of Messiah (Christ). In other words, Paul was subject to the same law (the *Written Torah*) as was *Y'shua* the Messiah.

In this passage Paul addressed four different categories of people:

- ◆ Orthodox Jews. Paul was already one of them, because he was a member of the sect of the Pharisees. Meeting them at their level was second nature for him. In their circle he was known as *Shaul*, the Pharisee.
- ◆ Those under indictment (*hupo nomos*). Paul had been in that same position, especially during the time when he was persecuting the Messianic Community. Therefore, he could also relate to this group of people at their level. These folks probably came primarily from the *am ha'ereztz* (ahm hah eh-rehtz') or "people of the land" (the common people) who were not very religious.
- ◆ The Gentiles (*anomia*). Those who did not know *Torah* but were seeking a way out of paganism.

- ◆ The weak. Those who wanted to keep *Torah* but were just too spiritually weak to do so, because they lacked faith in the cleansing power of the blood of *Y'shua*.

In all cases, Paul would approach these various classes of people at their own level. He did not begin contact with anyone by preaching to them about the evil of their ways, and their need for the saving grace of *Y'shua*, until he had gained their confidence by meeting them at their own level. This is a good example from which all of us, as Messianic Believers, might learn, as we attempt to show others the things we have learned about the Hebrew roots of our faith.

(See the article *Holy, Just, and Good* in Volume III of this series for more information on *hupo nomos* versus *en nomos*.)

~ Learn from the Past ~

Paul then wrote about the need for *Messianic Believers* to keep themselves free from sin. What is sin?

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

As an example, he pointed to the sins of the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt:

"But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." (I Cor. 10:5-6)

Paul followed with a litany of the sins they had committed: idolatry, sexual immorality, tempting God, and murmuring (v. 7-10). All of these things which happened, to the children of Israel, serve as examples so that *Messianic Believers* do not fall into the same types of sin:

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:11-12)

That which Paul identified as being the main problem for the Corinthian Church was idolatry. This is not surprising since the city was steeped in paganism. Paul was adamant that pagan practices and the true worship of God must not be mingled in any way shape or form:

"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." (I Cor. 10:21)

This is in strict accord with the *Written Torah*:

"Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. ²⁵ Worship the LORD [YHVH] your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water." (Ex. 23:24-25)

Paul then restated the *Gnostic* saying that he had quoted in 6:12. Once again, the *New International Version* puts quotes around this phrase to show that it was not Paul's understanding

of the situation, but something which the Corinthians had brought up in defense of their actions:

"Everything is permissible" -- but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible' -- but not everything is constructive."
(I Cor. 10:23 NIV)

The Corinthians probably felt (as do many Christians today) that once they had received *Y'shua*, and been forgiven for their sins, they were now free from following the *Torah* commands. Paul counters this statement by suggesting that even if they really felt that way, and did not see a problem with eating meats that had been sacrificed to idols, they might consider refraining from doing so anyway, because such an action, if observed by other Messianic Believers, could cause a brother or sister (who did not believe in this type of "freedom") to stumble into sin. Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans:

"But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin."
(Rom. 14:23)

Paul went on to indicate that if an individual did not have a problem eating meat purchased in the markets (that may have been offered to idols), there was no *Written Torah* prohibition against it. However, for a Messianic Believer to enter a pagan temple and participate in a pagan ritual meal would be strictly forbidden (see v. 21). His main point in this entire passage is not to offend others by one's actions:

"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God -- ³³ even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ [Messianah]."
(I Cor. 10:32)

~ More Instruction ~

The chapters which follow contain a wealth of instruction concerning how *Messianic Believers* should conduct their lives. Topics covered include:

Principles of public prayer.
Disorders at fellowship meals.
The gifts of the Spirit.
The supreme importance of love.

It is interesting to note that in the "Love Chapter" (I Cor. 13), Paul does not use the *Torah* commands as one of the attributes which he contrasts to the importance of Love:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."
(I Cor. 13:1-3)

Paul mentions speaking in tongues, prophecy, understanding mysteries, knowledge, faith, and charity, but he does not say that Love is superior to keeping the *Written Torah* commands. Perhaps this is because the *Written Torah* commands were designed by God to teach us how to love in a proper manner. Of course, if we follow the commands merely out of duty, while harboring a bad attitude internally, they have earned us nothing in terms of a reward. (Remember, we are saved by grace but rewarded by works.) However, even by keeping the commands with a bad attitude, a Messianic Believer can still be a blessing to others, by not stealing from them, murdering them, or committing adultery with their wives, etc.

Nevertheless, Paul was clear that what God really wants is a true "heart response" to his instructions:

**"O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart --
These, O God, You will not despise."**

(Psalm 51:15-17)

As Paul continued with more instruction in chapters 14 and 15, he addressed:

The superiority of prophecy (instruction) over speaking in tongues.
Exercising gifts in public worship.
Facts concerning the resurrection of Messiah and the coming resurrection of the Messianic Believers.

There is one reference to the *Torah* in these chapters:

"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law [Torah]."
(I Cor. 15:56)

This verse sums up all that was taught in the book of Romans, that the purpose of the *Torah* was to show the people where they were missing the mark (sinning). Since the *Torah* identifies sin, it follows that sin obtains its strength because of the *Torah*. But victory does not belong to sin. Victory belongs to God through the sacrifice of His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach*, and both His and our resurrection from the grave. For this reason Paul was able to say:

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

⁵⁵ **"O Death, where is your sting?**

O Hades, where is your victory?" (I Cor. 15:54-55)

~ First Day of the Week ~

One last question remains in the first epistle to the Corinthians. It involves the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem that Paul asked be taken up on the first day of the week:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." (I Cor. 16:1-2)

Some people point to this verse as a proof text that the Corinthian Church was meeting for worship on Sunday. While the English translations seem to indicate this, there remains a number of problems with this interpretation.

- ◆ The phrase "On the first day of the week" comes from the Greek *kata mia Shabbaton* which, according to Jay P. Green, in *The Interlinear Bible* literally means "Every one of a week." This would indicate that a collection was to be taken up on the first day of each and every week. ("One of a week" indicates the first day of the week, Sunday.)
- ◆ However, according to the Hebrew calendar (which Paul would no doubt have been using since he was a Pharisee) the first day of the week begins at sundown following the weekly Shabbat. Such a practice being the case, the collection could have been taken up after sundown when the Sabbath was finished. This would have met with the approval of the *Messianic Jews* who were in the Corinthian congregation, since handling money on the Sabbath was forbidden by Jewish tradition as well as *Written Torah*.
- ◆ The same phrase *mia shabbaton* was also used in Acts 20:7, where the congregation at *Troas* continued their Sabbath meeting with Paul after sunset and far into the night of the first day of the week. (See Acts 20:6-7)

- ◆ According to Dr. David Stern, in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, the Greek phrase *mia shabbaton* would translate into Hebrew as *Motza'ie-Shabbat*, which is the traditional Hebrew expression that means "departure of the Sabbath," or Saturday night.

~ Shavu'ot ~

Paul made one last statement which reveals that he was still obeying the *Written Torah* by keeping the Festivals:

"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost."

(I Cor. 16:8)

~ Summary ~

Once again, we have seen that Paul is consistent in his teaching that the *Written Torah* applies to all Believers; both Jew and Gentile. There is nothing we could find in this important epistle which would indicate that the *Written Torah* had been "done away." However, there is evidence especially concerning meat that had been offered to idols (which was for sale in the market place), which would go against the *Oral Torah* fences that Jewish tradition had built over the centuries since their return from Babylonian captivity.

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~ Paul's Second Epistle ~ ~ to the Corinthians ~

For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory,
The ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.
II Corinthians 3:9



Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church was a direct result of the effect his first letter had on that congregation. Paul was in Macedonia when he received a report, via Titus, about the effects of his first letter on the Corinthian congregation:

"For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. ⁶ Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more." (II Cor. 7:5-7)

Apparently, from the contents of this letter, a majority of the Corinthian congregation accepted the corrections which Paul had given in his first letter. However, it is evident from the last few chapters that there was a minority who did not accept Paul's apostleship. Thus, the tone of this second letter begins on a positive note but ends with a spirit of concern and self-defense.

This second letter was written from Macedonia (probably from the city of Phillippi) in late 56 or 57 CE (although *Harper's Dictionary* puts the date as early as 55-56 CE).

Titus and another one of the brothers carried this second letter to Corinth:

"But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, ..." (II Cor. 8:16-18)

~ Theme ~

The major theme of *II Corinthians* is Paul's defense of his ministry. This is especially evident in chapters 10-13, although evidence of this concern can also be found in the first nine chapters as well. Apparently the false apostles, who initiated a campaign against Paul, had managed to sway a number of members of the congregation. Paul's first letter had alleviated much of the opposition, so Paul praised them for their return to correct understanding concerning his ministry.

It seems probable that the opposition to Paul's teaching came from a faction of Orthodox Jewish Believers who probably wanted to bring the Gentile Believers into Judaism

(having them circumcised and subjecting them to the *Oral Torah*) as a means of declaring their salvation. Since this letter was written some years after the *Jerusalem Council* met (which had determined the minimum requirements for Gentiles in the *Believing Community* as recorded in Acts 15), Paul was well armed for the opposition he received from this Corinthian minority.

Once again we would like to remind the reader that our focus is to explore Paul's view on the relationship of the *Written Torah* to the Gentile Believers. Therefore, much of the interesting material found in this epistle will be passed over quickly so that the focus of the chapter can be maintained.

~ Overview ~

The first two chapters of this epistle contain Paul's salutation to the Corinthian congregation, some background information about his troubles in Asia, his original plan to come to Corinth (which was delayed in order to give them time to rectify the problems addressed in *I Corinthians*), his appeal to forgive the repentant man who had been having improper sexual relations with his stepmother, and how *Messianic Believers* are able to triumph in Messiah *Y'shua*.

~ The New Covenant ~

In chapter three, Paul began to defend his ministry by comparing it as being written on the hearts of the Messianic Believers, not just on tablets of stone:

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? ² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ [*Messiah*], ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart." (II Cor. 3:1-3)

This passage makes a definite reference to the ten commandments, which were originally written on stone tablets by the finger of God:

"And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." (Ex. 31:18)

However, it is interesting to note that nowhere in this passage, or the verses to follow, is the Greek word *nomos* (law) mentioned. This passage is not about whether the Law (*mitzvot* or 613 commandments) is still in effect, rather, it is about the internalization of that law a.k.a. *Torah* (instruction), transforming it into proper behavior. The trust (or faith) needed to receive the writing of the *Torah* on our hearts is through *Y'shua* the Messiah:

"And we have such trust through Christ [*Messiah*] toward God." (II Cor. 3:4)

Paul's ministry was that of the New Covenant, which is one of the Spirit, not of the letter:

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (II Cor. 3:5-6)

Does this mean that the *Written Torah* has been abolished? Not at all, for here is what the New Covenant consists of according to God:

"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)

With the advent of the New Covenant, Messianic Believers now have the *Torah* written directly on their hearts, no longer needing to keep a set of fences (*Oral Torah*) to assure obedience to the *Written Torah*. Messianic Believers now live in the fullness of *Torah*, by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is in full accord with the precepts of the *Written Torah*.

However, there is no Messianic Believer who is able to respond in this Godly manner 100 percent of the time. (Only *Y'shua* was able to do that.) Because we are still in our human flesh, with the pulls of the *yetzer hara* (yeht-zehr' hah-rah' = the evil inclination), all of us do, from time to time, react with human feelings and emotions, rather than by the Spirit of God which dwells within. Nevertheless, because we have accepted the reconciliation God made available to Messianic Believers through *Y'shua's* blood sacrifice, God no longer condemns us for our sins:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:16-21)

When we sin, we need to go to the Throne of Grace and ask forgiveness, and:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:15-16)

Paul went on to explain that the law which was written on stone was such a glorious law that after *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) received it, his face shown so brightly that the children of Israel were unable to look upon him, and he had to cover it with a veil:

"But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?" (II Cor. 3:7-8)

Here Paul pointed out that if the "Ministry of Death" (*Written Torah*) was glorious, the ministry of the Spirit will be much more glorious. In other words, think how much more glorious it is when that same *Torah* is written on the heart of a *Messianic Believer*:

"For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. ¹⁰For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious." (II Cor. 3:9-11)

What is the "ministry of righteousness?" It is the shed blood of *Y'shua* which, if accepted, brings forgiveness of sins. This is how we become righteous in the sight of God:

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

Certainly being forgiven for one's sins and being made righteous through the blood of *Y'shua* is a greater example of God's Glory than the *Written Torah* which identifies sin and thereby condemns the sinner to death. Nevertheless, one cannot say that the New Covenant is more glorious than the *Written Torah*, because the New Covenant is the *Written Torah* now written on the heart of every true *Messianic Believer*. In the book of *Romans*, Paul made it explicitly clear that the problem of sin did not lie with the *Written Torah* but with the weakness of man's flesh:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1-4)

Dr. David Stern, in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, gives the following equation to explain this concept: "God's '*Torah* of the Spirit' minus the Spirit equals '*torah*' of sin and death." (p.498)

~ The Veil ~

Because of the Gloriousness of the New Covenant Spirit which writes the *Torah* on the hearts of *Messianic Believers*, Paul was bold to declare the good news. He declared that the New Covenant ministry, of which he was an integral part, was more Glorious than the ministry of *Moshe*. Once again, this statement does not denigrate *Moshe* and the *Torah* which was given at Mount Sinai:

"Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech -- ¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away." (II Cor. 3:12-13)

What Paul said is that the true and final fulfillment of what was begun at Sinai had arrived. Now, because of the arrival of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit), the Glorious *Written Torah* can be properly kept:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- ¹⁷the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:16-17)

The children of Israel were unable to look upon *Moshe's* face because of the Glory which it manifested from his personal encounters with God:

"So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD [YHVH] had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. ³⁴ But whenever Moses went in before the LORD [YHVH] to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. ³⁵ And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him." (Ex. 34:30-35)

According to Paul's understanding (remember he was a *Pharisee*), the veil *Moshe* put over his face was an indication that the children of Israel were unable to look upon the Glory of the *Written Torah*. The reason they could not look upon it face to face was because they did not yet have the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh* to allow that Glory to be written on their hearts. That part of God's plan was not yet in place:

"But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament [Tanakh], because the veil is taken away in Christ [Messiah]. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." (II Cor. 3:14-15)

Does this mean that the Jewish people do not have the ability to understand the *Written Torah*? No, for the Jewish understanding of *Torah* is extensive and in depth. It is far greater than that of most Christians. What the Jewish people of Paul's day did not understand was how the *Tanakh* pointed to *Y'shua* as the promised Messiah:

"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Y'shua] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

How can the veil be lifted from the mind of anyone (Jew or Gentile) who does not believe? By praying to the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzchat*, and *Ya'acov* to reveal the true identity of the Messiah:

"Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (II Cor. 3:16)

We have heard testimony from *Messianic Jews* that when they fervently prayed for revelation of the true identity of Messiah (in the name of the God of *Avraham*, *Yitzchat*, and *Ya'acov*), God was faithful to answer them, and the answer they received was that *Y'shua* is the promised Messiah.

Once a person has come to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *Y'shua* is the Messiah, that person is given liberty:

"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (II Cor. 3:17)

Some say that because the New Covenant Believer has been given "liberty," that means he is no longer subject to the *Written Torah*. However, the definition of the Greek word *eleutheria* (which is translated "liberty") is:

"liberty to do or to omit things having no relationship to salvation ... true liberty is living as we should not as we please."

Written Torah has a relationship to salvation in that if one breaks a *Written Torah* command, the penalty is death:

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." (James 1:14-15)

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)

Therefore, the liberty which Paul speaks of in verse 17 must refer to freedom from those things which are not part of the *Written Torah*; those fences which were added by the Rabbis and which form a sizable portion of the *Oral Torah*.

As the definition of *eleutheria* states, *Messianic Believers* can only experience true liberty by living as they should (following the Glorious *Written Torah* commands), not as they please. This is within our ability because the *Ruach* (Spirit) has taken away the veil so that we can behold *Y'shua's* saving Grace:

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (II Cor. 3:18)

Thus, a transformation occurs in the heart of the Messianic Believer so that we understand the need to keep the *Written Torah*, so that we can become more like Messiah each and every day. Just as Paul told the Corinthians in his first letter:

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ [Messiah]."
(I Cor. 11:1)

~ The Proper Handling of the Word of God ~

It is most important for Messianic Believers (and especially for *their* teachers) to properly handle the Word of God:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
(II Tim. 2:15)

Paul makes this same statement to the Corinthians:

"But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."
(II Cor. 4:2)

The word "deceitfully" in this passage comes from the Greek word *doloo*, and it means to "ensnare or corrupt." The *Messianic* teacher must not corrupt the Word of God by saying that the *Written Torah* has been destroyed (especially in light of the fact that *Y'shua* said exactly the opposite (in Matt. 5:17)), or that it has been added to through oral traditions (*Oral Torah*). *The Open Bible* has, in the margin, an alternate translation for this phrase that says, not "*adulterating the Word of God*." One can "adulterate" the word of God by either adding to it or subtracting from it. The bottom line to all of this is that, as Messianic Believers, we cannot take the credit or the glory for our salvation or our ministry, for we are but clay pots which God is using to fulfill His Will:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ 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. 2:8-10)

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus [Messiah *Y'shua*] the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' [*Y'shua's*] sake. ⁶ For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]. ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (II Cor. 4:5-7)

~ Reconciled to God ~

Another passage that indirectly addresses the efficacy of the *Written Torah* is found in chapter five:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ [Messiah] reconciling the world to Himself,

not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ [Messiah], as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's [Messiah's] behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (II Cor. 5:18-21)

This passage requires the continued existence of the *Written Torah*, for if there is no longer a *Written Torah* to identify sin, then there is no need for reconciliation; for the act of abolishing the *Torah* would automatically reconcile all people on earth to God. This is certainly not the case, as both Scripture and world conditions testify.

Some would say that the *Torah* has been abolished only for those who have accepted *Y'shua* as their Savior. Is this true? What does verse 21 say? *Y'shua* became sin in our stead, so that we can be reconciled to God. *Y'shua* voluntarily took our sins upon Himself and paid the death penalty which we deserve. What we need to do is believe it, and receive the gift of His Holy Spirit. Only then can we walk in newness of life.

~ Exhortation ~

The remainder of *II Corinthians* is an exhortation on a number of topics. While there are a couple of allusions to the *Torah*, there are no passages which directly address the issues we are presenting in this article.

In the final chapter, Paul does urge the Corinthians (and by implication all *Messianic Believers*) to examine themselves:

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified." (II Cor. 13:5)

One cannot properly examine himself without having a measuring device with which to compare. One good way of examining oneself is to compare one's actions to that of *Y'shua*. This is what Paul urges the Corinthians to do. By using *Y'shua's* example as our measuring stick, we are, in effect, using the *Written Torah* as the measuring stick:

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

~ Summary ~

Once again, a careful analysis of two important Epistles of Paul reveal that rather than doing away with the Law of God (the *Torah*), what Paul was really teaching was adherence to the *Written Torah*.

What is most revealing about Paul's faithful adherence to the *Written Torah* in these particular epistles, is the fact that they were composed specifically for a Congregation which was located in one of the most pagan cities of the ancient world. If the Law had truly been "done away," Paul would not have been concerned about the persistence of the Corinthian's pagan practices. But this is not the case. Paul consistently taught them *Torah* principles as opposed to letting them continue on

in the pagan practices which, some might say, were not "all that bad."

Paul taught the Corinthians to build the structure of their spiritual life on a foundation of the *Torah*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings*. He told them to imitate him as he imitated the perfect *Torah* keeper, *Y'shua*. He condemned the immortality which they were allowing to exist within their congregation. He condemned the practice of taking their brethren to civil courts -- instead upholding *Torah* which had instructed them to establish a court system within the Believing community.

Perhaps the most telling passage to be found in either of these two books, was Paul's statement that he was no longer under the indictment of the *Torah* (*hupo nomos* or "under the law") because of his acceptance of *Y'shua's* shed blood as payment for his sins. However, Paul was quick to point out that he was still *Torah* observant (*en nomos* = "in the law") as taught by *Y'shua*. *Young's Literal Translation* gives a very clear rendering of this verse:

"... to those without law, as without law -- (not being without law to God, but within law to Christ [*Messiah*]) -- that I might gain those without law; ..." (I Cor. 9:21)

In *II Corinthians*, Paul talked about how the instructions of the *Torah* were so glorious that the face of *Moshe* glowed brightly after receiving it from God. Nevertheless, Paul called it a "ministry of death," not because it was an imperfect law, but because imperfect man could not keep it. Therefore, Paul contrasted that glorious "ministry of death" to an even more glorious "ministry of the Spirit" which allowed men and women

to receive the righteousness of *Y'shua* through the forgiveness of sin. This was not to say that the *Written Torah* was abolished, but that, without *Y'shua's* shed blood, it was a "ministry of death" due to the weakness of man.

The "ministry of death" and the "ministry of the Spirit" work together. The former shows the need for the later, for without the "ministry of death" there would have been no need for the "ministry of the Holy Spirit." Working together these two "ministries" bring about another ministry; "the ministry of reconciliation" of God and man:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ [*Messiah*] reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:18-19)

God is in heaven, *Y'shua* sits at His right hand, the *Written Torah* continues to set the standard for proper behavior, and through it all God is reconciling the world to Himself. Hallelujah!

Believe It, Receive It, and Be Blessed!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Paul's Epistle ~ ~ to the Ephesians ~

Having abolished in His flesh the enmity,
That is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.
Ephesians 2:15

In all of Paul's writings, examined up to this point in the series, he has consistently upheld the righteous requirements of the *Written Torah*. At the same time, Paul has clearly shown that all men are sinners and are therefore subject to the death penalty because they have broken the *Written Torah*:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned -- ..." (Rom. 5:12)

Because all men have sinned and are subject to the death penalty, Paul went to great lengths explaining how such a terrible situation could be rectified on an individual basis. In fact, that is one of the primary themes throughout his Epistles. Over and over, Paul showed the Believers that we have been forgiven through the Grace (favor) which God has shown us through His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-she'-ahk = Jesus the Messiah), who voluntarily took our sins upon Himself, suffering the death penalty for us. Therefore, we no longer need to fear the death penalty, because *Y'shua* has already offered Himself in our stead, paying the price for our sins. Forgiveness and salvation, through the grace of God, have been a consistent theme throughout the Epistles which we have examined thus far. We now move on to the Epistle written to the *Ephesians*.

~ The City of Ephesus ~

The city of Ephesus was located on the western Mediterranean seacoast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). It was a main commercial center of that region, but heavy silting in the harbor required that a canal be maintained so that ships could enter the port.

Ephesus was also a religious center, well known for a magnificent temple to the Roman goddess *Diana*. (In Greek her name was *Artemis*.) This temple was considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, because of its imposing size and works of art:

"And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: 'Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?'" (Acts 19:35)

The Temple of *Diana* was built about 550 BCE and was destroyed in 262 CE. It was centered around a statue of *Diana*, or *Artemis*, which was made of gold, ebony, silver, and black

stone. The legs and hips of the statue were adorned with reliefs of bees and animals, while the upper body displayed many breasts. On her head was an extremely high headdress. This temple was the center of pagan activity in the city of Ephesus.

Because of the rampant paganism in Ephesus, Paul had a battle on his hands, for he made every effort to counteract the pagan influence found there. Along with pagan worship at the temple of *Diana*, there was a large market for idols and items of magic which were sold to the many pagan worshippers. Because of the teachings of Paul, so many of the pagans turned away from their idol worship that the idol industry of Ephesus began to suffer an economic recession:

"And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said:

"Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." (Acts 19:23-27)

Upon hearing these words, accompanied, as it was, by the capture of a Jewish Believer named Alexander, the response of those still immersed in paganism was to go into a two hour chant:

"But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" (Acts 19:34)

~ Vain Repetition vs. Liturgy ~

This is a prime example of what *Y'shua* called "vain repetitions:"

"And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words." (Matt. 6:7)

Vain repetitions are the incessant repeating of mantras such as the one found in the above example: "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*," repeated over and over; in that particular case for two hours.

Liturgical prayers (prayers which are prepared ahead of time and recited at each service) were an integral part of Tabernacle and Temple service, a service which was ordained by God. The many prayers recited by the Priests at the Temple were well known to those who came there to worship. The worshippers would simultaneously recite the same prayers outside the Temple as the Priests were reciting inside. It was because of this practice that the worshippers were able to know that Zacharias had remained far too long in the Holy Place, after entering there to burn incense:

"And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense." (Luke 1:10)

Since the worshippers were praying the exact same liturgical prayers as was Zacharias, they knew that something unusual had occurred when he did not reappear shortly after they had finished their prayers for the incense burning:

"And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple." (Luke 1:21)

For those interested in the liturgical prayers used in the Synagogues, there is a very good Messianic *Siddur* (sehd-door' = a Jewish Prayer Book) available from Jeremiah Greenberg. You may contact him at: *Messianic Liturgical Resources*, PO Box 342083, Tampa, FL 33694-2083, Phone: 813-792-7252.

When it comes to traditional Jewish prayer books, there are many good ones available. One we recommend is: *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* by Joseph H. Hertz, pub. by Bloch Publishing Company, ISBN: 0-8197-0094-0. It contains some helpful commentary and also references the Scriptures from which many of the prayers are derived.

~ Paul in Ephesus ~

Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey. At that time he left two of his companions, Priscilla and Aquila, there to help minister to the growing congregation:

"So Paul still remained a good while [in Corinth]. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them [Priscilla and Aquila] there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them, saying, 'I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.' And he sailed from Ephesus." (Acts 18:18-21)

Paul visited Ephesus again on his third missionary journey. This time he stayed for a long period of time, teaching in the school of Tyrannus for two full years:

"And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus [Y'shua], both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10)

It was during this stay at Ephesus that Paul encountered the riot at the Temple of *Diana* mentioned above. It is believed that the total time of his stay in Ephesus, on this trip, was actually three years:

"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." (Acts 20:31)

During this time, the gospel was spread throughout the province of Asia (modern day Turkey).

Paul had one other encounter with some of the Believers at Ephesus, when he met with the Elders on his journey back to Jerusalem where he was to be arrested:

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church." (Acts 20:17)

After exhorting them to stay strong in the faith:

"... he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, ³⁸ sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship." (Acts 20:36-38)

~ A Prison Epistle ~

The book of *Ephesians* is considered to be one of Paul's "prison epistles," since it is believed to have been written while he was imprisoned at Rome. The suggested date for the writing of this epistle ranges from 60 to 63 CE. In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul made three references to his imprisonment:

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] for you Gentiles -- ..." (Eph. 3:1)

A similar reference is made in Eph. 4:1. His third reference speaks of being in chains:

"... that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." (Eph. 6:19-20)

~ Overview of Ephesians ~

Unlike some of Paul's other Epistles, *Ephesians* was not written to correct specific problems within the local Messianic Synagogue. Rather, its purpose was to help them walk in "the way" of life to which they had already been called by Messiah Y'shua. He wanted to encourage them to be "worthy" of their heavenly calling, to resist the Adversary, and their own internal lusts, by learning how to be "strong in the Lord" (Eph. 6:10).

The first three chapters of *Ephesians* defines the Believer's position in their heavenly calling. Paul lists many blessings which Believers receive as a direct result of having believed. The blessings include adoption (a.k.a. sonship), redemption, grace, power, and citizenship in the Commonwealth of Israel; thus making Believers a part of God's Chosen People.

The last three chapters (4-6), focus on the Believer's responsibility as a member of the Body of Messiah. Paul urged the Ephesians to dismiss their "old man" (their old nature) and begin walking in a new and better way.

As with other chapters in this series, this one is not intended to be a comprehensive commentary on the entire book of *Ephesians*. Rather, the focus will be on whether Paul teaches anything in this letter that might be construed as being contrary to the *Written Torah*, or whether his teachings actually support the *Torah*.

~ Forgiveness of Sins ~

After a brief introduction, in which Paul speaks about the Believer's "adoption as sons," through belief and faith in Y'shua HaMashiach, he launches right into the fact that, because of Y'shua, the Believer has been forgiven of his sins:

"In Him [Y'shua] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ..." (Eph. 1:7)

Now, if there were no law still in effect at that time (some 30 years after the time of *Y'shua*), then there would have been no need for one's sins to be forgiven:

"... for where there is no law there is no transgression."
(Rom. 4:15)

However, this was not the case for His *Torah* was, and still is, in effect. That being the case, the definition of sin remained the same as it was in the days of *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses):

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

Paul told the Ephesians they could know they had been forgiven of their sins because they had received the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Rue-ack' Hah Koh-dehsh' = the Holy Spirit):

"In Him [*Y'shua*] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Eph. 1:13-14)

While in verse seven Paul spoke about the Believer having already received "redemption," in verse 14 he speaks about "redemption" being yet future. This is a perfect example of the Hebrew concept of "Here now, but not yet." This concept is contrary to Greek thinking where everything has to be either black or white, right or wrong, past, present, or future. (For more information on this important concept see the article, *Here Now, But Not Yet*, in Issue 00-1). The remainder of the first chapter of *Ephesians* is taken up with a prayer by Paul that the Ephesians be granted a revelation of knowledge and understanding about their calling into the family of God.

~ Grace Wins ~

In chapter two, Paul pointed out to the formerly pagan Ephesians that previously their sins had separated them from God. This made them like walking dead men. They had been truly as good as dead because they had followed the ways of this world, which is controlled by the Adversary, *HaSatan*, the "prince of the power of the air:"

"And you He made alive [*italics are not found in the original Greek*], who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

(Eph. 2:1-3)

This entire section implies that there must be a standard of behavior by which a Believer is judged. While that is not explicitly stated in this passage, Paul's writing consistently shows that he assumed his readers would know that the standard by which Believers are judged is none other than the written law of God, the *Torah*.

But Paul's purpose here is not to emphasize the past sins of the Ephesians. He brings that subject up so that he can contrast their former sinful state with their current forgiven state:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ [*Messiah*] (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*]." (Eph. 2:4-7)

Then follows the famous statement:

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

This passage is frequently used as a proof text by those who believe that the "law has been done away." Yet, it says no such thing. What it does say, very clearly, is that one cannot be saved by keeping the law. One can only receive salvation and eternal life through the grace of God.

This leads to another question. What exactly does *grace* mean? The dictionary states that its primary meaning is "favor." A Believer is saved because he/she has received *favor* from God. This *favor* is given freely; it cannot be earned by works. God's favor (grace) has been given because we have accepted the shed blood of *Y'shua* as payment for our sins.

Does this mean that works are not important? Paul nips that idea in the bud, for in the very next verse he extols the virtue of doing good works:

"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)

Not only are Believers to perform good works; when we accept *Y'shua* as our Savior we become a new creation, designed for that very purpose. And what exactly are those good works which were "prepared beforehand?" The only good works to be found which were previously prepared, are those found in the *Torah*.

~ No Longer Aliens ~

The next passage begins with Paul pointing out to the Gentiles that prior to their becoming Messianic Believers they were totally cut off from God:

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- ¹² that at that time you were without Christ [*Messiah*], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:11-12)

The clear implication of this passage is that during the time when the Gentiles (the Uncircumcision) were totally cut off from God, they did not have God's blessings, because they were not a part of the Commonwealth of Israel.

Just the opposite was the case with the Jews (the Circumcision). They are clearly characterized as not being cut off from God, because they were a natural part of the Commonwealth of Israel, the ones who had the covenants of promise. Many may find it surprising that, some 30 years after the time of *Y'shua*, non-believing Jews were still considered, by God, to be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. However, as Paul stated in the book of *Romans*, that clearly was the case:

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. ³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar." (Rom. 3:1-4)

The Jews were given the task of preserving the "oracles" of God, which included, as their centerpiece, the *Written Torah*. Later, Paul went on to say:

"Concerning the gospel *they are enemies for your sake*, but concerning the election *they are beloved for the sake of the fathers*." (Rom. 11:28)

Non-believing Jews were still considered a part of the "election" because God had made an irrevocable promise to the Patriarchs. God has a plan for the non-believing Jew as well as for the Believer, for Paul categorically stated:

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The Deliverer will come out of Zion,

And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

²⁷ For this is My covenant with them,

When I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:26-27)

God will take away the sins of the non-believing Jews and they will be saved. How this will happen is another one of the "mysteries" of God, but this is the clear message of the book of *Romans*.

Notice also, that, in relationship to the Gentiles, Paul spoke of multiple covenants:

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

Because the word covenants is in plural form, Paul must be speaking about more than just the covenant of promise which God made with *Avraham*, which was a unilateral covenant. The *Mosaic* covenant also had promises which accompanied it. An integral part of the *Mosaic* covenant of promise was the *Written Torah*, which, if kept, provided numerous blessings such as those listed in Deut. 28:

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD [*YHVH*] your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD [*YHVH*] your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD [*YHVH*] your God: ³ Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country."

(Deut. 28:1-3)

Once the Gentiles had accepted *Y'shua* as the Messiah and their Savior, they too became a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, and "heirs according to the promise." Now they too could claim the blessings of God's promise to Abraham as well as the blessings for keeping the *Torah*:

"But now in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ [*Messiah*]." (Eph. 2:13)

To what have the Gentiles been brought near? The obvious answer is they have been brought near to God. But the implication is also clear that they have been brought near to the Commonwealth of Israel, because it was previously stated that it was their alienation from Israel which was a primary cause of their estrangement from God, because they were not a part of the covenant people.

~ Tearing Down Walls ~

Now we come to another passage which is often used to "prove" that the law has been "done away." While it does speak of the abolishment of "ordinances," it does not say the *Written Torah* commands have been abolished:

"For He Himself [*Y'shua*] is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances* [*dogma*], so as to create in Himself one new man *from the two, thus making peace*, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." (Eph. 2:14-16)

Does this passage really say that the entire *Written Torah* has been abolished through Messiah's sacrifice? That is what many believe. However, a more careful examination reveals that Paul was speaking about a specific set of laws; those contained in "ordinances." The abolishment of those ordinances had the effect of destroying the enmity that existed between Jew and Gentile, because now they could fellowship together in freedom.

Just what were the "ordinances" to which Paul was referring? The Greek word used here is *dogma* (Strong's #1378). *Dogma* is normally used for public decrees which are made by a ruler:

"And it came to pass in those days *that a decree* [*dogma*] went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered." (Luke 2:1)

What then were the decrees which had previously caused a separation between Jew and Gentile? They were the "decrees" which the rulers of the Synagogues made. They were the fences and traditions that had developed over the centuries as a result of the judicial decisions of the sages. In other words, they were those portions of the *Oral Torah* which had developed as a result of "case law," by which the Jews defined their relationship with the Gentiles.

Case Law is defined in the dictionary as: "law based on previous judicial decisions, or precedents; distinguished from *statute law*."

Statute Law, on the other hand, is law that has been established by a legislative body. Case Law does not have the legal force of Statute Law, because it is derived as the result of judicial interpretation not by legislative action. However, when it comes to the *Written Torah*, the Legislative Body is not a group of men, it is none other than God Himself:

**"For the LORD [YHVH] is our Judge,
The LORD [YHVH] is our Lawgiver,
The LORD [YHVH] is our King;
He will save us."** (Isa. 33:22)

Thus, the "ordinances" specified in Eph. 2:15 cannot be the "ordinances" mentioned in the Old Testament, for those were not judicial decrees (*dogma*), they were "ordinances" actually given by God:

"You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances [*chochaw*], to walk in them: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Lev. 18:4)

The English word "ordinances" in the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) has a much different meaning than that found in the Greek Scriptures (NT). In Hebrew, "ordinance" comes from the word *choch* (hohchk) and it refers to a law of God which cannot be derived through human reasoning. Therefore, we obey them because God said to do them, even though sometimes we cannot figure out the reason behind them.

~ Full Fellowship ~

The real point of Eph. 2:14-16 is that the *Oral Torah* of the Jews could no longer be used as a fellowship obstacle between Jewish and Gentile Believers. Prior to the coming of Messiah, the Jews had many stringent rules pertaining to social contact between themselves and the Gentiles. This was why Peter was initially criticized by his fellow Jewish Believers when he returned from Caesarea after baptizing Cornelius:

"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 [*Jewish Believers*] contended with him, ³saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:1-3)

It was not a violation of the *Written Torah* for Peter to have table fellowship with the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, however, it was against the Rabbinic *dogma* (ordinance) of the day, for Peter's action was totally forbidden by the *Oral Torah* traditions of the first century Jews. Therefore, God had shown Peter that he was to no longer observe that particular human "ordinance" (*dogma*):

"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)

~ Fellow Citizens ~

Because of the sacrificial work of *Y'shua*, both Jew and Gentile had become fellow citizens in the Commonwealth of Israel. No longer did a Gentile have to go through a one year

training program, be physically circumcised, and bring a sacrifice to the Temple in order to experience full fellowship in the Synagogue.

Of course, those Jews who did not accept *Y'shua* as Messiah may well have objected to Paul's teaching. In fact, some of the Messianic Jews objected as well, for they felt that Gentiles first had to become Jewish Proselytes in order to be saved. Paul, however, disagreed. Instead, he said:

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." (Eph. 2:18)

It is clear that Paul was not saying that the Messianic Jews and Gentiles were now part of a new "church" called Christianity. Instead, he made it clear that the Gentiles were being brought into the Commonwealth of Israel:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

Notice that verse 19 clearly states that because the Gentiles have believed and accepted *Y'shua* as the promised Messiah and Savior of the world, they are now considered to be part of the Chosen People of Israel, the "household of God." This squares exactly with what Paul taught in the book of *Romans*, about how the Gentile Believers were "grafted in" to Israel:

"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Rom. 11:16-18)

The main point of *Ephesians* chapter two was not the abolishment of the *Written Torah*, rather it is a beautiful expression of how, through faith in *Y'shua*, Gentiles have been brought into the Commonwealth of Israel and become fellow citizens with their Jewish brethren.

~ The Calling of the Gentiles ~

Many first century Jews believed they were the Chosen People, and that God was not working with the Gentiles unless, of course, here and there a Gentile decided to become a Jewish proselyte. Once a Gentile converted, he was considered to be fully Jewish and was expected to follow all of the *halacha** which the Jews followed.

Many passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) speak of Gentiles having a bright future in the plan of God, but they do

* Hah-lah-cha' = the way one walks. The Orthodox Jewish understanding of *Halacha* included both *Written* and *Oral Torah* commands.

not indicate that becoming Jewish was a part of that plan. However, Scripture does indicate that Gentiles would need to be "grafted in" to the Commonwealth of Israel and thereby come into a covenant relationship with God. Included in their responsibility would be the keeping of the *Written Torah*, but not necessarily the keeping of all the traditions and fences found in the *Oral Torah*:

"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

His servants --

Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,

And holds fast My covenant --

⁷Even 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." (Isa. 56:6-7)

Perhaps the Jews of the first century misunderstood the following passage, believing that it meant that all foreigners had to become Proselyte Jews in practice (which meant keeping the *Oral Torah* as well as the *Written Torah*), instead of becoming "fellow citizens" through some other process. Actually, what it really says is that many Gentiles will turn to the Jews to learn God's ways, but not necessarily the traditions of Jewish culture:

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts:

"Peoples shall yet come,

Inhabitants of many cities;

²¹The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,

'Let us continue to go and pray before

the LORD [YHVH],

And seek the LORD [YHVH] of hosts.

I myself will go also.'

²²Yes, many peoples and strong nations

Shall come to seek the LORD [YHVH] of hosts

in Jerusalem,

And to pray before the LORD [YHVH]."

²³ "Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts: "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'""

(Zech. 8:20-23)

It is easy to see how this passage might be interpreted to mean that all the nations had to become "Jewish" in practice, in order to have a place in God's plan. Paul, however, said this was not true.

~ The Mystery ~

Here then is God's revelation of the "mystery" that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be saved. Instead, they could become a part of the Commonwealth of Israel by a different method:

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] for you Gentiles -- ² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation [administration] of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ [Messiah]), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, ..." (Eph. 3:1-5)

Paul said that he had been given the responsibility of administering (not *dispensing* as it is often rendered) God's grace to the Gentile people. This "mystery" had not been previously revealed, because it had not been the proper time.

What was this "mystery?"

"... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ [Messiah] through the gospel, ..." (Eph. 3:6)

The work of Messiah *Y'shua* was what made the fulfillment of this "mystery" possible. This was a central part of the "good news" (gospel) which Paul had been given to preach to the Gentiles:

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ [Messiah], ⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]; ..."

(Eph. 3:8-9)

"... the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God ..." was that Gentiles could have their sins forgiven, have full fellowship with all Believers, and become members of the Commonwealth of Israel (the Chosen People), without first converting to Judaism.

To Paul, the "mystery" of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Commonwealth of Israel was a marvelous manifestation of God's love; a love that passes all human understanding. Paul's prayer was that the Ephesians might also understand what a great manifestation of love this "mystery" displayed, enabling them to be filled with "the fullness of God:"

"... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -- ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ [Messiah] which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:17-19)

~ Walk Worthy ~

The last three chapters of the book of *Ephesians* moves from a discussion of doctrinal issues to an exhortation for all Messianic Believers to live a life worthy of someone who has already received such a high calling as to be part of the very family of God:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering,

bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3)

A careful examination of these chapters reveals that all of Paul's instructions were totally in keeping with the precepts of the *Written Torah*. In the first section (Eph. 4:4-16), Paul exhorted the Ephesians to walk in a spirit of unity.

Next came a plea for the Ephesians to discard their old way of life (Paul calls it their "old man") and to learn how to walk as a "new man." In order to do this, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to conduct their lives in a *Torah* pursuant manner, so they might become Children of Light. He told these former pagans not to live the way the pagans live, but to pattern their lives after the way Messiah lived:

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰ But you have not so learned Christ [Messiah], ..." (Eph. 4:17-20)

Paul pointed out that the Gentiles had been previously alienated from God's lifestyle because of ignorance and blindness of heart. However, now those same Gentiles, through faith in *Y'shua*, were able to live a Godly lifestyle, such as was exemplified in its fullest by *Y'shua HaMashiach*. The Gentiles were expected to learn to walk that same righteous walk, for as the Apostle John said:

"He who says he abides in Him [*Y'shua*] ought himself also to walk just as He [*Y'shua*] walked." (I John 2:6)

What exactly was *Y'shua's* walk? *Y'shua's* lifestyle was totally without sin.

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

The only place that a sinless lifestyle can be learned is from the *Written Torah*, for it is the *Torah* which defines sin. *Y'shua* did not come to eliminate or destroy the *Written Torah*, He came to fulfill it (to complete it; to keep it fully) in order to show all of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, the proper way to live it.

~ Live Torah ~

In the remainder of the letter, Paul showed the Ephesians how to put into practice their Messianic faith. None of the admonitions he gave in any way contradicted the *Written Torah*. For example:

"... do not sin ..." (Eph. 4:26)

"Let him who stole steal no longer ..." (Eph. 4:28)

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." (Eph. 5:1)

One cannot be an imitator of God while casting aside the very law which He gave to mankind.

Paul then gave a laundry list of activities which are totally inappropriate for a Messianic Believer; all of which are likewise forbidden by the *Written Torah*:

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; ⁴neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ [Messiah] and God." (Eph. 5:3-5)

One easy way to know that Paul had the *Torah* in mind when he wrote this passage to the Ephesians is because two times he references covetousness. In the book of *Romans*, Paul admitted that he never would have suspected that coveting was a sin except that the *Torah* said it was:

"What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' ... ¹²Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:7, 12)

Some other instructions that are in keeping with a *Torah* lifestyle include:

"And do not be drunk with wine, ..." (Eph. 5:18)

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." (Eph. 5:22)

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ [*Messiah*] also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ..." (Eph. 5:25)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." (Eph. 6:1)

"Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: ..." (Eph. 6:2)

"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters ..." (Eph. 6:5)

Clearly, Paul was teaching the Ephesians a *Torah* lifestyle, for these are all *Torah* concepts.

~ Spiritual Armor ~

Paul's final plea was that Messianic Believers use every righteous means at their disposal to resist the Adversary (*HaSatan*). He called it putting on the "armor of God." (Eph. 6:13-17)

The spiritual armor of God which the Messianic Believer needs to wear consists of:

◆ A girdle of truth:

"The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." (Psalm 119:160)

◆ A breastplate of righteousness:

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

◆ The shoes of the gospel of peace:

**"How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good *things*,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"** (Isa. 52:7)

◆ A shield of faith:

**"The LORD [YHVH] *is* my strength and my shield;
My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart greatly rejoices,
And with my song I will praise Him."** (Psalm 28:7)

◆ A helmet of salvation:

**"He saw that *there was* no man,
And wondered that *there was* no intercessor;
Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him;
And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.
¹⁷ For He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
And a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing,
And was clad with zeal as a cloak."** (Isa. 59:16-17)

◆ The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God):

**"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the
division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is
a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."
(Heb. 4:12)**

~ Summary ~

The Apostle Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians* gives every indication that Paul held the *Written Torah* in the highest esteem. The two passages which some people use to claim Paul taught against *Torah*, in fact show that he upheld it.

Perhaps the reason why some read *Ephesians* as an antinomian (against *Torah*) book is because Paul's main emphasis is on God's grace. Paul wanted the Gentiles to know that they were not second class citizens. Because of God's grace, the Gentile Believers were full fledged members of the Commonwealth of Israel. They had all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities which came with their new citizenship. Now they could hold up their heads. Because of Messiah *Y'shua's* atoning sacrifice, Paul told the Ephesians they were to be:

"... renewed in the spirit of [their] mind, ²⁴ [*they were to*] put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:23-24)

Let us all strive to "put on" our new man, and follow the example which Messiah *Y'shua* set for us.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ *Paul's Epistle* ~
~ *to the Colossians* ~
~ *and to Philemon* ~

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit,
According to the tradition of men,
According to the basic principles of the world,
And not according to Christ.
Colossians 2:8



Is the law (the *Written Torah*) a body of Scripture that is relevant for the Jew only, or is it also a code of conduct for Gentiles who have come to Faith in Messiah *Y'shua*? This is the subject which we have been discussing in this series entitled *Gentiles and the Law*. The original impetus for this series arose out of a letter from a Gentile Believer who lives in Asia. He questioned if it was important for a Gentile to keep, what are commonly called, the "Jewish" Festivals listed in Leviticus, chapter 23.

What began as a simple question from a reader developed into a full-fledged study about exactly what the New Testament teaches concerning the "Law" and its relationship to all Believers in Messiah *Y'shua*, both Jewish and Gentile alike.

~ *Whose Feasts Are They?* ~

According to Scripture, the so-called "Jewish" Festivals are much more than Jewish; they are, in reality, the "Festivals of the LORD (*YHVH*):"

"And the LORD [*YHVH*] spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "The feasts of the LORD [*YHVH*], which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'"" (Lev. 23:1-2)

By the first century CE, these Festivals were sometimes referred to as "Jewish Feasts." This is one of the reasons why Christians today believe the Festivals are for the Jews only:

"And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves." (John 11:55)

Why did John use the phrase "Passover of the Jews?" We believe it was important for John to make a distinction so the exact timing of the crucifixion could be established, for the Samaritans also celebrated Passover, but on a different day. John wanted to make a clear distinction as to which Passover celebration he was identifying; the one celebrated by the Jews, not the one celebrated by the Samaritans.

* In *Y'shua's* day the Jews offered their Passover lambs at the Temple on the afternoon of *14 Aviv* and celebrated the Passover Seder after sundown at the beginning of *15 Aviv*. The Samaritans, on the other hand, offered their Passover lambs on Mt. Gerizim at twilight on *13 Aviv* and ate them that same evening, after sundown on *14 Aviv*.

Just because some people call the Festivals "Jewish" does not mean they have ceased to be what God originally proclaimed them to be; **"feasts of the LORD [*YHVH*]."** The Festivals continue to be special days which were given directly by God to all of the children of Israel, as well as to Gentiles who have become members of the Commonwealth of Israel whether through conversion to Judaism, or through faith in Messiah *Y'shua*:

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh ... ¹² that at that time you were without Christ [*Messiah*], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ [*Messiah*]."

(Eph. 2:11-13)

~ *Colossians and Philemon* ~

This chapter explores two New Testament epistles. The first is the letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to the *Colossians*. This letter is most important to our topic because it contains the phrase **"nailed it to the cross,"** which is often used as a proof-text that Messiah *Y'shua* did away with the entire law (*Torah*). We will be examining this passage of Scripture very carefully to see if it truly does mean that Gentile Believers are no longer required to follow the precepts of the *Written Torah*, or if it means something quite different.

Also included in this article is Paul's epistle to *Philemon*. It is directly linked to *Colossians*, having been written at the same time, and delivered along with the *Colossian* letter.

These two letters, along with *Ephesians* and *Philippians*, make up the 'Prison Epistles' (letters written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome). The most probable date range for the writing of these two epistles is 60 or 61 CE.

~ *The City of Colosse* ~

Colosse was a small city located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), in the fertile *Lycus Valley* near a mountain pass about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Apparently there were many herds of black sheep in the area around *Colosse*, for it was known for its beautiful black wool. This region of Asia Minor was at the eastern end of the area where the seven churches mentioned in the book of *Revelation* were to be found. (*Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea*.)

Colosse was within 10 to 15 miles of two larger and better known communities, *Laodicea* and *Hierapolis*, of which Paul made mention in his letter:

"For I bear him witness that he [*Epaphras*] has a great zeal for you, and those who are in *Laodicea*, and those in *Hierapolis*. ... Greet the brethren who are in *Laodicea*, and *Nymphas* and the church that *is* in his house."

(Col. 4:13, 15)

~ *Archippus* ~

Some believe that *Philemon* (the person to whom the epistle by that name was addressed) lived in the city of *Colosse*.

However, it is our opinion that he probably lived in nearby *Laodicea*. In the book of *Philemon*, Paul addressed a woman (*Apphia*) and another man (*Archippus*), whom scholars believe may have been *Philemon's* wife and son:

"To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ²to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, ..."
(Philemon 1:1-2)

Paul also made reference to *Archippus* in the book of *Colossians*, indicating that he was an elder. We believe he ministered in *Laodicea*, for Paul's message to him came directly after referring to that city:

"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.'" (Col. 4:16-17)

If *Philemon's* son, *Archippus* was an elder in *Laodicea*, it seems likely that *Philemon* also lived there.

~ The Epistle to the Colossians ~

Biblical scholars have found no evidence that Paul ever visited *Colosse*. This is confirmed by Paul's salutation which speaks of his "hearing" about their faith, as though he had never been there:

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] and of your love for all the saints; ..." (Col. 1:3-4)

Later, Paul made reference to the fact that the Believers of *Colosse* and *Laodicea* had not seen his face:

"For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ..." (Col. 2:1)

The Messianic Community in *Colosse* may have been founded by *Epaphras*, although that is not made specifically clear. If he did not found the congregation there, *Epaphras* certainly had been one of its foremost teachers:

"... as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ [*Messiah*] on your behalf, ⁸ who also declared to us your love in the Spirit." (Col. 1:7-8)

However, by the time these two epistles were written, *Epaphras* was a fellow prisoner with Paul in Rome:

"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], greets you, ..." (Philemon 1:23)

These letters were delivered by *Tychicus*:

"Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, ..."
(Col. 4:7-8)

Tychicus was accompanied by the slave *Onesimus* who was returning to *Philemon*, his master in *Laodicea*:

"... with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here." (Col. 4:9)

"I am sending him [*Onesimus*] back. You therefore receive him, ..."
(Philemon 1:12)

~ The Epistle to the Colossians ~

Paul's main purpose in writing to the *Colossians* was to assure them that Messiah *Y'shua* was, indeed, preeminent in all things. Paul told the *Colossians* that the Messianic Believers needed to make *Y'shua* first and foremost in their lives. Apparently, they needed reassurance because of a developing heresy which was causing them to believe that some kind of works, affliction of the flesh, or asceticism, was necessary for them to practice in order to receive salvation. Paul wanted them to understand that such teaching was false, and that Messiah *Y'shua* was sufficient for their salvation:

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." (Col. 2:9-10)

After a rather lengthy greeting and prayer for the *Colossians* (1:1-14), Paul devoted the rest of the first two chapters to doctrinal issues, while chapter 3 and the first part of chapter 4 are concerned with more practical issues related to living out the Messianic Faith.

~ Colossians and the Law ~

The Greek word *nomos* (which is always translated into the English word "law") does not appear in this epistle. However, Paul did make reference to specific elements contained in the "law," and it is from these references that we gain an understanding of his position concerning the *Written Torah*.

It must be remembered that the purpose of this series of articles (*Gentiles and the Law*) is not to give a comprehensive commentary on the entire book of *Colossians*, but to focus on passages which pertain directly to the question concerning the relationship of the Gentile Messianic Believer to the *Written Torah* of God.

~ Pleasing God ~

In his prayer for the *Colossians* (1:9-14), Paul made some telling comments which showed support for the precepts of the *Written Torah*:

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ..." (Col. 1:9-10)

The primary emphasis of his prayer was that the *Colossians* come to a full and complete spiritual understanding of God's Will, so they could please Him by their 'fruitful' walk. In other words, Paul was praying that the *Colossians* would

conduct their lives in a manner which made them worthy of being called "children of God:"

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"

(I John 3:1)

~ Knowledge of God ~

In the *Colossians* passage quoted above (Col. 1:9-10), Paul said that an integral part of coming to understand God's Will was to increase or grow in the **"knowledge of God."** Therefore, a key question to be answered here is; how does one obtain correct **"knowledge of God?"**

There are many worldly teachings concerning how a person can come to such knowledge:

- ◆ Some believe that a "knowledge of God" comes only through *revelation*, because the Scriptures either cannot be trusted or they are too difficult to understand.
- ◆ Others believe that a "knowledge of God" comes through the observance of certain rituals, and that without those specific rituals a person cannot truly "know" God.
- ◆ Still others teach that a "knowledge of God" comes through the practice of mysticism; learning about the spirits which inhabit the spiritual world, and then by talking with or even worshipping those spirits.
- ◆ Still others claim that a "knowledge of God" comes through an *ascetic* life; denying oneself the pleasures of this world (i.e. food, drink, marriage), or even going to the extreme of mortifying the flesh in a painful manner.
- ◆ While others teach that a combination of all or part of the foregoing list is what brings about a true **"knowledge of God."**

However, the Scriptures teach that the proper way to come to a true **"knowledge of God"** is through a correct understanding of His Word, the Holy Scriptures; through learning the proper application of His commandments:

**"Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
For I believe Your commandments."**

(Psalm 119:66)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

(II Tim. 2:15 KJV)

Although study just for the sake of knowledge is not the complete answer, for:

"Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." (I Cor. 8:1)

Knowledge must be accompanied by love, wisdom, and discernment, so that the knowledge the Messianic Believer gains can be put into correct and effective practice:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be

sincere and without offense till the day of Christ [*Messiah*], ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], to the glory and praise of God."

(Phil. 1:9-11)

Our Father in heaven desires that we all come to a correct knowledge of Him, for the purpose of becoming more like His Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-shee'-ahk = Jesus the Messiah):

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

(I John 3:2-3)

As Believers, we have "the hope" of becoming like *Y'shua*, therefore we make every effort to live a life of purity, doing our best to avoid committing sin. What exactly is sin? Its primary definition is the breaking of God's law (*Written Torah*):

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

~ Forgiveness of Sins ~

Paul concluded his prayer for the *Colossians* with these words:

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

(Col. 1:13-14)

We do not want to sound like a broken record, but once again it must be pointed out that the purpose of *Y'shua's* shed blood is so that Believers might be forgiven their past sins (which is defined as the breaking of God's Law or *Written Torah*).

The clear implication, from Paul's prayer, is that Messianic Believers should no longer live a life of sin; rather they should grow and increase in the **"knowledge of God."** By doing so, Messianic Believers can come to know the difference between sin and righteousness, so they learn how to live a life that is as free from sin as humanly possible. Of course, when we do slip up and "break the law" (sin), we have a High Priest (Messiah *Y'shua*) who both understands our human weakness and is able to effectively bring forgiveness for our sins:

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus [*Y'shua*] the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

(Heb. 4:14-16)

~ The Preeminent Messiah ~

The remainder of chapter one is taken up with three short discourses about the preeminence of Messiah *Y'shua*. In Col. 1:15-18, Paul spoke about the role of Messiah in the creation of the world:

"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. 1:17-18)

In verses 19-23 the subject is *Y'shua's* preeminence as the Redeemer who has reconciled sinners to the Father:

"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight ..." (Col. 1:21-22)

In this passage, Paul was careful to point out that previously the Messianic Believers of *Colosse* had lived lives which consisted of wicked works. In other words, they lived sinful lives which needed the blood of Messiah in order to be cleansed. Scripture is consistent in its insistence that wickedness, evil, and sin are all synonymous:

**"Do not incline my heart to any evil thing,
To practice wicked works
With men who work iniquity;
And do not let me eat of their delicacies."**

(Psalm 141:4)

Sin is defined by the Law (*Written Torah*). By denouncing "wicked works," Paul clearly showed his support of the *Torah* and its precepts.

In Col. 1:24 - 2:3, Paul went on to show how Messiah was preeminent in the body (the church), to which God had revealed a mystery concerning the Gentiles:

"... for the sake of His body, which is the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints." (Col. 1:24-26)

The English word church is not an adequate translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* because, over the years, it has taken on a lot of additional meaning. In modern parlance that word can signify a number of different things; such as a church building, a church denomination, or a church congregation. A better translation, in our opinion, would be simply "congregation" or "assembly," since that always implies the people of God without any attachment to physical buildings or manmade and man-run denominations.

In this passage, Paul spoke about a mystery concerning the Gentiles; a mystery which had been hidden since the beginning of time. Paul said this mystery was the promise that, in addition to Israel, the Gentiles could also receive forgiveness for their sins and become part of the "Chosen People" of God. The Gentiles had received this gift as a result of their faith in Messiah *Y'shua*, who had become "the hope of glory:"

"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ [*Messiah*] in you, the hope of glory."

(Col. 1:27)

Not only had Gentiles now received this gift, in addition, because it was free, it did not require them to convert to Orthodox Judaism. Indeed, Messiah *Y'shua* is our only hope for the glory of eternal life:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] our Lord."

(Rom. 6:23)

~ Freedom in Messiah ~

The main body of chapter two is taken up with a discussion of how these formerly pagan, gentile, Messianic Believers had been made free, through Messiah *Y'shua*, from the ideas, philosophies, and practices to which they were previously enslaved. In order to fully appreciate this passage, it must be remembered that the congregation at *Colosse* was made up almost entirely (if not completely) of Gentiles. Therefore, their former practices (having little or nothing to do with Judaism) must have come from paganism.

Paul began by encouraging them to remain steadfast in the true faith which they had been taught:

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6-7)

~ Be Not Deceived ~

Paul then issued a warning to the *Colossians* that they not be deceived into accepting a philosophy which might, on the surface seem good, but which was really, at its core, contrary to the teachings of Messiah:

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [*stoicheion*] of the world, and not according to Christ [*Messiah*]. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

(Col. 2:8-10)

Notice, this philosophy (against which Paul warned) was not the philosophy of God as expounded in the Scriptures, but one based upon the "**tradition of men.**" In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this philosophy was based upon the "**basic principles of the world.**"

What exactly were these "basic principles" upon which this vain philosophy of men was built? This has been a matter of discussion and dispute among Bible scholars for centuries. Some claim it was the *Written Torah*, sometimes called the "Law of Moses." Still others have said it was the *Oral Torah*, or the traditions of the Jews against which Paul was teaching. However, the real answer may lie within the definition of the Greek word *stoicheion* (translated as "basic principles"), which means:

1) any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise, an element, first principal 1a) the letters of the alphabet as the elements of speech, not however the written characters, but the spoken sounds 1b) the elements from which all

things have come, the material causes of the universe 1c) the heavenly bodies, either as parts of the heavens or (as others think) because in them the elements of man, life and destiny were supposed to reside. (Strong's definition.)

Notice in particular definitions 1b and 1c. Those "basic principles" (or "rudiments" as the KJV translates it) are not from Judaism or the *Oral Torah*, but from paganism. It was a concept among some pagans that since man was made from the physical elements of the earth, therefore man should worship the elements from which he came.

The idea that man was made from the elements of the earth was, of course, correct, for in the beginning God had:

"... formed man of the dust of the ground ..." (Gen. 2:7)

However, just because man was formed from the elements of the earth does not mean that man should worship those elements. This was the very same problem which Paul addressed in the book of Romans, when he wrote about how God had given the pagans up to a 'debased' or 'reprobate' mind because of their penchant for worshipping the things of creation (a form of idolatry) instead of worshipping the Creator God:

"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 1:24-25)

No doubt the *Colossian* Believers still had contact with their old pagan friends and family. As any modern Messianic Believer (who has come to fully accept the teachings of the *Written Torah* as the inspired word and Law of God) can tell you, it is often difficult for a new Messianic Believer to resist the temptation to revert back to some of their old religious practices in order not to offend those people who are closest to them.

Paul taught that the correct antidote to the old pagan philosophies, which led to the worship of creation, was to understand that all of their idolatrous practices had been washed away and forgiven when they became a new creature in Messiah:

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ [Messiah], ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col. 2:11-12)

The critical element in this process is the forgiveness of past sins (sin is the breaking of God's *Written Torah*):

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting [cheirographon] of requirements [dogma] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Col. 2:13-14)

It was the **"handwriting of requirements,"** or, as the *King James Version* translates it, the **"handwriting of ordinances"** that was nailed to the "cross" in order for us to be "forgiven" all "trespasses."

~ The Handwriting of Ordinances ~

The *antinomian* (against law) argument does not see this passage as meaning the "forgiveness of sins," but instead, they claim, this passage proves that the Law has been totally "done away." This position states that the phrase **"handwriting of requirements that was against us"** speaks of the *Written Torah* which identifies the Believer's sins, rather than the actual sins themselves, therefore, claiming the *Written Torah* is what has been nailed to the cross of Christ and no longer needs to be observed by the Messianic Believer.

In fact, some go so far as to say that one must not try to keep the precepts of the *Written Torah*, for to do so would actually be a sin. Through this strange bit of ill-logic, the *Written Torah*, which God created to define sin, itself becomes sin, for it is like saying that if (through some strange set of circumstances) the traffic laws no longer applied to a certain class of automobile drivers, therefore, those drivers must disobey the traffic laws in order to be considered good drivers.

What exactly are the **"handwriting of requirements,"** which the *King James Version* translates as the **"handwriting of ordinances?"**

The Greek word for "handwriting" is *cheirographon*. This is the only usage of this word in the Greek Scriptures (NT), so it is not possible to gain further understanding from its usage in other passages. James Strong defines it as:

1) *a handwriting, what one has written by his own hand* 2) *a note of hand or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at the appointed time.*

In other words, it is like a promissory note; a record of one's debts. While it is usually used to mean the recording of a monetary debt, in this case the word is used to signify a spiritual debt (sins). An interesting aspect of this definition is that it is written by one's own hand, not by the hand of God. God wrote the *Torah*, but we wrote our own record of sins through the actions of our life.

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, in his book *Sabbath to Sunday*, says this about the word *cheirographon*:

"... a term used in antiquity in the sense of a 'written agreement' or a 'certificate of debt.' ...

"Most commentators interpret the cheirographon either as the 'certificate of indebtedness' resulting from our transgressions or a 'book containing the record of sin' used for the condemnation of mankind. Both renderings, which are substantially similar, can be supported from rabbinic and apocalyptic literature." (pp. 348-349)

The second word in this phrase is the Greek word *dogma*. It is translated as "requirements" or "ordinances." Strong defines it as:

1) doctrine, decree, ordinance 1a) of public decrees 1b) of the Roman Senate 1c) of rulers 2) the rules and requirements of the law of Moses; carrying a suggestion of severity and of threatened judgment 3) of certain decrees of the apostles relative to right living.

Notice that Strong says one of the definitions of *dogma* has to do with the "law of Moses." As we demonstrated in the last chapter, on the book of *Ephesians*, *dogma* cannot mean the *Written Torah*, however, it could mean the *Oral Torah*, and in *Ephesians* we believe that is the case. However here, the issue being discussed is not the commandments themselves as a body of law (be they *Written Torah* or *Oral Torah*), but sin. Remember, that the Greek word *nomos* (law) is never used in this epistle. Therefore, the issue at hand is the charges or sins which were on the records of the *Colossian* Believers prior to their acceptance of *Y'shua's* sacrifice as payment for those charges (sins).

What we find then is a bill of charges written up against those who had not yet received forgiveness through the blood of *Y'shua*. Those charges were the *cheirographon dogma* or "handwritten decrees" which were to be brought before God against the accused. God's Righteous Judgment must be based upon these "charges;" for Him to just ignore them would make Him an un-Righteous Judge.

However if, for some reason, those written decrees or charges (*cheirographon dogma*) were to be miraculously taken away, then the individual would no longer be held accountable:

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (II Tim. 4:8)

This is exactly what Paul was telling the *Colossians*. The written charges (*cheirographon dogma*) which were against them because of their past sins (based upon *Written Torah* law), had been miraculously removed through the precious blood of Messiah *Y'shua*. This removal of the charges occurred when Messiah took those sins upon Himself, thus permitting the nailing of the written charges (*cheirographon dogma*) to the execution stake:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ... " (Eph. 1:7)

Please notice, this entire passage deals with the elimination of sins which had been committed, not with the elimination of the law (*Written Torah*). First of all, in verse 13 Paul mentioned that, prior to *Y'shua*, they had been as good as dead because of their sins ("**being dead in your trespasses**"). He strengthened this statement by going on to say they had been "**forgiven ... all trespasses.**" Verse 14, which is a continuation of verse 13 and not a separate sentence, shows how this forgiveness of trespasses (sins) was accomplished. It was done by taking the charges which had been brought against them ("**the handwriting of requirements that was against us**"), removing them ("**taken it out of the way**"), and forever disposing of them ("**having nailed it to the cross**").

Dr. Bacchiocchi states:

"What Paul then is saying by this daring metaphor is that God has 'wiped out,' 'removed,' and 'nailed to the cross' through the body of Christ, the cheirographon, the instrument for the remembrance of sin. ... what God destroyed on the cross was not the legal ground (law) for our entanglement into sin, but the written record of our sins. By destroying the record of sins, God removed the possibility of a charge ever being made again against those who have been forgiven." (p. 350)

This passage is better translated in the *New American Standard Bible*:

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

(Col. 2:13-14 NASB)

~ Total Triumph ~

By taking away all of the Messianic Believer's sins, Messiah *Y'shua* was also able to triumph over all the powers that have been arrayed against the Messianic Believer by the Adversary:

"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

(Col. 2:15)

It must be remembered that *HaSatan* (Hah Sah-tahn' = Satan the devil) is the god of this present age, and that he has veiled the gospel by blinding those who do not believe in *Y'shua*:

"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ [*Messiah*], who is the image of God, should shine on them." (II Cor. 4:3-4)

HaSatan is the Adversary of the Messianic Believers. He is the one who has brought the charges (*cheirographon dogma*) which have been arrayed against us:

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ [*Messiah*] have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." (Rev. 12:9-10)

Even though the charges which the Adversary has brought against Believers may be totally true, the fact remains that Messiah *Y'shua* made a "**public spectacle**" of the Adversary, and He has fully "triumphed" over *HaSatan* in the lives of those who have accepted His sacrifice as payment for those charges (*cheirographon dogma*). Remember, *HaSatan* had, and still has, "**principalities and powers**" under his control,

for he is still the god of this world until Messiah returns to become King of kings and Lord of lords.:

"These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."
(Rev. 17:14)

Comparing what Paul described to a modern court of law yields the following analogies:

- *HaSatan* equals the District Attorney who brings written charges (*cheirographon dogma*) against the sinner and leads the prosecution.
- *Y'shua* equals the Defense Attorney whose job is to answer the charges (the "**handwriting of ordinances**") that have been brought against the sinner.
- God the Father is the Judge who decides the case.

At this point, the analogy breaks down, for instead of the Defense Attorney (*Y'shua*) defending the actions of the accused Messianic Believers and claiming they are innocent, *Y'shua* turns to His Father (the Righteous Judge), admits that we are guilty, and asks that the penalty of death not be applied because He has already paid it in full. For this reason (and only this reason), the Messianic Believer does not have to die the second death, as the required penalty in order to erase the *cheirographon dogma* (charges or sins):

"For Christ [*Messiah*] also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ..."
(I Pet. 3:18)

Hallelujah!

~ Therefore ~

There follows an enigmatic statement which has confused generations of Believers, because there is no existing document that clarifies the *Colossian* heresy. Therefore, we cannot know exactly how, or by whom, the *Colossians* Believers were being judged:

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ [*Messiah*]."
(Col. 2:16-17)

Apparently, there was a controversy in the *Colossian* congregation which involved the manner in which they were celebrating the Sabbath Day, New Moons, and the Festivals, all of which are commanded to be observed by the *Written Torah*. Notice this passage does not say "therefore you no longer need to observe the sabbaths, the new moons, or the festivals." Rather, Paul told the *Colossians* not to let anyone JUDGE them concerning how they observed them. Also included in his warning against people 'judging' them were practices related to "food" and "drink."

~ Strange Worship ~

Before jumping to conclusions, it is important to study the remainder of the chapter, for doing so will help to clarify some of the issues to which Paul was referring in these two verses:

"Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is from God*."

(Col. 2:18-19)

The primary warning is found in verse 19, where Paul admonished the *Colossians* to hold "**fast to the Head**." The Head of the body is, of course, *Messiah Y'shua*:

"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ [*Messiah*] is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."
(Eph. 5:23)

The Head of *Messiah Y'shua* is God the Father:

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ [*Messiah*]; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ [*Messiah*] is God."
(I Cor. 11:3)

A second warning in this passage is that worship should always be towards God, not towards angels or any other spirit beings. Apparently, one of the problems some *Colossians* were having was not their observance of the *Written Torah*, but because they were worshipping angels. Before we rush to condemn the *Colossians* for their worship of angels, let us remember that angels (in their glorified form) are very impressive beings and that even the Apostle John nearly made this same mistake:

"Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ Then he said to me, 'See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'" (Rev. 22:8-9)

Angel worship is forbidden by the *Torah*:

"And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host [*tsaba*] of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD [*YHVH*] your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage."
(Deut. 4:19)

Tsaba, the Hebrew word translated as the "host" (of heaven), has multiple meanings. It can mean the sun, moon, and stars, it can mean angels, or it can mean the entirety of creation:

6635 תְּצָבָה *tsaba'* {tsaw-baw'} **Meaning:** 1) that which goes forth, army, war, warfare, host 1a) army, host 1a1) host (of organised army) 1a2) host (of angels) 1a3) of sun,

moon, and stars 1a4) of whole creation 1b) war, warfare, service, go out to war 1c) service

~ Elemental Spirits ~

Definition 1a4 is most interesting in light of the previous statement by Paul concerning the **"basic principles of the world,"** (sometimes translated the "rudiments" or "elementary spirits" of the world):

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [stoicheion] of the world, and not according to Christ [Messiah]." (Col. 2:8)

The *English Standard Version* may have the most accurate translation of this verse as it refers to the Greek word *stoicheion* as "elemental spirits:"

"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits [stoicheion] of the world, and not according to Christ [Messiah]." (Col. 2:8 ESV)

Paul returned to the subject of these **"basic principles"** or **"elemental spirits"** (*stoicheion*) in verse 20, where he tied them to certain **"regulations"** (*dogmatizo*) which came not from God, but from the traditions or **"commandments and doctrines of men."** Here is how this passage reads in the *New King James Version*:

"Therefore, if you died with Christ [Messiah] from the basic principles [stoicheion] of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations [dogmatizo = decrees] -- ²¹ 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' ²² which all concern things which perish with the using -- according to the commandments and doctrines of men?" (Col. 2:20-22)

This passage gives a more complete picture of the problem Paul was addressing.

- ◆ The problem had something to do with the worship of angels or of "elemental spirits."
- ◆ It did not involve the "commandments of God" (the *Written Torah*), it involved the "traditions" or "commandments of men."
- ◆ These commandments of men involved traditions which forbid the eating of certain foods, or (more probable) the abstaining from all food during specified periods of time. This practice was common in paganism, where certain foods were forbidden on certain days, or where certain foods were required to be eaten on certain days. A modern Christian practice along this line was when the Catholic Church forbid their members to eat meat on Friday and required them to eat fish.
- ◆ Another aspect of the prohibitions which had been placed upon the *Colossians* through outside influence were the admonitions not to "touch" or "handle" certain things. Again it is unclear exactly what Paul was referring to, but it may have had to do with

abstaining from marital relations during certain special days. Even today, some question whether a husband and wife should have conjugal relations on the Sabbath.

- ◆ These were regulations which the *Colossians* had imposed upon themselves. They did not originate from Scripture.

The practices Paul addressed, were probably based upon old pagan practices which the *Colossians* still clung to out of ignorance, fear, or a misguided and overactive zeal, in spite of Paul's teachings that Messiah *Y'shua* had set them free from all such superstitious practices.

These practices primarily affected their celebrations of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the Festivals. Someone was apparently passing 'judgment' upon them (making them feel guilty and afraid for their salvation) if they did not observe these special days according to certain **"commandments and doctrines of men."**

It is important to remember that observance of the Sabbaths, New Moons, and Festivals has been commanded by God, not by men. God established them to be days of rejoicing. The only day on which God has required fasting is *Yom Kippur* (Yohm Key'-poor = Day of Atonement). When it comes to celebrating these special days, we believe Messianic Believers should follow the instructions found in the *Written Torah*. Man made rules should not play a factor.

~ Shadows ~

It is also important to understand what Paul meant when he wrote about the festivals being a "shadow:"

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are [esti] a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ [Messiah]." (Col. 2:16-17)

It is commonly taught in Christian circles that this passage means the Sabbath day, the New Moons, and the Festivals have been eliminated because they were just a shadow, and with the coming of Messiah (the first time), these "shadows" are no longer needed. Notice however, the passage states that they are still a shadow. It does not say they were a shadow. The Greek word *esti* is never translated were.

In order for there to be a "shadow" there must be a "substance." Without that "substance" there can be no shadow. The Sabbath and the Festivals certainly are "shadows" in that they each picture a certain aspect of God's plan of salvation through Messiah *Y'shua*. This is especially pertinent in regard to His second coming. However, many of those "shadows," or pictures, have yet to be fulfilled. Also, it must be remembered that *Sukkot* (Sue-coat' - the Feast of Tabernacles) will be a required Festival for all nations after Messiah returns:

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD [YHVH] of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

(Zech. 14:16)

In our opinion, it is ridiculous to say the Festivals have been "done away" during this time period when *Y'shua* is away from the Bride (sitting at the right hand of the Father). Messianic Believers need these special days as constant reminders that *Y'shua* is indeed going to return to take His Bride to the *Chuppah* (Who'-pah = wedding chamber).

Y'shua HaMashiach is the "Substance" which creates the "shadows" of the Sabbaths, New Moons, and the Festivals. Without Messiah there would be no "shadows." Because of Messiah, the "shadows" still exist, for they have become reminders of things past (Passover and *Shavu'ot*) and rehearsals of things yet to come (the fall Festivals).

~ Recap ~

Let us sum up this important passage of Scripture.

- ◆ Paul did not want the *Colossians* to be enticed into following after teachings which were not of God.
- ◆ He warned them not to be deceived into following the pagan traditions of men which required people to abstain from foods which God had created for man's use. *
- ◆ They were told not to allow anyone to set themselves up as a judge concerning such matters, but to follow the Head of the Body (or Congregation), which is Messiah *Y'shua*.
- ◆ They were told not to worship angels or the "elemental spirits," but to worship God only.
- ◆ They were told not to be bothered by people who tried to make them feel guilty about how they were observing the Sabbaths, New Moons, and Festivals.

Paul summed up the entire passage by indicating that even though some of these ancient pagan practices seemed to be a good thing to do, they were not to be used in their religious observance:

"These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Col. 2:23)

Man-made religion based upon *asceticism* (the "neglect of the body"), is not how Messianic Believers are supposed to behave. Such practices, while making one appear to be suffering for God, actually have no benefit at all except as a show put on to impress other people. As Paul pointed out in the last sentence of this verse, *ascetic* practices have no value when it comes to overcoming one's natural evil inclination a.k.a. the *yetzer hara* (yeht-zehr' hah-rah').

~ Overcoming ~

Instead of spending time trying to please God and impress others by mortifying the flesh through self-imposed religious practices, what the Messianic Believer should be doing is

exchanging the Old Man and his *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) for a New Man and his *yetzer hatov* (yeht-zehr' hah-tohv' = the good inclination). The subject of chapter three could be summed up by saying that "righteous actions speak louder than a show of false piety," therefore:

"... put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and ... put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ..." (Col. 3:9-10)

Once again, Paul stressed that "knowledge" was the key to learning how to live a righteous life. Where can such knowledge be found? Only in the *Written Torah*, given to the children of Israel by God Himself, for:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17)

thus:

"... through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." (Prov. 11:9)

Notice also that all of the "Old Man" practices which Paul condemned, were practices which involved prohibitions in the *Written Torah*:

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. ⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, ..." (Col. 3:5-9)

Likewise, all of the things which Paul commends are practices that are found in a person who truly follows the guidelines of the *Torah*:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ [*Messiah*] forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." (Col. 3:12-14)

~ Holiness ~

Paul closed the epistle by urging the *Colossians* to live lives of holiness in three areas:

- ◆ Holiness in Family Life (Col. 3:18-20)
- ◆ Holiness in Work Life (Col. 3:23 - 4:1)
- ◆ Holiness in Public Life (Col. 4:2-6)

The remainder of the epistle (4:7-18) was taken up by a commendation for *Tychicus*, greetings to Paul's friends, and some directions concerning the reading of the letter.

* For more information on this subject, please see the booklet *To Eat or Not to Eat*.

~ The Epistle to Philemon ~

We turn now to the shortest of Paul's writings, the epistle to *Philemon*. Some scholars have described this book as a "postcard" sent along with the letter to the *Colossians*. Because it is so short, *Philemon* is often ignored by Believers. This is not good, for despite its brevity, it contains important instruction concerning personal interaction among Messianic Believers.

The story line is simple. *Onesimus* was a runaway slave of a Messianic Believer named *Philemon*, who lived in either *Laodicea* or *Colosse* (we believe the former). *Onesimus* had also committed some kind of offense against his master *Philemon* and then escaped, fleeing to Rome:

"... **Onesimus, ... ¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, ...**"
(Philemon 1:10-11)

It is possible that *Onesimus* had stolen money or goods from *Philemon* when he escaped, possibly so that he could make the journey to Rome.

~ Roman Law ~

It is clear from the names of the two principals involved (*Philemon* and *Onesimus*) that they are Gentile. Because of their Gentile origins, and the fact that they lived under the rule of Roman law, both probably would have viewed this situation through the eyes of Roman law, rather than *Torah* instruction.

Things are really no different today. If someone steals a car, the owner goes to the police. Hopefully, the car is recovered intact and the thief is arrested. If so, he will probably be convicted and sent to prison. This would no doubt be true, even if both parties were Christian.

However, according to *Torah*, the thief (if caught) would not only be required to return the car in its original condition (if possible), he would also be required to pay a substantial amount of additional money to the owner, especially if the car had been sold or wrecked:

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. ... ⁴ If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double."
(Ex. 22:1, 4)

Under *Torah* law, if the car thief was unable to pay, he would become the car owner's slave until the fine had been paid. During his time of slavery, the thief would hopefully learn some good work habits and self discipline so that when he was released from his obligation he was able to make an honest living.

In the case of *Onesimus*, Roman law stipulated that runaway slaves (if caught) could be severely punished or even condemned to death. Such punishment (like many of today's prison sentences) did nothing to reimburse the slave owner (*Philemon*). Even if *Onesimus* survived a severe beating and was returned, he might be maimed and not able to serve his master in the same capacity as before.

~ Torah Law ~

According to *Torah* law, if a slave escapes, he is allowed to remain free:

"You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. ¹⁶ He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him."
(Deut. 23:15-16)

Under *Torah* law, Paul would not have been required to return *Onesimus* to *Philemon*. That would have worked if they had been living in the land of Israel, under an Israeli government. In such a case, *Onesimus* could have legally remained with Paul, just as Paul desired:

"... whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel."
(Philemon 1:13)

~ Paul's Dilemma ~

However, they were not living under *Torah* law in the land of Israel, they were living under Roman law in the Roman Empire. If Paul had decided to keep *Onesimus* with him, as *Torah* law permitted, *Onesimus* would still have been subject to arrest, imprisonment, scourging, and possible death if he were caught by the Roman authorities.

The chief problem facing Paul was how to shield his new convert, *Onesimus*, from Roman law, for, by some special set of circumstances (to which we are not privy), *Onesimus* had come into contact with Paul and become a Believer in Messiah *Y'shua*:

"... Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, ..."
(Philemon 1:10)

Since *Onesimus* had become a Believer, he also had been forgiven for his past sins, including those which he had committed against his master *Philemon*. However, just because God had forgiven him for those sins, this did not mean that he was no longer obligated to make restitution to those he had wronged where such action was required. In the case of *Onesimus*, it was not just a matter of a slave who had escaped, it was also a case of a slave who was monetarily in debt to his master (*Philemon*), probably because he had stolen something he needed in order to make the journey to Rome. We know that *Onesimus* owed *Philemon* something because Paul offered to pay it:

"But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay ..."
(Philemon 1:18-19)

Thus, both *Onesimus* and Paul, found themselves in a delicate situation. It is clear that *Onesimus* had truly changed his life for the better upon becoming a Believer, for he had served Paul like a faithful son:

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, ¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. ... ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might

minister to me in my chains for the gospel."

(Philemon 1:10-11, 13)

Although Paul wished that *Onesimus* could stay with him while he was imprisoned, both of them realized that the best thing to do was for *Onesimus* to voluntarily return to his master and make restitution for what he had taken. However, *Onesimus* apparently did not have the money he needed to make full restitution, and since he was already a slave, he may not have been able to work it off since *Philemon* already owned all of his work output. It was for this reason that Paul offered to pay what was owed (see v. 18-19).

~ Brothers in Messiah ~

Once the decision had been made that *Onesimus* should return, it was up to Paul to persuade his friend *Philemon* to accept him back and not turn him in to the authorities. While it might seem strange for *Philemon* to do such a thing, it is possible that some masters would be willing to sacrifice one slave in order to make an impression upon the others, so they would not attempt to escape.

Because all three of the principals in this drama were Messianic Believers, the task before Paul was made much easier, for that meant they were all brothers in Messiah:

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, ..." (1 Pet. 3:8)

Paul used the brotherhood of Believers as his trump card with *Philemon*:

"For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave -- a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord." (Philemon 1:15-16)

Two of Paul's admonitions to the *Colossians* addressed this matter of master/slave relationship, when he taught them how Believing masters and slaves should interact with their counterparts:

"Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ..."

(Col. 3:22-23)

"Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."

(Col. 4:1)

Exactly what the final resolution of this matter was we do not know. What we do know is that Paul sent *Onesimus* back to *Philemon*:

"I am sending him back." (Philemon 1:12)

~ The Purpose of Philemon ~

One may wonder why such a personal letter is included in the Scriptures, for this book does not contain any doctrinal material. However, it does address, in a quite different manner, the primary issue of the *Colossian* epistle; that issue being forgiveness. Just as God the Father had forgiven *Philemon* of

his sins, so *Philemon* was called upon to forgive those sins which *Onesimus* had committed against him. This principle came straight from the mouth of *Y'shua*:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14-15)

In this brief letter we find a type of our relationship with both *Y'shua* and the Father. *Onesimus*, the sinner, represents the Messianic Believer. Paul represents *Y'shua* who asks that *Philemon* (who represents the Father) forgive *Onesimus* (the sinner) on his (Paul's) behalf, not because *Onesimus* deserved to be forgiven, but because Paul asked *Philemon* to forgive him, and because Paul was willing to pay the debt which *Onesimus* owed:

"If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. ... ²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say." (Philemon 1:17, 21)

~ Summary ~

Once again, in the epistle to the *Colossians*, we see that the Apostle Paul urged the Gentile Messianic Believers at *Colosse* to live a lifestyle consistent with the teachings and precepts of the *Written Torah*. The core subject of this epistle was not whether the law (*Written Torah*) should be kept, for that is assumed. The core subject was that Messianic Believers should not allow manmade traditions, which were not derived from a correct knowledge of the Scriptures, to dominate their religious practices. Paul urged the *Colossians* to cease their worship of angels and to realize that the sacrifice of *Y'shua* was totally sufficient to bring them forgiveness for their sins and bestow upon them a place, as beloved children, in the Family of God; with all of the charges against them nailed to the execution stake.

Likewise, in the epistle to *Philemon*, we find the Apostle Paul writing a letter which in no way denigrates or destroys the *Written Torah*. On the contrary, Paul established the *Torah*, because he called on both *Philemon* and *Onesimus* to obey not just the letter of the law (by repaying what had been taken), but also the spirit of the law. What is that spirit? It is the spirit of reconciliation:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ [*Messiah*] reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:18-19)

May we learn the lesson taught in these two great letters. May we learn how to be reconciled to God and to one another.

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