

Gentiles and the Law

Vol. VII - The Book of Hebrews

containing:

Background
The Recipients
Hebrews and the Torah
A Superior Priesthood
The Perfect Sacrifice

by

Dean & Susan Wheelock

And as it is appointed for men to die once,
But after this the judgment,
So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.
To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time,
Apart from sin, for salvation.
Hebrews 9:27-28

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~ Introduction ~

I, the LORD [YHWH], 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 directly from *Hebrew Roots*®.

In the first six volumes of the series we covered all of the General Epistles and the Epistles of Paul, except for the letter written to the *Hebrews* (which is often debated as to whether Paul actually wrote it or not). There is also some controversy as to who wrote *Hebrews* if Paul did not. Both of these issues are addressed in the following pages, after which is an examination of the text to see if it supports the common theory that the New Testament abolishes the law (*Torah*) of the Old Testament.

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

For an excellent 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, 2016

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~ Background ~

And I appeal to you, brethren,
Bear with the word of exhortation,
For I have written to you in few words.
Hebrews 13:22



The *Gentiles and the Law* series continues here with a background examination of the letter written to the *Hebrews*, the one remaining New Testament epistle which is yet to be covered. The primary purpose of this study is to discover whether or not this epistle, in any way, "does away" with the commandments found in the *Written Torah*, thereby nullifying the "law" of the so-called "Old Testament." Because of the focus, this booklet is not intended to be a comprehensive commentary on the entire book of *Hebrews*.

In many ways, *Hebrews* is the most enigmatic epistle of all, because it is unclear who the original author might have been. There is also disagreement among the scholars as to when it was written; whether before or after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Another question is, to whom was the letter written? It is clear the recipients were Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* -- but where were they located -- in Jerusalem, Rome, or elsewhere?

The first chapter, of this booklet, will focus on these questions, while the last three chapters will deal directly with the role of the "law" in *Hebrews* and whether or not this letter should be included in the New Testament canon, as some dispute.

In between these chapters will be a chapter which will give some historical background concerning the establishment of the Messianic Jewish community in the city of Pella. We believe this information has a direct bearing upon identifying the recipients of this letter to the *Hebrews*. Therefore, we recommend that you read all of the chapters in the order they are presented.

~ Authorship ~

The identity of the author of *Hebrews* is thought to have been lost very early, for even the most ancient manuscripts do not include his name. The Western Church (Roman Catholic) did not accept this epistle into their canon as scripture until the 5th century. The Eastern Church (Orthodox) accepted it early and claimed Paul was the author. Most of the opinions about authorship, which are available today, came much later -- all of them over 100 years after the time of *Y'shua*.

Tertullian (c. 155 - c. 220 CE) gave the title as *Barnabas to the Hebrews*, believing that it was written by Paul's companion Barnabas. The Churches of North Africa accepted Barnabas as the author.

Clement of Alexandria (150 - c. 215 CE), and the Alexandrian Churches, claimed Paul wrote the book of *Hebrews* originally in the Hebrew language and Luke later translated it into Greek. It is most likely that it was originally

written in Hebrew, since it was directed toward Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*, and Hebrew would have been the logical language for the original letter, unless it was written to Jews who came from a Hellenistic (Greek culture) background. Then Greek would have been the preferred language.

Origen (185 - 254 CE) said the epistle to the *Hebrews* was not written directly by Paul, as the language and style are not his -- although some phrases do resemble Paul's other writings. Origen believed that Paul was responsible for the ideas and content, and that he gave his approval to the letter once it was completed. This would account for the Pauline type statements (especially the last chapter) but not for the actual wording, which is said to use a higher form of Greek than his other letters.

Meanwhile Hippolytus (c. 170 - c. 235 CE) and Irenaeus (c. 120/140 - c. 200 CE) both denied that it was written by Paul.

Other candidates for the honor of authorship include: Clement of Rome (according to Erasmus who died c. 303 CE), Apollos (according to Martin Luther -- 1483 - 1546 CE), while John Calvin (1509 - 1564) wavered between Luke and Clement. Clearly, there is no firm consensus.

It must be remembered that Paul never actually wrote his letters with his own hand, but dictated them to someone who acted as a scribe. However, he did append a hand written closing statement to many of his letters, such as:

"The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write." (II Thess. 3:17)

While there is a Paul-like closing salutation to the book of *Hebrews*, it does not include Paul's name. Instead it states:

"Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. ²⁴ Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. ²⁵ Grace be with you all. Amen."

(Heb. 13:23-25)

Two 19th century German Messianic Jewish scholars (Dr. Joiachim Heinrich Biesenthal and Yechiel Lichtenstein) both thought that Paul was the author of this letter. Biesenthal said that Paul wrote it "in the dialect of the Mishna, the language of the schools." This would mean that it was originally written in Hebrew.

Lichtenstein was in agreement, saying this letter was different because Paul was writing to Jews and not to Gentiles. Thus, when he interacted with Jews he wrote as a Jew would write:

"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, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ [*Messiah*]), that I might win those who are without law; 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)

Even though Paul was the "apostle to the Gentiles," (Rom. 11:13) his initial commission, given him by *Y'shua*, also included the Jewish people as members of the children of Israel:

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.'"
(Acts 9:15)

~ Internal Evidence ~

One thing seems clear, the author of *Hebrews* had both a personal and intimate knowledge of those Messianic Believers being addressed, and they of him:

"But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven."
(Heb. 10:32-34)

As we can see, the author of *Hebrews* either had been, or still was in prison when this letter was written. The author also speaks about the great sufferings of the recipients of this letter.

When attempting to identify the recipients of this letter, it may be significant to recognize that the most severe persecutions against the early Messianic community was among the Jewish Believers in Jerusalem and Judea.

The author was also well known to the readers, as he hoped to be reunited with them as soon as possible:

"But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."
(Heb. 13:19)

The author personally knew Timothy, as did the receivers of the letter:

"Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly."
(Heb. 13:23)

It appears that both the writer and the receivers of this letter were not eyewitnesses of *Y'shua* when He walked the earth, but were considered to be "second generation" Messianic Believers. Some say this is evidence that Paul was not the author, since he did have a personal encounter with the resurrected *Y'shua* on the road to Damascus. On the other hand, Paul did not know Him personally when *Y'shua* walked the earth in the flesh:

"... how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ..."
(Heb. 2:3)

What this generation of Believers heard expounded about *Y'shua*, was confirmed to them through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts, demonstrating this was truly a message from God:

"God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"
(Heb. 2:4)

One other reference, which seems to point strongly to Paul as the author of this epistle, is in the closing salutation:

"Those from Italy greet you."
(Heb. 13:24)

Since the writer was a prisoner, or former prisoner (Heb. 10:34), who resided in Italy, and who personally knew Timothy, Paul seems to be the likely candidate.

~ Other Evidence ~

Another piece of evidence, for the authorship of Paul, comes from Simon Peter, the "Apostle to the Circumcision:"

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me [Paul], as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter ..."
(Gal. 2:7)

Peter's second epistle does not designate a specific people group to whom it was written. However, the fact that Peter was the Apostle to the Circumcision (Jewish Believers), coupled with his opening salutation in the letter known as *First Peter* (where he identifies himself as writing specifically to those in the Dispersion), provides us with circumstantial evidence that the letter we know as *Second Peter* may also have been written to the Diaspora Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach], To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ..."
(I Peter 1:1)

It appears that the epistle of *Second Peter* was also written to Diaspora Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*, for we find that Peter made direct mention that Paul also wrote a letter to the Jewish Believers. We believe the "letter" of which Peter spoke was what we know today as the epistle to the *Hebrews*:

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."
(II Peter 3:14-16)

If the "you" of *Second Peter* designates Jewish Believers, then it is clear that Paul also wrote a letter to Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*. Of course, it is possible that the letter to which Peter was referring was a different Pauline epistle which has since been lost, but there is no evidence, of which we are aware, to support such a claim. We believe Peter's statement (II Peter 3:14-16) refers directly to the epistle to the *Hebrews* (written to the Jewish Believers) by the Apostle Paul.

~ Other Opinions ~

Despite much of the evidence which points to Paul as the author, the *Hastings Bible Dictionary* comes to the following conclusion concerning the author of the epistle (book) of *Hebrews*:

"His vocabulary is rich and varied, and in this respect stands closer to the writings of St. Luke than to any other of the NT books. ... For these and similar reasons it is generally believed that our author was a scholar of Hellenistic training and most probably an Alexandrian Jew of philosophic temperament and education." (p. 371)

However, it seems unlikely that an "Alexandrian Jew of philosophic temperament and education" would have been imprisoned in Italy.

One other fact to note is that *Hebrews* was really not written in the style of a letter or epistle, but rather as an exhortation:

"And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words."
(Heb. 13:22)

This "book" may be the transcript of a sermon, which then had a conclusion added in the form of a closing salutation as would a letter.

Paul, Barnabas, Clement, Apollo, or Luke -- take your pick. It is our opinion that the epistle to the *Hebrews* was written by Paul in Hebrew or Aramaic and probably translated into Greek by Luke or some other Messianic Believer who was well versed in the Greek language. This would account for the intimate knowledge which the writer (Paul) had of both the identity of the recipients and the Temple service -- and also for the fact that the usage of the Greek language was similar in many ways to the *Gospel of Luke* and the book of *Acts*, both of which were written by Luke.

~ The Recipients ~

According to the scholars, not only is the author of *Hebrews* a mystery, so too are the recipients. Here the list is fairly short. It usually includes the Jewish Believers living in the Holy Land, the Jewish Believers living in Rome, or the Jewish Believers living in Alexandria, Egypt. Of these three, the most ancient tradition favors those living in the Holy Land -- probably in Jerusalem, since the author specifically uses the Temple service to support many of his main points. Those Jews living in Jerusalem would have been most familiar with Temple service, even if the letter was written after its destruction.

It seems clear that the author had a single local congregation in mind, or a group of congregations in a given region. In any case the recipients formed a homogenous group of Jewish Believers in Messiah *Y'shua* and probably did not include non-Messianic Jews. Whoever the recipients might have been, their spiritual growth seemed to have stopped just when they were expected to blossom forth with vigor:

"... of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." ¹² For though by

this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food."

(Heb. 5:11-12)

While initially, most scholars thought that the book of *Hebrews* was written to Messianic Jews, more recently some have concluded it could have been written mainly to Gentiles. The reasoning behind this position is because all of the early Believers had the Hebrew Scriptures taught to them in the synagogue as a basic teaching of their faith. It is therefore concluded that their study of *Written Torah* would have included details of Temple worship and service and there would have been no need to write about it:

"Of these things we cannot now speak in detail."

(Heb. 9:5)

~ Timing ~

There are varied opinions as to when the epistle to the *Hebrews* was written. It is generally agreed that if Paul was the author it must have been written between 61 - 63 CE, because that is when many believe Paul was put to death. However, some place Paul's death as late as 67 CE. If Paul was, in fact, put to death during the reign of the Emperor Nero, he would have died prior to Nero's death, which occurred on June 9, 68 CE.

Whatever the exact date, if Paul was the writer of the book of *Hebrews* it would have definitely been composed prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. If Paul was not the author, then it could have been written as late as 100 CE, as some claim -- although that is highly doubtful in our opinion.

Many English translations have a problem with the tenses used in the Greek and sometimes make it sound as though the Temple had already been destroyed. However, *Young's Literal Translation* clarifies that issue when speaking of the Temple service -- for the author uses the present tense, not the past tense. For example:

"And these things having been thus prepared, into the first tabernacle [*Holy Place*], indeed, at all times the priests do go in, performing the services, ⁷ and into the second [*Holy of Holies*], once in the year, only the chief priest, not apart from blood, which he doth offer for himself and the errors of the people, ⁸ the Holy Spirit this evidencing that not yet hath been manifested the way of the holy places [*Holy of Holies*], the first tabernacle [*Holy Place*] having yet a standing; ⁹ which is a simile in regard to the present time, in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered, which are not able, in regard to conscience, to make perfect him who is serving, ¹⁰ only in victuals, and drinks, and different baptisms, and fleshly ordinances -- till the time of reformation imposed upon them."
(Heb. 9:6-10 YLT)

As you can see, according to Young's more literal translation of this passage, worshippers were (at the time this letter was written) still offering sacrifices for sin at the Temple. If this was the case, then the letter must have been written prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. That would easily place its dating within the time frame of Paul's ministry, which

ended sometime during the reign of the Emperor Nero (54-68 CE).

~ Summary ~

After much consideration it is our opinion that the letter to the *Hebrews* was authored by the Apostle Paul and that it was originally written in the Hebrew language. This does not mean that Paul hand wrote the original manuscript himself for, as we have seen, it appears that all of his epistles were dictated to a scribe. It was this original document (or a copy) which would have been sent to the Messianic Jews who were the recipients of the letter.

This original Hebrew language version of the letter to the *Hebrews* was, at some point, translated into Greek, and that is the version from which our English translations have been derived. This early Greek translation could have been written before it was sent, but in all probability it was translated later (for some of the so-called discrepancies would, no doubt, have been caught by Paul, assuming that he knew Greek, and if it had been done in his presence). It is possible the Greek translation was done by Luke. Since Luke was probably not Jewish by birth, he therefore may not have had as intimate a knowledge of Temple procedures as would a native born Jew raised in the Jewish faith (such as Paul). This could account for some of the seeming discrepancies which so trouble some modern readers.

It is also our opinion that the letter to the *Hebrews* was written to the Messianic Jews who were residing in Jerusalem or who, as we will see in the following article, had already removed themselves to Pella. In either case, it seems evident that it had formerly been the custom of the recipients to attend Temple services and now they were denied that opportunity.

As to the timing of the writing of the letter to the *Hebrews*, we would place it after the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* יַעֲקֹב (Yah-ah' cove = Jacob or James - #3290) in 62 CE, but prior to Paul's death which, we believe, occurred during the reign of the Emperor Nero who himself died in June of 68 CE.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ The Recipients ~

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed
To the things we have heard,
Lest we drift away.
Hebrews 2:1



While some of the theories, concerning the recipients of the letter to the *Hebrews* touched on in the previous chapter, have a certain amount of merit, we would like to put forth another view which seems to explain the purpose of the book in a more meaningful way. We will begin by establishing that the Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* continued to worship at the Temple for many years after the death and resurrection of *Y'shua* in 30 or 31 CE. We will then show where those Jewish Believers may have been residing at the time of the writing of this letter.

~ Temple Worship ~

The recipients of the letter to the *Hebrews* were apparently quite familiar with the services which had been originally held in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and were, at that time, well practiced in Temple worship. This is not surprising, since it was the custom of Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*, who resided in Jerusalem, to frequent the Temple:

"Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

(Acts 2:44-47)

In addition to this passage, there is also the specific example of Peter and John going to the Temple at the hour of prayer (3 p.m., the time when the evening sacrifice began):

"Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour."

(Acts 3:1)

Not only did the Apostles attend Temple Service during the time of the sacrifices in order to worship, they used their presence there to teach other attending worshippers about *Y'shua HaMashiach*. Since everyone present was there specifically for Temple worship, it stands to reason the Apostles would have also participated in the worship service itself, teaching the people about *Y'shua* before and/or after those services took place.

The general practice of the Temple worshippers was to recite the prayers used by the Priests as the service was being conducted. At various times, they would prostrate themselves in homage to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Apostles would not have had a problem joining in, since they worshipped this same God whom *Y'shua* quoted:

"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ³²'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."
³³ **And when the multitudes heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching."** (Matt. 22:31-33)

On occasion they may even have brought an *Olah* עֹלָה (Oh-lah' = a Burnt Offering - #5939) to express their heart felt appreciation to God for what He had done by sending His own Son, *Y'shua*, as the Anointed One -- the *Mashiach* מָשִׁיחַ (Mah-shee'-ahk = Messiah - #4899). On other occasions, they may have brought a *Shelem* שְׁלֵמָה (Sheh-lehm' = a Peace Offering - #8002), the meat of which would have been eaten with other Messianic Believers as a Festive meal consecrated to God.

Based upon the teachings found in the book of *Hebrews*, Messianic Believers would not have been required to bring a sacrifice for sin, a *Chattah* חַטָּאת (Hah-tah' = Sin Offering - #2403) because that offering had been covered by the blood sacrifice of *Y'shua*:

"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Heb. 9:26)

"And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin." (I John 3:5)

"The next day John saw Jesus [*Y'shua*] coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

Based upon statements found in the letter to the *Hebrews* and in the book of *Acts* (the *Acts of the Apostles*), it is entirely possible that some of the Messianic Jewish Believers in Jerusalem might have brought the *Chattah* Offering, as required by the *Written Torah*, after having committed an inadvertent sin. However, the Rabbis always taught that intentional sin could only be forgiven through repentance. While it is unclear what the practice of these Jerusalem Messianic Jews might have been in relation to the *Chattah* Offering, one thing is clear -- Messianic Believers in the Diaspora (whether Jew or Gentile) could not bring a *Chattah* Offering (or any other for that matter) unless they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It is also possible (even probable) that frequent Temple worshippers, among the Messianic Jewish Believers residing in and around Jerusalem, might have found it necessary, on occasion, to bring an *Asham* אֲשָׁמָה (Ah-shahm' = Trespass Offering - #817). That would have been required if the individual inadvertently entered the Temple complex in a state of ritual impurity. The *Asham*, or Trespass Offering, would have been given to fulfill the following commandment found in the *Written Torah*:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying:

¹⁵ 'If a person commits a trespass [*ma'al*], and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the LORD [YHVH], then he shall bring to the LORD [YHVH] as his trespass offering [*asham*] a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering [*asham*]. ¹⁶ And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering [*asham*], and it shall be forgiven him." (Lev. 5:14-16)

To be found guilty of not bringing this offering, when it was required by *Written Torah*, would result in excluding that person from future Temple Worship.

~ Paul's Example ~

The fact that Messianic Believers still participated in certain Temple Services is also made clear when, late in Paul's ministry, he participated in the Temple Service which was required for the removal of a vow under which he had placed himself:

"So Paul still remained a good while. 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." (Acts 18:18)

It is unclear exactly what kind of a vow Paul undertook, but it seems to be somehow related to the Nazirite vow (Num. 6). However, in the strict Nazirite vow Scripture does not say that the person taking the vow was required to shave his head before beginning, but rather when the vow was completed, or if the time period of the vow was interrupted by contact with a dead body. Even then, the shaving was supposed to be done in conjunction with a specific Temple sacrifice:

"And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. ... ¹³ Now this is the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ... ¹⁸ Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering." (Num. 6:9, 13, 18)

Perhaps Paul had come in contact with a dead body and decided to shave his head and restart his vow even though he was not in Jerusalem to go through the prescribed Temple ritual. Dr. David Stern, in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, makes this comment concerning Paul shaving his head at Cenchrea:

"Strictly speaking, however, this cannot have been a Nazirite vow; for if it had been, Sha'ul would not have been shaved in Cenchrea but would have waited till he arrived in Yerushalayim (v.22) to shave his head and offer the obligatory sacrifice at the Temple. Furthermore, if we assume that the patterns described in the Mishna, compiled

around 220 CE, were already being followed in Sha'ul's time [*which we cannot automatically assume as being the case - DEW*], he would have had to spend at least thirty days in Israel to validate his vow, (Nazir 3:6, 7:3), since a Nazirite vow undertaken in a 'land of the Gentiles' is invalid. Perhaps this was a Diaspora adaptation of the Nazirite vow.

"No matter what the details of Sha'ul's vow were, this verse proves that he did not abandon the *Torah*; on the contrary, even when he became as a Gentile among Gentiles he continued to observe Jewish practices. See Acts 13:9N, I Cor. 9:20-22 & NN." (pp. 290-291)

Whatever the technicalities involved, it is clear that once Paul arrived in Jerusalem he was able to fulfill his vow by going through a Temple ritual. Not only did Paul do this for himself, at *Ya'acov's* (James) suggestion he took with him four other Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* and agreed to pay for their vow fulfillment as well:

"And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ... ²⁰ ... And they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law [*Torah*]; 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. ²² What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. ²³ Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. ²⁴Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law [*Torah*]." (Acts 21:17-18, 20-24)

Whatever the circumstances of Paul's vow might have been, it is clear that Temple worship was an integral part of the practices of the Jewish Messianic Believers in Jerusalem right up to the time when Paul was taken into custody by the Romans. His arrest happened during the time of the Procurator Felix, who held that office from 52 - 60 CE. This puts the dating of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem somewhere between 20 to 30 years after the death and resurrection of *Y'shua*. During all this time, the Jewish Believers in Jerusalem were still practicing Temple worship.

~ Persecution ~

It has also been noted that the recipients of the epistle to the *Hebrews* suffered heavy persecution at some time prior to the writing of this epistle:

"But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ..." (Heb. 10:32)

While this could be referring to the early persecution of the Messianic Believers in Jerusalem, in which Paul himself

participated, there was another persecution against them which began to take place as the time for the destruction of the Temple drew near.

~ *Ya'acov* or James ~

The leading figure of the Jerusalem Congregation of Messianic Believers (composed almost totally of Jewish Believers) was *Ya'acov* the half-brother of *Y'shua*. This is the same James who we just encountered in Acts 21 (above). He was the *Nasi* נָסִי (Nah-see' = President - #5387) of the *Beit Din* בֵּית דִּין (Bah-eet' Deen = House of Judgment or Council #1004 & #1777) of the *Nazarene* community in Jerusalem. This was the same body before which Paul and Barnabas brought the question about Gentile circumcision as recorded in Acts 15.

There is a lot of legend which has grown up around the person of *Ya'acov* (Jacob aka James), most of which was recorded centuries later by the "Church Fathers." This is not to say that we should totally discount their stories about him. However, some of what they wrote is a little far-fetched and does not always square with *Torah*. For this reason, the Church Fathers' writings need to be read critically.

The following story originated with a Greek Christian named Hegesippus (c. 180 CE), who was thought to have some Jewish ancestry. His original writings have been lost, but his account of the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* has been quoted by the 4th century Christian historian, Eusebius of Caesarea in Book Two of his *Ecclesiastical History*. Here is some of what Hegesippus is quoted as writing:

"But James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles. This apostle was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a [*public*] bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woolen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camel's, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God. And indeed, on account of his exceeding great piety, he was called the Just, and Oblas (or Zaddick and Ozleam) which signifies justice and protection of the people; as the prophets declare concerning him." (p. 76 - underlining ours.)

What exactly did Hegesippus mean about *Ya'acov* being allowed to "enter the sanctuary?" If he meant the Holy Place or, as some later writers claimed, the Holy of Holies, this would be impossible, since he was not a direct descendant of Aaron through his male line. Since *Ya'acov* was a half-brother of *Y'shua*, this could not have been the case, for *Ya'acov*, like *Y'shua*, was from the tribe of Judah:

"For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."

(Heb. 7:14)

If, on the other hand, Heggesippus meant the Court of the Israelites when he wrote "sanctuary," that would make sense, for *Ya'acov* certainly would have been eligible to enter that court since he was a male member of the children of Israel.

Whatever the case, it is well established that *Ya'acov* was considered to be a *Tzadik* צַדִּיק (Tza-deek = a righteous man - #6662), by both the Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* and by many of the Pharisees.

~ The Death of *Ya'acov* ~

The Jewish historian Josephus recorded the death of *Ya'acov* at the hands of the High Priest, along with the events leading up to it. His death probably took place in 62 CE, shortly after the death of the Procurator Festus, who governed Judea from 60 to 62 CE:

"And now Caesar, upon hearing of the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea as procurator; but the king [*Agrippa II*] deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus [*Anas in the NT*]. ... this younger Ananus, ... was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who were very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, ... therefore, Ananus ... thought he had now a proper opportunity [*to exercise his authority*]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [*Ananus*] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [*some of his companions*]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done ..." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, ix, 1 - underlining added.).

Thus, according to Josephus, there were others (presumably also Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*) who were martyred along with *Ya'acov*.

The implication is that many Jews (not just Messianic Jews) were upset by this illegal action, for in order to perpetrate this outrage Ananus had convened the Sanhedrin. This act too was illegal under Roman law, because that body could not be convened without the permission of the ruling Roman authority.

When Albinus (the new Procurator) arrived, the people persuaded Albinus and King Agrippa II to depose Ananus (Anas) from the office of High Priest. This, however, was not the end of Ananus (the persecutor of the Messianic Believers) as a political force in Judea, for in the autumn of 66 CE Ananus was elected to head the Jewish government which was established after the defeat of Cestius Gallus.

~ Later Accounts ~

Many of the so-called "Church Fathers" elaborated on the death of *Ya'acov*. Let us return to the account of Hegesippus as quoted by Eusebius:

"Some of the seven sects, therefore, of the people, ... asked him [*Ya'acov*] what was the door to Jesus? and he answered,, "that he was the Saviour."" (*Ecclesiastical History* p.76)

Eusebius then went on to state in a rather lengthy discourse:

"From which, some [*who heard James testimony*] believed that Jesus is the Christ. But the aforesaid heresies did not believe either a resurrection, or that he was coming to give to every one according to his works; as many however, as did believe did so on account of James. As there were many therefore of the rulers that believed, there arose a tumult among the Jews, Scribes, and Pharisees, saying that there was danger, that the people would now expect Jesus as the Messiah.

"They came therefore together, and said to James, 'We entreat thee, restrain the people, who are led astray after Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat thee to persuade all that are coming to the feast of the passover rightly concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in thee. For we and all the people bear thee testimony that thou art just, and thou respectest not persons. Persuade therefore the people not to be led astray by Jesus, for we and all the people have great confidence in thee. Stand therefore upon a wing of the temple, that thou mayest be conspicuous on high, and thy words may be easily heard by all the people; for all the tribes have come together on account of the passover, with some of the Gentiles also.'

"The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees, therefore placed James upon a wing of the temple, and cried out to him, 'O thou just man, whom we ought all to believe, since the people are led astray after Jesus that was crucified, declare to us what is the door to Jesus that was crucified.'

"And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why do ye ask me respecting Jesus the Son of Man? He is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven.'

"And as many were confirmed, and gloried in this testimony of James, and said, 'Hosanna to the son of David,' these same priests and Pharisees said to one another, 'We have done badly in affording such testimony to Jesus, but let us go up and cast him down, that they may dread to believe in him.'

"And they cried out, 'Oh, oh Justus [*James*] himself is deceived,' and they fulfilled that which is written in Isaiah, 'Let us take away the just, because he is offensive to us; wherefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.' (Is. iii).

"Going up therefore, they cast down the just man, saying to one another, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, as he did not die immediately when cast down; but turning round, he knelt down saying, 'I entreat thee, O Lord God and Father, forgive them, for

they know not what they do.' Thus they were stoning him, when one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, ... cried out saying, 'Cease, what are you doing? Justus [*James*] is praying for you.' And one of them, a fuller, beat out the brains of Justus [*James*] with the club that we used to beat out clothes. Thus he suffered martyrdom, and they buried him on the spot where his tombstone is still remaining, by the temple." (*Ecclesiastical History* p.76-77 - underlining added.)

~ More Persecution ~

The exact details of the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* (James) cannot be known for sure. As you can see, there are some discrepancies between the account in Josephus and that of Eusebius. One major fact they agree upon, however, is that *Ya'acov* was martyred. Historians today believe his martyrdom was primarily caused by the temporary High Priest Ananus, although Eusebius believed the perpetrators may have also included the "Jews, Scribes, and Pharisees" mentioned above.

What is most important to our topic is what followed the death of *Ya'acov*. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* reports that once the new Procurator, Lucceius Albinus, was installed, life for the Jewish people (both Messianic and non-Messianic) became even more harsh:

"Josephus depicts Albinus as unusually rapacious. He increased the burden of taxes and released prisoners only on payment of ransom." (Article: *Albinus, Lucceius*, CD-Rom version.)

These actions caused the *Sicarii* (the assassins within the *Zealot* party) to intensify their activities by seizing leading citizens and holding them as hostages pending the release of those wrongfully imprisoned.

Albinus reigned only two years, from 62 to 64 CE. He was followed by the last Roman Procurator, Gessius Florus, who governed from 64 to 66 CE when the First Jewish Revolt began. Florus too was an oppressive ruler. During this troublesome time it is believed a persecution took place against the Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* because of the testimony of *Ya'acov*, that *Y'shua* was the Messiah and resided in heaven awaiting His return to rule the earth.

A late 19th century Jewish Christian (today we would call him a Messianic Jew) wrote an *Exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. His name was Adolph Saphir. Here is what he had to say concerning this matter:

"Then arose another persecution of the believers, especially directed against the apostle Paul. Festus died about the year 63 [*actually in 62 CE*], and under the high priest Ananias [*Ananus*], who favoured the Sadducees, the Christian Hebrews were persecuted as transgressors of the law. Some of them were stoned to death; and though this extreme punishment could not be frequently inflicted by the Sanhedrin, they [*some non-Messianic Jews*] were able to subject their brethren to sufferings and reproaches which were felt most keenly. It was a small thing that they confiscated their goods; but they banished them from the holy places. Hitherto they had enjoyed the privileges of devout Israelites; they could take part in the beautiful and

God-appointed services of the sanctuary; but now they were treated as unclean and apostates. Unless they gave up faith in Jesus, and forsook the assembling of themselves together, they were not allowed to enter the temple; they were banished from the altar, the sacrifice, the high priest, the house of Jehovah." (p.9 - underlining added)

If Saphir is correct in his evaluation of this time period, it would make sense that some of the Jewish Believers might have decided it was the better part of wisdom to remove themselves from Jerusalem, and even from Judea and the Galilee, in order to avoid persecution. After all, their main reason for remaining in Jerusalem during those perilous times was so they could participate in Temple worship, just like the Apostles did some 30 years earlier. Now that they were banished from the Temple, there was no reason to remain in harms way. Adolph Saphir writes:

"We can scarcely realize the piercing sword which thus wounded their inmost heart. That by clinging to the Messiah they were to be severed from Messiah's people was indeed a great and perplexing trial; that for the hope of Israel's glory they were banished from the place which God had chosen, and where the divine Presence was revealed, and the symbols and ordinances of His grace had been the joy and strength of their fathers; that they were to be no longer children of the covenant and of the house, but worse than Gentiles, excluded from the outer court, cut off from the commonwealth of Israel, -- this was, indeed a sore and mysterious trial. Cleaving to the promises made unto their fathers, cherishing the hope in constant prayer that their nation would yet accept the Messiah, it was the severest test to which their faith could be put, when their loyalty to Jesus involved separation from all the sacred rights and privileges of Jerusalem." (p. 10 - underlining added)

These Messianic Jewish refugees of 62 CE may have formed the advanced guard who paved the way for yet another more major exodus which took place a few years later.

~ More Trouble ~

There was more trouble yet to come. After the death of the Procurator Festus (62 CE), the *Zealots* had their fill of Roman rule and really began stirring up the Jewish people to revolt. In many cases they threatened the common people to such a degree that many Jews joined the revolt because they were afraid the *Zealots* would otherwise kill them.

In 64 CE the last Roman Procurator, Gessius Florus, began his rule. As already mentioned, he was one of the worst of the lot, for he was an "oppressive and rapacious ruler." The *Encyclopedia Judaica* states:

"On the occasion of a visit to Jerusalem of the Roman governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus Gaius, the Jews complained bitterly to him of the procurator's conduct. On his departure the situation deteriorated. ... There is no doubt that Florus's conduct was one of the chief causes of the ensuing war which resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple." (Article: *Gessius Florus*, CD-Rom version.)

The situation continued to deteriorate up to the autumn of 66 CE when Cestius came against Jerusalem with the Twelfth Legion, and other troops, to put down the Judean uprising. During this campaign Cestius burned several communities on his way to Jerusalem. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*:

"... the Roman army reached Scopus, seized the suburbs of Jerusalem, and besieged the Temple Mount. A few days later, however, Cestius decided to withdraw. Josephus maintains that this was a strategic error, for the situation in the city was critical, many of the inhabitants being inclined to capitulate. Cestius' decision may have resulted from a pessimistic appraisal of his army's strength or of the logistics situation in the light of the approaching winter. The retreat became a rout as the Jews pursued and attacked the Romans, ... Cestius' defeat had several important consequences: many more moderates joined the rebels, a government was set up, and generals were appointed in command of various districts. In Rome the defeat led to the appointment of Vespasian as the commander of the army." (Article: *Cestius Gallus*, CD-Rom version.)

~ Escape ~

When Cestius retreated from his attack on Jerusalem in 66 CE it gave the remaining Jewish Believers an opportunity to remove from the city just as *Y'shua* had told them they should do when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her." (Luke 21:20-21)

Now the timing and recipients of the book of *Hebrews* begins to come into focus. When Jerusalem was temporarily surrounded by armies in 66 CE, the Jewish Believers would have remembered *Y'shua's* instruction. As soon as Cestius withdrew his army, those who had not left after the death of *Ya'acov* (James) were able to make their escape.

There is a passage in chapter 6 which seems to confirm this position, that the recipients had already taken refuge away from Jerusalem when the book of *Hebrews* was written:

"Therefore, when God wanted to demonstrate still more convincingly the unchangeable character of his intentions to those who were to receive what he had promised, he added an oath to the promise; ¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in neither of which God could lie, we, who have fled to take a firm hold on the hope set before us, would be strongly encouraged." (Heb. 6:17-18 CJB)

This indicates that the people receiving this letter had, at some time in the past, "fled" from where they originally were settled. We believe this confirms that those Messianic Jewish Believers left Jerusalem for a place of safety.

~ Holding Back ~

Did some of the Jewish Believers stay back and join the revolt and defend Jerusalem? Probably, since not everyone

would have heeded the warning. Just like many today who know the Scriptures but do not see the signs of the times:

"He answered and said to them, 'When it is evening you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red;" ³ and in the morning, "It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening." Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.'" (Matt. 16:2-3)

In 67 CE Vespasian began his campaign to quell the Jewish revolt by conquering the Galilee, the coast of Judea, and Transjordan (east of the Jordan River). When Nero died, in 68 CE, Vespasian became the new Emperor and his son Titus took over command of the army in Judea. The siege against Jerusalem continued until the city fell, the Temple Mount was captured, and the Temple burned on the 9th of Av in 70 CE. However, the Jewish Believers were safe from this holocaust, having made their way to a city named Pella.

~ Pella ~

The city of Pella was part of the Decapolis, a group of ten cities mentioned in Scripture:

"Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee." (Mark 7:3)

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* lists the cities of the Decapolis as follows:

"... in the mid 1st century AD the 10 cities of the league were Scythopolis (modern Bet She'an, Israel), Hippos, Gadara, Raphana, Dion (or Dium), Pella, Gerasa, Philadelphia (modern Amman, Jordan), Canatha, and Damascus (capital of modern Syria)." (*CD-Rom Version*)

Pella was located east of the Jordan River in the Jordan Valley about 60 miles northwest of Amman (Jordan), 18 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, and 7 miles southeast of the modern Tel (site of an archaeological excavation) called *Bet She'an*. This area had some of the region's most fertile land and plenty of water. Pella was famous for its warm water baths which were thought to have healing properties.

Pella was an ideal safe city for the Messianic Jews who managed to escape the siege in Jerusalem, since it was not identified by the Romans as part of the rebellion. This was no doubt true, since the city was predominantly pagan and most of the inhabitants would have been loyal to the Romans. Since the Messianic Jews were escaping persecution brought on them in part by the Jewish Zealots, they too would not have been under suspicion as being in rebellion.

~ Multiple Warnings ~

There are a number of recorded warnings of the impending tragedy which was about to befall Jerusalem and the Temple. The first of these has already been mentioned; the warning which *Y'shua* gave to His disciples concerning what they were to do when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who

are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

(Luke 21:20-22)

Josephus recorded other warnings which were said to have been given beginning several years prior to the destruction of the Temple and the razing of the city of Jerusalem. He begins this section of his history by telling us that most people did not heed the warning signs:

"Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. (*Wars* 6:5:3)

The first sign Josephus mentioned was the vision of a 'sword' over the city:

"Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year." (ibid.)

This was followed by another sign, a 'great light' in the sky:

"Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus* [*Nisan*], and at the ninth hour of the night so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day-time; which light lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskilful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it." (ibid.)

This light was followed by a very unusual sign, a heifer giving birth to a lamb:

"At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple." (ibid.)

Then there was the automatic opening of the Nicanor gates to the Temple courtyard:

"Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner, [*court of the temple*] which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night [*midnight*]. Now, those that kept watch in the temple came thereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it; who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of

happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared, that this signal foreshewed the desolation that was coming upon them." (ibid.)

A month after the closing of the Festival of Passover another strange sign was seen in the heavens on *21 Iyar* [*second month*]:

"... before sun-setting chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities." (ibid.)

Some later Church historians cite this passage as being the sign of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies which led the Messianic Jews to leave the city of Jerusalem and move to Pella.

Yet another sign was seen during the festival of *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost):

"Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [*court of the*] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying. 'Let us remove hence.'" (ibid.)

The last, and what Josephus describes as the 'most terrible' sign was that of a man named Jesus (*Yeshua*) who was the son of a plebeian (a commoner or member of the lower class) named Ananus, who proclaimed daily "Woe, woe to Jerusalem." Josephus tells us that this Jesus began proclaiming his 'Woe' message four years prior to the beginning of the war. Since the initial attack took place in 66 CE (the failed attack by Cestius) that would place this pronouncement as beginning about the time of the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* (James) in 62 CE. This is an interesting coincidence to say the least.

Later in this passage Josephus stated that this Jesus proclaimed his message for "seven years and five months." Here is a portion of what Josephus relates concerning this matter:

"But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian, and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple [*Succoth or the Feast of Tabernacles*], began on a sudden to cry aloud, 'A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people' This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city." (ibid.)

This man Jesus was repeatedly beaten but continued to give this prophecy to the inhabitants and pilgrims in Jerusalem. His repeated answer to the beatings was "Woe, woe to

* Here Josephus uses the Syro-Macedonian month Xanthicus, for the Hebrew month Nisan or Aviv.

Jerusalem." When asked who told him to make this pronouncement he would not reply. During the final siege of the city, he was struck by a large stone from one of the 'engines' which the Romans used to hurl rocks into the city, and thus he died.

~ Escaping Jerusalem ~

Josephus wrote about a number of different escapes of Jews from Jerusalem prior to the final assault by the Roman army under Titus. The first recorded escape took place in November 66 CE after Cestius departed from his attack on the city:

"After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city as from a ship when it was going to sink; ..." (*Wars of the Jews*, 2:20:1)

During the winter of 67/68 CE, before the Passover, Josephus writes:

"The Idumeans complied with these persuasions; and in the first place, they set those that were in the prisons at liberty, being about two thousand of the populace, who thereupon fled away immediately to Simon, ..." (*Wars* 4:6:1)

If some of the Messianic Jewish Believers had been cast into prison after the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* (James), it is probable that a portion of these two thousand released prisoners were Believers in *Y'shua* who then took the opportunity to flee to Pella.

Josephus also records that some of the Jews who escaped from under the watchful eye of the Jewish Zealots went to Vespasian to plead that he intercede on behalf of those Jews who were being forced to stay in Jerusalem against their will:

"These things were told Vespasian by deserters; for although the seditious [*Zealots*] watched all the passages out of the city, and destroyed all, whosoever they were, that came thither, yet were there some who had concealed themselves, and, when they had fled to the Romans, persuaded their general to come to their city's assistance, and save the remainder of the people; informing him withal, that it was upon account of the people's good-will to the Romans that many of them were already slain, and the survivors in danger of the same treatment." (*Wars* 4:7:3)

Even late in the siege there were Jews who managed to escape from Jerusalem, although it was very difficult:

"As Josephus was speaking thus with a loud voice, the seditious would neither yield to what he said, nor did they deem it safe for them to alter their conduct; but as for the people, they had a great inclination to desert to the Romans; accordingly, some of them sold what they had, and even the most precious things that had been laid up as treasures by them, for every small matter, and swallowed down pieces of gold, that they might not be found out by the robbers; and when they had escaped to the Romans, went to stool, and had wherewithal to provide plentifully for themselves; for Titus let a great number of them go

away into the country, whither they pleased." (*Wars* 5:10:1 - underlining added)

Josephus also records that many opportunities became available which resourceful Messianic Jews could have used to escape, even as late as the early months of 70 CE. However, it is our opinion that most of the Messianic Jews left much earlier and established themselves in and around the city of Pella where they were safe from the fighting.

Later Church historians added further information to what Josephus recorded. These undoubtedly were oral traditions which had been handed down through the 'Church' generations. Eusebius, the 4th century Church historian, made the following comment:

"The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella." (*Ecclesiastical History*, p. 86)

~ Summary ~

It is clear from Scripture that the Jewish Messianic Believers who lived in or near Jerusalem continued to practice some form of Temple worship at least up to the time when Paul was taken prisoner, and probably beyond that date. It is also clear, from the accounts in Josephus and the writings of the "Church Fathers," that such worship was common until the martyrdom of *Ya'acov* (James).

The key date seems to be 62 CE, the year in which *Ya'acov* (James) died, and when Jesus the son of Ananus began to proclaim the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Thus, beginning in late 62 CE and continuing on clear into the early months of 70 CE, the Messianic Jews were able to leave Jerusalem and set up a community in the Decapolis city of Pella. Here they were safe from both the Jewish Zealots, who would have considered them traitors -- and from the Roman army, who had no reason to attack them or the pagan inhabitants of that city.

For this reason, we believe the epistle to the *Hebrews* was written to the Messianic Jewish Believers residing in Pella. As we will see in the following chapter, the main purpose of this epistle was to comfort them in their loss of Temple worship and show them that when it came to offerings, they had all that was needed in *Y'shua's* offering of Himself for sin. The Apostle Paul made it clear that worship at the physical Temple was no longer necessary for the removal of sin, and that sacrifice for sin had been accomplished once and for all by *Y'shua HaMashiach*:

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,²⁸ so Christ [Messiah] was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Heb. 9:27-28)

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~ Hebrews and the Torah ~

God, who at various times and in various ways
Spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
Has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,
Hebrews 1:1-2

It is now time to turn to an examination of the book of *Hebrews*, to see if there are any passages which can be construed as "doing away" with the *Written Torah*. Please remember, the following chapters are not intended to be a comprehensive commentary on the entire book of *Hebrews*. (That would require a large book.) Rather, they are an examination of those portions of the epistle which relate directly to the *Written Torah*.

~ Drastic Moves ~

Over the years, we have seen a number of people who joyfully entered the Messianic Movement from mainstream Christianity, only to later renounce *Y'shua* and move on into Orthodox Judaism. To make such a drastic move requires the forsaking of faith in *Y'shua* as one's personal Savior and the promised Messiah of Israel. It is not the acceptance of the Pharisaic teachings of *Oral Torah* that disturb us (for we know some very strong Believers in *Y'shua* who hold to an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle). Rather, it is abandoning the atoning blood of *Y'shua* that is the cause of deep concern:

"Now the parable is this: ... ¹³ But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away."
(Luke 8:11, 13)

"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"
(Heb. 10:29)

It is important for all Messianic Believers to keep in mind what the Apostle Peter told the *Sanhedrin*:

"This [*Y'shua*] is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone." [Psalm 118:22] ¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
(Acts 4:11-12)

~ A Warning Sign ~

Many times the move by former Messianic Believers away from *Y'shua* and the Gospel message, is accompanied by warning signs. For some, one of the first signs is renunciation of the book of *Hebrews* as inspired Scripture, thereby removing it (in their minds) from the "New Testament." This is not to say that all people who have rejected the book of *Hebrews* have

renounced *Y'shua* as their Savior and Messiah, however, for some, rejecting this book was the first step down that path.

For those who have entered upon the path of doubt, which leads to renouncing Faith in *Y'shua*, the next step often entails rejecting all of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Somewhere along the way these people have come to accept the "Church" position that Paul started a new religion and the teaching that this "Church" is the "new Israel." This is called "Replacement Theology," and it is a common false doctrine found in Christianity. Some people, who came to a Messianic understanding of the Faith, reason that if this claim about Paul by the "Church" is true, then he must be a false teacher and therefore his teachings should not be followed.

Many who have abandoned their Faith in *Y'shua* have accepted the "doctrinal lie" (one that is often enhanced by faulty English translations) concerning the motives and writings of the Apostle Paul. Such was not the case for the first century Disciples, who understood that becoming a *Nazarene* meant joining a sect of Judaism. To them, accepting *Y'shua* as Messiah certainly was not an act of leaving Judaism to join a "new religion:"

"For we have found this man [*Paul*] a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the [*Jewish*] sect of the Nazarenes."
(Acts 24:5)

The Apostle Peter commended Paul and his writings, calling him a "beloved brother," although Peter admitted that Paul's writings were sometimes difficult to understand:

"... -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."
(II Pet. 3:15-16)

It is our opinion that those who have left the *Nazarene* (Messianic) Faith do not understand that Paul was actually teaching both Gentile and Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* to observe the original intent of the *Written Torah*.

What Paul actually taught against were certain aspects of the *Oral Torah* and Traditions of the Pharisees. Many of those who have left the Faith, did so after accepting the lie that Paul tried to "do away with the law [*the Written Torah*]." Once this error had been accepted, it was a simple matter to take the position that all of Paul's writings must be rejected.

Such a position is based on faulty scholarship and centuries of indoctrination by a "Church" that wanted to separate itself as far as possible from Judaism. This is one of the key reasons why we began researching and writing the *Gentiles and the Law* series of articles in *Hebrew Roots*® many years ago. It has been our continuing effort to demonstrate that Paul was, in fact, a traditional Jew, and that he taught a traditional Jewish message which clearly identified *Y'shua* as the promised Jewish Messiah and Savior of all mankind. The book of *Acts* makes it clear that Paul was not a "former" Pharisee who left Judaism, but that He, personally, continued to be a Jew of the sect of the Pharisees:

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

The false doctrine, which claims that Paul started a new religion, is also taught by the Orthodox Jewish Anti-Missionaries; those who try very hard to keep their fellow Jews from accepting *Y'shua* as the Messiah, a position which they consider to be blasphemy. It is quite convenient for the Anti-Missionaries that mainstream Christianity has given them this piece of ammunition for their attack on the Messianic Faith, even though it is an entirely false teaching. Unless one has a firm understanding of what Paul really taught, this double-barreled teaching, coming from both the mainstream "Church" and Orthodox Judaism, is difficult to dispute.

~ God's Plan ~

A key to understanding the book of *Hebrews* (and all of Scripture for that matter) is to realize that God took the next step in His Great Plan of Salvation when He sent His Son *Y'shua HaMashiach* to earth. There are two main steps remaining: 1.) the return of Messiah *Y'shua* to establish the *Malchut Shamayim* מְלָכוּת שָׁמַיִם (Mahl-khoot' Shah-mah'-eem = The Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God - #4438 & #8064) on earth for 1000 years, and 2.) the establishment of the *Olam Haba* עוֹלָם הַבָּא (Oh-lahm' Hah-bah' = the World to Come - #5769) which follows (see Rev. 21 - 22). This great plan was actually formulated and initiated before mankind even existed on earth:

"He [*Y'shua*] indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you ²¹ who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." (I Pet. 1:20-21)

The initial steps in God's Plan of Salvation were revealed throughout the *Tanakh* (the Jewish title for the "Old Testament"). It began with the creation of *Adam* אָדָם (Ah-dahm' - #120) and *Chava* חַוָּה (Hah-vah' - #2332). Had they not disobeyed (sinned), they would have had the opportunity to eat of the *Etz HaChaim* עֵץ הַיָּדֵי (Ehtz Hah Haheem' = The Tree of Life - #6086 & #2416) and thereby obtain eternal life. However, once they had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they entered into a state of sinfulness and were no longer allowed to partake of that precious Tree. The end result for them, and for all of mankind who followed their sinful path, was the first death:

"... 'but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Gen. 2:17)

"Then the LORD God [*YHVH Elohim*] said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' -- ²³ therefore the LORD

God [*YHVH Elohim*] sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." (Gen. 3:22-24)

The recording of this profoundly important event in human history is found in the first three chapters of the book of *Genesis*. The rest of the story -- how God's Plan developed and how it ultimately leads to the redemption of mankind -- is found within the remainder of the Holy Scriptures -- both the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) Scriptures.

Some of the highlights of the unfolding of God's Plan found in the Hebrew Scriptures include:

- ◆ The destruction of the original creation and all mankind (except for Noah and his family) in a worldwide flood.
- ◆ The calling of Avram (Abram) who became *Avraham* (Abraham), and God's promise to make a great nation of his descendants through his son *Yitz'chak* (Isaac).
- ◆ The development of the nation of Israel from the twelve sons of *Ya'acov* (Jacob), whose name was changed to Israel.
- ◆ The calling of the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery under the leadership of *Moshe* (Moses) and *Aharon* (Aaron).
- ◆ The giving of the *Torah* to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai and their establishment as the nation of God.
- ◆ The establishment of the Israelite monarchy under the kingship of David, followed by Solomon.
- ◆ The dividing of the kingdom of Israel into the House of Israel (northern ten tribes) and the House of Judah (southern two tribes) following the death of Solomon.
- ◆ The captivity of the House of Israel by the Assyrians, causing a dispersion, of those tribes, which exists to this day.
- ◆ The captivity of the House of Judah by the Babylonians and their return to the Promised Land to rebuild the Temple.

Many other events could be listed, but this gives the general outline of how God has worked with His "Chosen People," the children of Israel, up to the time of *Y'shua*.

~ A Word About Covenants ~

Before getting into an actual examination of the book of *Hebrews*, it would be well to understand a basic principle concerning Covenants.

It is common, when thinking about Covenants, to dwell upon the Terms and Conditions of the Covenant rather than upon the Covenant Relationship itself. By Terms and Conditions we mean the list of things which each party agrees to do in order to uphold the Covenant Relationship. For

example, in the Mosaic Covenant, given through *Moshe* to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, the Terms and Conditions included the 613 *Mitzvot* or commandments.

However, the 613 *Mitzvot* do not constitute the Covenant Relationship itself, even though they constitute the main body of the "Terms and Conditions" of the Mosaic Covenant. The actual Covenant Relationship was the mutual agreement that was made between God and the children of Israel through their mediator *Moshe*. Today, we might say that the Covenant Relationship is what is sealed by a handshake, or signatures on a piece of paper, which commit the involved parties to the Covenant. In ancient times, a Covenant Relationship, between two individuals, might have required the drawing and mixing of each others' blood -- thereby making them Blood Brothers in an indissoluble Blood Covenant regardless of what either one of them might do in the future.

It is possible for the Terms and Conditions to be changed without destroying the Covenant Relationship. If the Covenant Relationship is a Bilateral Covenant Relationship (that is if both parties are involved in working out the Covenant Relationship and mutually agree to its Terms and Conditions prior to its initiation) then it requires that both parties also agree before a change can be made to those Terms and Conditions. If one of the parties of a Bilateral Covenant Relationship does not agree to the proposed changes, then those changes cannot be made. At that point the other party can either accept the fact that a change cannot be made, or they can attempt to dissolve the Covenant Relationship (if that is allowed in the original Terms and Conditions) and go their way.

In a Unilateral Covenant Relationship (where one of the parties arbitrarily dictates the Terms and Conditions to the other party), the Terms and Conditions can be changed by the dictating party whether the receiving party likes the change or not. In a Unilateral Covenant Relationship the receiving party can "break" the Terms and Conditions of the Covenant, but cannot dissolve the actual Covenant Relationship. (This is what the children of Israel did time after time, yet God has never abandoned His covenant with the children of Israel.) The Covenant Relationship stands as long as the dictating party says it stands.

This is the case with the Mosaic Covenant (often referred to as the "Old Covenant," although, as we will see, that is a misnomer):

**"If those ordinances depart
From before Me, says the LORD [YHVH],
Then the seed of Israel shall also cease
From being a nation before Me forever."**

(Jer. 31:36)

God established the Mosaic Covenant and He also wrote the Terms and Conditions without consulting with the children of Israel or, as far as we know, even with the mediator *Moshe*. What the children of Israel did was to accept the Mosaic Covenant unconditionally before they even heard the Terms and Conditions:

"And Moses went up to God [Elohim], and the LORD [YHVH] called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of

Israel: ⁴ 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'

"⁷ So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD [YHVH] commanded him. ⁸ Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD [YHVH]." (Ex. 19:3-8)

The Hebrew text actually phrases the Israelite's response this way: "Whatever God says we will do." The implication is they agreed to do anything He commands even before they heard what those demands were.

Our English translations have caused some to claim that the book of *Hebrews* makes the statement that the "Old" Covenant (Mosaic Covenant) Terms and Conditions were dissolved by God and replaced with "New" Covenant" Terms and Conditions. This, however, is simply not true, because the Terms and Conditions of the "New Covenant" are the same as those of the "Old Covenant." The only difference is the place where those Terms and Conditions (laws or commandments) are written:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD [YHVH], when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³ 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. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD [YHVH],' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD [YHVH]. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

(Jer. 31:31-34)

The Terms and Conditions (laws) of the "Old" Covenant were written on stone. Whereas, the "New" Covenant was founded on man's relationship with God through Messiah *Y'shua*, who kept the law perfectly and has become our High Priest to be compared with *Melchizedek* מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק (Mahl'-kee Tzeh'-dehk - #4442) (see Heb. 5:6, 10)

~ Summary ~

The book of *Hebrews* has been a sticking point for some people in the Messianic Movement for a number of years. Some have become so disconcerted about what they believe is contained in this epistle that it sets them on a road which leads them to the rejection of all of the Apostle Paul's writings. For

some of them, the final step was to move completely away from the entire New Testament, reject *Y'shua* as the Messiah, and enter into Rabbinic Judaism.

It is our view that such a drastic move results from a total misunderstanding of the writings of Paul, which the Apostle Peter said were "... **hard to understand...**" and which "... **untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction...**" (II Pet. 3:16)

In dealing with the problematic portions of the book of *Hebrews*, it is necessary keep in mind that God has a definite Plan which He is bringing to pass here on earth. A vital element in the fulfillment of the Plan was when *Y'shua HaMashiach* came to earth and lived as a sinless human being, so that He (being the Son of God) could offer the perfect sacrifice for sin. This single act paved the way for the completion of God's Plan, which will be the establishment, on earth, of the *Malchut Shamayim* (Kingdom of Heaven) for 1000 years, followed by the *Olam Haba* (the World to Come).

The intricacies of the book of *Hebrews* cannot be fully understood without understanding the difference between a Covenant Relationship (the actual agreement or handshake that seals a covenant), and the Terms and Conditions which spell out what is expected of the parties involved in the covenant.

In the case of the children of Israel, the Covenant Relationship was a Unilateral Covenant which God established by His own Word and which He therefore is allowed to change according to His Will. As will be seen in the following chapter, the only Terms and Conditions which God transformed or changed was that of the Priesthood. All other *Torah* Terms and Conditions remain intact. However, God also established a New Covenant Relationship, in which He promised to:

"... **put My [His] law [Torah] in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I [He] will be their God, and they shall be My [His] people.**" (Jer. 31:33)

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~ A Superior Priesthood ~

But now the work Yeshua has been given to do
Is far superior to theirs,
Just as the covenant he mediates is better.
For this covenant has been given as *Torah*
On the basis of better promises.
Hebrews 8:6 CJB



Now that the foundation has been laid, the task begins of examining the book of *Hebrews* in some detail. Once again, please understand that the purpose here is not to expound on every verse in this epistle, but only those portions which seem to either call into question or support the *Written Torah*.

~ The Theme of Hebrews ~

A consistent theme runs throughout the book of *Hebrews* which can best be summed up in the word "Superior," not in the word "Replace." This is the way in which Paul chose to begin his message to the Messianic Jewish Believers in *Y'shua*; those who had been forced to abandon their much loved Temple worship (see previous chapter). For example:

- ◆ *Y'shua* the Messiah is Superior to the Prophets of old because He is the heir of all things (Heb. 1:1-3).
- ◆ *Y'shua* the Messiah is Superior to Angels because He is God's own Son, and therefore God's Agent, and not merely a messenger (Heb. 1:4 - 2:18).
- ◆ *Y'shua* the Messiah is Superior to *Moshe*, because He is able to deliver all of the children of Israel, throughout their generations, into God's Millennial Rest, whereas *Moshe* (because of the hardness of their hearts) was unable to deliver the "Exodus generation" into God's "Rest" as symbolized by entrance into the Promised Land (Heb. 3:1 - 4:13).

This theme, of *Y'shua's* Superiority, continues throughout the book of *Hebrews*. It was the primary tool which Paul used to comfort those who had lost so much of their spiritual life when they were forced to flee the Holy City of Jerusalem, where God had placed His name nearly 1000 years prior:

"Yet regard the prayer of Your servant [*Solomon*] and his supplication, O LORD [*YHVH*] my God [*Elohim*], and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: ²⁹ that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, "My name shall be there," that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place." (I Kings 8:28-29)

The Temple in Jerusalem was where God placed His name. This was the same Temple which *Y'shua* called "My Father's house:"

"When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!'" ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up' [Psalm 69:10]." (John 2:15-17)

Paul quoted a number of passages from the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) which pointed to *Y'shua's* Superiority, beginning with:

**"For to which of the angels did He ever say:
'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You?'" [Psalm 2:7]**

And again:

**"I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son?" [II Sam. 7:14]** (Heb. 1:5)

There are over 40 direct quotes from the *Tanakh* in the book of *Hebrews*, plus many other places which allude to passages in the "Old Testament." Paul used the Hebrew Scriptures extensively in this epistle, because he knew his audience was made up of pious Jews, some of whom may have studied the Hebrew Scriptures for a major part of their life and would know the implications therein. They were not Gentiles who were just becoming acquainted with the *Tanakh*.

~ The Sabbath ~

The first *Torah* question arises in chapter 4:1-13, where Paul issued a challenge to the Messianic Jewish Believers to accept God's promise to bring them into His Rest. By this Paul meant the ultimate goal of all Believers in *Y'shua*, which is to enter, by Faith, the "rest" of the Millennial rule of *Y'shua* in the Kingdom of God. This being the primary focus of this passage, mainstream Christianity has used it to "spiritualize away" the seventh day Sabbath, even though the Sabbath was created and sanctified at creation and continues to be a "shadow" pointing to the 1000 year "rest" to come:

"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Gen. 2:2-3)

In *Hebrews*, chapter four, Paul reminded them that the weekly Sabbath 'rest' is a picture of the Millennium 'rest' which is yet future. However, in a clear testimony to the continual 'sanctification' of the Sabbath day itself, Paul wrote the following:

"There remains therefore a rest [sabbatismos] for the people of God." (Heb. 4:9 NKJV)

The problem here is that most of the English translators have concealed the fact that in addition to this primary meaning, verse 4 also states that the Sabbath day continues to be in effect for the "people of God." The Sabbath command is

a part of the Ten Commandments and therefore to be kept by God's people "throughout their generations." In addition, it serves as a "type" or "shadow," picturing the great millennial rest to come. If Paul had intended to downplay the Sabbath, he would have used the Greek word *katapauo* (Strong's #2664) in this verse, which is the word translated as "rest" in other parts of this passage:

"For he that is entered into his rest [katapauo], he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." (Heb. 4:10)

Here are how two other translations render this passage:

"There must still be, therefore, a seventh-day rest reserved for God's people, ¹⁰ since to enter the place of rest is to rest after your work, as God did after his." (Heb. 4:9-10 New Jerusalem Bible)

"So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping for God's people. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered God's rest has also rested from his own works, as God did from his." (Heb. 4:9-10 Complete Jewish Bible)

The Oxford University Press edition of the *King James Bible* has an interlinear which clarifies some of the passages with notes. Their note concerning Heb. 4:9 is that the word "rest" could be translated as "keeping of a sabbath:"

"There remaineth therefore a rest [sabbatismos = keeping of a sabbath] to the people of God." (Heb. 4:9 KJV)

Thus we find that rather than the seventh-day Sabbath being abolished, it is confirmed. Here is David Stern's comment on Heb. 4:9-10 taken from his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*:

"Greek *sabbatismos*, used only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the related Greek word '*sabbatizein*' was coined to translate the Hebrew verb *shabat* when it means 'to observe *Shabbat*.' The usual translation, 'There remains a Sabbath rest,' minimizes the observance aspect and makes the role of God's people entirely passive.

"Christians often assume that the New Testament does not require God's people to observe *Shabbat* and go on to claim that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the Church's day of worship (see 1C 16:2N). But this passage, and in particular v. 9, shows that *Shabbat*-observance is expected of believers. From Co 2:16-17, which says that *Shabbat* was a shadow of the things that were to come, but the substance comes from the Messiah, we learn that the essence of *Shabbat*-observance for believers is not following the detailed rules which *halakhah* sets forth concerning what may or may not be done on the seventh day of the week. Rather, as v. 10 explains, the *Shabbat*-keeping expected of God's people consists in resting from one's **own works, as God did from his**; it consists in trusting and being faithful to God (vv. 2-3). Although the specific 'works' from which the readers of this letter were to rest were animal sacrifices (see 6:4-6N), by implication all self-struggle, in which one relies on one's own efforts instead of trusting God, is to be avoided;

and in this the author is making the same point as Sha'ul does at Ro 3:19 - 4:25." (p. 673, emphasis Stern's, underlining added.)

The seventh-day Sabbath is still in effect and it reminds God's people every week of the great 'Rest' to come when Messiah *Y'shua* returns to rule the earth:

"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience." (Heb. 4:11)

~ The Priesthood ~

In the last three verses of chapter four Paul moved into the chief subject of this epistle; the Priesthood of *Y'shua HaMashiach* and how it compared to the Levitical Priesthood. Once again, he demonstrated the Superiority of *Y'shua*, this time as our High Priest:

"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)

~ Exhortation of Comfort ~

The purpose of this particular exhortation is to comfort the Messianic Jews, who were forced to leave Jerusalem. It was meant to help them overcome the bitterness they must have felt for having lost what was so precious to them; no longer being able to worship at the Temple according to the commandments set forth in the *Written Torah*.

Today it is hard for us to understand what a traumatic event that must have been for those Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* -- to be denied participation in Temple Service. Perhaps some can identify with this situation by looking back to one's own journey out of mainstream Christianity, Sunday worship, and the holidays of the Christian Church. Many people have related to us how difficult it was for them to leave that spiritual environment, even though such a move entailed leaving doctrinal error to enter into *Torah* truth.

How much more difficult must it have been for those 1st century Jewish *Nazarenes* to be forced to leave formal *Temple* worship, which was actually based on *Written Torah*. Temple service would have given new meaning to their Faith once they, as Jews, came to spiritual completion in *Y'shua*. After receiving *Y'shua*, those 1st century Jewish Messianic Believers could more fully understand how all of the services in the Temple pointed directly to Him. How wonderful it must have been, to be able to enter the Temple knowing that all of its services had been established as a Tutor or Schoolmaster pointing them to the Messiah -- a Messiah who they now knew personally:

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ [*Messiah*], that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after

faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

(Gal. 3:24-25)

It is interesting to note that the Rabbis hold a similar view -- that if a person understands the Hebrew Scriptures properly, it would be evident they all point in some way or another to the Messiah.

However, Paul was telling the Messianic Jewish Believers in *Y'shua* they would have to look beyond the Physical Temple and its beautiful services, to a Superior Tabernacle and a Superior Priesthood which exists in heaven, but which they could not see. This Heavenly Tabernacle and Priesthood can only be seen through the spiritual eyes of Faith, and not with physical eyes. The goal for which Messiah *Y'shua* came to earth had been completed, therefore, they were to look to heaven for their Temple service, especially since they were now denied access to the physical Temple in Jerusalem.

~ The Priesthoods Compared ~

Paul then briefly compared the Aaronic (Levitical) Priesthood of the descendants of Aaron (the first High Priest) to the *Melchizedek* Priesthood, of which *Y'shua* is still the High Priest to this very day. This passage is merely an introduction to the subject, which is expounded upon more fully in later chapters. Despite the Superiority of the *Melchizedek* Priesthood, Paul showed, in the opening verses of chapter 5, that the Aaronic Priesthood had also been established by God and was not to be denigrated:

"For every *cohen gadol* [*High Priest*] taken from among men is appointed to act on people's behalf with regard to things concerning God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and with those who go astray, since he too is subject to weakness. ³ Also, because of this weakness, he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor upon himself, rather, he is called by God, just as *Aharon* was." (Heb. 5:1-4 CJB)

Since all of the High Priests, who served in the Aaronic Priesthood, were flesh and blood men, they were able to identify with the sins of the people, because they too had weaknesses and were susceptible to sin. Paul went on and showed how Messiah *Y'shua* was also able to identify with the sinful nature of man, because He had lived among men as a flesh and blood human being:

"During *Yeshua's* life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions, crying aloud and shedding tears, to the One who had the power to deliver him from death; and he was heard because of his godliness. ⁸ Even though he was the Son, he learned obedience through his sufferings."

(Heb. 5:7-8 CJB)

Messiah *Y'shua* understands our plight because He too had to suffer as a man. Yet, He was able to remain sinless through it all -- something none of us are able to do.

Y'shua did not seek to be High Priest, rather it was awarded to Him by God the Father:

"So neither did the Messiah glorify himself to become *cohen gadol*; rather, it was the One who said to him,

'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'
[Psalm 2:7]

⁶ Also, as he says in another place,

'You are a *cohen* [Priest] forever, to be compared with Malki-Tzedek.' [Psalm 110:4] (Heb. 5:5-6 CJB)

Because He is God's own Son and had "learned obedience through his sufferings," *Y'shua* is able to offer eternal salvation to those who believe in Him and obey Him:

"And after he had been brought to the goal, he became the source of eternal deliverance to all who obey him, ¹⁰since he had been proclaimed by God as a *cohen gadol* to be compared with Malki-Tzedek." (Heb. 5:9-10 CJB)

~ Moving On ~

In the remainder of chapter 5 and most of chapter 6, Paul exhorted the Messianic Jewish Believers to move away from the "elementary *principles* of Christ" and to "go on to perfection." In other words, they needed to move beyond the basic doctrines of the *Nazarene* Faith and begin learning the deeper spiritual meanings found in Scripture:

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ [Messiah], let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits."
(Heb. 6:1-3)

Some have gotten hung up by the term "elementary principles" in verse 1, claiming it makes light of the *Written Torah*. However, once again this is a false accusation against Paul, since the statement clearly indicates he is talking about the "elementary" or "first" principles concerning Messiah, and not of the entire *Written Torah*.

Anyone who has ever been engaged in teaching knows that a person cannot truly comprehend the advanced principles of a subject without first mastering its "elementary" principles. What Paul was saying here is that it was time for those Messianic Jewish Believers to move forward in their understanding from a physical plane to a deeper level. Such a statement in no way negates the "elementary" principles concerning Messiah, which they have already learned, for those are the foundation upon which the more advanced principles are built. However, He encourages them not to get stuck at this "elementary" level.

This passage is a setup designed to move them into a deeper understanding that acceptance of *Y'shua* is a Faith matter, not just one of ritual observance. While physical rituals can be very helpful in one's spiritual walk and development, what really matters, when everything is said and done, is the degree of Faith or Trust which a Believer has concerning God's ability to accomplish the awarding of Eternal Life through the person and work of Messiah *Y'shua*. This matter of Faith or Trust will become much more evident later in the epistle, and is

the reason for its extensive elaboration in the Faith Chapter (Heb. 11).

The Jewish Messianic Believers had been forced to leave their beloved Temple worship and now they had to Trust that the physical pictures they witnessed in the Temple rituals were being conducted on their behalf in heaven on a spiritual level. Not only were those rituals now being conducted in heaven -- they are far Superior to what took place in the Earthly Temple, because the Heavenly Tabernacle is not weakened by being part of the physical plane. The heavenly rituals are perfect, because they are being conducted at the highest Spiritual level, in a Tabernacle that can not be destroyed.

~ The *Melchizedek* Priesthood ~

The last two verses of chapter 6 serve as a pivot from the previous exhortation into yet another discussion and comparison of the two Priesthoods:

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, ²⁰ where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus [Y'shua], having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (Heb. 6:19-20)

Using *Y'shua's* entrance into God's Presence as another launching pad, Paul goes into a more detailed description of the *Melchizedek* Priesthood; how it is Superior to the Aaronic Priesthood, and how *Y'shua* fulfills the role of the *Melchizedek* High Priest. This *Melchizedek* Priesthood was first introduced in the book of *Genesis*, when *Avraham* returned from rescuing *Lot* after defeating the four kings. Paul began his discourse on this subject at that point:

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace, ...'" (Heb. 7:1-2)

~ Who Was *Melchizedek*? ~

Jewish tradition teaches that this ancient *Melchizedek* was *Shem*, the son of Noah, who was born before the Flood and was still alive during the time of *Avraham*. *Melchizedek* is only referenced twice in the *Tanakh*. As mentioned, He was introduced when *Avraham* returned from his battle with the kings of the east, at which time he gave *Melchizedek* a tithe of all the booty:

"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High [El Elyon]. ¹⁹And he blessed him and said:

'Blessed be Abram of God Most High

Possessor of heaven and earth;

²⁰ And blessed be God Most High,

Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.'

And he gave him a tithe of all." (Gen. 14:18-20)

Paul gave us another piece of information about *Melchizedek* not found in the Torah -- that he had no recorded genealogy, presumably having always existed:

³ ... **without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually."**

(Heb. 7:3)

This would preclude *Melchizedek* from being *Shem*, since his genealogy is clearly recorded for us in the *Torah*:

"And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth."

(Gen. 6:10)

The other *Tanakh* reference to *Melchizedek* presents a more full picture of exactly who He is:

"A Psalm of David.

The LORD [YHVH] said to my Lord

[*Adonai* = *Messiah*],

'Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'

² **The LORD [YHVH] shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.**

Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

³ **Your people shall be volunteers**

In the day of Your power;

In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,

You have the dew of Your youth.

⁴ **The LORD [YHVH] has sworn**

And will not relent,

'You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.'"

(Psalm 110:1-4)

Who was David's Lord? It was his very own descendant -- Messiah *Y'shua*, or as Orthodox Judaism would view it, Messiah ben David, the King Messiah who is yet to come. What Paul was saying was that the Messiah had already come as Messiah ben Joseph (the Suffering Servant Messiah) in the person of *Y'shua*. He (*Y'shua*) is David's Lord and therefore the "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Was, then, the *Melchizedek* of *Avraham's* day the one who became *Y'shua*, or was he *Shem*, as Rabbinic Judaism teaches? There is a very interesting and important fact that needs to be understood concerning the *Melchizedek* of Psalm 110, who clearly is equivalent to the King Messiah to come, based on the deeds He is prophesied to accomplish:

"The Lord [*Adonai* = *Messiah*] is at Your right hand;

He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.

⁶ **He shall judge among the nations,**

He shall fill the places with dead bodies,

He shall execute the heads of many countries.

⁷ **He shall drink of the brook by the wayside;**

Therefore He shall lift up the head." (Psalm 110:5-7)

Notice that the *Masoretic* text (considered by Rabbinic Judaism to be the correct Hebrew text of the Old Testament) uses the Hebrew word *Adonai* אֲדֹנָי (Ah-doh-nahee' - #136) in both verse 1 and verse 5 to describe the Messiah. The

definition of *Adonai* (or *Adon*) is: "firm, strong, lord, master." (Strong's #113.) It is used to indicate someone who is in a position of power. This is the correct rendering for the word found in verse 1 (translated as lower case Lord), where it speaks of David's "Lord," (who was to be a descendent of David, in the human realm) as being distinct from the LORD (*YHVH*), which is the family name of the Creator God.

However, in verse 5, it is known that the most ancient Masoretic texts contained the word *YHVH* (LORD) instead of *Adonai* (Lord). This is one of 134 places where the Scribes changed *YHVH* to *Adonai*, and noted that fact in the margin.* Therefore, verse 5, in those ancient original Masoretic texts, reads as follows:

"The LORD [YHVH] is at Your right hand;

He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath."

(Psalm 110:5)

What this tells us is that David's Lord (*Adonai* or the *Messiah*), the One who was to come from his loins and become the Messiah, is a member of the *YHVH* family. He is the One whom we know today as *Y'shua ben Joseph* (*Y'shua* the son of Joseph) or, more properly, as *Y'shua ben YHVH* (*Y'shua* the Son of God). This is, no doubt, why Paul quoted portions of Psalm 110 nine times in the book of *Hebrews*. It is also why he quoted twice from Psalm 2 where David prophesied on behalf of Messiah:

"Yet I have set My King

On My holy hill of Zion.'

⁷ **'I will declare the decree:'**

The LORD [YHVH] has said to Me,

'You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

⁸ **Ask of Me, and I will give You**

The nations for Your inheritance,

And the ends of the earth for Your possession.

⁹ **You shall break them with a rod of iron;**

You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

(Psalm 2:6-9)

We believe that *Melchizedek*, the King of Salem, who met *Avraham* after the war, was none other than the member of the God Family (manifest in human form) who became *Y'shua HaMashiach*. This is the point Paul was making and he wanted his audience to understand it -- for this is why the *Melchizedek* Priesthood is far Superior to the Aaronic Priesthood which was composed only of sinful men, all of whom are dead and buried.

Having established the Superiority of both *Y'shua's* *Melchizedek* Priesthood and also that He is better than the Angels, Paul went on, in chapter 7, to show how (symbolically) *Levi* paid tithes to *Melchizedek*, through his great-grandfather *Avraham*, even though, according to *Torah*, the descendants of *Levi* were to be given the tithes of the children of Israel:

"Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him."

(Heb. 7:9-10)

In all of this the *Torah* is supported.

* For more information on this important topic see the booklet: *The Emendations of the Sopherim* (SPES).

~ A Superior Priesthood ~

Moving on, Paul continued to show how the *Melchizedek* Priesthood of *Y'shua* is Superior to the Aaronic Priesthood of the Levites. Here we enter one of the controversial portions of the book of *Hebrews*. Paul began by pointing out that God's goal (which is perfection for the people) could not be achieved under the Aaronic Priesthood:

"Therefore, if it had been possible to reach the goal through the system of *cohanim* [priests] derived from Levi (since in connection with it, the people were given the *Torah*), what need would there have been for another, different kind of *cohen* [priest], the one spoken of as to be compared with Malki-Tzedek and not to be compared with Aharon?" (Heb. 7:11 CJB)

Yes, the *Written Torah* was given through the Levites, for *Moshe* was also a Levite and it was he who ordained his brother Aaron to be the first High Priest of the Aaronic Priesthood. However, that Priesthood was not able to bring the people to the goal. And what exactly was the goal? Perfection and eternal life through the full payment of everyone's sins. This goal could not be achieved through the Levitical Priesthood. It is achievable only through the blood of Messiah *Y'shua*:

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] His Son cleanses us from all sin." (I John 1:7)

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." (I John 5:13)

And so a different Priesthood (actually a more ancient one) was reestablished for the children of Israel, so that the goal of perfection and eternal life could be reached. To accomplish this goal required a transformation (many translations use the word 'change') of the Priesthood from Aaronic to *Melchizedek*:

"For if the system of *cohanim* [Priests] is transformed, there must of necessity occur a transformation [*nomou metathesis*] of *Torah*." (Heb. 7:12 CJB)

Can God make a change or transformation to the Terms and Conditions of the Mosaic Covenant? Absolutely, because it is a Unilateral Covenant Relationship which does not allow the children of Israel a voice or a vote when a change is made (see previous chapter).

Let us turn once again to David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* for some additional clarification concerning this matter:

"This [v. 12] is the only place where the New Testament speaks of a **transformation of *Torah*** (Greek *nomou metathesis*, which the Revised Standard Version renders, 'a change in the law'). In Ac 6:14N I observed that the *Tanakh* itself records at least one change in the *Torah*, the addition of the festival of *Purim*; and also that a prominent Jewish tradition speaks of a change in *Torah*

when the Messiah comes. The logical **necessity** for such a transformation is demonstrated by vv. 11-14; and the Scriptural basis for the transformation is found in Psalm 110:4, quoted at 5:6, 6:20 and v. 17 below.

"The context makes it overwhelmingly clear that no change or transformation in *Torah* is envisioned other than in connection with the priesthood and the sacrificial system. The term '*metathesis*' implies retention of the basic structure of *Torah*, with some of its elements rearranged ('transformed'); it does not imply abrogation of either the *Torah* as a whole or of *mitzvot* not connected with the priesthood and the sacrificial system. As *Yeshua* himself said, 'Don't think that I have come to abolish the *Torah*. ... I have come not to abolish but to complete.' (Mr. 5:15&N)." (p. 681 emphasis Stern's, underlining added)

When studying this passage, the purpose of the *Written Torah* must be kept in mind:

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

The purpose of the *Written Torah* is to show God's people where they have "missed the mark" by committing sin:

"What shall we say then? Is the law [*Torah*] sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law [*Torah*]." (Rom. 7:7)

And so, there has been a transformation of the Priesthood from the Aaronic back to *Melchizedek*. Now, instead of relying on a sinful human being as our High Priest, we have the sinless Son of God, *Y'shua HaMashiach*, in that position:

"It becomes even clearer if a 'different kind of *cohen*,' one like Malki-Tzedek, arises, ¹⁶ one who became a *cohen* not by virtue of a rule in the *Torah* concerning physical descent, but by virtue of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is stated,

'You are a *cohen* FOREVER, to be compared with Malki-Tzedek.' [Psalm 110:4]

¹⁸ Thus, on the one hand, the earlier rule is set aside because of its weakness and inefficacy ¹⁹ (for the *Torah* did not bring anything to the goal); and, on the other hand, a hope of something better is introduced, through which we are drawing near to God." (Heb. 7:15-19 CJB)

The Terms and Conditions of the Mosaic Covenant, by themselves, were not able to bring anyone to the state of sinlessness required to obtain eternal life. Therefore, God, in His infinite wisdom, unilaterally transformed (changed) the *Torah* Terms and Conditions so that a *Chatah* Offering sufficient for our needs was provided. That *Chatah* Offering was the body and blood of *Y'shua*.

~ The Added Law ~

There is an enigmatic statement found in the book of *Galatians* which needs to be addressed at this point to help clarify what Paul was teaching in the book of *Hebrews*:

"What purpose then *does* the law [*Torah*] serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; ..." (Gal. 3:19)

The question is: What Law was added? Some Christian commentators say it was the entire Terms and Conditions of the Mosaic Covenant. However, we have already seen (throughout the many articles of this series) this cannot be the case for a variety of reasons -- one of the most obvious being *Y'shua's* own statement:

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

Likewise, it cannot be animal sacrifices in general that were added, because the *Torah* records animals being offered prior to Mount Sinai. For example:

"Then Noah built an altar to the LORD [YHVH], and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." (Gen. 8:20)

The practice of substitutionary animal sacrifice, as a picture of Messiah *Y'shua's* sacrifice, has always existed. In fact, the very first offering of animals occurred in *Gan Eden* גֶּן עֵדֶן (Gahn Eh-dehn' = Garden of Eden - #1588 & #5731) when God Himself had animals sacrificed to make clothing for Adam and Chava:

"Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God [YHVH Elohim] made tunics of skin, and clothed them." (Gen. 3:21)

To understand which "law" was added, we need to go back to the time of the Sin of the Golden Calf. *Moshe* was on the mountain with God receiving the Ten Commandments (the essential outline of how man was to conduct his life in relationship to God and to man), which were written on stone tablets by the finger of God. Meanwhile, the children of Israel became restless (lacking faith that *Moshe* would return). They pressured Aaron to build for them a golden calf to which they offered sacrifices, claiming it was a representation of God:

"And he [Aaron] received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. "

"Then they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"

"⁵ So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD [YHVH].'"

"⁶ Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." (Ex. 32:4-6)

When *Moshe* returned, he called for action against the perpetrators, but only the sons of Levi responded:

"And he said to them, 'Thus says the LORD God [YHVH Elohim] of Israel: "Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."'"

"²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. ²⁹ Then Moses said, 'Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD [YHVH], that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.'" (Ex. 32:27-29)

When God saw that only the tribe of Levi stood with *Moshe* against those who had participated in this blasphemy, He decided to take all of the sons of Levi to form a Priesthood. Up to this time, it had been God's intent to use the firstborn sons of all the children of Israel to serve as Priests:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: ¹²'Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, ¹³ because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD [YHVH].'" (Num. 3:11-13)

The firstborn still belonged to God, but He determined not to use them in the office of priesthood after this event. Therefore, as a result of the Sin of the Golden Calf, the entire Levitical Priesthood system was added to the *Torah*. In other words, the Levitical Priesthood, with its sacrifices and services, was **"added because of transgressions."**

What Paul, in the book of *Hebrews*, was now telling the Messianic Jewish Believers, who had been forced to leave Jerusalem, was that the Priesthood had been restored to *Melchizedek*; the Firstborn of God who was *Y'shua*.

~ More Evidence ~

Paul continued to give additional evidence of the Superiority of the *Melchizedek* Priesthood over the Aaronic Priesthood. First of all, the *Melchizedek* Priesthood of *Y'shua* was established by an oath from God:

"What is more, God swore an oath. For no oath was sworn in connection with those who become *cohanim* now; ²¹ but Yeshua became a *cohen* by the oath which God swore when he said to him,

'ADONAI has sworn and will not change his mind,

"You are a *cohen* forever.'" [Psalm 110:4]

²² Also this shows how much better is the covenant of which Yeshua has become guarantor." (Heb. 7:20-22 CJB)

Y'shua is the only High Priest who overcame sin and qualified to be the *Melchizedek* High Priest forever -- not just for the span of an adult human lifetime:

"Moreover, the present *cohanim* are many in number, because they are prevented by death from continuing in office. ²⁴ But because he lives forever, his position as *cohen* does not pass on to someone else; ²⁵ and consequently, he is totally able to deliver those who approach God through him; since he is alive forever and thus forever able to intercede on their behalf." (Heb. 7:23-25 CJB)

Not only is *Y'shua* a High Priest forever, since He has always been sinless, He therefore does not have to offer a daily animal Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*) to cover His own sins before He can make intercession for the people. *Y'shua's* sacrifice was a one time event which is good for eternity. Therefore, He is able to make intercession for God's people at any time, day or night:

"This is the kind of *cohen gadol* [High Priest] that meets our need -- holy, without evil, without stain, set apart from sinners and raised higher than the heavens; ²⁷ one who does not have the daily necessity, like the other *cohanim g'dolim* [High Priests], of offering up sacrifices first for their own sins and only then for those of the people; because he offered one sacrifice, once and for all, by offering up himself. ²⁸ For the *Torah* appoints as *cohanim g'dolim* men who have weakness; but the text which speaks about the swearing of the oath, a text written later than the *Torah*, appoints a Son who has been brought to the goal forever."
(Heb. 7:26-28 CJB)

As we move forward into succeeding chapters, it is important to keep in mind that the main subject being discussed continues to be the change in Priesthood from Aaronic to *Melchizedekian*.

~ The Tabernacles Compared ~

Paul began the next section by summing up the information already covered:

"Here is the whole point of what we have been saying: we do have just such a *cohen gadol* [High Priest] as has been described. And he does sit at the right hand of *HaG'dulah* [the Majesty] in heaven. ² There he serves in the Holy Place, that is, in the true Tent of Meeting, the one erected not by human beings but by ADONAI."
(Heb. 8:1-2 CJB)

From here Paul transitions into a brief comparison of the Earthly Temple versus the Heavenly Tabernacle and how *Y'shua*, according to *Torah*, would not qualify to be a Priest in the Earthly Temple because He is not a direct descendant of Aaron through His male line:

"For every *cohen gadol* is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so this *cohen gadol* too has to have something he can offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he wouldn't be a *cohen* at all, since there already are *cohanim* offering the gifts required by the *Torah*."
(Heb. 8:3-4 CJB)

Paul then drove home the point that the Earthly Temple in Jerusalem was only a physical copy of what has always existed in heaven:

"But what they are serving is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly original; for when Moshe was about to erect the Tent, God warned him, 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern you were shown on the mountain..'"
(Heb. 8:5 CJB)

Moshe, while he was on Mount Sinai communing with God, was given a clear vision of the Heavenly Temple and its *avodah* עֲבֹדָה (ah-voh-dah' = services - #5656). He then

passed on the details of that structure, and its implements, to the artisans who had the responsibility of constructing the *Mishkan* מִשְׁכָּן (Meesh'-kahn = Tabernacle in the Wilderness - #4908):

"And let them make Me a sanctuary [*mikdash*], that I may dwell among them. ⁹ According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle [*mishkan*] and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."
(Ex. 25:8-9 NKJV)

This also was the case with King David, who was given a set of blueprints (as it were) which he handed on to his son Solomon, so that the First Temple could be built according to God's specifications:

"Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; ¹² and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD [*YHVH*], of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God [*Elohim*], and of the treasuries for the dedicated things; ¹³ also for the division of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD [*YHVH*], and for all the articles of service in the house of the LORD [*YHVH*]. ... ¹⁹ 'All this,' said David, 'the LORD [*YHVH*] made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.'"
(I Chron. 28:11-13, 19)

~ A New Covenant Relationship ~

With all of this as background, Paul then went on to state categorically that the work of *Y'shua* as High Priest in heaven is far Superior to the work of the Levitical Priests on earth. This is not to say the work of the Levitical Priesthood was not important -- just that *Y'shua's* Priesthood was far more so. Using this premise as his basis, Paul then transitions into a discussion of the relative merits of the "New" Covenant versus the "Old" or "First" Covenant:

"But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as *Torah* on the basis of better promises. ⁷ Indeed, if the first covenant had not given ground for faultfinding, there would have been no need for a second one."
(Heb. 8:6-7 CJB)

What was the fault that God found with the First Covenant? It was not with the covenant itself [which He established], it was with the people:

"For God does find fault with the people when he says, 'See! The days are coming,' says ADONAI, 'when I will establish over the house of Isra'el and over the house of Y'hudah a new covenant'" [Jeremiah 31:30] (Heb. 8:8 CJB)

There was a problem with the "Old" Covenant which was centered in the Covenant Relationship itself. The problem was not that the basic outline of the Terms and Conditions of the original Mosaic Covenant (the Ten Commandments) were

written on physical stone, but that the Covenant Relationship was written on hearts of stone. Ezekiel prophesied of a future time when God would write His Covenant Relationship upon hearts of flesh and give His people a new Spirit, so they could truly be in close Covenant Relationship with Him, both willing and able to observe properly its Terms and Conditions:

"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD [Adonai]: 'Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.'"

¹⁷ **"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord [Adonai] GOD [YHWH]: 'I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' ¹⁸ And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. ¹⁹ Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God [Elohim].'"** (Ezek. 11:16-20 NKJV)

In other words, those who have accepted the New Covenant, offered to them because of their acceptance of the one-time sacrifice of *Y'shua*, have entered into a more intimate Covenant Relationship because the Terms and Conditions have been internalized (written on the Believer's mind and heart). One who is truly living in this New Covenant Relationship will not need to keep "checking the rules," for, by the Spirit of God (the *Ruach HaKodesh*) which now indwells them, that individual will know, and desire, to keep the rules, thereby becoming a living example of God's *Torah*. This does not mean that a person in New Covenant Relationship with God the Father, through *Y'shua* the Son, can make up their own rules. It means that they will learn God's rules (the Written Torah), will internalize them, and will act according to the Terms and Conditions of those rules through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This passage, just quoted from Ezekiel, confirms the core point of the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, and repeated by Paul, that God will write His *Torah* on the hearts of those who believe and accept *Y'shua* as their Savior and High Priest:

"For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says ADONAI:

**"I will put my *Torah* in their minds
and write it on their hearts;
I will be their God,
and they will be my people."** [Jeremiah 31:32]
(Heb. 8:10 CJB)

The last verse of chapter 8 is sometimes controversial because of a word which most English translators have added. That word is "covenant:"

"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Heb. 8:13 NKJV)

Most all translations do what is done here in the New King James Version, they add the word "covenant" after the word "new" because Paul has just quoted the passage from Jeremiah which deals with the "New Covenant." However, *Young's Literal Translation* correctly reads as follows:

"...in the saying 'new,' He hath made the first old, and what doth become obsolete and is old is nigh disappearing."
(Heb. 8:13 YLT)

While it may seem logical, for clarification, to insert the word "covenant" in this passage, the question must still be asked which exact part of the Terms and Conditions of the First Covenant had become "obsolete" and is "disappearing?" Remember, the main subject of the book of *Hebrews* is a "New" Priesthood. Therefore, it is the "Old" Priesthood, with its Sin Offering (*Chatah*) that is "ready to vanish away" or is "nigh disappearing," not the entire Terms and Conditions of the entire Old Covenant.

In our opinion, this is another indication that the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing at the time this epistle was written, but it seems clear that it was about to succumb to the Romans. Let us recall what *Y'shua* said to His disciples concerning the Temple:

"These things which you see -- the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." (Luke 21:6)

Once the Temple was gone, it was clear the "Old" Priesthood had passed away. This is not to say that a physical Temple will not be rebuilt in these end times, for we believe both the Temple and the Levitical Priesthood will once again function in Jerusalem in fulfillment of another prophecy which *Y'shua* made:

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Matt. 24:15-16)

The point is this: there cannot be an "abomination of desolation" standing in the Holy Place unless there is a Holy Place. For there to be a physical Holy Place there must be a Temple or Tabernacle reconstructed in Jerusalem -- the place where God placed His name.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ The Perfect Sacrifice ~

For by one offering
He has perfected forever
Those who are being sanctified.
Hebrews 10:14



Now comes the most controversial portion of the book of *Hebrews*, the section where Paul wrote about the *avodah* (service) which was conducted in the Earthly Temple:

"Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary."

(Heb. 9:1 NKJV)

The word "covenant" is not found in the Greek text of this passage. It has been added by the translators. What portion of the "first covenant" is passing away? It is that portion which deals with the Earthly Temple service, the Priesthood, and specifically the Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*). This entire passage, from Heb. 9:1 through Heb. 10:18, is dealing exclusively with the heavenly New Covenant system of Priesthood and Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*) as opposed to that of the Earthly Temple and Priesthood. Once again we turn to David Stern for comment:

"This section shows that the New Covenant's system of priesthood and sacrifice in which Yeshua offered up himself once and for all in order to clear the way to the Holy of Holies for everyone, is better than the Old Covenant's system and effectively replaces it. The subject matter is the same as in *Seder Kodashim*, one of the six major divisions of the Talmud." (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 692)

~ Temple Furniture ~

One of the very first objections raised against the book of *Hebrews*, by those who reject it, is that Paul does not know what he is talking about since he has one of the pieces of Temple furniture in the wrong place. Perhaps this is because people are reading the *New International Version* (NIV):

"A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ which had the golden altar [*thumiasterion*] of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant."

(Heb. 9:2-4 NIV)

This translation (as well as the Revised Standard Version and several others) translate the Greek word *thumiasterion* (Strong's #2369) as "altar." If this is correct, then Paul has misplaced the *Incense Altar* by placing it in the Holy of Holies along with the *Ark of the Covenant*, instead of in the outer room (the Holy Place) along with the *Menorah* and the *Table of Showbread* where it belongs.

However, the first and best definition of the word *thumiasterion* is censer: "*a utensil for fumigating or burning incense.*" Several translations, including the KJV and the NKJV more correctly translate this verse as follows:

"... and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴ which had the golden censer [*thumiasterion*] and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, ..." (Heb. 9:3-4 NKJV)

Why is this differentiation between "altar" and "censer" important? Because on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) the High Priest was required to take the golden "censer" full of hot coals into the Holy of Holies. He then added incense to those hot coals to create a smoke screen, so that his view of the *Ark of the Covenant* and the *Mercy Seat* (above the Ark) would be obscured. In this manner, the Golden "Censer" was an integral part of the service conducted once a year in the Holy of Holies:

"Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD [*YHVH*], with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. ¹³ And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD [*YHVH*], that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die."

(Lev. 16:12-13)

So, instead of Paul being unknowledgeable about the furniture and utensils of the Temple, he actually displayed an intimate understanding about their use. Also, remember, Paul was writing to a knowledgeable audience, so it was not necessary for him to explain everything in minute detail, the way he would have to do if he were writing to Gentile Believers (or modern Christians) who were not well versed in the details of the Temple ceremonies.

The claim has been made that this same Greek word, *thumiasterion* is translated in Rev. 8:3 as "altar," and that another Greek word, *libanotos* (Strong's #3031), is translated as "censer." While this latter statement is true, the former is not. The word translated as altar in Rev. 8:3 is actually *thusiasterion* (Strong's #2379). It is a related word, but it does not contain the Greek letter for "m." *Thusiasterion* is always translated as "altar," while *thumiasterion* is used only once (in Heb. 9:4) and correctly translated as "censer." If Paul had intended to state that the altar itself was in the Holy of Holies, he would have used the word *thusiasterion* (#2379). In addition, by using *thumiasterion* (#2369), instead of *libanotos* (#3031), Paul is showing that the golden censer he is referring to was the one directly associated with the Incense Altar.

~ The Ark ~

The controversy does not stop there. The next objection has to do with the placement of the items which are associated with the *Ark of the Covenant*:

"... and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴ which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the

covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat." (Heb. 9:3-5)

Here the objection has to do with the preposition "in." Critics point out that most of these items were not "inside" the *Ark*, but were kept "outside:"

"Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they had come out of Egypt." (II Chron. 5:10)

So the question is, did Paul really say that the "golden pot," "Aaron's rod," and the "tablets" were inside the *Ark*, or did he saying they were inside the Holy of Holies and therefore "with" the *Ark*? The troublesome word here is the Greek word *en* (Strong's #1722), which is usually translated by the English word "in." However, 134 times it is translated as "with," and 117 times it is translated "among" (in the KJV text).

David Stern makes the following comment which is pertinent to both the question about the censer and this question about the location of these items:

"Earlier, in v. 2, the Greek text says that the table with showbread and the *menorah* were "in" the Holy Place. And in the latter part of the present verse {v. 4}, the Greek says that the manna, rod and tablets were "in" the ark. But the Greek expression for the relationship between the Holiest Place and the incense altar is not "in which" but "having," i.e., "having associated with itself." Like the ark the incense altar was *associated with* the Holiest Place. But the author did *not* make the mistake of *locating* the incense altar *in* the Holiest Place, which would have been an error; on the contrary, choosing his words carefully, he associated the incense altar with the Holiest Place *even though* it was outside. (Ibid., p. 692-3, underlining added.)

If this is true for the Incense Altar, then it is also true for those items said to be "associated with" the *Ark of the Covenant*.

The bottom line is that Paul was covering this material rapidly, because he knew his audience already understood all of these things. He was just bringing these factors to mind so that he could make his next major point. Therefore, Paul wrote:

"Of these things we cannot now speak in detail." (Heb. 9:5)

~ The Point of All This ~

Paul then moved on to the point of all this business about the Earthly Temple. It was to compare *Y'shua's* Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*) and Priesthood, in the Heavenly Tabernacle, to that which was performed in the Earthly Temple by the Aaronic Priesthood on *Yom Kippur*:

"Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. ⁷ But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; ⁸ the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the

first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- ¹⁰ concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation." (Heb. 9:6-10)

The Holy of Holies in the Earthly Temple was closed to all men except the High Priest on *Yom Kippur*. This demonstrated that access to God the Father was not yet available to the people, but only to the High Priest once a year, and then only if he came with blood to cover both his sins and the sins of the people. However, **"the time of reformation"** (Heb. 9:10) had come, and God had now unveiled a Superior sacrifice which allowed access for all to Himself through *Y'shua* the Son:

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], ..." (I Tim. 2:5)

Because the time of "reformation" had come, things were being "put right:"

"Because they are only rules of the flesh, of meats and drinks and washings, which have their place till the time comes when things will be put right." (Heb. 9:10 BBE)

David Stern comments:

"Non-Messianic Judaism has never supposed that the mechanical performance of ritual acts causes God to forgive sin. Rather, since the destruction of the Temple, Judaism has taken a different tack, teaching that neither sacrifice nor priesthood is necessary for God to forgive sin. The author expresses the view that sacrifice and priesthood are indeed necessary, that the Mosaic system was **imposed until the time for God to reshape the whole structure**, literally, 'until a time of reformation,' and thus prefigured the system established by Yeshua the Messiah." (Ibid., p. 694, emphasis Stern's.)

~ Eternal Redemption ~

We now come to the crux of Paul's position in regard to the Heavenly Tabernacle versus the Earthly Temple:

"But Christ [*Messiah*] came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." (Heb. 9:11-12)

Eternal redemption! What a beautiful concept. No longer do Messianic Believers have to bring animals to a physical Temple, time after time, in order for their sins to be covered. Now we are able to go directly to the Father, through the Son, to ask forgiveness for our sins:

"In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God." (John 16:26-27)

It is the blood of the world's most important man (*Y'shua*) which brings this most precious of all gifts to those who Trust God and have Faith in *Y'shua*:

"For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ [*Messiah*], who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14)

Once again we see the Superiority of *Y'shua's* blood sacrifice as High Priest of the *Melchizedek* Priesthood. First of all, the Heavenly Tent or Tabernacle is far better than the Earthly one. Therefore, *Y'shua* has entered a Superior Holy of Holies -- for the one He entered is in the Heavenly Tabernacle, not the physical one on earth which was susceptible to destruction. In addition, *Y'shua* took His own blood as His means of entry into the Holy of Holies. He did not have to rely on the blood of animals. Neither did *Y'shua* have to rely on the Ashes of the Red Heifer for physical purification, before entering the Heavenly Holy of Holies. (According to Jewish Tradition, the High Priest had to be sprinkled with water containing the Ashes of the Red Heifer before conducting the *avodah* [services] in the Earthly Holy of Holies.)

~ Mediator ~

Therefore, *Y'shua* is the Mediator of a New Covenant:

"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Heb. 9:15)

Y'shua's atoning blood brings the Believer forgiveness for all of his past unforgiven sins committed under the Terms and Conditions of the First Covenant. Therefore, sin no longer has a hard and fast grip on the Messianic Believer, whether Jew or Gentile:

"... whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ..." (Rom. 3:25)

Because of all these factors, *Y'shua* qualified to be the Mediator of the New Covenant Relationship between God and man, a covenant that promises eternal life for those who believe it and agree to be a part of it.

~ Wills or Covenants? ~

Now comes another controversial passage. Was Paul writing about a Last Will and Testament or about Covenants?

"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant [*diatheke*], by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant [*diatheke*], that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. ¹⁶ For where there is a testament [*diatheke*], there must also of necessity be the death of the testator [*diatithemai*]. ¹⁷ For a testament [*diatheke*] is in

force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator [*diatithemai*] lives." (Heb. 9:15-17)

This is one of the places where we get our faulty modern terminology "New Testament" and "Old Testament." The way this passage was phrased, in most English Bibles, does not make sense. This is a classic case where confusion reigns because we are dealing with a translation (from Greek to English) of a translation (from Hebrew to Greek). The outcome of this dual translation is confusion.

The main subject, up to this point, has been the transformation of the Terms and Conditions which deal directly with the Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*) of the Levitical Priesthood of the First Covenant, to those of the Sin Sacrifice (*Chatah*) of a Superior Priesthood (*Melchizedek*). This transformation is also accompanied by the initiation of a New Covenant Relationship.

Notice that in verse 15 the Greek word *diatheke* (Strong's #1242) is translated as "covenant," but in verses 16 and 17 this same word is translated as "testament." The problem is that the translators did not know what to do about the idea of the requirement that the "testator" (*diatithemai* Strong's #1303) had to die. Therefore, they reasoned, Paul must be talking about a Last Will and Testament, even though such a document was never used in ancient Israel or Judah. In that system, when a man died his property was divided equally among the sons, with the firstborn receiving a double portion. Nevertheless, many translators switch over from "Covenant" to "Testament."

Our friend Frank Houtz, leader of a ministry called *Dry Bones Restoration Company*, points out that there are only two Greek words which can be used to translate the Hebrew word *brit* (covenant).^{*} One is *diatheke* and the other is *suntithemai*. Of these two words *diatheke* has the best correlation with *brit*. However, *diatheke* is not perfect, because it can also mean, "will or testament," while the Hebrew word *brit* never carries that connotation.

So then, what about that Greek word *diatithemai* which is translated as "testator." This word, in Greek, means to "dispose of one's own affairs," but it also can be used to mean "to make a covenant, enter into a covenant, with one."

Frank Houtz states:

"... the word *testator* ... could mean the *one covenanting*. Yet, the one covenanting does not have to die, which should be understood from the context. This places our problem back on the phrase, 'of necessity be the death of the.'" (Website article: *Confessions of a Reformed Biblical Heretic*)

Jay P. Green's *The Interlinear Bible* literally translates this particular portion of v. 16 in this manner:

"For a covenant death needful to be brought of him covenanting." (Heb. 9:16 YLT)

Houtz goes on to clarify:

"In interlinear format we recognize that the problem resides with the English translators making the sentence

^{*} We are indebted to Frank Houtz for this analysis. We invite you to read his studies on the Book of *Hebrews*, which can be found at his Website: www.drybonesrestorationcompany.com

structure work with the preconceived notion that the one spoken about dying is the covenantor. We see it [*The Interlinear Bible*] is speaking of the covenantor bringing the death, not being the one who personally died. ... if the subject is a covenant, that the one covenanting needed to bring a sacrifice victim to effectuate his covenant." (Ibid., underlining added.)

A covenant, in the Biblical sense, requires there to be, what Houtz calls, a "sacrifice victim." This would be the animal[s] offered to confirm the sealing of the Covenant Relationship. For example:

"Then He said to him [Avram], 'I am the LORD [YHVH], who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.' ⁸ And he said, 'Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?' ⁹ So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two." (Gen. 15:7-10)

In this case, the several animals sacrificed to seal the Unilateral Covenant which God made with *Avram*, constituted the "sacrifice victim[s]." *Young's Literal Translation* has the concept of this passage correct, although it is a bit difficult to understand because it is a literal translation of the Greek and therefore, does not flow smoothly as would a normal English translation:

"And because of this, of a new covenant he is mediator, that, death having come, for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, those called may receive the promise of the age-during inheritance, ¹⁶ for where a covenant is, the death of the covenant-victim to come in is necessary, ¹⁷ for a covenant over dead victims is stedfast, since it is no force at all when the covenant-victim liveth." (Heb. 9:15-17 YLT)

Here is our paraphrased version of these three verses:

Because of this, He [Y'shua] is Mediator of a new covenant, for redemption has been made available to those who have committed death causing transgressions resulting from breaking the Terms and Conditions of the first covenant. Therefore, those who are called may receive the promise of eternal life. For the sealing of a covenant relationship requires that a covenant victim be sacrificed. As long as the covenant victim lives, the covenant relationship is not in effect. (Heb. 9:15-17 Paraphrased)

A covenant with God cannot take effect until the blood of the *Covenant-victim* has been offered. In the case of the Mosaic Covenant such an offering was given (a subject we will examine below). In the case of the New Covenant, the *Covenant-victim* was none other than *Y'shua* Himself.

In all previous Biblical covenants it was not possible for a human party of the Covenant to be the *Covenant-victim*, for once he was dead the Covenant would cease to exist. However, the New Covenant is a Superior Covenant in that *Y'shua* was able to offer Himself as the *Covenant-victim* because the grave

could not hold Him for more than the prophesied three days and three nights. The Apostle Peter testified concerning this matter to the assembled people on the Festival of *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost):

"For David says concerning Him [Messiah Y'shua]:

"I foresaw the LORD [YHVH] always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

²⁶ Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;

Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.

²⁷ For You will not leave my soul in Hades [the grave], Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in your presence."

[Psalm 16:8-11]
(Acts 2:25-28)

~ Blood Covenants ~

It has already been pointed out that the sealing of a Covenant Relationship, in Biblical terms, required that blood be shed. Paul picked up on this theme and briefly expounded on it. Once again, we believe that he did not delve deeply into this subject, because he assumed his Messianic Jewish audience already understood the concept:

"Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. ¹⁹ For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.' ²¹ Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry." (Heb. 9:18-21)

Some criticize this passage because, they say, *Torah* does not state that *Moshe* sprinkled blood on the "book itself," the "tabernacle," or the "vessels." He only sprinkled the altar and the people:

"And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has said we will do, and be obedient.' ⁸ And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD [YHVH] has made with you according to all these words.'" (Ex. 24:6-8)

However, this particular ceremony was not the only time blood was shed during the sanctification of the Tabernacle. Aaron and his sons (the Priests) also had to be sanctified with blood. That ceremony took place over a seven day period.

Apparently, not every ritual was described in detail in the *Written Torah*. If fact, we have already seen that only summary information was given concerning the manner in which the Tabernacle and the vessels were to be constructed. The same is true concerning the manner in which the various offerings, listed in the first seven chapters of the book of *Leviticus*, were to be conducted. If one wants to know the details of those

rituals it is necessary to go to the *Talmud*, where the Rabbis preserved the manner in which the ceremonies were performed, according to the Oral Traditions.

With this in mind, let us turn to Josephus, the 1st century Jewish historian who was also a trained Priest. He made the following comment concerning the initial consecration of the Tabernacle, the Priests, and the people:

"And when Moses had sprinkled Aaron's vestments, himself and his sons, with the blood of the beasts that were slain, and had purified them with spring waters and ointment, they became God's priests. After this manner did he consecrate them and their garments for seven days together. The same he did to the tabernacle, and the vessels thereto belonging, both with oil first incensed, as I said, and with the blood of bulls and of rams, slain day by day, according to its kind." (*Antiquities*, 3:8:7 underlining added.)

We again remind you that Paul is addressing a knowledgeable audience, and they did not need to be reminded of every detail.

This discussion then lead Paul into his final conclusion of this section:

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without [the] shedding of blood there is no remission." (Heb. 9:22)

David Stern lists two passages in the Hebrew Scriptures as examples which verify that blood is required for most all purification (Ex. 29-30; and Lev. 1-9, 14-17). He also lists some places where purification takes place without blood. For example:

"Then the LORD [YHWH] said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.'" (Ex. 19:10)

~ Heavenly Purification ~

While the copy of the Heavenly Tabernacle (the Earthly Tabernacle) had to be purified with the physical sprinkling and pouring out of blood, there was also a purification which had to take place in relationship to the Heavenly Tabernacle before intercession for Believers could be made:

"Therefore it was necessary that the copies [Earthly Tabernacle] of the things in the heavens should be purified with these [blood, etc.], but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." (Heb. 9:23)

David Stern comments:

"Why do heavenly things require ... sacrifices at all" Surely they are not defiled, as are the copies (see 10:1N), such as the Tent and its implements. Hugh Montefiore, a Jewish Anglican, writes on this verse.

"What our author meant was this: the purification of men's consciences, made by means of the heavenly cultus, needed a better sacrifice to make it effective than [the sacrifices] which sufficed for the earthly cultus, which was a mere copy of the heavenly." (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*)

"The Messiah's blood made it possible for undefiled heavenly things to purify defiled sinners. For external cleansing, external sacrifices suffice (9:9-10); but for spiritual cleansing, spiritual ones are needed." (Ibid., p. 700, emphasis Stern's)

The Heavenly Tabernacle itself did not need to be purified, but those Believers coming to God the Father, through the Mediator *Y'shua HaMashiach*, do need an extraordinary purification in order for their prayers to enter His presence. This extraordinary purification was made possible through the Sin Offering of the sinless Son of God, *Y'shua*, who gave His own blood in payment for our sins.

~ Once and For All ~

Here, then, is the main point toward which Paul had been directing his remarks; that Messiah *Y'shua* gave a, once and for all time, sacrifice for sin which is efficacious for all people; past, present, and future:

"For Christ [Messiah] has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵ not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another -- ²⁶ He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷ And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸ so Christ [Messiah] was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Heb. 9:24-28)

Moving into chapter 10 (without a break, for this was a letter) Paul went on to show that the "blood of bulls and goats" (demanded by the *Torah* for the Earthly Temple service) is insufficient for a Sin Offering in the Heavenly Tabernacle:

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." (Heb. 10:1-4)

Paul then went on to prove this point from the *Tanakh*:
"This is why, on coming into the world, he says,

'It has not been your will to have an animal sacrifice and a meal offering; rather, you have prepared for me a body.

⁶ No, you have not been pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings.

⁷ Then I said, "Look!

In the scroll of the book it is written about me.

I have come to do your will.'" [Psalm 40:7-9]

⁸ In saying first, 'You neither willed nor were pleased with animal sacrifices, meal offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings,' things which are offered in accordance with the *Torah*; ⁹ and then, 'Look, I have come to do your will;' he takes away the first system [Priesthood] in order to set up the second [Priesthood]. ¹⁰ It is in connection with this will that we have been separated for God and made holy, once and for all, through the offering of Yeshua the Messiah's body." (Heb. 10:5-10 CJB)

Messianic Believers in Messiah *Y'shua* (whether Jew or Gentile) have, for once and for all time, been made holy through *Y'shua's* offering. This was not the case with the Levitical Priesthood, which had to continually bring Sin Sacrifices (*Chatah*) for both their own sins and the sins of the people:

"Now every *cohen* stands every day doing his service, offering over and over the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this one, after he had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ from then on to wait until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has brought to the goal for all time those who are being set apart for God and made holy." (Heb. 10:11-14 CJB)

Confirming the fact that the *Ruach HaKodesh* רֹחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ (Reu-ackh' Hah Koh-dehsh' = the Holy Spirit - #7307 & #6944) has been the vehicle which God used to communicate with His prophets, Paul wrote:

"And the *Ruach HaKodesh* too bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ 'This is the covenant which I will make with them after those days,' says ADONAI: 'I will put my *Torah* on their hearts, and write it on their minds....,' [Jeremiah 31:32]

¹⁷ he then adds,

'And their sins and their wickednesses I will remember no more.' [Jeremiah 31:33]

¹⁸ Now where there is forgiveness for these, an offering for sins is no longer needed." (Heb. 10:15-18 CJB)

Because *Y'shua's* offering of Himself constituted a once and for all sacrifice, it was no longer necessary for those Messianic Jewish Believers to bring a physical Sacrifice for Sin (*Chatah*) to the Earthly Temple -- a practice which they could no longer perform anyway. Here we finally see clearly what was causing these Jewish Believers so much consternation. They truly believed that they were still required to bring a *Chatah* animal sacrifice for sin to the Earthly Temple, even though they knew that their past sins had been forgiven through the blood of *Y'shua*.

What Paul was relating here is that animal sacrifices were no longer needed, because *Y'shua* fulfilled all the sin sacrifices when He gave His sinless self in full payment for our sins:

"For to this you were called, because Christ [*Messiah*] also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

²² 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth;' [Isaiah 53:9]

²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (I Peter 2:21-25)

Here is David Stern's commentary on Heb. 10:15-18:

"Having God's *Torah* written in one's heart and mind necessarily implies that God has forgiven one's sins, so that **an offering for sins is no longer needed.** Therefore the readers of this sermon should free themselves from their compulsion to offer animal sacrifices as sin offerings and instead be fully assured of the sufficiency of Yeshua's sacrifice of himself on their behalf. We moderns have no such compulsion, but we too should be convinced of the necessity of blood sacrifice for sin while having assurance that Yeshua's blood sacrifice fulfills that requirement. With this, the author's major argument is completed.

"But the author is very specific in limiting what he says. **An offering for sins is no longer needed** and is ruled out. But the other sacrificial offerings remain part of God's order even after Yeshua's death, as proved by Sha'ul's activity in the Temple at Ac 21:26 and his own offering of sacrifices which he himself speaks of at Ac 24:17. With the destruction of the temple, sacrificial offerings became impossible; but if the Temple is rebuilt, thank offerings, meal offerings, and praise offerings may be offered once again. The author does not proclaim the end of the sacrificial system in its entirety, only the end of animal sacrifices for sins." (Ibid., p.705, emphasis Stern's, underlining added.)

What follows summarizes Paul's teaching throughout this epistle:

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus [*Y'shua*] ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is faithful.*" (Heb. 10:19-23 NKJV)

~ Additional Exhortations ~

The remainder of the book of *Hebrews* is primarily composed of further exhortations to the Messianic Jewish Believers to hold fast their Faith in *Y'shua*. These exhortations culminate in the famous Faith Chapter, Hebrews 11, where many of the familiar figures of the *Tanakh* are held up as models of Faith -- a trait Paul wanted the Jewish Messianic Believers to emulate. He concluded the Faith chapter with a

reminder that all of those ancient men and women of Faith did not live to see the promise:

"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ..." (Heb. 11:39)

If all of those people were willing to suffer extreme persecution -- even to the point of death -- for a promise which was not yet fully clear to them, then how much more should those of us, who live in the end times, and who understand more fully the Plan of God, have Faith -- even unto death:

"... God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." (Heb. 11:40)

However, we live in a faithless generation -- so much so that *Y'shua* made the comment that He was not sure He would find Faith on the earth when He returned:

"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? ⁸ I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8)

Paul summed up his appeal for Faith among the Messianic Believers with this exhortation concerning the endurance demonstrated by *Y'shua*:

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus [*Y'shua*], the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." (Heb. 12:1-4)

The remainder of the book of *Hebrews* consists of further exhortations:

- ◆ To patiently endure God's chastening (Heb. 12:5-24).
- ◆ The danger of turning against God (Heb. 12:25-29).
- ◆ The necessity for Messianic Believers to learn to love their neighbors as well as those within the Messianic Community (Heb. 13:1-8).

One exhortation which we feel is very important to reiterate, at this particular time in the history of the Messianic Community, has to do with doctrine:

"Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods [*non-nutritious spiritual food*] which have not profited those who have been occupied with them." (Heb. 13:9)

It has been our experience that of all the problems which exist today within the Messianic Community, the most insidious of all is the constant bickering over doctrine:

"... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ [*Messiah*] --" (Eph. 4:14-15)

Sometimes, doctrinal disputes arise because someone has come to inaccurate conclusions, as we have seen with some of the concerns people have expressed about the book of *Hebrews*. For this reason, it is important to question and discuss Scripture for the purpose of clarification, rather than to argue and hold to a position which has not been well researched.

~ One Last Point ~

Paul made one last point about the sacrificial system and how it relates to Messianic Believers:

"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus [*Y'shua*] also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate."

"¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." (Heb. 13:10-15)

The Messianic Jewish Believers to whom Paul wrote were, at the time they received this letter, outside the camp of Jerusalem, totally away from the Temple. In that regard they were like *Y'shua* who was sent outside the camp to be crucified. However, no matter where we might be, even in prison, we can still offer **"the sacrifice of praise."** Let us do so with joy and gladness.

~ Summary ~

There is a consistent theme running throughout the book of *Hebrews*, which is that mankind has now received a Superior way in which to achieve access to the Creator God. That Superior way is through the one time *Chatah* Offering (Sin Sacrifice) of *Y'shua HaMashiach*. His *Chatah* Offering is Superior because He is Superior in many ways:

- ◆ *Y'shua* is Superior to the Prophets of old, to the Angels, and to *Moshe*.
- ◆ *Y'shua's* Superiority stems from the fact that He is the Son of God.
- ◆ *Y'shua* was given a Superior Priesthood -- after the order of *Melchizedek*.

Some people balk at the idea that the *Melchizedek* Priesthood could be Superior to that of the Levites. That is the very reason why Paul spent so much time and so many repetitions comparing them:

- ◆ The Heavenly Tabernacle is Superior to the Earthly Temple because it cannot be defiled by sinful man.
- ◆ As High Priest (after the order of *Melchizedek*) *Y'shua* is able to cleanse everyone of their sins through His Sacrificial Offering.
- ◆ *Y'shua* did not have to present an offering for his own sins (as did the Levitical Priests) for He was without sin.
- ◆ *Y'shua's* offering was a once and for all time sacrifice for sin, and therefore does not have to be repeated annually.
- ◆ *Y'shua* is able to provide eternal redemption for all who accept His shed blood in payment for their sins. (Thereby being grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel as per Paul in Rom. 8-11.)

Interspersed throughout the text are numerous exhortations. An important one that supports *Torah* is the clear statement that God's people are to keep the seventh day Sabbath.

The recipients of this epistle were obviously in despair over the fact that they could no longer attend Temple Service in Jerusalem. Some of them apparently believed that they still needed to bring an animal sacrifice for sin in order to be forgiven. Paul continually comforted them by instructing them that such was not the case. *Y'shua's Chatah* Sacrifice totally suffices for the forgiveness of all sins, now and forevermore. Paul encouraged them to look to the Heavenly Tabernacle for solace:

"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. 4:16)

Paul also spent time showing how Messianic Believers have been brought into a New Covenant Relationship -- a covenant where God has written the Terms and Conditions (laws) on our hearts of flesh and put a new Spirit in us. Thus, through all of this great work which *Y'shua* accomplished, Messianic Believers are now able to receive the greatest gift of all -- Eternal Redemption.

Paul taught that the Law (*Torah*) has been transformed by means of *Y'shua's Chatah* (Sin) Offering.

The book of *Hebrews*, in our opinion, is one of the most inspiring books found in Scripture. It clearly tells us about the great work *Y'shua* accomplished during His brief life here on earth:

"But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."
(Heb. 7:24-25)

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