

The Law and the New Testament Believer

**A Study on Whether or Not the Law Has
Application for the New Testament Christian**



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INTRODUCTION

Of the many topics that get addressed from the pulpit of Christian churches or across the airwaves of Christian radio, probably none are more confusing than the topic of “the Law.” This topic is discussed—or at least mentioned—thousands of times each weekend at church services across the United States and the world. It is likewise discussed, or alluded to, hundreds of times every day in Christian radio messages around the globe. While some preachers proclaim that “man should live by God’s Law,” others boldly preach that Christians “are no longer under the Law.” Oddly enough, if one listens regularly to a variety of pulpit messages and radio programs, one will eventually hear many preachers expound both positions! But how is this possible and why is there such confusion?

The confusion exists for a variety of reasons. Most pastors avoid truly in-depth examinations of this issue because they are not sufficiently equipped to do so. Could you imagine trying to give a truly specific and detailed explanation of the following statement so that all congregants would fully understand?

For I delight in the law of Elohim¹ after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members... So then with the mind I serve the law of Elohim; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:22-25)

Some pastors do try to clarify this statement, as do certain commentaries. Most often, however, members of the flock come away more confused than they were at the beginning of the explanation. But this is not the only difficult statement concerning the Law. How, for example, would we deal with the apparent contradiction in the following statements made by Paul?

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth... (1 Corinthians 7:39)

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Galatians 5:18)

On the one hand, Paul teaches that a wife is bound to her husband “by the law.” However, if we take the second statement at face value, a Christian woman who is “led of the Spirit” is “not under the law.” Does this mean that a Paul is teaching that a Spirit-filled Christian woman is not bound to her husband? Or consider a few of Paul’s statements on the specific Law topic of circumcision:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Messiah² shall profit you nothing. (Galatians 5:2)

¹ This study will use the Hebrew ‘Elohim’ rather than the word ‘God.’ See the study, “*What’s in a Name?*”

² The word ‘Messiah’ will be used rather than the word ‘Christ.’ See the study, “*What’s in a Name?*”

Him [Timothy] would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters... (Acts 16:3)

These two passages are truly interesting. In the first, Paul states that if someone allows himself to be circumcised, Messiah “will profit [him] nothing.” If Messiah came to save, and Messiah shall profit a person who allows himself to be circumcised ‘nothing,’ is Paul saying here that such a person will be damned to hell? And while we are struggling with the meaning of this statement, we see in the second passage that Paul circumcised Timothy “because of the Jews.” Did Paul inadvertently damn Timothy to hell by circumcising him so that Messiah would ‘profit him nothing,’ just to establish a pretense in front of ‘the Jews’? Just what was Paul up to and why the apparent contradiction? And finally, while we are grappling with these questions, consider a couple other statements by Paul:

And I, brethren, if I yet (still) preach circumcision, why do I yet (still) suffer persecution...? (Galatians 5:11)

What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much in every way... (Romans 3:1-2)

These last two statements by Paul seem to indicate that he had a positive attitude toward circumcision, as his action in Acts 16:3 would support. All three passages, however, appear to strongly contradict his statement in Galatians 5:2. Can the Scriptures contradict themselves or is there something else going on here?

It is the aim of this study to clarify these apparent contradictions and to give the modern New Testament believer a clearer perspective on the Law and its applicability in his/her life today. The study will consist of 5 main areas. It will first define for the reader just what the Law is, based upon statements made by Messiah, the Prophets, Paul, and other Biblical writers. Second, the study will examine the perspective from which the ‘great’ men and women of the Bible viewed the Law. Third, the study will concentrate heavily on many of the seemingly contradictory statements made by the Messiah and Paul, and why the modern Christian church is not able to understand these statements in a manner consistent with the rest of the Scriptures. Fourth, the study will review the Biblical purpose of the Law and some of the modern-day results of the failure of the church to understand that purpose. Fifth, the study will suggest several steps that the modern Christian should take as a result of the study.

In this modern age of increasing lawlessness wherein we move closer to the fulfillment of Biblical ‘end-time’ prophecy, it is our hope that the reader will find the study timely and useful. It is our belief that a purification of our faith will become more and more important, and many believers are searching for a deeper understanding of Biblical truths today. We hope that this study will give the reader a deeper insight into the complex issue of the Law and its applicability for believers today, both individually and communally. As a friend of the author—well schooled in Christian theology and presently teaching in a Bible college in Texas—once confided: “Of all the Biblical topics, I will have to admit that I have many questions concerning the Law.” Perhaps we should all be as honest as this person, roll up our sleeves,

and delve more deeply into this issue than we ever have. Who knows, the journey may be quite spiritually rewarding!

WHAT IS THE LAW?

Before we can truly begin a study of the Law, we must first address the question, “What is the Law?” At first blush, this may seem to be a silly question. Many, if not most, Christians have a firm concept in their minds of just what ‘the Law’ is. However, if one were to take a survey of individuals from several denominations, one would find that they do not all hold the same definition of ‘the Law’. While possible responses are numerous, the majority generally fall into one of four major categories as follows: (1) “The Law is the Law of Moses;” (2) “The Law is the Ten Commandments;” (3) “The Law is the law of love: Love God and love your neighbor;” and (4) “The Law is the Old Testament law; Christians don’t have to keep it.” Generally speaking, proponents of each definition will have a certain Bible verse, or set of Bible verses, to support their respective positions. But which definition is correct? Are they all correct at the same time? No wonder there is such confusion in the church! To end the confusion—or at least put it on hold for a while—perhaps we should look to Messiah, the “author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), to get his definition of ‘the Law’ before we continue our study. But first, a brief aside...

Unlike much of mainstream Christianity, if you were to ask a practicing Jew the definition of ‘the Law’, the vast majority—whether Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform—would agree on the same definition. The author can attest to this by personal experiences while visiting all three types of congregations and speaking at great length with several rabbis. To a practicing Jew, the term ‘the Law’—‘Torah’ in Hebrew—refers specifically to those instructions given by the Almighty to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.³ For this reason, the term ‘the Law’ is very often combined with the term ‘prophets’—the ‘Law and the Prophets’—to describe what Christians would refer to as the ‘Old Testament.’⁴

Every week, in synagogues across the world, the Jewish Sabbath service includes a reading from ‘the Law’ and then a selected reading from ‘the prophets.’⁵ Several individuals are called forward, one by one, for the honor of reading one or more passages from these designated portions, or to give a short ‘message’ following the readings. We find this practice identical to that of Paul’s day,

And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. (Acts 13:15)

³ Most practicing Jews, however, have been taught that the Most High also gave Moses a set of ‘oral instructions’ as well. We will address this subject later in the paper.

⁴ The entire ‘Old Testament’ is referred to by Jews as the ‘Tanakh.’ This word is an abbreviation of the three words ‘Torah’ (Law), ‘Navi’im’ (the prophets), and ‘Ketuvim’ (the writings of the Old Testament not penned by Moses or the prophets, e.g., the book of Ruth, Esther, etc.).

⁵ The reading from the Law is called the ‘Torah reading’ and that from the Prophets is the ‘Haftorah reading.’

We see that the writer of the book of Acts equated the term ‘the Law’ with the first five books of the Bible—‘Torah’—just as we find carried forward in the synagogues of today. We see here that Paul was being asked to give ‘the message’ after the Scripture readings, just as occurs in synagogues today. Similarly, we find that Messiah actually gave the ‘Haftorah’ (see footnote 5) reading from “the prophets”—in this case from Isaiah 61:1—in the synagogue in Nazareth.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book [scroll] of the prophet Isaiah 61:1. And when he had opened the book [scroll], he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:16-19)

When we look to the words of the Messiah, we find that He also used ‘the Law’ together with ‘the prophets’ indicating that He also equated ‘the Law’ with ‘Torah’.⁶

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

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40)

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of Elohim is preached and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. (Luke 16:16-17)

So we see that to the Messiah, to Luke, and to the writer of the book of Acts, the term ‘the Law’ has the same meaning as held by the Jews—the Law (‘Torah’) given to Moses as contained in the first five books of the Bible. But if this simple explanation is indeed the case, why all the confusion in the writings of Paul as we saw earlier?

As we will come to find out later in the study, the confusion characterizing some of Messiah’s teachings and much of Paul’s writings stems from certain teachings on the Law by a particular Jewish sect known as the Pharisees. This sect is important because their doctrines greatly influenced, not only many first-century Christians, but also the entire face of Jewish development down to the present day. The first-century Christians—unlike the vast majority of Christians of today—knew and understood the doctrines

⁶ The Hebrew word, ‘Torah’ (Strong’s #8451), has a much deeper meaning than does the English word, ‘Law’. As demonstrated in several Old Testament passages, and as attested to by most Rabbis with whom the author has spoken, it is probably better translated as ‘instruction’ because it conveys the instructions of the Most High on how to live our lives. Because the Creator has given these instructions, and made them mandatory, they are in fact ‘the Law’.

and teachings of the Pharisees. And, unlike modern Christians, those of the first-century were able to understand most, if not all, of the various Pauline subtleties and nuances which confuse us today. But more about that later; for now, let us concentrate on the Messiah's definition of 'the Law' and His attitude toward it.

MESSIAH AND "THE LAW"

Messiah Practiced and Taught the Law

We have seen thus far that the Savior's definitions of 'the Law' pertained to the 'Law of Moses', which was consistent with the historical understanding of the Jews. And why not? According to Paul, to the Jews "were committed the oracles of Elohim" (Romans 3:2). One might wonder, therefore, what would Messiah have to say—and what might He say at His 2nd coming—concerning the mainstream Christian teaching that Believers are 'no longer under the Law', or that 'the Law is done away with?' Did Messiah hold these beliefs when He walked the earth? Did He in fact believe, or teach, that portions of the Law were to be eliminated after His death? Let us look to the Scriptures to find out.

Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

This passage, when discussed from the modern pulpit, is not usually addressed in its entirety. The reading usually ceases after the word 'fulfill,' and a teaching usually follows that equates the word 'fulfill' with the idea 'put an end to' or 'do away with'. As the conventional wisdom goes, "Jesus fulfilled the Law so that we don't have to keep it any longer," or words to that effect. In fact, this teaching is so prevalent, that the rest of what the Savior had to say is often 'lost in the shuffle.'

Upon closer examination, however, we find His very strong admonition that every jot and tittle of the Law is to remain in full force and effect as long as this present heaven and earth are in existence. "Till heaven and earth pass," He says, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Notice He did NOT say "until my death," or "until the Church teaches otherwise" or anything else but "Till heaven and earth pass." The fact is, all is not yet fulfilled; this heaven and earth have not yet passed. Satan has not yet been cast into the lake of fire, the new heaven and earth have not yet been created (Isaiah 66:22), and we are not yet in the Kingdom to come. According to our Savior then, the Law—the Torah—is still in full force and effect—every jot and tittle! But does such an interpretation agree with other of His statements elsewhere in the Scriptures?

If we take a quick survey of Messiah’s teachings, we will find that He is quite consistent concerning ‘the Law’—the very words of instruction that His Father gave to Moses. Even prior to the formal beginning of His earthly ministry, during His temptation by Satan, we find Messiah quoting ‘the Law’ as His defense.

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Elohim.⁷ (Matthew 4:4)

We have all heard this passage quoted, but now let us take a look at what it says. The Messiah is proclaiming—directly to Satan, the great Tempter—that we are to live “by every word” that proceeded out of the mouth of our Creator. Messiah did not say, “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Elohim, until my death,” or “until the church tells you some of His words no longer apply.” But let us continue to look at a few more of His statements.

Messiah and ‘All the Commandments’

When the rich man asked Messiah what he should do to enter the kingdom, He did not say “believe only.” What He did say was,

Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, Elohim: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. (Matthew 19:17)

The Messiah then went on to give several examples of the commandments to which he is referring (verses 18-19). Many teachers have opined that He is talking only about the Ten Commandments, but again, if we look closely, we find that the scope of Messiah’s answer goes beyond the Ten Commandments. Messiah told the young rich man, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (verse 19). This is a Torah commandment, but not found in ‘the Ten.’ It is a quote from the book of Leviticus,

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but shalt love thy neighbor as thyself... (Leviticus 19:18)

In another setting (Mark 12:29-30), when Messiah was asked which commandment is the greatest, again His quotation did not come from the ‘Ten Commandments’, but rather from the book of Deuteronomy,

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our Elohim, the LORD is one: And thou shalt love the LORD thy Elohim with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Following Messiah’s proclamation that He did not come to destroy the Law (Matthew 5:17-20), Messiah went well beyond the ‘Ten Commandments’ as he taught on the Law. In this instance, he

⁷ Quoting the Law (Deuteronomy 8:3).

addressed divorce (Matt 5:31-32, referring to Deu 24:1), taking oaths (Matt 5:33-37, referring to Lev 19:12), taking revenge (Matt 5:38-42, referring to Exo 21:24, Lev 24:20, and Deu 19:21), giving alms (Matt 6:1-4, referring to Deu 14:22-29, Deu 26:12, etc.), fasting (Matt 6:16, referring to Lev 23:27, Isa 58:5), and several other issues. In every case, He did not do away with the commandments in the Law, but He made them harder and more exacting—matters of the heart. For example,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Rather than doing away with the Law, Messiah was establishing it within the hearts of His followers! This is in full agreement with His earlier proclamations of Matthew 4:4 and 5:17-20. Messiah was teaching the Law!

The Law and Messiah's Authority

If we look to another Scripture, we will find that Messiah's keeping of the Law was important for another reason—to prove who He was. Most of us are familiar with the story of Messiah cleansing the leper in Mark 1 and Luke 5. But, if we look carefully at what followed the event, we again find Messiah teaching observance of the Law. Immediately upon healing the man,

And he straightly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them. (Mark 1:44)

Have you ever heard a pastor explain just what 'the testimony' for the priests consisted of and why Messiah thought it important enough to make an issue of it? If 'the testimony' was only the healing itself, Messiah could simply have told the healed leper to show himself to the priests. But He specifically told the man to also "offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded." Somehow, *both* the miracle *and* the offering "which Moses commanded" were to be a testimony to the Temple priests; but why? Why would it be a significant 'testimony' for Messiah to command the newly healed leper to follow the Law immediately after the miracle of his healing?

As it turns out, this is by no means a minor point. While we—equipped with the whole Bible and 2000 years of history—take it for granted that Yahoshua⁸ was the Messiah, the Jewish religious leaders of his day were not so sure. That fact that He taught boldly and performed many miracles was not enough; the Jews had been taught for centuries not to be impressed simply by 'signs and wonders.' The prophet Isaiah, almost 700 years earlier, had cautioned that people would seek after those who might be able to

⁸ This study will use the name 'Yahoshua' rather than the 'Jesus'. Yahoshua means 'Yahovah will save' (note the significance of Matthew 1:21) and is the Hebrew name delivered by the Angel. See the study, *What's in a Name?*

perform wonders because they are ‘wizards’ or have ‘familiar spirits’ (Isaiah 8:19). So in addition to his warning, Isaiah gave the people a test to determine if a worker of miracles was from the Most High or not.

Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion. And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should a people seek unto their Elohim for the living to the dead? To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:18-20)

In other words, miraculous wonders were not enough. In addition, the miracle worker also had to be in agreement with the Law of Moses and the testimony of the prophets. In that way the people would know that his power and authority were from the Creator rather than Satan. That is why we see that certain of the scribes and Pharisees challenged Yahoshua’s authority constantly (e.g., Matthew 21:23). Many were probably not mean, just cautious and discerning. Some—likely mindful of Isaiah’s warning—went so far as to claim that Yahoshua received his power to do miracles from Satan or Beelzebub⁹ (e.g., Matthew 9:34, 10:25, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15). How was a discerning person to know the truth? This is the key to Messiah’s instruction to the healed leper.

When Messiah specifically instructed the healed leper to “offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded,” he was telling the man to obey the Law and do the actions it commanded. This proved—per Isaiah’s teaching—that Messiah’s miraculous action was in agreement with ‘the Law’ and ‘the Testimony’ and that His power came from the Creator and not from ‘familiar spirits’ or because He was a wizard. His command for the leper to follow the Law, therefore, was extremely significant and served as the ‘testimony’ to the priests—the very people who should have been able to interpret its significance. (Note: Isn’t it amazing how many little details of the Scriptures come into focus when the simple truth is taught?)

But Did Not Messiah Do Away With Parts of the Law?

But wait, one might say. Didn’t the Savior do away with portions of the Law? Didn’t He instruct in Matthew 15:11 and Mark 7:15 that we can eat animals that were formerly unclean? Didn’t He break the Sabbath in Matthew 12? While these are valid questions—and while we have all been taught this particular interpretation—upon further study we will find that this traditional interpretation is erroneous and not in accordance with the rest of the Bible. Consider just a few examples to the contrary.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.
(Luke 4:16)

⁹ Beelzebub comes from the two words ‘baal’ (lord) and ‘zebub’ (flies), or ‘lord of the flies.’

If Messiah did away with the Sabbath, why do we see that it was his custom to keep it?

But pray ye that your flight be not in winter, neither on the Sabbath day. (Matthew 24:20)

If Messiah did away with the Sabbath, why in speaking of the 'end times' would he make this statement indicating to his followers that the Sabbath would still be observed far in the future?

And if the Sabbath were to be done away with, why would the prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the post-end-time recreation of the 'new heavens and new earth, make the following statement indicating that, not just Jews, but 'all flesh' would be observing it:

For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make, shall remain before me saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:22-23)

While we have considered just a few examples thus far, these clear Biblical indications seem to suggest are that our traditional teachings do not agree with other parts of the Bible. As we continue our study, we will find that Messiah was, in fact, not doing away with the Sabbath, the dietary commandments, or any other commandments of his Father. As we study further, we will find that his statements in these instances were referring to another body of 'commandments' altogether. The first century Christians would have picked up this subtlety, but Christians today are not equipped to do so. Let us, therefore, postpone these issues until we examine the teachings of Paul, later in the study.

Sin No More

We have seen thus far that Messiah kept the Law, taught the Law to His followers, and used it to prove His authority as a true prophet of the Most High. While many mainstream Christians acknowledge these points, somewhere along the way they have picked up the idea that He minimized some parts of the Law. But consider the following:

After Messiah had healed a sick man on the Sabbath day¹⁰ in John 5, we find rather stern warning to the same man,

Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (John 5:14)

In a similar incident wherein the Messiah forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, we find that He gave the woman the same warning.

¹⁰ NOTE: There is no commandment in the Law forbidding healing on the Sabbath.

...Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Yahoshua said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more. (John 8:11)

In other words, while He displayed a great deal of grace to both individuals, He also demanded of both that they “sin no more.” But what did He mean by “sin no more?” To make this determination, we will have to look at how the Bible defines sin. As it turns out, the New Testament definition—which agrees with the traditional Biblical and Jewish definition—holds that sin as a violation of the Law.

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the Law: for sin is transgression of the Law. (1 John 3:4)

That is why Messiah did not simply forgive people, but told them to “sin no more.” He honored the Law of His Father and He wanted His followers to do the same. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Perhaps that is why he exhorted people to ‘repent’ over and over again.

From that time Yahoshua began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 4:17)

Now after that John was put in prison, Yahoshua came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of Elohim, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of Elohim is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:15)

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or, those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:3-5)

So too, when Messiah sent the apostles forth and they conducted healings, they too preached that repentance was an important part of the gospel.

And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. (Mark 6:12-13)

James gives a similar message when he makes the following statement,

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:20)

While there are a myriad of similar passages in the New Testament dealing with importance of keeping the Law of the Most High, perhaps we should briefly turn again to Messiah’s words for his forecast of

the fate of those who live their lives by a standard other than the Law of His Father. Looking far into the future, Messiah gave a prophetic glimpse of the time when He will be sitting in judgment of all mankind. And what will be His standard? The will of His Father—the Law.

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

So it shall be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:49-50)

These two statements, made by a loving Savior, should give us all cause to pause and consider them carefully. His love notwithstanding, he is zealous for doing the will of his Father and having his followers do likewise. When he said that we are to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of” his Father (Matthew 4:4), he was not kidding. And we should remember that his great commission included all his commandments,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you... (Matthew 28:19-20)

We must remember—often contrary to the teachings that we receive—that the ‘all things’ whatsoever Messiah commanded’ us included his teachings on observing the Law of his Father. And given the Messiah’s seriousness of forecasts about the future judgment, it is no wonder that James cautions most not to be teachers and leaders.

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. (James 3:1)

Undoubtedly, this warning would apply to those who, contrary to the examples of Messiah, teach the selective removal of significant portions of the Law of the Most High—even if the seminary taught them to do so!

Incidentally, given the overwhelming evidence we have seen thus far supporting the belief that Messiah honored, obeyed, and taught the Law of His Father, this might be a good time to take another look at a verse terribly misinterpreted by mainstream traditions.

Think Not That I Have Come To Destroy the Law...

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle

shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17-19)

It is interesting that most mainstream Christians today read these words but don't comprehend what they read. Conventional teachings tell them to read the word 'fulfill' and see 'finish' or 'do away with.' "Christ fulfilled the Law so we don't have to keep it!" They are blind to the fact that such an interpretation makes completely no sense, given the statements that follow it. If His fulfillment 'did away with' Law observance henceforth, why would the Messiah have gone on to say that as long as heaven and earth remain, not one jot or tittle would pass from the Law? If Law observance were henceforth done away with, why does He warn that those who violate "one of these least commandments" will be "least in the kingdom of heaven?"

It is obvious from this passage that the Greek word 'pleroo' (Strong's #4137) used for 'fulfill' in this verse does not mean 'finish' or 'do away with'. If anything, it would appear to have the opposite meaning. But let us look to a couple other uses of 'pleroo' to see how it is used elsewhere in the New Testament.

But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Yahoshua answering said unto him, Suffer (permit) *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil (pleroo, Strong's 4137) all righteousness. Then he suffered (permitted) him. (Matthew 3:14-15)

Clearly the use of 'pleroo' in this case does not mean that all righteousness is 'finished' or 'done away with'. Again, the word would appear to have the opposite meaning. Let us consider another example.

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of Elohim which is given to me for you, to fulfil (pleroo, Strong's 4137) the word of Elohim; (Colossians 1:25)

Does use of the 'pleroo' in this case mean that Paul's ministry was to 'finish' or 'do away with' the word of Elohim? Clearly not; again the opposite meaning is intended. Let us then consider another passage.

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil (pleroo, Strong's 4137) it. (Colossians 4:17)

Does use of the word 'pleroo' mean that Archippus was to 'finish' or 'do away with' his ministry or was he to fulfill it to the fullest? Let us look to one last example.

Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our Elohim would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with

power: That the name of our Yahoshua the Messiah may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our Elohim and the Lord Yahoshua the Messiah. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

Does the word ‘pleroo’ here mean that the pleasure of the Most High’s goodness was to be ‘finished’ or ‘done away with?’ Again, let’s hope not. All four of these passages would all make no sense if the word ‘fulfill’ (‘pleroo’, Strong’s 4137) carries the idea ‘to finish’ or to ‘do away with.’ The fact is, the word ‘pleroo’ has almost the opposite meaning. It means “to fill to the full; to cause to abound; to make complete in every particular, to render perfect.”¹¹ And, if we use the actual meaning for ‘pleroo’ in Matthew 5:17 that we have used in all four of the other passages—rather than the traditional mainstream misinterpretation—Messiah’s words also show internal agreement and make more sense as well!

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:17-19)

Messiah did not come to ‘finish’ the Law or to ‘do away’ with it; He came to ‘to fill it to the full; to cause it to abound; to make it complete in every particular, to render it perfect.’ That is why not “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from” it as long as heaven and earth are still here. That is also why we are to obey it, to teach others to do it, and to repent if we transgress against it. Again, the Messiah was teaching that the entire Word of His Father is everlasting and not to be ignored. How can our pastors teach otherwise? Perhaps it is because of a mistaken interpretation of the writings of Paul. So, let us then take a look into these writings of Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles’.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHINGS OF PAUL?

This is the part of the study we have all been waiting for. After all, did we not begin the study with some of the statements of Paul, and did we not highlight some of the confusion stemming from these statements? Given the fact that Paul’s letters comprise a significant portion of the New Testament, it only makes sense that we should look closely at what he has to say about the Law. This is especially true given that most of today’s Christians are non-Jews and Paul declared that he was the “Apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13). So, what about Paul and what does he really teach about the Law?

Most pastors today—especially those coming out of the seminaries—are led to believe that they understand Paul’s teachings on the Law. They also seem quite comfortable with the fact that

¹¹ Definition from BibleWorks 5, of the Hermeneutica Bible software suite. The same definition can be found in other sources.

mainstream interpretations of Paul’s teachings seem to be diametrically opposed to the teaching of Messiah and the rest of the Bible. “Of course...” many pastors have been heard to say, “...Messiah probably kept the Law; he was Jewish.” Some would continue with the statement that, “Messiah had to keep the Law because he was still under the ‘old covenant’ and had to keep it perfectly because we cannot...” When it comes to Gentile observance of the Law, however, most pastors would likely state—as taught in numerous radio messages and from numerous pulpits—that “Gentiles don’t have to keep the Law; we are not Jewish and Paul says that we aren’t under the Law anyway...”

Perhaps this interpretation of Paul is true and perhaps it is not. Certainly the myriad of different permutations and interpretations of this reasoning have contributed to the fact that there are literally hundreds of Christian denominations today, most all of which claim to be led by the Holy Spirit. But if this is the case, why are they all on different sheets of music? How do we make our own interpretations? Should we look to our own denominational doctrines, to our Christian study Bibles, to the Bible Answer Man?¹²

For purposes of this study, we will endeavor to stick to the watchword of the reformation “Sola Scriptura”¹³ Of course, realizing that passages have been interpreted in a variety of ways historically, we will endeavor to ‘compare Scripture with Scripture’ to determine if mainstream interpretations of Pauline passages are consistent with the other books of the Bible. After all, if the writings of Paul are inspired, they must be in agreement with rest of the Bible; and so must our interpretations. If we find that our interpretations are not consistent with the rest of Scripture, then our teachings—and the doctrines stemming from those false interpretations—are nothing more than ‘traditions of men.’ And of course, we know what the Savior had to say about this situation,

Full well ye reject the commandment of Elohim, that ye may keep your own tradition.
(Mark 7:9)

As we begin our examination of Paul’s writings, let us prayerfully examine our own traditions to ensure that they are in fact in agreement with the will of the Most High and the rest of the Scriptures.

A Brief Look at Paul’s Seemingly Negative Comments Concerning the Law

While we are generally not in favor of stringing together sets of Bible verses, begging the reader’s indulgence for a moment, it might be worthwhile to do it at this point in the study. The following 6 passages, viewed together, demonstrate a large portion of prevailing Pauline doctrine—or at least prevailing Christian interpretation of Pauline doctrine—concerning the Law.

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before

¹² A popular Christian radio program claiming to teach the “essential” doctrines of Christianity.

¹³ “Solely the Scriptures”

Elohim. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to Elohim, but under the law to Messiah,) that I might gain them that are without law. (1 Corinthians 9:20-21)

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Messiah Yahoshua might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Messiah, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of Elohim by faith in Messiah Yahoshua. (Galatians 3:22-26)

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar. (Galatians 4:21-24)

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

The conventional interpretation would have us believe that to be “under the Law”¹⁴ is somehow not as good as being “under grace;” that being “under the Law” is akin to being “in bondage,” like Hagar, the bondmaid. We almost get a bad taste in our mouths to think of being “under the Law.” There are even pastors who will go so far as to say that “if you put yourself under the law, you deny the sacrificial death of the Savior and are in danger of hellfire.” But how does their interpretation compare to the rest of the Scriptures? Did other great men of the Bible also hold Paul’s seemingly negative attitude toward the Law? How, for example, did Old Testament followers of the Most High view the Law?

¹⁴ Note Paul’s consistent use of the term “under the Law” rather than saying it a different way. The words, “under the law” is a ‘term of art’ with a special meaning that we will see later in the study.

How was the Law Viewed by Old Testament ‘Believers’?

Unfortunately, many pastors today teach—and many congregants believe—that the “Old Testament God was a God of wrath,” which they contrast with the New Testament “God of Love,” or “God of Grace.” Of course, such a teaching directly contradicts the words of the Most High, spoken through the prophet Malachi,

For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.
(Malachi 3:6)

The mainstream teaching follows the general line that the ‘Old Testament God of Wrath’ would destroy those who did not follow his Law. The Law is portrayed as some type of onerous burden that was to be endured until the coming of the Messiah. But is this characterization of the Law accurate? Did the ‘great men’ of the Old Testament view the Law as something to be endured; or did they view it with joy and happiness?

While we could painstakingly review comments of all the Old Testament prophets, judges, and ordinary ‘great men’ of the Bible, such an in-depth examination would get tedious in short order. While the reader is encouraged to look into the issue deeper on his/her own, let us, instead, look to one—a man after the Almighty’s own heart—King David. According to the Scriptures, King David was, for the most part, pleasing to the Most High,

Because David did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. (1 Kings 15:5)

David’s attitude toward the Law was one of awe and admiration. It is also in total agreement with the attitude displayed by the Messiah, by James, John, and many other writers of the Bible, as already indicated. David, according to the teachings of many pastors, could even see into the future and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah,

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (Psalm 110:1)

But if this is the case, why would David—who could look forward to the ‘grace’ of the New Testament—have such an awesome respect and love for the Law?

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
(Psalm 119:1-6)

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.... I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me. (Psalm 119:11-19)

Oddly enough, many pastors read passages from the Psalms, which demonstrate King David's attitude toward the Law. Unfortunately, most of these pastors somehow miss the fact that David is lifting up the whole Law—the very Law they claim to no longer be under! Yes, David considers it a blessing to live according to the Law of the Most High—just like the Messiah, James, John, and the whole host of Old Testament prophets.

“But sure...,” one might say, “...of course the Israelites kept the Law; they were Jews.” While not all Israelites were Jews in the Old Testament days, one hears such statements quite often as a rationalization of how the ‘good men’ of the Old Testament could love and keep the Law, while the non-Jewish Gentiles could disregard it—or at least large portions of it. But is this reasoning true? Did non-Jewish Gentiles of the Old and New Testaments really disregard the Law—or large portions of it—as is the teaching today?

Even the Gentiles...

If one looks to the Bible rather than ‘the tradition of men,’ one will find that those Gentiles who had turned away from their pagan ways and elected to follow the “Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 71:22, 89:18, etc.), were expected to observe the Law of the Most High—just like the Israelites!

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. (Exodus 12:48-49)

And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever *be* among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; as ye do, so he shall do. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth *with you*, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye *are*, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you. (Numbers 15:14-16)

An example of one such stranger that sojourned with Israel was Caleb—one of the men that Moses sent forth to spy out the land of Canaan. Many believe that Caleb was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah because of the following verse:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers

shall ye send a man... Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. (Numbers 13:1-6)

And the names of the men *are* these: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. (Numbers 34:19)

But notice, Caleb is specifically referred to twice as “son of Jephunneh.” So, why this emphasis and who was Jephunneh? Again, the Bible provides us with our answer,

Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD. (Numbers 32:11-12)

Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadeshbarnea. (Joshua 14:6)

Jephunneh was a Kenezite; the Kenizites were not Israelites, but one of the pagan peoples that inhabited the land of Canaan—the land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants.

In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. (Genesis 15:18-21)

This brings us to an interesting series of questions. If Caleb was the son of a Kenezite, what was he doing as a leader of the tribe of Judah in Joshua 14:6? How could a non-Israelite be treated as an Israelite—so much so that he was a leader in the tribe? The answer lies in a passage we have already seen dealing with Gentiles who would turn from their pagan ways, follow the ‘Holy One of Israel’, and sojourn with the Israelites.

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. (Exodus 12:48-49)

While Caleb’s father was a Kenezite, he had obviously elected to sojourn with the Israelites, follow the Most High, and circumcise his son Caleb, who was then treated “as one who is born in the land,” with all the rights and privileges of native-born Israelites. That is how he could be able to be a leader in the

tribe of Judah. The Almighty's judgments are fair; He is unbiased and does not "respect persons" because of their status, but according to their actions in following His will. Both the Old and New Testaments point out this characteristic—again indicating that He does not change.

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring *it* unto me, and I will hear it.
(Deuteronomy 1:17)

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning *here* in fear: (1 Peter 1:16-17)

Not only did Caleb follow the Almighty's Law, but the Bible indicates that he followed it to his utmost and he was blessed with part of the land inheritance promised to the descendants of Abraham.

And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD Elohim of Israel.
(Joshua 14:13-14)

We can also find another strong indication that the Law of the Most High applies to Gentiles who want to follow the 'Holy One of Israel.' In the book of Isaiah, we find the following passage:

Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation *is* near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed *is* the man *that* doeth this, and the son of man *that* layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I *am* a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things* that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him. (Isaiah 56:1-8)

We find here a similar directive to those of Exodus 12:48-49 and Numbers 15:14-16. Again, the theme is the same: if a Gentile will turn from paganism, do those things that please the LORD, and take hold of His covenant, they will be treated just like—if not better than—sons and daughters. But again, the litmus test is obedience to the things that please the Most High—those things contained in His Law! But Caleb is not the only example of a Gentile who “wholly followed the LORD.” While there were undoubtedly many, we will look at a couple; one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

An obvious Old Testament choice for our examination should be Ruth. The Bible tells us that an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, Elimelech, and his wife Naomi, departed Bethlehem—because of a famine—and settled in the land of Moab. Their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, both married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. When the husband and sons of Naomi died, she decided to return to Judah. Ruth—the Moabite—decided to return with Naomi to Israel (Ruth 1:1-10).

Like the Kenezites, Perezites, Jebusites, and various other ‘ites’ surrounding Israel in that day, the Moabites were pagan Gentiles. But Ruth, like Caleb before her, purposed in her heart to follow the ‘Holy One of Israel’ rather than return to her pagan gods.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? *are* there yet *any more* sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go *your way*... And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy El my El: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me. (Ruth 1:11-17)

Like Caleb before her, Ruth was likewise rewarded for her choice. The Isaiah 56 promise for “a name better than of sons and of daughters” definitely applied to Ruth. Not only did she find herself in the line of King David (Matthew 1:5-6), but she, a Gentile woman, was blessed to be in the line of Messiah as well (Matthew 1:16)!

It would appear that following the ‘Holy One of Israel’ and obeying His Law was a blessing in the Old Testament. We have also seen the positive attitudes of Messiah, James and John in the New Testament. But now, let’s take a look at a New Testament Gentile that we have probably never considered from this point of view—Cornelius the centurion.

Cornelius is often spoken of in Christian teachings today. He is acknowledged as being a “devout man that feared Elohim,” according to the following passage:

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian *band*, *A devout man*, and one that feared Elohim with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to Elohim always.

(Acts 10:1-2)

We find out that, somehow, this Gentile was picked for a personal visit and witness by Peter—all at heavenly direction, in a vision, which commanded Peter to,

Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what *is* the cause wherefore ye are come? (Acts 10:20-21)

Furthermore, we find that the entire incident came about because Cornelius, himself, had also received an angelic visitor from heaven.

And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of Elohim. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. (Acts 10:30-32)

It is rather curious that in most mainstream Christian teachings, these underlying events are barely given a second thought. While they are read aloud, these events are glossed over and the main emphasis usually centers around verses 11-15, where we are told that Peter's vision now enables us to eat pork, shellfish, and other things previously forbidden by the Bible.¹⁵

But perhaps we should look a little closer at these underlying events. After all, two men, Peter and Cornelius, in two separate locations, received simultaneous angelic visitors directing them to each other. Is this not the least bit significant? After all, it is not as if people receive heavenly visitors every day. Very few of the folks reading this study have ever seen an angel; the author of this study can only hope! Even the Patriarchs only experienced a handful of such visits, and yet we scarcely stop to examine what made Cornelius so special. Was it simply because he was devout and prayed? Perhaps we should look a little closer at Cornelius the centurion...

Well, we know that Cornelius was obviously a Gentile, an Italian Gentile, to be exact, of "the Italian band." The first question we need to ask is, "Why would the Almighty decree that the Gospel of Messiah should be preached to Gentiles?" After all, had not the Messiah directed his followers earlier that only Israelites were to be the intended recipients of the Gospel?

¹⁵ For an in-depth study of whether or not the Law's dietary commandments were nullified, see the study "Biblically Clean Foods".

These twelve Yahoshua sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 10:5-7)

So why was Cornelius worthy to receive a blessing which had been designated only for Israelites? If we remember that the Most High does not change (Malachi 3:6), we will see that the same grace applied on behalf of the Gentiles Caleb and Ruth was getting ready to be applied to the Gentile Cornelius.

But wait, Caleb and Ruth received the same portion as “sons and daughters” because they had made the decision to follow the ‘Holy One of Israel’ and to observe His Law. Did Cornelius do the same? Although mainstream teachings never point this out, let us take a look for ourselves.

We saw in Acts 10:2 that Cornelius was a “devout man” who “feared Elohim with all his house.” But just what does this mean? An adherent of any religion can be devout, but Cornelius was devout man that “feared Elohim.” Could that mean that Cornelius feared him like Caleb and Ruth feared Him? Would it not make sense that Cornelius also obeyed Him? A closer look will indicate that he did in fact obey the Most High by keeping his Law!

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian *band*, A devout *man*, and one that feared Elohim with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to Elohim always.
(Acts 10:1-2)

We again note that Cornelius feared Elohim and prayed to Him always, but we also see that he “gave much alms to the people.” What kind of alms was he giving? We must remember that there were no Gentile ‘believers’ before Cornelius; he was the first. So, where did he get the idea to give alms? And to which people did he give them?

We covered this topic earlier in the paper. Alms giving is a requirement of the Law and is addressed in such passages as Deuteronomy 14:22-29, Deuteronomy 26:12, etc. Messiah likewise addressed alms giving in Matthew 6:1-4. And if we look to another verse in Acts 10, we will see a good indication that Cornelius was providing these alms to the Jewish needy, in accordance with the Law.

And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth Elohim, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from Elohim by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.
(Acts 10:22)

But how would this be possible? Alms were usually brought to the Temple in Jerusalem and to the synagogues in other towns and cities. Could it be that Cornelius was attending worship services with

the Jews in the synagogue in Caesarea? Of course it is possible—and indeed likely—because we see numerous instances of Gentiles worshipping in synagogues on the Sabbath day (e.g., Acts 13:42-47, Acts 14:1, Acts 17:2-4, Acts 18:4) just like they were instructed to do in Isaiah 56:6.¹⁶

Not only did Cornelius fear the ‘Holy One of Israel,’ pray always, and give alms to the Jewish needy, but we also find that he fasted and that his fasting was also approved by the Most High. As we have seen earlier, fasting is also addressed in the Law of the Most High (e.g., Lev 23:27, Isa 58:5), and addressed by the Messiah in Matthew 6:16.

And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of Elohim. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. (Acts 10:30-32)

By all indications, Cornelius was a Gentile that feared the ‘Holy One of Israel’ and followed His Law—as indicated by his prayer, fasting, and alms giving in a setting wherein he was of good report among the nation of the Jews. No wonder he was chosen to be the first Gentile to receive the Gospel; he was acting just like Caleb and Ruth!

But again, we are faced with a dilemma. If Cornelius—like Caleb, Ruth—was honored by the Most High for keeping His Law, why would Paul—according to mainstream Christian teachings—spent so much effort teaching that Gentiles are no longer under the Law? Why would he have made the statement,

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law,¹⁷ but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

Whence Came Paul’s Authority?

If we assume that Paul were in fact teaching against the Law of the Most High, we will probably have to examine the underlying issue of where he received such authority—especially when his teachings appear to directly contradict the teachings and practical examples of Moses, all the prophets, Messiah, and several Gentile ‘believers.’ Let’s face it, many of today’s Christians have been warned not to follow every new doctrine that comes along, but to test all teachings by the Scripture. If we were living in Paul’s day, and interpreted his teachings in accordance with mainstream Christian standards, what would we think of Paul’s teachings?

¹⁶ Also see the study entitled “The LORD’s Day”

¹⁷ Again, note the use of the term, “under the Law.”

It is not the purpose of this study to discredit the writings of Paul. On the contrary, a man with Paul's qualifications was needed at that very time to accomplish a very special mission for the 'Holy One of Israel.' And we will indeed see that Paul turns out to be quite a Biblical hero—for many of the same reasons, and in the same pattern as those before him. But for now, be patient and let us examine Paul's teachings just like we would examine the teachings of anyone else. After all, the Bible commends the Bereans for doing just that,

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. (Acts 17:10-12)

Again, we see here that—just like other 'believing' Gentiles in Acts 13:42-47, Acts 14:1, Acts 17:2-4, Acts 18:4, etc.—these Greek women and men were in the synagogue at Berea with Jews. Like Cornelius, these Gentiles were likely 'of good report' among the Jews, because they were worshipping the 'Holy One of Israel' rather than Greek gods. And we see that these Gentiles—along with their Jewish brethren—"searched the scriptures daily" to determine whether the things Paul preached were true. So, were Paul's teachings true?

So far in our study, we have seen that Paul's teachings—as interpreted by mainstream Christianity—appear to be diametrically opposed to the rest of the Bible. His statement that "ye are not under the law" (Romans 6:14) certainly flies in the face of Messiah's teachings and examples. It also flies in the face of the teachings of Moses, David, Isaiah, James, John, and scores of others. So, was Paul really changing the Almighty's standards for how His people are to act? If so, where did Paul get such authority—authority to change "thus saith the LORD?" And yet, mainstream Christianity accepts this belief hook, line, and sinker, without so much as a raised eyebrow.

One might be willing to accept Paul's authority to change Scripture if there were some clear Biblical statement given by Messiah or one of the original Apostles. Were they to have said, "Another (Paul) will come and will be anointed to changed the Word of the LORD," then perhaps the mainstream interpretations might carry some weight. We have, however, no such indication from anyone. We only have Paul's own claim to have had a vision on the road to Damascus.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is* hard for thee to kick against the

pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Yahoshua¹⁸ whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto Elohim, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

(Acts 26:12-18)

Is there any indication here that Paul will have the right, or the authority, to change “thus saith the LORD?” None whatsoever, not even according to his own testimony! He is commissioned to turn Gentiles “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto Elohim, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” Everywhere else, these goals were accomplished when the Gentiles turned from paganism and lived their lives in accordance with the will of the ‘Holy One of Israel,’—in accordance with His Law. Does anything in Paul’s statement indicate that a paradigm shift was about to occur? If not, the very commission Paul received on the road to Damascus is diametrically opposed to his later statement that, “ye are not under the law” (Romans 6:14).

So we see here no Biblical indication that Paul has the authority to change Scripture. Messiah had said that we are to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Elohim (Matthew 4:4) and mainstream Christian tradition tells us that Paul had the authority to change all that. So, who is right, Paul or Messiah and the rest of Scripture? So, how should we view Paul? Why all the confusion?

PAUL’S WRITINGS AND THE ‘OTHER LAW’

As it turns out, Paul’s commission to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13) was no accident. We will find that he was called to this mission because of specific wisdom that he had been given. But there appears to have been no small amount of confusion over his writings, even in his own day. Let us take a look at what Peter had to say about the writings of Paul.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:13-16)

¹⁸ As a brief aside, note here that Messiah spoke to Paul ‘in the Hebrew tongue’ and gave his Hebrew name, ‘Yahoshua’; not ‘Jesus.’ See the study, ‘What’s In a Name?’

First, we are told that Paul had written “according to the wisdom given unto him.” We also see that some of his points were “hard to be understand,” and finally, that unlearned men would twist the writing of Paul in ways that Paul did not intend “unto their own destruction.” As in many instances we have already seen, there is a subtlety here that is missed by most mainstream Christian teachers. There have always been individuals who have twisted the Scriptures unto their own destruction. Israel had seen many such individuals, some of whom had even claimed falsely to be prophets. So why would Peter focus on the writing of Paul? What made Paul different from other Bible writers to the extent that Peter would highlight “the wisdom given unto him” prior to making the statement that his writings would be twisted?

The Wisdom Given Unto Paul

As turns out, the ‘wisdom given to Paul’ is a key factor in all his writings. Again, do not miss the fact that Peter emphasizes this point.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

(2 Peter 3:13-16)

So just what was Paul’s wisdom; why was it important, and how did it characterize “all his epistles?” As it turns out, Paul defines for us the particular wisdom he had been given. First, he tells us that he is a Pharisee and comes from a line of Pharisees.

Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee... (Acts 23:6)

We should note here that this statement comes in the 23rd chapter of Acts; Paul was not just beginning, but was well into his ministry. We should also not miss the fact that he still claimed to be a Pharisee rather than making the claim in the past tense. But how could Paul make such a claim—how could he still be a Pharisee—and still preach the Gospel? We will answer that question shortly, but prior to this, we should look to another couple verses where Paul gives us a little more insight as to his ‘bona fides’.

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense *which I make* now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the

perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward Elohim, as ye all are this day. (Acts 22:1-3)

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of Elohim, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. (Galatians 1:13-14)

Paul tells us here that he had studied at the feet of Gamaliel and that his knowledge and zeal exceeded that of his peers. But into just what areas did this knowledge and zeal extend? Paul indicates that it pertained to the “traditions” of his fathers. But just what did Paul mean by the phrase, “traditions of my fathers” and how did it tie in with studying “at the feet of Gamaliel?”

Most Christian pastors would say that Paul’s “traditions of my fathers” pertained to keeping the Old Testament Law. Such teaching, however, is woefully inadequate and misleading. It is only espoused because most mainstream Christian pastors have no idea who Gamaliel was, nor what he taught.¹⁹ The Bible points out that Gamaliel—just like his pupil, Paul—was a Pharisee.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; (Acts 5:34)

But why does the Bible spend sacred text to point out who is a Pharisee? As it turns out, this issue is key to much of the content—and surrounding confusion—of Paul’s writings. His use of the term “traditions of my fathers” is a direct reference to the Pharisaic doctrine under which he was raised. As we continue our study, we will find that the ‘wisdom given unto Paul’—the knowledge of the traditions and interpretations of the Pharisees—was key to his calling of being the Apostle to the Gentiles. But why?

The answer lies in the fact that, unlike the Christians of today, those of the first century did not have a huge network of churches spreading across the globe. Their brothers, sisters, and parents might just as well have spent their time in the pagan temples of their ancestors. For the early Christians, the Jewish Temple and synagogues was where the ‘Holy One of Israel’ was worshipped. That is why the Jerusalem Temple had an ‘outer court’ and why we find the Gentiles of other cities in the synagogues on the Sabbath day (e.g., Acts 13:42-47, Acts 14:1, Acts 17:2-4, Acts 18:4). In these settings, the Christians of the first century had weekly—if not daily—contact with Jews. That is why Cornelius could be of “good report among all the nation of the Jews” (Acts 10:22). But in addition to this daily contact between Jews and first century Christians, another dynamic was developing that would have long term effects on the face of both Judaism and Christianity.

¹⁹ Gamaliel was in fact one of the most respected Pharisaic sages of the Temple period. One can still read many of his teachings in the Jewish ‘Talmud.’

In the Second Temple period, there were a variety of Jewish sects to include the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and various other smaller sects such as the Nazarenes. The sect of the Pharisees, however, had become the preeminent and predominant sect within Judaism. There are books on this development, should the reader desire further information on the topic. For our purposes, suffice it to say that the Pharisees acquiesced to the Sadducees running of the Temple while they concentrated instead on building, not only synagogues for worship away from Jerusalem, but also schools for instructing Jewish children. This was truly insightful on their part; after several generations of instructing the children in the Pharisaic traditions, the bulk of the population came to belong to the Pharisaic sect of Judaism.²⁰ For the most part, the other sects quietly faded into relative obscurity.

What Do the Pharisees Believe?

It is unfortunate that much of mainstream Christianity has been given the impression from their pastors that people who were Pharisees were intentionally bad or evil. This negative impression is based mostly on ignorance and partially on statements such as the following:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Matthew 23:13-15)

And, indeed, these statements do seem rather damning toward the Pharisees. But when we later take another look, we will find that Messiah's rebuke—while perhaps directed at a few Pharisees personally—was directed primarily at those Pharisaic teachings that were in direct, or significant, conflict with Torah of His father, the Law of Moses. The Pharisees, as a whole, were not evil and many of their beliefs and actions were quite honorable. Were this not the case, Paul would probably not have made the present-tense claim ‘I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Messiah would probably not have made the statement “whatsoever they bid you observe,” (Matthew 23:3), and Gamaliel would probably not have commanded the council “to put the apostles forth a little space” (Acts 5:34). So, just who were the Pharisees and what did they believe?

Most of the historical information on the Pharisees—other than in their own writings, such as the Talmud—comes from the writings of the famous Jewish historian, Josephus.²¹ The Pharisees are believed by many to have had their beginning as a distinct sect of Judaism during the intertestamental period of 1 and 2 Maccabees. During this period, the Greek ruler, Antiochus Epiphanies, had instituted a program of Hellenization in Palestine, which was an effort to eradicate observance of the Law and make the Jews more like Greeks. Maccabees records a group of ‘pious ones’ (Hasidim) that were

²⁰ Today's modern Jews are also overwhelmingly Pharisaic. The orthodox, conservative, and reform movements all have at their core the traditions of the Pharisaic fathers'—just like Paul.

²¹ Primarily in 2 of his works: *The Wars of the Jews* and *The Antiquities of the Jews*

allies of Judas Maccabee in opposition to, and revolt against, Antiochus. It is these Hasidim that are believed to have been the first Pharisees.

The name ‘Pharisee’ derives from the Hebrew word ‘parash’ meaning ‘to separate.’ While opinions vary as to the exact nature of this separation, most believe it pertained to separation from ritual uncleanness, apostate Jews, and Gentiles. The Pharisees strove to be perfect in their purity and observance of the Law and began to develop an entirely distinct body of commandments whereby they lived. These additional commandments served as ‘fences’ around the actual commands contained in the Law and were much more exacting and restrictive. They were designed to ensure that one could not come even close to violating the commandments of the Law. Josephus says of them,

Now, for the Pharisees, they live simply, and despise delicacies in diet; they follow the guidance of that which their teaching has selected and prescribed to them as good for them they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe its dictates for practice.²²

The piety and sincerity of the Pharisees struck a chord among the people and they became extremely influential. Josephus further indicates that their influence among the masses was so extensive that when they spoke even against a king or High Priest, the masses gave them heed.²³ Moreover, the masses also gave heed to Pharisaic regulations on prayers and sacred rites of divine worship.²⁴ Perhaps, that is why the Messiah noted their predominant influence as follows:

Then spake Yahoshua to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. (Matthew 23:1-3)

It was into this powerful and influential sect of Judaism that Paul was born and raised. Before we can truly begin to understand Paul’s writings and what he meant when he referred to the “traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:13-14), or “law of the fathers” (Acts 22:1-3), we will have to take a brief look at the Pharisaic interpretations of the Law that influenced the prevailing worship of the people.²⁵

To the Pharisees, the Law contained in the five books of Moses is not the entire Law. They believe that when the Almighty gave His written Law to Moses, as recorded in the book of Exodus (Exodus 24:4), He also gave Moses a set of oral instructions through which to interpret the written instructions. These oral instructions, known as “Torah she’bal peh”—the Oral Torah—were supposedly passed verbally

²² *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter 1, Section 3, contained in *The Works of Josephus—Complete and Unabridged*, translated by William Whiston, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, November 1991.

²³ *Ibid*, Book XIII, Chapter 10 and Book XVIII, Chapter 1, Section 4.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Book XIII, Chapter 10, Section 6.

²⁵ The term ‘traditions of the fathers’ or ‘laws of the fathers’ is rendered in Hebrew as ‘Pirkei Avot’ and was an actual component of the Mishna, although the reference by Josephus seems to pertain to these traditions in a somewhat broader sense.

from father to son all the way from Moses until the time of the Pharisees, when they finally began to be put into written form.²⁶ Then the various Pharisaic sages recorded their interpretations and commentary to this ‘Oral Torah’, which developed into the ‘traditions of the fathers’ referred to by Paul.

These Pharisaic writings, recorded and maintained by the scribes, were held by the Pharisees to be as much ‘the Law’ as was the written Law of Moses. These ‘traditions’ came to comprise literally thousands of additional commandments surrounding and modifying the written Commandments contained in the written Law of Moses. Josephus describes this reality for us.

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the Law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the wealthy, and having no following among the people, but the Pharisees have the masses on their side.²⁷

Josephus verifies for us that the term ‘tradition of our forefathers’ did not pertain only to the written Law of the Most High as given to Moses, but also to the additional myriad of commandments taught by the Pharisee to the masses as ‘the Law’. Now that we understand this distinction somewhat better, we are ready to look to one of Paul’s statements which acknowledges this distinction in the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law and demonstrates that Paul was raised under the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law.

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (Philippians 3:4-6)

As we will soon examine, it is this Pharisaic interpretation of the Law, and Paul’s often-negative reaction thereto, which produces such confusion in the modern, mainstream Church. We will likewise discover that the seemingly-confusing statements made by my Messiah in Mathew 15 and Mark 7 have the same purpose and focus as much of Paul’s writings. So, let us now delve into these interesting matters!

Things Hard To Be Understood, Which They That Are Unlearned And Unstable Wrest...

As we begin to understand and examine these finer variations in the meaning of the Law, as introduced by the Pharisees, we can begin to understand how these issues might be hard to understand (2 Peter

²⁶ The final collection of these writings was redacted by ‘Yehuda ha Nasi’ (Judah the Prince) into the ‘Mishna’ in the 3rd century C.E.

²⁷ *Antiquities*, Book XIII, Chapter 10, Section 6.

3:16). For example, if a Sadducee of Paul's day, or a Karaite Jew²⁸ of today, and a Pharisee were to stand side-by-side and talk about the Law, the average mainstream Christian of today would assume that they were all talking about the same law; the written Law of Moses. The Pharisee would know of the additions and modifications of the written law of Moses, but believe that his additions were also integral to the same Law. The Karaite, mindful of the arguments and rationale of the Pharisees, would nonetheless hold the belief that any additions to the written Law are simply the 'traditions of men.' On the outside, however, the "unstable" or the "unlearned" (2 Peter 3:16) might be totally confused. Were these 'unlearned' individuals to go on to teach on the subject of the Law and Paul's writings, they would likely wrestle with these issues and twist the Scriptures "to their own destruction." As we will come to see clearly, that is exactly what has happened in the Christian Church—by well-meaning but 'unlearned' pastors and teachers.

Unlike most of our well-meaning but 'unlearned' teachers of today, let us now use our somewhat deeper understanding of Pharisaic traditions and teachings to reexamine some of the more confusing statements made by the Messiah and by Paul. As promised, let us first look at some of Messiah's statements contained in Matthew 15 and Mark 7.

Think Not That I Have Come to Destroy the Law... (Part 2)

Because Matthew 15 and Mark 7 are almost identical, we will show only the passage from Mark 7, below. The essential elements, however, are virtually the same in both. And it is critical to note that the setting of both passages is an encounter of Messiah with the Pharisees. And knowing their expanded definition of the Law, we may now be able to better understand the intricacies of, and reasons for, the verbal sparring between Messiah and these 'teachers' of the Law.

Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of Elohim, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of Elohim, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth

²⁸ There are at least several thousand Karaite Jews in Israel today. Like the Sadducees of Paul's day, they believe that the Law is only the written Law of Moses. They even have several websites; one of these is www.karaite-korner.org.

father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free*. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of Elohim of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear. (Mark 7:1-16)

In this passage, just as in Matthew 15:1-13, the ‘violation’ committed by the disciples (verse 2) was not a violation of the written Law of Moses; it was a violation of the modified ‘law’ of the Pharisees. The disciples had not washed their hands before consuming bread, but the Law of Moses contains no such commandment. The ‘tradition of the fathers’ however, contains many such commandments and people are to wash their hands before consuming bread. For example,

Before eating bread...one must wash his hands first... The water used for washing the hands must be poured out of a vessel that is perfect, having neither hole nor crack... When using a vessel containing a spout, we must not let the water run through the spout... We first wash our right hand then our left. The water must cover the entire hand up to the wrist. No part of the hand should be left unwashed; therefore the fingers must be slightly parted... After washing both hands, we rub them together and then raise them upward, as it is written (Psalms 134:2): “lift up your hands... Over true bread made of one of the five species of grain (wheat, spelt, oats, barley, or rye) we say the benediction... One must be careful not to linger between washing the hands and the benediction...”²⁹

As the reader is probably aware, none of these commandments concerning washing one’s hands before eating bread is found in the Law of the Most High. They are all from the ‘traditions’ of Paul’s fathers, and we have significantly abbreviated them above. These man-made traditions actually span several pages and go into each intricacy of vessels, water sources and quality, blessings, etc. This is why the scribes always accompanied the Pharisees; they had a full-time job keeping track of these thousands of commandments. But we continue...

After talking about the hand washing commandments, the Pharisees also mentioned commandments relating to the “washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables” (verse 4). Again, these commandments are not from the Law of Moses, but from the ‘tradition of the fathers.’

²⁹ These commandments, from the traditions of the fathers, are found in the Talmud. For ease of reference for the reader, we will use a condensed version of the Talmud entitled Code of Jewish Law (Kitzur Shulkan Arukh), because it is easily accessible in Jewish bookstores by the average reader. It is designed to be a ready reference for the modern Jew, which contains a subset of laws and customs most applicable to the modern Jew today. *Code of Jewish Law, a Compilation of Jewish Laws and Customs* by Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, Translated by Hyman E. Goldin, LL.B., Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, 1998). Volume 1, chapter 38-41, pp. 125-132.

Glass and metal utensils bought from a heathen for culinary purposes, even when new, must not be used even for holding cold victuals before they are immersed in a pool that would be approved for the ritual immersion of a woman after her period of menstruation. Before they are immersed, the following benediction is pronounced: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hath sanctified us by His commandments, and commanded us concerning the immersion of a vessel”... Wooden vessels need not be immersed, but if they have metal hoops, they are to be immersed without pronouncing the benediction. Clay vessels need not be immersed, but if they are glazed on the inside, they are to be immersed without pronouncing the benediction... Glassware manufactured by an Israelite who employs non-Jewish workmen, should be immersed without pronouncing the benediction... also trays upon which matzot (unleavened bread) are placed, should be immersed without pronouncing the benediction... The whole vessel must be immersed at one time...³⁰

Once again, these commandments are not from the Law of Moses, but from the ‘traditions’ of Paul’s fathers, and we have again significantly abbreviated them. So now let us look carefully at the response of the Messiah to the Pharisaic accusations against His disciples. Unlike the typical message from the pulpit, let us carefully examine His response to determine if the Savior was changing, or doing away with, His Father’s commandments.

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of Elohim, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of Elohim, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:6-7)

Messiah's own words show us that He was not changing, or doing away with, His Father’s commandments. He specifically contrasted these ‘traditions of the elders’ with the commandment of His Father and rebuked the Pharisees for putting some of their own commandments over the Law of His Father. Note what He says as He continues,

For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban,* that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.* And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of Elohim of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:10-13)

³⁰ Ibid, chapter 37, pp. 119-121.

Again, Messiah was rebuking the Pharisees for putting some of their own commandments above those of His Father contained in the Law. In this case, the Pharisees were allowing the people not to provide for their parents, as commanded in the Law, but rather to designate certain things or animals “corban” as future offerings for the Temple. Again, Messiah’s rebuke was that they were teaching people to violate the Law commandments of His Father. So, once again, Messiah is demonstrating that His Father’s commandments contained in the Law are paramount and of the utmost importance. How then should we interpret the following verses?

And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.
(Mark 7:14-16)

Conventional Christian teachings would have us believe that Messiah changed His Father’s dietary commandments by this verse (and Matthew 15:11) and we can now eat anything we want to. But does this make sense? Does this pass the test of comparing Scripture with Scripture? Of course it does not. The Creator had commanded,

These *are* the beasts which ye shall eat...whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is cloven-footed, *and* cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Nevertheless... these shall ye not eat... And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he *is* unclean to you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcass shall ye not touch; they *are* unclean to you... These shall ye eat of all that *are* in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat... And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers...they *shall be* an abomination unto you.. (Leviticus 11:1-47)

So, why would the Savior make void His Father’s commandment, especially when we see that He had just rebuked the Pharisees for doing the same thing? If we are discerning, we will realize that He did no such thing. Remember, he had just verbally sparred with the Pharisees and challenged some of their traditions, which violated the written word of His Father. In verses 14-16, Messiah was not changing the Law of His Father; He was challenging the Pharisaic allegations that people would be defiled by not following their “washing” commandments prior to eating. Let us take another look at the setting of this confrontation.

Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault. (Mark 7:1-2)

Again, let us be a little more discerning here than we have in the past. The disciples were eating a Biblically clean food—bread—in the first place. The context here is the ‘defilement’ comes from the fact that the disciples had not washed their hands. This ‘defilement’ was defined by the Pharisees and

not agreed to by the Messiah. The entire passage does not even entertain the possibility of eating anything unclean such as pork, jellyfish, eels, scorpions, etc. To anyone following the Scriptures, such things would never even have been considered as ‘food;’ they are ‘*traif*’³¹ and abominable. In other words, they are not things that the Messiah would even consider to “goeth into the mouth.”

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (Matthew 15:11)

Neither Jews, nor any of the ‘great men of the Bible’ would interpret this statement to have anything to do with eating *traif*. Christianity is able to be tricked into stretching the meaning because many ‘good Christians’ have been consuming such things for 16 centuries, thanks to the influence of Emperor Constantine. During his reign in the fourth century, he adopted the following creed and forced it—under pain of persecution and death—upon the Christian Church.

I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrews, and of all the other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspirations, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations, and fasts and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues and the food and drink of the Hebrews; in one word I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom...

Perhaps the good Emperor Constantine should have read his Bible a little more and spent a little less time writing creeds and paganizing the Church. Had he done so, he might have noted that most of the customs, rites, unleavened breads, feasts, fasts, new moons, Sabbath, food and drink, etc. of the Hebrews were commanded by the Most High to Moses; only the pagans were eating *traif*. But let us return to the creed of good Emperor Constantine,

I accept all prayers, purifications with water, sanctifications by the Pontificus Maximus (Pope), propitiations, and feasts, and the New Sabbath “Sol dei” (day of the sun), all new chants and observances, and all the foods and drinks of the Romans. In other words, I absolutely accept everything Roman, every new law, rite and custom, of Rome, and the new Roman religion.³²

Had the emperor spent a little more time reading the Scriptures, he might have realized that the Roman traditions, with which he filled the Roman church, were not from the Most High, but of pagan origin, complete with an abundance of idols (statutes) and pagan holidays.³³

For Christian pastors to follow in Constantine’s footsteps and teach today that Messiah now allows His people to eat *traif* and do other pagan things, is an abomination to Him and to His Father. Nowhere in

³¹ ‘Traif’ is a Hebrew word meaning something unclean that only the heathen, or apostate Israelites might eat.

³² Jeffrey Weiss, *The Truth of Reformation*, p. 33. Also at <http://www.yaih.com>, quoting Stefano Assemani, *Acat Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium at Occidentalium*, Vol. 1 Rome 1748, p. 105.

³³ For a discussion of the true Biblical Holydays, see the study, “Holy Days or Holidays?”

the entire Old Testament do we ever find any good ‘men of the Bible’ eating *traif*. As we continue to examine the writings of Paul, we will likewise find that his statements have been taken out of context and twisted by the “unlearned and unstable.” To teach otherwise carries serious consequences. We must remember that in the end-time wrath of the Almighty, swine, mice, and other unclean things will still be viewed as *traif*.

For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one *tree* in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination³⁴, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:15-17)

If Messiah were on the earth today, He might likewise ask the pastors and seminaries today,

Why do ye also transgress the commandment of Elohim by your tradition... Thus have ye made the commandment of Elohim of none effect by your tradition... But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.
(Matthew 15:3, 6, 9)

We should take the time to point out here that Yahoshua’s teachings were a direct threat to the teachings of the Pharisees and therefore to their almost absolute influence over the people. If people could simply read the written Torah without relying on the Pharisaic Rabbis to interpret for them the traditions, they would no longer need the Rabbis.

We have already seen that the Pharisaic sect had tremendous influence on the majority of the Jewish people, especially in the cities, and that they were a powerful force to be reckoned with. Mindful of this situation, the disciples took the time to point out their concern to Yahoshua with respect to His challenging their authority.

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? (Matthew 15:12)

We know from later events that this fear was indeed justified, because some Pharisaic leaders played a significant role in the arrest and subsequent death of Yahoshua.³⁵

Before we leave the words of the Messiah, we need to take a quick look at one more statement from the Gospel of Mark. Following the Messiah's discussion on ritual purity with the Pharisees, we find the following statement:

³⁴ The Hebrew word ‘sheqets’ means something ‘unclean’, ‘detestable’ or ‘an abomination.’

³⁵ Responsibility here is intended in the temporal occurrence of events. Messiah’s actual death was for all mankind and the Bible records that His death was a voluntary act on His part (e.g., John 10:17-18).

And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? (Mark 7:17-19)

The phrase "purging all meats" is rendered "(*Thus He* declared all foods clean.)" in the NASV, NIV, etc. This verse has likewise been used within mainstream Christianity to teach that Messiah cleansed anything that one might want to eat, to include *traif*. Such a determination, however, goes beyond the context of the verse. We must remember that the 18 previous verses dealt ONLY with the pharisaic requirements of ritual purity, which they applied to foods that were Biblically clean in the first place. Messiah did declare all *foods* clean from Pharisaic-declared ritual defilement; He said absolutely nothing about *traif*!

So, we find once again that Scripture agrees with Scripture; our Savior was not changing His Father's Law concerning clean and unclean animals, but simply disputing the requirements of manmade traditions. What's more, Messiah once again proved that His Father's commandments were superior to the religious traditions of man—even if taught by the majority movement of His day.³⁶ But was Paul equally consistent, or did he have a different message? Perhaps it is now time to take another look at Paul's writings, but this time let us examine what he had to say through the eyes of those to whom he wrote—God fearing Gentiles of the first century, just like Cornelius.

BACK TO PAUL—THIS TIME THROUGH THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE

As we prepare to look more closely at the writings of Paul, we must prepare to do so with keener eyesight than enjoyed by your average mainstream seminary graduate. Not taking away from the demanding course of study that these students undergo, they are simply not taught to see Paul for what he claimed to be—an expert in the Pharisaic interpretation and teaching on the Law. As we have seen, the Gentiles trying to follow the 'Holy One of Israel' were in the synagogues on the Sabbath, and would have had plenty of contact with Pharisaic teachings on the Law.³⁷ Most recently, we have seen that Messiah's seemingly contradictory statements on the Law were not contradictory at all, but simply challenges to certain aspects of the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law. As we take a closer look at Paul, we find his writings similarly focused. Paul never taught against the Law of the Most High, just against some of the 'traditions of his fathers' contained in Pharisaic doctrines.

What Was Paul's Attitude Toward the Law of Moses?

"But, not so fast..." one might say "how do we know Paul followed and taught the Law of Moses? In order to make this determination, perhaps we should look at a couple of his statements.

³⁶ He that hat an ear to hear let him hear...

³⁷ Even today, Gentiles spending time in synagogues will learn a lot about the 'traditions' of the Pharisees.

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: (Acts 24:10-14)

We find here, in Paul's statement, that he claimed to believe all things in the Law and the prophets. Here, Scripture agrees with Scripture in that he sounds just like King David, Caleb, and the Messiah himself. Had Paul in fact believed otherwise, this would have been a perfect place to specify the differences. He was testifying before Felix, the governor (verse 1-3), and was clarifying his beliefs against accusations made by the orator, Tertullus, on behalf of the High Priest. Paul did not claim here that any part of the Law had been changed by the cross, but stated that he believed all things, which are written in the law and in the prophets. And we should also not fail to notice another important distinction Paul makes during his statement.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way³⁸ which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: (Acts 24:14)

Knowing what we now know about Pharisaic Judaism, we can also now discern an important distinction Paul was making in his beliefs. His statement that he believed "all things which are written in the law" was a direct contradiction to the oral 'traditions of the fathers' that the Pharisees were teaching in addition to the written Law. In addition to stating his beliefs, Paul was also exploiting the bitter disagreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the 'Oral Torah.'

The second statement we will review is Paul's statement before Festus, two years after his statement before Felix.

And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. (Acts 25:7-8)

³⁸ The term "the way" indicates that he considered his beliefs to constitute a 'sect' under the umbrella of Judaism; the sect was not called Christianity, but the 'sect' (way) of the 'Netzerim' (Nazoreans) (Acts 24:5).

Notice here that Paul, late in his ministry, claimed that he had not offended against the Law. We should not overlook the significance of his statement here. Had Paul been in fact teaching that the Law—or significant parts—had been done away with, as mainstream Christianity claims, he could not have made that statement.

And finally, we must point out that Paul, earlier in his ministry, had gone so far as to take a vow to prove that he had not taught against the Law.

And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law... Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. (Acts 21:20-26)

Notice here that Paul was told to take a vow to prove that the accusations—that he had taught against the law—were untrue (verse 24). Furthermore, the vow was to signify that Paul himself observed the Law (verse 24). And we find that Paul in fact took the vow (verse 26).

So, what are we to conclude from these verses, and the verses above? We must conclude that, (1) either Paul took the vow under false pretenses or (2) he did not in fact teach against the Law. If Paul took the vow under false pretenses, then he made a false oath and is not worthy of being esteemed as a teacher. If, instead, he did not teach against the Law, then he was consistent with the claims he made before Felix and Festus, and lived his life in agreement with that of the Messiah and other ‘great men’ of the Bible.

As we continue our study, we will find that Paul was, in fact, honorable and that his teachings—interpreted by mainstream Christianity to be ‘against the Law’—were in fact for the Law and against those Pharisaic traditions, which they had placed above the Law. Mainstream Christianity has only missed this fact because Constantine, and others like him³⁹, stripped the Nazarene movement of its

³⁹ These include Ignatius, Ambrose, Justin, and many others. For a good source, which addresses many of the religious debates in the first few centuries, refer to *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977. Dr. Bacchiocchi is a Seventh Day Adventist who has the distinction of having been the first non-Catholic graduate of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. While I do not endorse many Adventist beliefs, Dr. Bacchiocchi’s work is well worth the read.

Hebrew roots, blurred the key role played by the Pharisees, and systematically paganized the movement into following the ways of Rome.

This study will not focus on every statement made by Paul; to do so would necessitate turning the study into a book. We will, instead, examine several of those key passages most often used in sermons to ‘prove’ that Paul preached against the law. It will be left to the reader to apply the same analysis to those passages that we are not able to address in the study. Because Paul wrote the same way in all his letters (2 Peter 3:16), the reader should be able to do this. For now, let us move to the first of our select passages contained in Paul’s letter to the believers at Rome.

PAUL’S LETTER TO THE ROMANS: “There Is Nothing Unclean Of Itself...” (Romans 14:14)

For a couple reasons, probably the best place to start an in-depth examination of Paul’s writings is his letter to the believers in Rome. With hardly a second thought, it is assumed in mainstream Christian circles that the book of Romans is written to a group consisting of Jews and of Gentile Christians who are living as Gentile Christians do today. In a sense, one could almost say that the Gentiles of this group were the ‘most gentile of the Gentiles.’ Rome was the farthest west of the cities mentioned in the Bible, and the seat of an empire characterized by worship of a pantheon of pagan deities. The Gentiles of this congregation, destined to one day claim to be the very center of the Christian faith, are never assumed to have Hebraic inclinations; they are simply assumed to be the forerunners of today’s Gentile Christians.

With such assumptions, it would only seem to make sense for Paul to be interpreted as telling these individuals that they are no longer “under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14-15), or that “Christ is the end of the law...to everyone that believeth” (Romans 10:4), or that they can now eat what was formerly “abomination” because since the cross, “There is nothing unclean of itself” (Romans 14:14). Was Paul really doing this? Was he teaching something diametrically opposed to the teachings of his Savior and to the Law and the Prophets? Was he a false prophet, as some have expressed, or have the “unlearned and unstable” twisted his statements into doctrines of demons, just as Peter had warned (2 Peter 3:15-16)?

As we will demonstrate, the problem lies not with Paul’s teachings, but with the fact that mainstream Christianity, stripped of its Hebraic roots by Constantine and his predecessors, has been fooled into reading Paul’s words outside the context in which they were written. The Romans to whom Paul wrote were not ignorant of Judaism at all.⁴⁰ Unlike today’s Christians, the believers in Rome were Gentile believers of the sect of the Nazarenes and quite familiar with the Law and Pharisaic teachings on the Law. At the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the congregation had just been stripped of its

⁴⁰ The knowledge and influence of Judaism within most Eurasian empires were not insignificant in the Biblical period. See, for example, *Jews, God, and History*, by Max I. Dimont, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1962, for a discussion of the influence of the Jews on Rome and the west in general. Unkelos, a cousin of Mark Anthony, even converted to Judaism. And let us not forget that the first followers of the Messiah were members of a sect of Judaism known as the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5).

Jewish members by an edict of the emperor exiling all the Jews from Rome—as we will see later in the study.

As we delve into Paul’s letter to the Romans, it will be tempting to do a verse-by-verse analysis of the entire letter. Such an undertaking would consume several scores of pages, expanding this study into a book. Almighty willing, that will happen some day. In the meantime, however, we will limit ourselves to a few passages, which should give us a broader perspective on the nature of Paul’s letter to these Gentile Nazarenes of Rome. Perhaps, with this broader insight, the reader will be able to evaluate the rest of the letter in the light in which it was written. So, let us delve into Romans and consider several passages that you have never heard taught in Sunday sermons or in Mainstream Christian radio programs.

Did Paul Write to a Gentile Nazarene Congregation in Rome?

To learn what the Bible tells us about the congregation in Rome, we must first look to the book of Acts where we find that in the earliest days of the movement of the Nazarenes⁴¹—within 3 months of the death of Yahoshua—“strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes” came to Jerusalem to participate in the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost).⁴²

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them... And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven...

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia...Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes... (Acts 2:1-10)

As the reader will recall from Acts 1:4, the believers had not yet left Jerusalem and certainly had not yet ‘spread the gospel’ to Rome. The Jews and Gentile proselytes spoken of here were not Christians; Christianity as we know it today did not even exist. These individuals were, rather, members of a Hebraic congregation in Rome. The Gentile “proselytes” to Judaism—just like today—are not simply individuals who ‘hang around’ and go to an occasional worship service. “Proselytes” to Judaism agree to abide by all Jewish laws (written and traditional), live as other Jews of the community, and accept the covenant of circumcision. Furthermore, they have to stand before a “Beit Din” (a court of Jewish law) and be evaluated for acceptance. Once the Beit Din accepts them, they are proclaimed to be Jews and are fully accepted into the Jewish community. The fact that these proselytes accompanied the Jews of

⁴¹ The sect of the Nazarenes, from the word ‘netzer’ meaning ‘branch’ (I am the vine, you are the branches) were not called ‘Christians’ until Antioch (Acts 11:26). Note: The Bible says they were “called Christians”; the passage does not indicate that they referred to themselves by that term.

⁴² The Law (Leviticus 23:16-22; Deuteronomy 16:16) directs that the faithful should journey to Jerusalem to observe the Biblical festivals of Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost.

Rome to Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost is a witness that they were observing the Law. These individuals, “Jews and proselytes,” later became believers in Messiah (Acts 2:37), were immersed (Acts 2:38-41), and continued to meet in the Temple (Acts 2:46) for the time they were there.

Paul’s letter to the Romans, written some 25 years later, was written to this congregation. We have no Biblical indication that they had changed their focus and, as we continue to examine Paul’s letter to them, we will find that they are continuing to observe the Law, just as they had done during their Pentecost visit to Jerusalem 25 years earlier.

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? (Romans 7:1)

But if we look closely, we will notice a subtle, but significant focus of Paul’s letter to this congregation. While mainstream pastors teach that Paul must have been writing to Jews in some parts of the letter, Paul’s words indicate otherwise. Paul’s audience does not include Jews, but focuses only on Gentiles.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. (Romans 1:13)

These Gentiles, to whom Paul wrote, knew the Law. They were not “Gentiles” as we know them today, but Gentiles like Caleb, Ruth, Cornelius, and the Gentile proselytes that had traveled to Jerusalem to observe the festival of Pentecost. They knew the Law and were observing it. As we continue, we will find more indications that this was in fact the case.

But how do we know that Paul was writing only to Gentiles? How do we know that Paul’s later references to the Law were not focused at the Jews of the congregation, just as the mainstream pastors claim? Perhaps it would be a good idea for the reader to pause for a short time and read Romans from chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 11, verse 13. Nowhere do we have any indication that Paul is changing the focus of his letter or changing audiences within the letter. In other words, the audience of Paul’s letter remains constant throughout the letter; he is writing to Gentiles the entire time; to assume otherwise, must be done with no Biblical indication or authority. He even reiterates that his audience is Gentiles.

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office. (Romans 11:13)

But why Paul’s exclusive focus on Gentiles members of the congregation in Rome? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the Jewish members of the congregation in Rome had just been forced out of Rome by edict of the Emperor Claudius.

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth⁴³; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome;) and came unto them. (Acts 18:1-2)

Paul probably wrote his letter to the congregation in Rome when he did because they had just lost their Jewish congregants and were in need of edification and identification as Nazarenes.

So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Messiah: for it is the power of Elohim unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:15-16)

Paul does not suppose here that these congregants are committed Nazarene ‘believers’ in Yahoshua, but states that he is “ready to preach the gospel” of Messiah to them—probably because the intervening 25 years since the Acts 2 Pentecost experience had dimmed their resolve as Nazarene believers. Paul’s claim of not being “ashamed of the gospel of Messiah” is probably an acknowledgment of the prevailing Pharisaic pressure against the belief that Yahoshua was the Messiah.

Paul’s initial appeal to the congregation in Rome was not as Christians, as mainstream pastors have been taught, but as members of a Hebraic congregation who knew the ‘Law and the prophets’.⁴⁴

Paul, a servant of Yahoshua the Messiah, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of Elohim, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Yahoshua our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of Elohim with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Yahoshua the Messiah: To all that be in Rome, beloved of Elohim, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from Elohim our Father, and the Adoni Yahoshua Messiah. (Romans 1:1-7)

Paul makes his appeal to these congregants based upon these Scriptures, with which they were quite familiar. As we continue in Paul’s letter, we find another strong allusion to the fact that these Gentile members of the congregation were observing the Law of the Most High.

⁴³ It is generally believed that Paul’s letter to the Romans was written while Paul was in Corinth, after he had written 2 Corinthians, but prior to his departure for Jerusalem. This would place the date of Romans in 56 C.E., and after the Jews had been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius.

⁴⁴ We must remember here that it was the year 56 C.E. There were no printing presses and no “Bibles” as we know them. Most Romans were pagans who frequented the pagan temples. The sacred Scriptures, to which Paul referred, were in scroll form in the Hebraic congregations—just like the one in Rome.

Behold, thou art called a Jew⁴⁵, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of Elohim, And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

(Romans 2:17-20)

Note here that Paul does not say, “Behold, you are Jews,” (the born Jews had been recently expelled from Jerusalem). He says, “Behold, thou art called a Jew.” Why? Because the members of the congregation to whom he was writing were not born Jewish, but were being called Jews because of their conversion and how they were living their lives—just like Caleb, Ruth, and Cornelius. To the outside observer, who did not know their histories, these individuals would be called “Jews” because of their observance of the Law.⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, these individuals were doing such a good job that their reputation was known throughout the Mediterranean world.

First, I thank my Elohim through Yahoshua Messiah for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)

This congregation in Rome was not a ‘Christian church’ as mistakenly believed today. With this understanding, we will now be able to pick up some of the nuances in Paul’s letter, nuances that are invisible to the average seminary graduate. We will see that Paul, just like Yahoshua before him, lifted up the Law of the Most High while teaching against those Pharisaic doctrines that put human tradition above the Law of the Most High.

At the beginning of Romans 2, Paul exhorts the congregants in Rome not to be judgmental toward others. He indicates that the Most High, Himself, will be the judge.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of Elohim is according to truth against them which commit such things. (Romans 2:1-2)

As we will see, Paul’s statement here is a veiled reference to the Pharisaic tendency to judge observance of the Law in accordance with Pharisaic interpretation—just as we have seen earlier in the study. Obviously, the Gentile congregants in Rome were continuing that practice at the time Paul wrote to them. We will see that Paul’s letter to these Roman congregants did not teach against the Law, but

⁴⁵ The NIV, NASB, and RSV versions of the Bible, based on the ‘Codex Vaticanus’ Greek manuscript, change the wording to “Behold, if you call yourself a Jew...” This is a subtle, but significant change which alters the meaning considerably. This translation, while ideal to Roman Catholic interpretation of Romans, begins to break down logically in verse 21 and later verses. Note: Codex means ‘book’ vice scroll, and ‘Vaticanus’ denotes that this ‘book’ was discovered in the Vatican. (The reader can make his/her own assessment as to possible Roman influence.)

⁴⁶ Even today, if a Christian were to tell someone that he doesn’t eat pork and observes the Sabbath and other Biblical holy days, he will almost invariably be met with the statement, “Oh, so you’re Jewish...” Try it!

against the self-righteous attitude toward the Law that the Pharisaic system had imparted on the people. Let us take a look at Paul's words.

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of Elohim, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou Elohim? For the name of Elohim is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. (Romans 2:17-24)

At the beginning of the passage Paul points out the self-righteousness of the congregants and then begins to challenge them for violating the very commandments of the Law they are using to judge others. Paul, by citing these commandments of the Law is uplifting the Law to these congregants of Rome. But Paul goes even further...

Paul, mindful of the fact that these Gentiles had accepted the covenant of circumcision, uses this knowledge to prick their consciences even further. We must remember that the Pharisees taught people to interpret the Law through their paradigm. The fact that these Gentiles had fully converted, even unto accepting circumcision and becoming 'fully Jewish' per Pharisaic prescription was supposed to give them a special status not enjoyed by their lesser Gentile brethren. Knowing the Pharisaic teachings well, notice Paul's transition and contrast in this passage.

Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou Elohim? For the name of Elohim is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of Elohim. (Romans 2:23-29)

In verse 23, Paul is stating that these proselytes, while following Pharisaic tradition are breaking the commandments of the Law (remember Messiah's rebukes to the Pharisees for doing the same thing). In verse 24, Paul is stating that these Gentile converts—now called 'Jews'—are causing the Almighty's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles, the same group out of which they came. These 'proselyte Jews' are now guilty of the same rebuke Ezekiel leveled at the 'born Jews' of his day (Ezekiel 36:21-23); violating the commands of the Law causes the name of the Almighty to be blasphemed. In verse

25, Paul stresses that the much-valued circumcision of these proselytes is only good if they walk fully in the Law. In verses 26-27, he makes the point that the uncircumcised Gentiles who keep the commandments of the Law are actually better witnesses than circumcised individuals who do not keep the Law. In verse 28-29—again playing on the desire of these “proselytes” to be Jews—Paul indicates that a real Jew will ‘walk the walk,’ keeping all the commandments from the heart (just as Messiah taught) and get their praise from the Almighty, Himself. Those who did not, would get their praise only from men (the Pharisees).⁴⁷

On the surface, it might seem that Paul is minimizing the importance of circumcision, but remember the warning of 2 Peter 3:15-16. Then notice that Paul does not minimize the importance of circumcision or the calling of Jews.

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of Elohim. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of Elohim without effect? Elohim forbid: yea, let Elohim be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. (Romans 3:1-4)

As promised, we will cut short the verse-by-verse examination and skim the next several chapters of Romans to get to the oft-taught and oft-misunderstood parts. As you skim Chapters 3-6, notice that Paul is teaching the importance of faith and warning against a one-sided reliance solely upon the literal fulfillment of commandments for their sake alone. He points out the love of the Most High in reaching people from all walks of life and their ultimate justification by the sacrifice of Messiah. Paul acknowledges that people may be, and are, saved while sinners. But note what Paul then says,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin⁴⁸, that grace may abound? Elohim forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Yahoshua the Messiah were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Messiah was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Romans 6:1-6)

Once again, we see that Paul lifts up the Law, but demonstrates that our attitude toward keeping it should be one of humility, rather than judgment of others. But Paul goes on,

⁴⁷ Paul makes a similar reference to his former desire to “please men” in Galatians 1:10

⁴⁸ We have already seen that Biblically, “sin is the transgression of the Law” (1 John 3:4).

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? (Romans 7:1-2)

Paul further lifts up the Law ten verses later and points out that knowledge of the Law illuminates the extent to which sin is evil.

Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? Elohim forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. (Romans 7:12-13)

Paul then goes on to acknowledge the inner conflict that he experiences between his knowledge of the “spiritual” Law of the Most High and carnal actions.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (Romans 7:14-15)

Paul then goes on to explain that, given his knowledge of the Law, if he still submits to his sinful nature and gives in to carnal actions, this process is tantamount to trying to demonstrate—in the face of the Almighty’s Law—that these actions are good.

If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. (Romans 7:16)

Paul refers to this process as the “law of sin” and contrasts it with the Law of the Almighty, the Law of his mind. He acknowledges that the law of sin is bad, but that he delights in the Law of the Most High.

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of Elohim after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank Elohim through Yahoshua the Messiah our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of Elohim; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:17-25)

Paul then goes on to state that those in Messiah, who walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh, have no need to worry about condemnation.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Messiah Yahoshua, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yahoshua hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, Elohim sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

But what does it mean to “walk after the Spirit?” In all likelihood, it would probably mean that we are to walk as the Messiah walked because He walked after the Spirit. The first Epistle of John explains it this way.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Yahoshua Messiah the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. (1 John 2:1-7)

Just like Paul, John is stating that we should seek not to sin (transgress the Law) but if we do, we have Messiah as our advocate. John demonstrates here that walking in Messiah’s footsteps means for us to walk as He did and we have already seen that Messiah lifted up His Father’s Law at every turn; He observed it and taught others to do so. John further tells us that this understanding is nothing new; it has been this way from the beginning according to the Word of the Most High. But let us return to Paul and we find that Paul is in agreement with 1 John.

Paul tells us that the Spirit will quicken us to enable us to overcome and put to death, “to mortify,” the deeds of the flesh.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please Elohim. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of Elohim dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Messiah, he is none of his. And if Messiah *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Yahoshua from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Messiah from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Romans 8:8-13)

Paul then makes one of his many statements misunderstood by modern Christianity but well understood by these Gentile members of the congregation in Rome.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

Many teachers of mainstream Christianity tell us that the ‘bondage’ here refers to being under the Law. But would this interpretation make sense in light of all we have seen thus far? Would it agree with King David’s attitude toward the Law, or with Caleb’s attitude, or with Messiah’s? Did they consider it ‘bondage’ to observe the Law? But just to what is Paul, the Pharisee, referring then?

While the Bible never uses the word ‘bondage’ and observance of the Law in the same sentence, the Pharisees did, and do. They teach that when a Gentile converts to Judaism (just as the Gentile proselytes did in the Roman congregation), they must first accept the ‘ol malchut shamayim’ (yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven), followed by the acceptance of ‘ol mitzvot’ (‘yoke of the commandments’ or ‘yoke of the Law’).⁴⁹

Within Judaism, ‘Ol malchut shamayim’ is a metaphor for accepting the rabbinic authority of the Pharisees. Only after one does this, as the teaching goes, is he ready to take on ‘ol mitzvot’ and keep the commandments as interpreted and taught by the Pharisaic Rabbis for their salvation. Of course this includes the thousands of manmade commandments that we have briefly touched upon above—truly a ‘yoke’ to be borne. It is this ‘yoke’ that is referred to in Acts and Galatians.

Now therefore why tempt ye Elohim, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:10)

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1)

We will take a brief look at these passages later when we deal with the issues that each book addresses. For now, however, let us look to the book of 1 Timothy, where the reference to ‘ol malchut shamayim’—or submission to rabbinic authority—is most evident on its face.

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of Elohim and *his* doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise *them*, because they are brethren; but rather do *them* service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Yahoshua the Messiah, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness...(1 Timothy 6:1-3)

⁴⁹ See Barachot 13a of the Gemara. One may also do an internet search for the terms ‘yoke’, ‘Judaism’, ‘commandments’ to read Jewish writings confirming this terminology. It is this expression to which Paul referred when he used the term of art “under the Law” to refer to being under “ol mitzvot.”

In verse 1, Paul's reference to "the yoke" acknowledges that many, even after having become believers, are still under rabbinic authority. In verse 2, he notes that some of the Rabbis (masters) are even believers, and they should not be despised because of their Pharisaic attitude toward the Law. On the contrary, Paul teaches that their followers should continue to "do them service" because of their faithfulness.⁵⁰ Paul went on to say that this teaching agreed with the teachings of Messiah.

Then spake Yahoshua to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. (Matthew 23:1-4)

Messiah taught here that the people should obey the Pharisees as the recognized leaders of the people. Notice also that he referred to their religious requirements as a "burden...on men's shoulders"—a yoke!

It is no accident that Messiah told His followers—those who accepted His rabbinic authority—that His yoke was light.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

Messiah's yoke consisted of submitting to Him and then observing only the written Law of His Father, which consists of relatively few commandments compared to the thousands in rabbinic tradition. Furthermore, Messiah had taught His followers that reason for keeping the commandments of the Law was not for their salvation, but for the glory of the Father in Heaven.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
(Matthew 5:14-16)

But now let us turn back to Romans. From chapter 8-10, Paul speaks about the plan of salvation and then makes another reference that has been misinterpreted by the mainstream church.

⁵⁰ One should approach an evaluation of Pharisees with a great deal of humility and trepidation. To live a life of a Pharisee is indeed difficult and requires dedication not shown by many modern Christians. They believe that their religious system is the will of the Most High and most follow its requirements tirelessly. Messiah did not condemn Pharisaism, but only those teachings which they elevated above "thus saith the LORD."

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to Elohim for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of Elohim, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of Elohim's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of Elohim. (Romans 10:1-3)

Again, this statement by Paul is usually misunderstood but, once again, it refers to the Pharisaic belief system. In verse 2, Paul acknowledges that they have a "zeal for Elohim" but not according to knowledge. He then states that they are ignorant of Messiah's righteousness and have established instead their own righteousness. And in fact, the tradition of the Pharisees holds that they can define righteousness, based upon the teachings of their sages, and that Pharisaic "halacha" (the complete body of Pharisaic law) can even supercede the written Law of the Most High. Perhaps the most well known expression of this Pharisaic belief is contained in the story of Aknai's Oven from Baba Metzia 59.

Simply put, the teaching goes something like this. Two Rabbis, Eliezar and Joshua, were debating the issue of ritual cleanliness of Aknai's oven, per Pharisaic tradition. Everyone in the surrounding assembly disagreed with Rabbi Eliezar so he asked for a series of signs from Heaven to prove that he was correct. The final sign was the voice of the Most High from Heaven declaring that Rabbi Eliezar was correct. To that, Rabbi Joshua retorted, "Lo b'shamayim hi" (it is not in the heavens, quoting Deuteronomy 30:12). The idea here is that because the Torah (the Law) has been given to man at Sinai, it now belongs to the Rabbis for proper interpretation and the Almighty therefore has divested Himself of the authority to interpret it! This is the epitome of Paul's reference to their own righteousness—to assume that their 'tradition' is even above the Word of the Most High spoken from Heaven!

To sum it up, the Rabbis believe that they are the determiners of absolute right and wrong. To these Rabbis, and the thousands who follow them, reading the Torah and trying to follow it is not the proper way to follow the Most High. The Rabbis alone have the authority to tell you the meaning of the commandments and the way in which they are to be obeyed; they have in a sense made themselves and their interpretation the very goal of the Law—at least the Pharisaic version of it. That is why Paul proclaimed that they go about "to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of Elohim."

But in his next statement, Paul contrasts the Pharisaic belief with his own proclamation that Messiah—and not the Pharisaic Rabbis—is the true determiner of righteousness.

For Messiah *is* the end (Greek word 'telos') of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:4)

The traditional mainstream teaching would have us believe that this statement proves that Messiah has put an end to the Law. But wait, the word law is the Greek 'telos' (Strong's 5056) and derives from 'tello' meaning 'goal.' It does not mean 'end' in the sense of being 'done away' with or 'finished', but rather 'end' in terms of achieving the goal one set out for. Paul is proclaiming that Messiah—and not

the Rabbis—is the goal of the Law and He is the final determiner of what is right.⁵¹ But is this really what Paul is saying? Let us take a look at the word ‘telos’ (end) used elsewhere with similar meaning in the New Testament.

But every man in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits; afterward they that are Messiah’s at his coming. Then *cometh* the end (‘telos’), when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to Elohim, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:23-24)

It is Messiah’s ‘telos’ (goal) to deliver the earth back to the Father; it is not ‘the end’ of all things. But let us look at another verse using the word ‘telos’.

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Yahoshua Messiah.: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end (‘telos’) of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls. (1 Peter 1:7-9)

The obvious intent of this passage is not that the ‘telos’ of one’s faith means its ‘elimination’ or its being ‘done away with’. The coming of Messiah is rather the ‘goal’ of our faith. But let us look at still another example of the word ‘telos’.

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end (“telos”) of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. (James 5:11)

Certainly the ‘telos’ of the Lord is not His being ‘done away with.’ The ‘telos’ of the Lord—His goal—is to show mercy.

So, Paul’s proclamation that Messiah is the ‘telos’ of the law in Romans 10:4 means that He is the ‘goal’ of the Law—not its end. Messiah’s coming, and His interpretations of the Law, rather than those of the Pharisees, determine true righteousness. The reader should not fail to notice here that this interpretation of Paul’s words is totally consistent with his other statements we have examined concerning the Law and it shows his statement to be in agreement with Messiah’s statements as well. Oh, that the scales will fall from the eyes of our Christian seminary teachers...

Once again, we will cut short the verse-by-verse examination and skim the next two chapters of Romans. In the 11th Chapter of Romans, Paul goes on to urge the Gentiles of the Roman congregation not to judge the Pharisaic Jews because of their view of the Law, but to be humble in dealing with them. He points out that the Most High has not cast them away (Romans 11:1) even though they be blinded in

⁵¹ That is why the Messiah and the Pharisaic Rabbis were often engaged in disputes concerning the Law, as we have seen above.

part (Romans 11:7), and that eventually they will be saved (Romans 11:18-36). Paul then goes on, in chapter 12, to exhort them, in accordance with the “perfect will of Elohim” (per His Torah) to live humble and righteous lives.

In Romans 13, we will probably have to slow down again to capture the context of Paul’s “hard to be understood” verses in Chapter 14. He begins chapter 13 with the following words:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of Elohim: the powers that be are ordained of Elohim. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of Elohim: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Romans 13:1-2)

The usual teachings on Romans 13 hold that Paul is giving instructions on how to deal with ‘civil’ authorities (the “higher powers” of verse 1). Again, however, we must ask ourselves if this makes sense. For the first 12 chapters, Paul has been dealing with ‘religious’ issues of the Law, Pharisaic interpretation of the Law, and similar issues; in chapters 14-15, he also deals with religious issues. Only in chapter 13 does Paul seem to digress. Given that there were no chapter breaks in Paul’s original letter, and the fact that neither Caesar, nor the roman senate, nor the roman civil authorities are mentioned, the readers of Paul’s letter might have been confused by such a switch. And given Paul’s accomplished writing skills, one would not expect him to open the possibility for such confusion. If we look a little deeper than is normally the case, we will find once again that the problem lies not with Paul, but with the mainstream paradigm through which we are taught to read the chapter. Let us then take another look at these higher “powers.”

The Greek word for “powers” in this passage is ‘exousia’ (Strong’s 1849). While it might possibly refer to civil rulers, when we examine the same word in a similar context in the book of Luke, we find a distinctly religious connotation.

And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers (exousia), take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: (Luke 12:11)

Notice here that that the word ‘exousia’ is used specifically within the context of synagogues.⁵² Remember also, that it was specifically these religious ‘powers’ that had decided Messiah’s ‘guilt’ and turned Him over to the Romans for execution. Similarly, Steven was also accused at a synagogue and brought to a religious council (Acts 6:9-12) where he was tried and ultimately executed (Acts 7:58). It makes perfect sense, therefore, that Paul reference to ‘powers’ was identical to Messiah’s use. Unlike American churches and synagogues of today, synagogue congregants of 2000 years ago were under the authority of the religious ‘powers’ even unto death if it could be determined that they had violated ‘the Law’—either the one taught by Messiah or the expanded ‘law’ of the Pharisees. After all, Paul himself had been one who persecuted first century Nazarenes under the authority of these religious ‘powers.’

⁵² We will see an identical use when we get to the book of Colossians.

If we now proceed through the rest of Romans with the understanding that Paul's focus had nothing to do with Roman civil authorities, Paul's message is consistent and makes a lot more sense. As Paul continues,

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are Elohim's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (Romans 13:5-6)

Notice that Paul states that these 'powers' are not Caesar's ministers, but rather 'Elohim's ministers' and that they are continually occupied with being His ministers, "attending continually upon this very thing." Civil authorities a la the Roman Empire would hardly 'attend continually' on the occupation of being the Almighty's ministers. Religious leaders—especially the Pharisees—would. And as we continue with Paul, we find that he continues with religious issues for the remainder of the chapter—in perfect consistency (Romans 13:7-14).

As we now move to Paul's "hard to be understood" verses of Chapter 14, we will find that they make a lot more sense. Paul begins this part of his letter with the same religious focus that has characterized the rest of his letter.

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for Elohim hath received him. (Romans 14:1-3)

Just what is Paul talking about here? The average mainstream teaching usually deals with 'not judging one's brother' but most often, there is scant—if any—discussion about why Paul would use eating vegetables to make his point. And why would he make the point that eating "herbs" (vegetables) is a sign of weakness but then go on to say that the Almighty "hath received" these weak vegetable eaters?

As the reader might have guessed, there is again more than meets the eye of the average seminary graduate. Back in Paul's day, and even to this day, the issue of foods for members of Hebraic congregations is significant and one that has been known to have a significant impact on fellowship. It is evident from Paul's letter that this particular issue was dealing with this very problem. But why was—and is even to this day—food such an important issue in Hebraic congregations?

Remember our earlier discussions of Pharisaic dietary commandments when we looked at Messiah's teachings from Matthew 15 and Mark 7? We see the same sort of dynamic working in this Roman congregation as well. As it turns out, those following the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law are forbidden to consume foods prepared by Gentiles. For example:

The sages have forbidden us to eat the bread of a non-Jew... An article of food that is not eaten raw...if cooked or roasted by a non-Jew, even in the vessels and in the house

of a Jew, is forbidden, inasmuch as it was cooked by a non-Jew. However, an article of food that is eaten when raw ... is not forbidden as the cooking of a non-Jew.⁵³

Because vegetables and fruits can be eaten raw, it is permissible to eat them from the hand of, or in the house of, a Gentile. Even today, that is the case. Messianic Jews, for example, who manage to invite an Orthodox Jew to their home generally ensure that they have fresh fruits and vegetables in their homes to offer their Pharisaic guest. As far as expecting them to consume a home-cooked meal is concerned, it is a sure impossibility.

Keep in mind here that we are only addressing the subject of ‘foods.’ Biblically abominable flesh such as swine, rabbit, opossum, etc., were not even contemplated. To those following the Word of the Almighty, such flesh is *traif* and is abominable. And given everything we have examined to this point regarding these Gentiles of this Roman, Hebraic congregation, only ‘food’ is contemplated in this passage. These people who ‘knew the Law’ (Romans 7:1) and were “making their boast” of the Law (Romans 2:23) were not eating *traif*. But, back to Paul...

Paul’s reference in verse 2 that “one believeth that he may eat all things” pertains to those congregants who followed only the written Law, without all the Pharisaic additions and interpretations. These individuals would have no problem eating ‘foods’ prepared by Gentile believers. The “another, who is weak” refers to those congregants that believed they also had to be under rabbinic authority as well. That is why they chose to eat vegetables in those settings. Paul went on to point out that such additional restrictions were not necessarily contrary to the Law because “Elohim hath received” those practicing such restrictions (verse 3). Paul made it even clearer in his next statement that he was referring to rabbinic authority.

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for Elohim is able to make him stand.
(Romans 14:4).

We see here the same reference to rabbis as ‘masters’ that we saw in 1 Timothy 6:1-3. In other words, Paul is telling the congregants not to judge negatively those congregants who believe they need to be under rabbinic authority. Paul uses yet another example in his next verse.

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth Elohim thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth Elohim thanks.
(Romans 14:5-6)

⁵³ Code of Jewish Law (Kitzur Shulkan Arukh), Volume 1, chapter 38, pp. 121-122.

This reference, contrary to mainstream interpretations, does not refer to the present Sabbath/Sunday debate or the debate over why modern Christians are observing ‘warmed over’ pagan holidays.⁵⁴ The first century believers were keeping the Biblical Sabbath (remember they knew and observed the Law, and were even ‘making their boast’ of doing so!), per the instructions of the Most High and the example of Messiah.⁵⁵ Paul was referring, rather, to the bitter sectarian debates within Judaism—believe it or not—over when to observe certain of the Biblical holy days!⁵⁶ These debates notwithstanding, it is important to remember that the days themselves are days that the Almighty commanded to be observed in His Law. We will see this even more clearly when we get to verse 18. For now, let us look at verses 14-16, which serve as another of those “hard to be understood” verses, to which 2 Peter 3:16 refers.

I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Yahoshua, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat⁵⁷, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Messiah died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of Elohim is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:14)

In light of all we have seen thus far, would we still agree with the mainstream Christian teaching that claims Paul was ‘doing away with’ the Old Testament dietary laws here? Or would we still agree with the related claim that Messiah did away with them, after Messiah’s staunch defense of His Father’s commandments (“woe be it unto you...who make void the commandments of Elohim to keep your own tradition”)?

A far more plausible explanation is that Paul is affirming his agreement with Messiah’s example of following the written Law and no longer believing that foods are “unclean” simply because Pharisaic commandments and traditions are not followed. But even in light of his relatively new-found realization, he still respects the fact that others may still hold these traditions to be important. He therefore urges the Roman congregants not to let these differences be reasons to dispute with one another. But, we must not assume that Paul would support eating traif. How do we know this? Because Paul goes on to make the following statement:

For he that in these things serveth Messiah *is* acceptable to Elohim, and approved of men. (Romans 14:18)

⁵⁴ Modern Christian holidays, such as Dec 25 and Ishtar Sunday, were celebrated by pagans long before Messiah was born. Claims to have ‘won these days for the Lord’ do not meet the Scriptural test of Jeremiah 10:2, Deuteronomy 18:3, 20:18, etc. The first century believers observed the Almighty’s days from His Torah.

⁵⁵ See the study “The Sabbath” or refer to Luke 4:16, Acts 17:2, Acts 13:42-44, etc.

⁵⁶ One such debate was ongoing at the time between the Pharisees and Sadducees on when to begin the Feast of First Fruits per Leviticus 23:11. Another debate focused on the practice of the Pharisees to ‘slip’ feasts by a day or two to allow them to either coincide with the Sabbath or not. (More about this in the study “Holy Days or Holidays.”)

⁵⁷ The Greek word used here is “broma” (Strong’s 1033). The KJV renders it as “meat” but it means “food.”

The words “is acceptable to Elohim” denote that such behavior is not contrary to the written Torah of the Most High. The words “approved of men” connotes that the behavior is also not contrary to Pharisaic tradition. If traif were contemplated here, as mainstream Christianity would have us believe, then both conditions would be violated!

So, how then should we view the book of Romans? Is it, as we have been taught, the confusing, disjointed letter in which Paul ‘wipes away’ large portions of “thus saith the LORD?” Or rather, is it a coherent letter from a Pharisaic expert, addressing Pharisaic issues, for the Hebraic congregation in Rome—and totally in agreement with the Almighty, the Messiah, and the rest of Scriptures? If it is the former, it should not be in the Scriptures. If it is the latter, then it should be taught as such by pastors and within Christian seminaries. Perhaps a re-look at the caution of Peter will help us decide which it is.

And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

It would seem to us that the influence of Rome from the 2nd to the 4th centuries, which stripped away our Hebraic roots as believers, have caused us to be “unlearned and unstable” and to have twisted the writing of Paul toward purposes against “thus saith the LORD.” But more about that later... For the time being, if our assumption is correct, then we should see a similar pattern in all the writings of Paul because “in all *his* epistles,” he speaks “in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood.” So let us now take a brief look at the book of Corinthians to see if the same patterns are there.

PAUL’S LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS: “Circumcision is nothing...” (1 Corinthians 7:19)

Our look into Paul’s letter to the Corinthians should go quite a bit faster than the book of Romans because we will not have to introduce so many of the Pharisaic beliefs and practices this time. We will, rather, assume that the reader understands these issues and get right to some of the key verses of the letter.

Unlike the book of Romans, we have no immediately obvious indication that the Corinthians are well-steeped in Pharisaic understanding and traditions. Neither do we find that they had sent representatives to Jerusalem for that Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) immediately following the death and resurrection of Messiah (Acts 2). Nor do we have any indication in the first four chapters that they had any contact at all with a Hebraic congregation. Can we conclude, therefore, that the Corinthian congregation was totally Gentile and devoid of Hebraic practices, as is generally assumed today? Perhaps we should look a little deeper to see if this is really the case...

Christianity generally holds that Paul, during his second missionary journey, traveled to Corinth and founded a “church” during the eighteen months he was there (52-53 C.E.). But if Paul truly ‘founded’ the church, how did Paul begin this gentile congregation? Did he go into pagan temples to gain converts or was the congregation already in existence? If we look to the book of Acts, we will find that the core of the congregation was already there and did, in fact, have both Hebraic roots and understanding.

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Yahoshua was Messiah*. (Acts 18:1-5)

We should highlight one small point here that is usually glossed over in mainstream Christian messages. Notice the Scriptures point out that Paul was preaching “every sabbath” in the synagogue to Greeks as well as Jews. As we saw earlier, it was Paul’s custom to observe the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) and there were usually Gentile believers in the synagogue when he did so. But we continue...

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, *one* that worshipped Elohim, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of Elohim among them. (Acts 18:6-11)

While it is generally assumed that Paul’s going “unto the Gentiles” meant that he started a separate Gentile church, look where the Scriptures say Paul went. He went to a house that was next door to the synagogue and “joined hard” to the synagogue—part of the same building! Furthermore, the owner of the house “worshipped Elohim” just like Cornelius had done. And if that were not enough, the “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue” also believed and continued to fellowship with Paul. All these things would indicate that Paul’s congregation was definitely Hebraic in nature. (How have we been ‘taught’ not to see that one?)

Before we leave Paul in the book of Acts, we will find another close parallel to what we saw in the book of Romans. Paul, contrary to mainstream teachings, was not off elsewhere in a ‘gentile church’ but very much still in Hebraic circles, and therefore very much in the eye of Pharisaic leaders.

And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This *fellow* persuadeth men to worship Elohim contrary to the law. (Acts 18:12-13)

As we have seen throughout our study, the accusation that Paul was teaching “contrary to the law” meant that he was teaching contrary to the Pharisaic version of the law.⁵⁸ Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, proves this to be the case. Note his distinct use of the term “your law” instead of “the Law.”

And when Paul was now about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and *of your law*, look ye *to it*; for I will be no judge of such *matters*. And he drave them from the judgment seat. (Acts 18:14-16)

So, we see, contrary to mainstream teachings that Paul’s going “unto the Gentiles” took him only next door to the synagogue and to people that were still observing the Law—just like Cornelius, the congregation in Rome, etc.—and very much aware of Pharisaic beliefs and traditions toward the Law.

But, is this theory mere speculation or does Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reflect a knowledge of things Hebraic? Let us move to the back to 1 Corinthians, chapter 5 for the first indication of Hebraic knowledge. Paul begins the chapter by chastising the congregation members for allowing violation of the Torah commandments which forbid a man to have his father’s wife (Leviticus 18:8, Deuteronomy 22:30, 27:20). Paul then goes on to make a curious reference to the Passover.

Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Messiah our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.
(1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

If the congregants in Corinth were not familiar with, and observing, the Passover, why would Paul write something in a letter that might otherwise be confusing for the readers? Remember, this was a letter and he was not there to explain the nuances of Passover to them. Neither did they have television or radio to teach them about it. So, how were they to know? The obvious reason—proven by our examination of Acts 18:1-16—is that the congregants in Corinth knew Passover very well; they were a Hebraic congregation—“Jews and the Greeks”—and observing it! Paul exhorted them “let us keep the feast” simply encouraged them to do so in the pattern that Yahoshua taught—from the heart. One would

⁵⁸ For Paul to preach that Yahoshua was Messiah was an affront to the Pharisees for reasons we have already seen. It would also appear that Paul preached using full name of Messiah, “Yahoshua.” The Pharisees held at that time—and unto this day—that the form shorter for “Yeshua” should be used because it does not include the “Yahovah” the Name of the Creator. Pronunciation of the sacred Name of the Most High is strictly forbidden among the Pharisees.

wonder why most mainstream Churches do not follow Paul's admonition to "keep the feast" today. More about that later... For now let us move to one of the more referred to of Paul's proclamations on the subject of circumcision.

Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

(1 Corinthians 7:18-20)

As with most of Paul's statements that mainstream doctrines are developed around, this one is usually taken out of the context in which it was written. On its face, most expositors use this passage to teach that circumcision is no longer required or desired—especially for Gentile believers. Furthermore, they usually relate this statement into the overall teaching that Christians are no longer "under the Law" and should disregard circumcision. But was Paul really saying that circumcision should be disregarded?

As the reader will recall, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans while he was in Corinth and in that letter he made the following statement:

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. (Romans 3:1-2)

In addition, Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthian congregation to be their chief teacher on Paul's behalf.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Messiah, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Messiah Yahoshua I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Messiah, as I teach every where in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:15-17)

As the reader will recall, it just so happened that Paul had circumcised this same Timothy (Acts 16:3) prior to Paul's journey to Corinth. So, if Paul was trying to disregard circumcision, why would Paul send to them circumcised Timothy of all people? While the average pastor or seminary almost never delves into such issues, "come now, and let us reason together" as the Almighty exhorted through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:18).

If mainstream Christian explanations and teachings (which never delve into these small, but significant details) on this verse are correct, they would have us believe that circumcision is irrelevant and Messiah "shall profit you nothing" (Galatians 5:2) if one decides to become circumcised. But, if this is really what Paul was teaching to the Corinthians, why would he have sent the opposite message—penned from Corinth—to the Romans and then send to the Corinthians a circumcised Timothy to be a "father" (1 Corinthians 4:15) of the congregation on Paul's behalf? We are forced to ask ourselves whether Paul is

schizophrenic or whether there is a dynamic here that may be “hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16), given the non-Hebraic perspective from which the mainstream Christianity reads Paul.

As we will see, Paul is not schizophrenic and his message to all the congregations to which he writes is consistent—even though “hard to be understood”—by people unlearned in the dynamic of Pharisaic influence among the early believers. Let us briefly compare statements from Peter and from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to see Paul’s acknowledgment that this same dynamic exists in the letter to them.

And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:15-17)

Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Messiah, as I teach every where in every assembly. (1 Corinthians 4:16-17)

Just as Peter indicated, Paul is acknowledging to the Corinthians that they are getting the same message that he sends to every congregation to which he writes. We have seen this dynamic between Messiah and the Pharisees and between Paul and the Pharisees in Acts and Romans. When we understand that the orientation of the Corinthian congregation was Hebraic, as we have seen, it only makes sense that they are getting the same message. With this understanding, let us now briefly examine the question of circumcision and just what Paul might have meant by his statement to the Corinthians. Let us take another look at Paul’s statement on circumcision.

But as Elohim hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of Elohim. (1 Corinthians 7:17-19)

Taking a closer look at Paul’s words, the first thing we should point something usually glossed over in mainstream teachings. Even if Paul did really mean that “circumcision is nothing” and “uncircumcision is nothing,” he makes the contrast that “keeping the commandments of Elohim” is important. So, whatever Paul is, or is not, teaching about circumcision, he is not teaching against the Law, but emphasizing its importance—just like Moses, the Prophets, Messiah and many of Paul’s statements elsewhere. But what is Paul really saying about circumcision?

Circumcision is an interesting topic. Most Christians acknowledge that it was a 'sign' of the covenant that the Most High made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11) but somehow it has taken on a negative connotation in the modern church, principally because of the loss of the church's Hebraic roots and misunderstood statements by Paul. As a matter of fact, when a mainstream Christian is approached regarding observance of the Law, the first question out of his mouth will be either, "But what about circumcision?" or "But what about the sacrificial system?" (more about this question later).

First of all, circumcision is not generally mandated in the Law for Gentiles, except for those Gentiles who were servants of Israelites (Genesis 17:27) or for those Gentiles who wanted to take hold of the covenant of Abraham and partake of the Passover.

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This *is* the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof... All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. (Exodus 12:43-48)

The Abrahamic covenant consists of several promises, as described in Genesis 12:1, 12:7, 13:14-16, 15:1-6, 15:12-16, 17:2-10, 17:15-16, and is targeted toward the Israelite descendants of Abraham. One of the chief promises of this covenant is possession of the land of Canaan. As we have seen in Genesis 12 and elsewhere, Gentiles could elect to "take hold" of this covenant and be treated as "one born in the land" (Exodus 12:48, Leviticus 19:34, Numbers 9:14) and even be given a place and name "better than of sons and of daughters" (Isaiah 56:1-8).

Again we must ask ourselves, was Paul really denouncing circumcision or was he addressing another issue in the congregation of Corinth, which has escaped the eye of the modern Christian church? Let us take another look at the circumcision statement for our answer, but let us read a little farther this time in order to get the entire context.

Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called *being a servant*? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use *it* rather. For he that is called in the Lord, *being a servant*, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being free*, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. (1 Corinthians 7:18-24)

Most of us who read this passage have probably always assumed that Paul's references to "servant" and "servants" here meant 'bond servants.' If so, is his exhortation "be ye not the servants of men" an

encouragement for them to rebel against their masters? That would seem to conflict with the Biblical message elsewhere that servants should submit themselves to their masters. Are we missing something? Why have we never questioned why Paul would deal with the issues of circumcision and servitude in the same setting?

Given all we have seen thus far, let us take another look at how circumcision and servitude might be related. Because Paul says he claims to teach the same way “every where in every assembly” (1 Corinthians 4:16-17), perhaps we can refer back to his letter to the Romans for a clue.

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for Elohim is able to make him stand.
(Romans 14:4)

We saw in Paul’s letter to the Romans, and in 1 Timothy 6, that to be a man’s “servant” meant to submit to his rabbinic authority. Could Paul be using the same terminology in his letter to Corinth? Because submission to rabbinic authority is voluntary, that would certainly account for the permissibility of his exhortation “be ye not the servants of men.” That would also account for Paul’s sending Timothy to the Corinthian congregation so that those needing an authoritative rabbi or “father” could use the circumcised Timothy as their covering (1 Corinthians 4:15).

We know that the congregation had Hebraic roots with Pharisaic influence (Acts 18) and that the congregation was terribly divided (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). We know that Paul had exhorted the congregants that their faith “should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of Elohim” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). We also know that the congregants—per the Pharisaic paradigm—felt it important to claim a covering under one master or another (1 Corinthians 3:3-4). Would not then Pharisaic attitudes toward Gentiles and circumcision be a topic that Paul might address to these congregants and that be the reason that Paul would relate circumcision and rabbinic “servitude” in the same passage? It absolutely does, and we should examine Paul’s statement on circumcision in that light.

Paul’s reference to circumcision was a reference to the Pharisaic formula for conversion that we have already seen: (1) submission to the yoke of heaven (Pharisaic rabbinic authority), (2) submission to the yoke of the commandments (per Pharisaic interpretation), (3) circumcision per rabbinic tradition, and (4) adjudication by the “Beit Din” (rabbinic court). Incidentally, if a Gentile undergoes circumcision on his own, but not in accordance with rabbinic tradition, this circumcision is not recognized as “circumcision” by rabbinic authorities.⁵⁹

Looking back to Paul’s statement on circumcision (1 Corinthians 7:19) therefore, was not a statement against circumcision or the rest of the Law.⁶⁰ It was merely proclamation that to be under rabbinic authority—as evidenced by the Pharisaic formula for conversion with included circumcision—or not to be under rabbinic authority is not important, but the keeping of the Almighty’s commandments is

⁵⁹ Therefore, the term “of the circumcision” (Galatians 2:9, 12; Colossians 4:11; Titus 1:10) most likely was another ‘term of art’ referring to those believers who were also under Pharisaic rabbinic authority.

⁶⁰ Consistent with this theme, Paul refers to the Law as authority in 1 Corinthians 7:39, 9:8, 14:34, 15:34, etc.

important. Paul was telling them—just as he told the Romans—not to let these beliefs be the source of division among themselves. Before we leave Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we will take a brief look at one more passage usually taken out of context.

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles [meat market], *that* eat, asking no question for conscience sake: (1 Corinthians 10:25)

Given the various types of animals sold for human consumption around the world, is Paul really saying that the Creator’s people should start eating centipedes, snakes, dogs, cats and rodents as long as they are sold in meat markets? Such a statement would be in violation of “thus saith the LORD” and should probably be read in context.

The context of Paul’s statement is very clearly enunciated 6 verses earlier (1 Corinthians 10:19). The sole question being discussed is whether or not Believers could eat meat, which had been previously sacrificed to idols by someone else and subsequently ended up in the meat market. There is absolutely no reason to construe Paul’s statements outside those parameters. Even in 1 Corinthians 10:27 when he Paul says to “eat anything that is set before you,” notice that he is not talking about unclean flesh or traif. He clarifies the context of his statement in the very next verse:

But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth *is* the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof. (1 Corinthians 10:28)

The example he uses makes it perfectly clear that he is talking strictly about the consumption of meats, which had been offered to idols by someone else previously; he is not addressing the question of whether the congregants can start eating unclean flesh.⁶¹ While this would have been the perfect opportunity for Paul to proclaim that eating swine, rat, lobster, or any other unclean animal were permissible—if that had been his intention—he did not do so. And since Paul did not use these statements to teach against the dietary commandments of the Most High, we should probably not take his statements out of context and use them for purposes not originally intended.⁶²

So, we see that Paul’s message to the Corinthians is internally consistent and does not violate the teachings of Moses, Messiah, or Paul’s other statements concerning the Law. So let us now take a brief look at the book of Galatians to see if the same patterns are there.

PAUL’S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: “Who hath bewitched you? (Galatians 3:1)

As we begin our look into Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we should probably first see if it follows the same manner that he claims to use “every where in every congregation” (1 Corinthians 4:17) and the

⁶¹The Torah does not specifically forbid the consumption of biblically clean meat which ended up in a meat market after someone else had previously sacrificed it to an idol. Notice that Paul does NOT address the act of offering such meat to an idol—a practice which IS forbidden by the Torah!

⁶²For a more in-depth discussion on this matter, see the study, *Biblically Clean Foods*.

same pattern recognized by Peter (2 Peter 3:15-16). If so, we should find Paul making similar references to those he made in Romans and 1 Corinthians. If present, these references should pertain to traditions and teachings of men contrasted with the commandments of the Most High. So, let us begin our examination.

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Yahoshua the Messiah, and Elohim the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the congregations of Galatia... I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Messiah unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Messiah. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or Elohim? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Messiah. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Yahoshua the Messiah. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the congregation of Elohim, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. (Galatians 1:1-14)

All through these first 14 verses to the Galatians, Paul gives very clear indication that the readers of his letter are familiar with the traditions and teachings of the Pharisees. In verses 1 he makes the point that his gospel is not of men but by Messiah and the Father. We have already seen this same expression used by Messiah during his interactions with the Pharisees and by Paul as well.

In verse 10, Paul makes reference to his earlier submission under the Pharisaic hierarchy by his statement “if I yet [still] pleased men, I should not be the servant of Messiah.” Note the consistency of Paul’s use of the word “servant” in the context of following a religious leader, just as we saw in Romans 14:4 and 1 Corinthians 7:21-22: The understanding here is that Paul could either be the “servant” of the rabbinic system—as he once was—or a servant of the Chief Rabbi, Messiah Yahoshua.

In verse 11, Paul contrasts the gospel of the Pharisees with that of Messiah and in verse 14, he comes right out and says that everything he had written heretofore had referred to the “tradition of the fathers”—the Pharisaic version of Judaism and Pharisaic version of the Law. Paul could hardly have been clearer as to the context of his letter to the Galatians: they were obviously congregants in a Hebraic congregation. Again, he is following the paradigm of writing the same way “in all his epistles” and speaking in them of things “hard to be understood” by those unlearned in the ways of Pharisaic Judaism. With this understanding, let us now continue...

In chapter 2, we find a couple instances where Paul’s statements have been misunderstood because of our being unfamiliar with the influence of the Pharisees on the early believers. The first of these is this.

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Messiah Yahoshua, that they might bring us into bondage: (Galatians 2:4)

By now, we should be well used to the pattern. Mainstream Christianity has taught us that being brought “into bondage” means the observing the Law. We, however, have seen in Romans that Paul uses this term, not to refer to the Law, but to being under the onerous requirements of Pharisaic traditions.

As we get to the second of Paul’s statements that is usually interpreted wrongly, we should probably be ready for it as well because of our earlier examination of Pharisaic dietary commandments.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14)

Again, mainstream Christianity usually makes a point here that Peter must have been eating swine with the Gentiles because he was eating with them. This is an assumption based upon nothing more than the fact that mainstream Christianity eats swine today. As we have already seen, the congregations to which Paul wrote were not pagan congregations; they were congregations with Hebraic roots that understood Law observance well enough to appreciate the nuances of Paul’s letters. The Gentiles in these congregations were most likely—like Caleb, Ruth, and Cornelius—eating Biblically clean foods and not eating *traif*. Peter fled from their company because of fears he would be judged by those of “the circumcision” based upon their Pharisaic restrictions we have already seen concerning food preparation by, or served in the house of, Gentiles.⁶³ To assume anything else goes well beyond what is written, makes Paul a liar, and violates the warning of 2 Peter 3:15-16.

Chapter 4 of Galatians also has an interesting passage usually misunderstood.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of Elohim through Messiah. Howbeit then, when ye knew not Elohim, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known Elohim, or rather are known of Elohim, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye

⁶³ In addition to the Pharisaic restrictions we have already examined, Ohalot 18:7 of the Talmud declared the dwelling places of Gentiles “unclean.”

desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. (Galatians 4:7-11)

In some Christian circles, this statement by Paul has been used to teach that the observance of “days, and months, and times, and years” refers to the Biblical holy days and is, therefore, a sign of going back under the Law and into bondage. However, a closer look finds this to be far from the truth. The type of bondage Paul refers to here goes back to the time even before they became members of their present Hebraic congregations. Paul’s statement “when ye knew not Elohim” most likely refers to the time when they were still pagans and “did service unto them which by nature are no gods,” meaning service to idols. The observance of “days and months, and times, and years” most likely refers to the observance of “times” forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10.⁶⁴

There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times... (Deuteronomy 18:10)

Paul again goes on to compare the Pharisaic concept of being “under the Law” (Galatians 4:21) with the idea of “bondage” (Galatians 5:1). The reader is encouraged to read through the argument. Paul then makes his statement that, “if ye be circumcised, Messiah shall profit you nothing” (Galatians 5:2) and goes on to explain that submitting to circumcision for the purpose of coming under the Pharisaic worship traditions—referring to the “leaven” (verse 9) of the Pharisees—which he compares with bondage, is circumcision for the wrong reason. Notice that Paul is not making a blanket statement against circumcision because he goes on to state that he still preaches circumcision, ostensibly if done for the right reason.

And I, brethren, if I yet [still] preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. (Galatians 5:11-15)

Throughout the rest of chapter 5, Paul exhorts those of this congregation in Galatia to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and then goes on to tell them to avoid the deeds of the flesh (verses 17-21)—just like the Law commands. He continues this idea to the end of his letter.

We will not examine Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians, not because they are not important, but rather because they contain few contentious verses and it is not the goal of this study to be a commentary on all of Paul’s writings. We will instead move to Paul’s much discussed, and much misunderstood, letter to the Colossians.

⁶⁴ There are some who believe that the “times” here may refer to modification to the Biblical Holy Days of the Most High or to a series of extra days that they have deemed need be observed. See Shulkan Arukh, vol. 3, chap. 122-127. The author does not endorse this belief.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS: "Nailing it to His Cross..." (Colossians 2:14)

One of the most oft-addressed portions of Paul's letter to the Colossians comes from the second chapter of the letter.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Messiah. (Colossians 2:16-17)

As the conventional wisdom of many pastors would have us believe, "Paul clearly shows us here that the Old Testament Law was nailed to the cross and we no longer have to worry about the dietary laws, Jewish holidays, or keeping new moons or the Sabbath." But, given all we have seen thus far, could that really be what Paul meant by these words? Again we must ask if he is really attempting to change "thus saith the LORD" and the teachings of all that went before—to include those of the Messiah.

To properly answer these questions we will, of course, have to determine what Paul meant by the "handwriting of ordinances" and to whom he referred by the terms "principalities and powers." But first, let us briefly look at just what was supposed to have been done away with. According to the passage, that would be 'meats', 'drink', 'holydays', 'new moons', and the 'Sabbath day.'

If these four things were truly done away with, it would be pretty good idea to ask a few questions. Why, for example, was it Paul's "manner" to keep the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) well after the cross? Why would we find Gentiles observing the Sabbath after the cross as well (Acts 14:1, 17:4, 17:10-17, 18:4)? Why did Paul fail to tell the Gentiles that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in Acts 13:42-48? With respect to holy days, why would the post-cross believers have observed the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) in Acts 2:1-10—both Jews and proselytes? Why would Paul have referred to the "fast" of the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9) if it were no longer being observed? Why would Paul have used the Passover metaphor of "leaven" and then told the Corinthians to "keep the feast" (1 Corinthians 5:8) if they were not already doing so? And finally, why would Paul have made the following statement when referring to himself?

When they desired *him* to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem.⁶⁵ but I will return again unto you, if Elohim will. And he sailed from Ephesus. (Acts 18:20-21)

Because none of these instances would agree with the mainstream interpretation of Paul's words in Colossians 2:16-17, perhaps Paul was making another of his statements which are "hard to be

⁶⁵ The Bibles based on the 'Codex Vaticanus' Greek manuscript omits these underlined words without a footnote, although they are contained in the majority of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. (Note: perhaps it has something to do with goals of Rome and the warning found in Daniel 7:25.)

understood” as we have seen in all of his letters we examined. Perhaps Paul’s own words will clarify the matter for us if we just look a little closer. Let us, therefore, take another look at the passage to see if we can find a clue or two.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Messiah. (Colossians 2:16-17)

Notice here that Paul did not say “Elohim will not judge you.” He specifically stated that the readers were not to let any “man” judge them. Who might be wanting to judge the congregants in religious matters such as ‘meats’, ‘drink’, ‘holydays’, ‘new moons’, and the ‘Sabbath days’? Could it have been the Pharisees and the Gentile congregants who accepted the Pharisaic yoke? We have already seen some of the scores of rabbinic commandments concerning food and drink. We saw in Messiah’s dealings with the Pharisees some of the scores of commandments dealing with Sabbath observance. It would probably come as no surprise to the reader that there are scores of commandments dealing with observance of the other holy days and the new moon.⁶⁶ But could Paul be referring to Pharisaic traditions in his letter to the Colossians as well? After all, would not Paul’s claim to teach the same way “in Messiah, as I teach every where in every assembly” (1 Corinthians 4:16-17) apply to the Colossians as well? If so, we would probably expect to see the same pattern that we saw in his other letters. Let us therefore, unlike the average mainstream expositor, go back toward the beginning of Paul’s letter to the Colossians to determine if his focus is Pharisaic traditions.

Let us start 16 verses earlier at the beginning of chapter 2 to capture the context of Paul’s statements 16 verses later.

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of Elohim, and of the Father, and of Messiah; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Messiah. As ye have therefore received Messiah Yahoshua the Lord, *so* walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of

⁶⁶ The appearance of the new moon set the month in the Almighty’s calendar, and, by extension, all of the Biblical Holy Days of Leviticus 23, except the weekly Sabbath. Observance of the new moon is directed in the Law (Leviticus 23:24, Numbers 10:10, Psalm 81:3). For a deeper study on the Holy Days and their importance for the New Testament believer, see the study, *Holy Days or Holidays*.

the world, and not after Messiah. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Messiah: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of Elohim, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
(Colossians 2:1-13)

Per everything we have seen heretofore, the climate in which Paul's statements were made follow the same pattern of combating the influence of Pharisaic tradition. Paul states that he was involved in a conflict (verse 1), which had to do somehow with enticing doctrines (verse 4) that might lead that might lead them astray. In verse 8, he makes the statement that these doctrines are after the "tradition of men...and not after Messiah," just as Paul had argued to the other congregations.

The center of Paul's "conflict" and the focus of his letter was the Pharisaic tradition based upon the "yoke of heaven" and the "yoke of the commandments" as we have seen. With this understanding, we are now ready to determine what is meant by the "handwriting of ordinances" and to whom Paul referred when he used the terms "principalities and powers."

Almost any of the modern study Bibles will point out that the Greek word for "handwriting" ("cheirographon", Strong's 5498) refers to a legal document of some type. The Greek word for "ordinances" ("dogma", Strong's 1378) refers to a teaching that does not allow for an alternative opinion or way of thinking. The Pharisaic "traditions of the elders" was just such a document, a dogmatic legal document, which literally brought one's entire set of daily actions under the Pharisaic microscope. That is undoubtedly why the "scribes" always accompanied the Pharisees whenever Messiah was challenged concerning his teachings.

Paul's use of the words "principalities and powers" further illuminate this reality. As we have already seen, the book of Luke renders the Greek of Messiah words as 'arche' (Strong's 746) and 'exousia' (Strong's 1849) when referring to the "magistrates" and "powers" in the synagogue.

And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates ('arche'), and powers ('exousia'), take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: (Luke 12:11)

So, let us take another look at Paul's statement to the congregants in Colosse.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities ('arche') and powers ('exousia'), he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an

holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Messiah. (Colossians 2:16-17)

We do not have Paul violating “thus saith the LORD” and the example set by his Savior, but rather an exhortation to the congregants not to let the traditions of the Pharisees govern what they are to eat and drink or how they are to observe the holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths of the Most High. Paul’s reference to Messiah having “spoiled” these “principalities and powers” was his acknowledgment that Messiah had prevailed in every argument he ever had with them. All of these arguments were done in front of the disciples and others so that Messiah’s triumphed over the Pharisees “openly” in His defeat of their manmade power base.

This becomes even more clear if we follow Paul’s words past verse 17 to the end of the second chapter. Paul goes on to make the following statement:

Wherefore if ye be dead with Messiah from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments (‘entalma’) and doctrines of men?⁶⁷ (Colossians 2:20-22)

We find, therefore, that Paul’s letter to the Colossians is teaching against the “commandments of men” and not against the “commandments of Elohim” found in His Law. Again, mainstream Christianity would do well to look to Peter’s (2 Peter 3:15-16) warning before trying to use Paul’s statements out of context to teach against the commandments of the Almighty. To do so violates the words of the Messiah and all the rest of the Bible—to include the example of Paul. But, more about that later.

For the sake of brevity—which has been lacking thus far—we will not address the rest of Paul’s letters in any great detail. Note only that Paul lifts up the Scriptures throughout and those things “which are hard to be understood”⁶⁸ should be examined for the same pattern that has characterized the rest of Paul’s writings. In all of them, a careful examination in context will find Paul exalting the Scriptures, to include the proper observance of all the commandments of the Law. As he said to Timothy,

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in

⁶⁷ The Greek word for commandments used here is “entalma” (Strongs 1778), and is the same word we see used in Messiah’s reference to the “commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Notice that this word, **en-TAL-ma**, contains the same phonetic root as used in the Hebrew word **TAL-mud**, the complete codification of these “commandments of men.” In contrast, the Greek word used to describe the Torah “commandments” of the Almighty (Matthew 19:17) is the Greek word “**en-TO-lay**” (Strong’s 1785). This word contains the same phonetic root as the Hebrew word **TO-rah**. Is this mere coincidence or a conscious effort to point out this important distinction by those who recorded for us the New Testament writings? Given all we have seen thus far, the distinction seems intentional.

⁶⁸ Examples include 1 Timothy 4:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 10:25. These are addressed in detail in the study, *Biblically Clean Foods*.

Messiah Yahoshua. All scripture is given by inspiration of Elohim, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of Elohim may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

We should not miss the significance of the fact that Paul links his statement back to the time when Timothy was “a child.” What is seldom stressed from the pulpit is that the “holy scriptures” of Timothy’s childhood were the “Law and the prophets.” The writings of what would later become the ‘New Testament’ had not even been penned yet! Paul’s exhortation that Timothy should “continue thou in these things” meant that Timothy should continue to follow the “Law and the prophets.” We again, therefore, find Paul exalting the “Law and the prophets” and exhorting one of his closest followers to live in accordance with them. Oh, that our pastors today would follow Paul’s example today instead of encouraging Christians to violate the Law of the Most High...

“But wait,” one might protest, “what about Acts 15?” And, given the traditional teachings of mainstream Christianity, that would be an excellent question at this point. After all, was it not James, the Messiah’s half-brother who assumed leadership of the Nazarene sect in Jerusalem, who proclaimed that the Gentiles had to observe only 4 commandments? Let us move then to the famous council in Jerusalem, which had before it the decision of how the Gentile congregants were to live their lives to be members in good standing...

ACTS 15: “We trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles...” (Acts 15:19)

As indicated above, Acts 15 contains a very-oft discussed passage, which is used to teach Christians that the Creator’s commandments do not apply to New Testament Gentile Believers. The statement, made by Messiah’s half brother, James, seems to say just that if taken alone and out of context.

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to Elohim: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.
(Acts 15:19-21)

But just what is going on here? Is James telling the Gentiles that they do not have to pay any attention to “thus saith the LORD?” Were the Gentiles in his congregation any less intelligent or dedicated than Caleb, Ruth, or Cornelius? Perhaps they were and perhaps not. Perhaps, on the other hand, there was an underlying dynamic we have never paid attention to, but those of Jerusalem knew very well. Let us probe a bit and use some of the insight that Paul, the “apostle to the Gentiles,” had provided us.

The first thing to notice here is that James is considering Gentiles who had turned—or were turning—from their pagan ways to worship of the Most High. Unlike Caleb, they had not grown up in the faith, but had come out of paganism and were experiencing something entirely new. Furthermore, these Gentiles were faced with something that neither Caleb nor Ruth had to worry about. These Gentiles were in the congregation in Jerusalem and were right in the middle of the “mainstream” of Pharisaiic

influence! After all, it was in Jerusalem that the Pharisees had constantly challenged Messiah and years later, Josephus recorded that their influence still controlled “the masses” of the populace. And, if we look back to the words of Messiah, we will realize that this influence even extended into the Nazarene congregation in Jerusalem.

To determine how the Nazarene congregants were living their lives in Jerusalem, one need only look back at the words of the founder of this Nazarene sect of Judaism—Messiah, himself. Remember his admonition to His followers late in His ministry?

Then spake Yahoshua to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that observe and do*; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. (Matthew 23:1-4)

While Messiah acknowledged that the scribes and Pharisees had placed their ‘yoke’ upon the shoulders of the people, He nonetheless commanded His Jewish followers—there were no recognized Gentile followers of Yahoshua until Cornelius—to live in accordance with the Pharisaic pronouncements, because they “sit in Moses’ seat. For them, it was not a change, because the Pharisees—as Josephus reported—had been in control of the masses since the time of the Maccabees (almost 200 years). The Jerusalem congregants were believers, but they lived and worshipped in accordance with the Pharisaic traditions.⁶⁹

Mainstream Christianity, unaware of this reality, had misinterpreted the Jerusalem council in a monumental way and has twisted this event in a way unintended by the writer of the book of Acts. Mainstream pastors and teachers explain that these four directives were given to the Gentiles so that they would not offend the sensitivities of the Jews. This idea, while partially true, misses the main event taking place when examined in context of the passage. Let us then take another look at the passage.

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to Elohim: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. (Acts 15:19-21)

First, the focus of the discussion is not Jewish Believers, but rather Gentile Believers who are only turning to the Almighty and therefore ‘spiritual babes’. That is why James stresses the need not to make this transition difficult for them. If the focus was the sensitivities of Jewish Believers, then the sentence

⁶⁹ It might surprise the reader to know that there is a sect of Nazarene Jews in Israel today who believe that Yahoshua is the Messiah of Israel. They are unique because even though they are ‘believers’, they still live their lives in accordance with the “halacha” of Pharisaic Judaism. They have a website at www.netzarim.co.il.

should have begun by reflecting those difficulties rather than those of the Gentile Believers. The Jewish Believers, who grew up in the Torah, would have no transition to worry about.

Second, the question was not whether or not the Gentiles should observe the Law, but whether or not they should observe it per Pharisaic tradition and take upon themselves ‘the yoke’. Let us back up and capture the context of the debate, so that we truly understand the meaning of Peter’s statement, which won the day at the council. And notice once again that the catalyst for this debate is the Pharisees—only this time believers in Yahoshua that are Pharisees!

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago Elohim made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And Elohim, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye Elohim, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:5-10)

Could it be any clearer? The debate focused on whether or not the Gentiles had to be immediately circumcised and follow the Law per the Pharisaic interpretation and traditions (‘the yoke’) in order to be part of the congregation! After more discussion, James made his statement.

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to Elohim: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. (Acts 15:19-21)

James mandated that the new Gentile believers would have to turn away from paganism by observing immediately four commandments dealing with matters relating to idol worship: (1) pre-sacrifice consorting with temple prostitutes, (2) strangling of the sacrificial animal, (3) consumption of the animal’s blood, and finally (4) sacrifice of the animal. They were not expected to take on the Pharisaic ‘yoke’ with respect to observance of the Law, but tied his proclamation to the reason, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

The very clear context of these statements was that the Gentiles were to start with the basic four and then, as they heard Moses preached in the synagogues every Sabbath day,⁷⁰ they would come to

⁷⁰ The Gentile believers at that time observed the Biblical Sabbath, not Sunday. We have already seen numerous examples of this fact and there exists NO Biblical statement commanding that this be changed. For a full discussion of this issue, see the study, *The Lord’s Day—Sabbath or Sunday*. It addresses those verses taken out of context by mainstream Christianity to include Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

internalize the rest of the *written* commandments. They could then observe the law as Caleb, Ruth, and Cornelius had done, without being overwhelmed—and potentially ‘scared off’ by the hundreds of additional Pharisaic commandments.

This is the same practice used in synagogues and churches today. Once an ‘unsaved’ soul accepts the importance of the Word of the Most High, he is not expected to give up all his sinful ways right on the spot, but rather invited into fellowship, given a few absolutes, and then lovingly taught the finer ways of a Believer’s life as he continues to hear the Word preached every week. Nothing has changed in this approach toward new congregants. In this way, rather than the Torah commandments of the Father being a burden, they would come to want to follow them. That, after all, is what the New Covenant is all about. Paul describes it as follows:

This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.
(Hebrews 10:16)

Paul is referring back to Hebrews 8:10, which is a direct quote from Jeremiah 31:33. In Jeremiah, the word "laws" is "Torah"—the Law of the Most High. In other words, the New Covenant is NOT to do away with the Torah commandments of the Almighty but to have them put into the hearts and minds of the New Testament Believer!

Oh, that the scales would fall from the eyes of our mainstream Christian teachers as they did for Paul in Acts 9:18 and that they would teach the whole truth of the Gospel...

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW: “...that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

At this, the fourth major area in the study, it is time to examine the purpose of the Law. We have seen thus far in the study that ‘great’ men and women of the Old Testament observed the Law, just as Moses and the Prophets had instructed. We have seen that Messiah observed it and taught His Nazarene followers to do likewise. We have seen that our own mainstream Christian arguments against observing the Law were based upon misinterpretations of Pauline letters by Gentile, non-Hebraic Christians of the 2nd-4th centuries. Contrary to these unbiblical doctrines, both Messiah and Paul lifted up the Law and taught its preeminence and predominance over the ‘traditions of man’—whether those traditions happen to be religiously motivated or not. Assuming then that we might want to take another look at the Law of the Almighty for our lives today, an important component of such an assessment must be to determine the purpose of the Law in our lives today. So, then, just what is the purpose of the Law?

While volumes could be written on the various components of the Law of the Most High, for purposes of this study we will concentrate on three main aspects of the purpose of the Law. First, observance of the Creator’s Law provides for good order and discipline within society. Second, observance of our Creator’s Law demonstrates the depth of our allegiance to, and love of, Him. Third, the Bible puts us

‘on notice’ that our own personal judgment will be affected in large measure by how well we conform our lives to the Law of the Most High. So, let us now briefly consider each of these aspects at this time.

The Law’s Good Order and Discipline: “... that thou mayest prolong *thy* days upon the earth”
(Deuteronomy 4:40)

If one were to ask the purpose of the laws of the United States, the average American citizen would probably say the purpose of the law is to maintain ‘good order and discipline’ so that the society will function smoothly and the rights and privileges of the citizenry can be maintained. Prohibitions militate against violence, theft, fraud, unsafe or negligent conduct, and a variety of other unsavory practices. All in all, most people would probably agree that the rule of law, when coupled with an honest legal system, is good for a society and keeps it running smoothly.

When we look to the Law of the Most High, as penned by Moses at the direction of the Most High, we can say that this Law fulfills the same basic purpose as the legal system of the United States or any other civilized nation on the earth: it provides for ‘good order and discipline’ for the people who follow it, and deals largely with relationships with people and organizations comprised of people. But the Law of the Most High goes deeper than the jurisprudence of the United States or other civilized nation.

If one were to take the entire body of laws of the United States, for example, one would find that the number of such laws is well into the tens of thousands by the time one looks at federal, state, and local laws. By contrast, the Law of the Most High consists of only a little over 600 statutes, judgments, ordinances, etc. This relatively few number of ordinances provides, not only for good order and discipline in society as a whole, but for worth of the individual, inter-familial relations, the right to private property, good medical health, wholesome social values, an effective welfare system, an agricultural framework which maximizes plant yields without fertilizer, a fair retribution system for violators of the Law, and a host of other provisions.

Not long ago, the author conducted a series of weekly studies on the Law with a group of 7 pastors over a period of two months. After the initial session and the expected “we are not under the Law” response, there followed two sessions of intense study on the particular statutes and judgments of the Law. At the beginning of the third meeting, the senior pastor remarked, “If our society was run in accordance with the Law today, it would be a more wonderful place to live!” It is no wonder that Moses said,

Know therefore this day, and consider *it* in thine heart, that the LORD he *is* Elohim in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: *there is* none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong *thy* days upon the earth, which the LORD thy Elohim giveth thee, for ever. (Deuteronomy 4:39-40)

And it is likewise no wonder that King David, echoing the same attitude that Moses had, said the following concerning the Law of the Most High,

For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness *is* unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all *are* thy servants. Unless thy law *had been* my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me. I *am* thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: *but* I will consider thy testimonies. I have seen an end of all perfection: *but* thy commandment *is* exceeding broad. O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they *are* ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. I have sworn, and I will perform *it*, that I will keep thy righteous judgments... My soul *is* continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they *are* the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, *even unto* the end. I hate *vain* thoughts: but thy law do I love. Thou *art* my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word. Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit *is* falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth *like* dross: therefore I love thy testimonies. (Psalm 119:89-119)

And was that not the reaction of the Queen of Sheba and other rulers to Solomon's kingdom when Israel was following the Law of the Most High as the law of the land? And arguably, the United States itself, with a jurisprudence based largely upon Biblical principles has also been blessed immensely, whether the majority of the people understand the reasons or not. In short, because the Law is the Almighty's instruction book of how to live our lives, it produces positive results and a people who follow the Law of the Most High will be blessed as a nation—just as Moses indicated.

The 'good order and discipline' purpose of the Law that we have just addressed is easily understood by the majority of citizens in a nation espousing the 'rule of law' because order and discipline in a society make it work. One does not necessarily have to have a religious perspective to see this because this aspect of the Law concerns itself primarily with man's relationship to his fellow man and the organizations of man. To sum up this aspect, we could probably look to the words of the Messiah, who distilled this aspect into one pithy verse:

And the second *is* like, *namely* this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Mark 12:31)

But, before we leave this aspect of the Law, we should note that it pertains but to the second of two commandments the Messiah addresses in this setting of Mark 12. Let us consider the fuller passage.

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Yahoshua answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The LORD our Elohim, the LORD is one: And thou shalt love the LORD thy Elohim with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: *this is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31)

If we look to another of the Messiah's teachings, we find that BOTH of these commandments pertain to the Law and in fact summarize and embody that Law.

And when the multitude heard *this*, they were astonished at his doctrine. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, *which was* a lawyer, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Yahoshua said unto him, Thou shalt love the LORD thy Elohim with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:33-40)

We should not miss the significance of Messiah's statement, which was made to a Pharisaic lawyer of the law. Of the two commandments, the love of the Creator is the more/most important aspect of the entire Law. In other words, if the entire Law were to be distilled into two commandments, the first, and greatest, proportion and reason for the Law would be love of the Creator! And it is an unfortunate fact that this important teaching of the Messiah has been overlooked by mainstream Christianity because of the misinterpretations of Pauline letters that we have seen heretofore. While this may be hard to believe, let us look deeper and determine if this is in fact the case. If it is, then mainstream Christianity is guilty of the same sin that characterized the organized religion of the Pharisees. They had put their own tradition above the love of the Father, and so have we. We, like they, have left our "first love" (Revelation 2:4). As we have done thus far in the study, let us look deeper than would the typical seminary lesson to determine if this is really the case.

The Law and Our Love of the Creator: “this is the love of Elohim...” (1 John 5:3)

If one were to ask the average practicing Christian if he/she loves the Creator, the immediate response would be “of course I love Him.” If, however, one were to then ask, “How do you love Him *exactly*, with examples?” he/she would probably be at a loss for words. At best, the person would probably say that they pray often and then give examples of how they are good to other people. But remember, relations with other people apply to the *second* greatest commandment, but, what about the *first* and *greatest* commandment? Just exactly how do we love the Father with all our heart, soul, and mind? While prayer is a good start, is there anything else?

While the instructions for loving the Creator are all through the Scriptures, John gives us a good summary of what the Bible teaches concerning love of the Most High.

Whosoever believeth that Yahoshua is the Messiah is born of Elohim: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of Elohim, when we love Elohim, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of Elohim, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:1-3)

What John seems to be saying here is that to love Him is to obey Him, and to obey in a manner characterized by a joyful attitude toward doing so. Remember Messiah’s teachings on the Law and giving the ‘heart attitude’ that should characterize our observance of, and obedience to, the Law of the Most High? And does this not make a great deal of sense? Do we not evaluate a child’s love for a parent by observing the extent to which they cheerfully obey? Do we not judge the character of a soldier by observing the extent to which he cheerfully and professionally carries out the lawful orders of his superiors? And do we not evaluate the loyalty of a citizen by observing the extent to which he obeys the laws of the land and observes the national traditions of the country? How, then, would someone else evaluate our own love toward our Heavenly Father? Messiah tells us that the same standard will apply.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
(Matthew 5:14-16)

Just as a parent is ‘glorified’ by an obedient child and a commanding officer is ‘glorified’ by an obedient soldier, the Creator is glorified when his children obey Him. Do not miss the significance of the fact that Messiah links these “good works” to the Law of His Father.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:14-19)

Messiah demonstrated here that the “good works” to which He referred were the “good works” per the commandments of His Father’s Law! And does this not make sense? Why else were the Israelites to which Messiah spoke the “light of the world?” As Paul told us earlier, “unto them were committed the oracles of Elohim” (Romans 3:2), to include the perfect Law of the Most High! And why would we want to live otherwise?

“Fine,” one might say, “perhaps the legal and moral aspects of the Law are good, but what about the ‘ceremonial law’?” “Weren’t the sacrificial system, the feast days, and other like things done away with at the cross? The ‘ceremonial law’ no longer applies!”

The Ceremonial Law: Biblical Fact or Manmade Fiction ?

It is taught in most Christian denominations today that even if the legal and moral precepts of the Law should be followed, the so-called ‘ceremonial law’—consisting of the sacrificial system, the ‘Jewish holidays’, and other similar thing were done away with at the cross and no longer apply for the New Testament church. But is this the case?

The first question that should probably be asked is, “Where is the term ‘ceremonial law’ used in the Bible?” In reality, this term is never used in the Bible. It is rather a construct of the ‘tradition of men’ to ‘explain away’ certain parts of the Law that they find objectionable or useless, such as the sacrificial system or matters such as “meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*.” (Colossians 2:16). But, why would the Almighty command such things and why would He care?

The short answer to this question is that the Law, in addition to dealing with interpersonal and societal relationships, also pertains to relationships between human beings and the spirit realm. The sacrificial system, for example, was instituted by the Most High for reasons that we do not fully understand. We have some idea of the importance of blood for atonement, but do not really understand what is going on in the spirit realm in the Courts of Heaven during a sacrifice here on earth. This study will not attempt to delve into the sacrificial system because the sacrificial system pertained only to the Temple once it was built.

Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest:
But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer

thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee. (Deuteronomy 12:13-14)

At this time, the Temple is no longer standing and the sacrificial system is in abeyance. There are interesting passages in the book of Ezekiel pertaining to the conduct of sacrifices in what some scholars interpret as a rebuilt Temple during the time of the millennial reign of Messiah on the earth. For purposes of this study, we will abide by the colloquialism, “don’t even go there,” in an effort to avoid the ‘pre-tribulation’, ‘mid-tribulation’, ‘post-tribulation’, ‘pan-tribulation’⁷¹ debate. We will, however, take a quick look at a few other so-called ‘ceremonial law’ issues, which might possibly be more relevant to the modern New Testament Christian. In the interest of brevity, and because most of these issues are addressed in other studies, we will limit ourselves to one so-called ‘ceremonial law’ issue—whether or not Christians should observe the Biblical holy days given in the Old Testament.

Prior to looking at this issue, however, we must remember that our actions are observed by those around us. We must also remember that, in addition to human observers, the inhabitants of the spirit realm are also interested in what we do here on the earth. Consider, for example, the observations of Satan in the book of Job (chapters 1, 2), the “watchers” of Daniel (chapter 4), Satan as a ‘roaring lion’ (1 Peter 5:8), etc.

Let us now take a brief look at whether or not Christians should observe the Biblical holy days given in the Bible. We have been taught that they ‘are Jewish’, do not pertain to Christians, and were ‘done away with at the cross’. But is this the case, especially given the fact that the mainstream teachings on Colossians 2:16 were based upon faulty interpretations of Paul’s letter, as we saw earlier?

Perhaps we first consider that these days were not designated as ‘Jewish’ at all, but rather, the Feasts of the Most High, Himself, and commanded to Moses.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, *Concerning* the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, *even these are my feasts.* (Leviticus 23:2)

As we read further, we are told *4 times* that they are to be observed, not just until the cross, but forever, throughout our generations.

...it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings... (Leviticus 23:14)

...It shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations... (Leviticus 23:21)

...it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings... (Leviticus 23:31)

...It shall be a statute for ever in your generations...: (Leviticus 23:41)

⁷¹ The pan-tribulation position holds that “it will all pan out in the end.”

That is why the early Nazarenes were observing the Pentecost (Acts 2), why Paul had to “keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem (Acts 18:20-21, KJV), why Paul exhorted the Corinthian congregants to “keep the feast” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) and why Paul made observance that “the fast was already now past” (Acts 27:9). Prior to the negative influences of Rome on the Nazarenes, they were observing the “Feasts of the LORD” in accordance with His Law!⁷² In complete contrast, the modern Christian church is characterized by a totally different phenomenon. As observed by both human and spiritual ‘watchers’ alike, modern Christians do not observe the Biblical holy days of their Creator, but rather ‘warmed over’ pagan holidays!

Concerning Messiah’s birth, most serious Bible scholars know that the Messiah was not born on December 25. They freely admit that it was a pagan holiday and many sources will even go so far as to admit that it was the birthday of Mithra (also known as ‘Tammuz’ by the Babylonians and as ‘Esus’ by the Druids)—a pagan deity that was proclaimed by his followers as the savior. So why would we want to celebrate the birth of a pagan deity? Rome mandated observance of this day in the 4th century and it has carried forward to this day. Our pastors, realizing that it is pagan, mollify us with the apology, “We won the pagan day for the Lord!” But did we, or did we simply paganize ourselves a little more?⁷³

Did not Moses warn the Israelites “thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations” (Deuteronomy 18:9), and did not Jeremiah admonish the people, “learn not the way of the heathen” (Jeremiah 10:2)? And did not Paul warn us that false deity worship was really the worship of devils?

...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to Elohim: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.
(1 Corinthians 10:20)

With respect to our worship of the Most High and His son, who gets the glory in the courts of Heaven when believers worship on the days appointed for the pagans by their demonic advisors? Would the Creator have been glorified had Job bowed down before his Christmas tree (Jeremiah 10:2) in order to get a present?

Why do we celebrate the Messiah’s resurrection on ‘Ishtar’ (Easter) Sunday? The pagans celebrated the fertility festival of Ishtar on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, long before the birth of the Messiah. Rome also mandated this holiday and we follow it to this very day. The Bible gave us the Biblical feast of Firstfruits as the day of Messiah’s resurrection. (See for example, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 for Paul’s understanding.)⁷⁴ Would the Creator have been glorified had Job taken a bite of an Easter ham sandwich with his face “toward the east” (Ezekiel 8:16) for the Ishtar sunrise service?

⁷² In addition, we have already seen the numerous times in which the 1st century Nazarene believers were observing the Biblical Sabbath of the Most High—another of His Feast Days (Leviticus 23:2-3)

⁷³ The Messiah’s real Biblical birth can be determined to be the first day of the Biblical feast of Tabernacles. See the study, *Holy Days or Holidays??? Part 2*.

⁷⁴ For a full study on this topic, see the study, *Holy Days or Holidays??? Part 2*.

Why, in spite of Messiah's own words that He died on the Passover (Luke 22:16) do we still refuse to observe this Biblical appointed time in commemoration of His death? In short, why do we ignore all the Biblical holy days—established to foretell and witness to every significant event in the life of Messiah—which the Law commands us to observe and instead keep our own pagan holidays because we are wedded to the 'tradition of men?' Why do we violate the Sabbath of the Most High—a weekly commemoration of His creation—in favor of 'the day of the sun' which was celebrated by the pagans for centuries prior to the coming of Messiah?⁷⁵ Why do we take into our bodies the 'unclean' and the 'abomination' (Leviticus 11:7-10) in the form of swine, shellfish, snake, etc., in direct contradiction to the commandments of the Most High?

If we put aside the flawed mainstream interpretations of Paul's letters, what possible argument could be used to persuade good Christians that the Law of the Most high is bad while pagan festivals and practices are good? It seems almost silly to argue that "we're not under the Law" (an argument shown to be based upon fallacious interpretation of Paul's writings) so that we can keep pagan practices. Would we possibly fall for such a deception if it were not for the fact that we had been raised to believe these things as children? Perhaps that is why Jeremiah gave the following prophecy concerning the Gentiles.

O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and *things* wherein *there is* no profit.
(Jeremiah 16:19)

Perhaps that is also why John would make the following prophecy concerning the end-time body of believers who might still need to be cleansed from pagan practices:

Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of Elohim, and the faith of Yahoshua. (Revelation 14:12)

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen... And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.
(Revelation 18:1-4)

We see here that in addition to having the testimony of Messiah, the end-time saints will also be keeping the commandments of the Most High—just as every 'great' character of the Bible taught. But what about those who fail to heed this call?

⁷⁵ See the study, *The Lord's Day*. If all Old Testament followers of the Most High, Messiah, Paul, and the first century Gentile believes kept the Sabbath as we have seen, how have we been deceived?

The Law and the Judgment: “depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:23)

While it may be politically incorrect in this ‘age of grace’, the Bible in fact teaches that we will be judged in accordance with our deeds. We will not spend a great deal of time in this area, but will simply highlight the role of the Law in this process.

As to the existence of a future judgment, Paul made the following comment:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment... (Hebrews 9:27)

The Messiah also taught that there will be a judgment. Perhaps one of His most well-known teachings on the matter is the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Then Yahoshua sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 13:36-43)

His grace notwithstanding, numerous teaching by the Messiah focused on the importance of our actions and confirmed that our deeds and our words have the potential to put us at great risk.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of Elohim with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: (Mark 9:43-47)

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:36-37)

But just which words and deeds did the Messiah indicate would be important? Consider the words He spoke to the rich man when asked how one may enter eternal life.

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, Elohim: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*
(Matthew 19:17)

Just as been the consistent theme throughout the Scriptures, the commandments of the Creator—His Law—is the standard for determining what is right and wrong. Let us review once more a statement that we have hopefully taken to heart.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:16-19)

And finally, we will take one last look at the judgment itself to review the standard by which we will all be judged. That standard, in the words of the Messiah, is whether or not we do the will of His Father and live in accordance with His Law—the same Law that the Messiah and every other ‘great’ person of the Bible exalted, to include Paul.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: (Matthew 7:18-26)

Messiah’s message is clear. He taught us that man is to live by “every word of Elohim” (Luke 4:4) and He will judge us by how well we tried to carry out His command. His message is clear and in agreement with every other writer in the Bible. The word of His Father is our instruction for how to live our life, and will be the standard by which Messiah will judge us: He who hath an ear let him hear...

CONCLUSION: "...What manner *of persons* ought ye to be...?" (2 Peter 3:11)

So now that we come to the end of our study on the Law and its applicability to the New Testament believer, we must ask ourselves the question, "So what?" Should this study, or the Law, have any impact on the average Christian today? To answer this question, the negative impact of not having observed the Law is already being felt by all mainstream Christians, whether they realize it or not. The Bible warns us, "Be not deceived; Elohim is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The culture war which is rocking the formerly 'Christian America', and the formerly 'Christian West' as a whole, is a direct result of faulty Christian teachings on the Law. After 13-plus centuries of "unlearned" interpretations of Paul's writings, and being told we are 'not under the Law,' our religious leadership has taken us halfway down the 'slippery slope' of judgment as a nation.

How else would one explain that fact that some Christian pastors can now openly proclaim to be practicing homosexuals and claim New Testament justification for their position? Worse yet, some mainstream denominations are now even ordaining church leaders who openly admit to being practicing homosexuals. If we "are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:15) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8), then who are the rest of us to judge? We are reaping as we have sowed...

Not only within the mainstream church, but within society as a whole, belief in the Bible as the foundation for right and wrong is losing ground. In the United States of America, for example, a country largely established on Biblical principles ("all men are created equal," "in God we trust," "endowed by their Creator," etc), we have lost our Biblical moorings. Judges (in whose courtrooms the Ten Commandments were once prominently displayed) can no longer discern between right and wrong, in accordance with Biblical values. Consequently, the Bible is now 'unconstitutional' for any application other than church services and parents now have the added burden of trying to protect their children from the 'gutter filth', which characterizes much of rap music, MTV, and the likes of Howard Stern—not to mention the promiscuity of daytime soap operas and nightly television sitcoms. We are persuaded into thinking that this is an issue of First Amendment right of 'free speech' or the 'separation of church and state', but we forget that the first Amendment has been around for over 200 years and 'gutter filth' was never contemplated until the post-1960s 'cultural revolution' when the mantra "God is love" became ubiquitous. And of course for the first 200 years of our existence, neither was contemplated the possibility of a 'constitutional right' for a woman to ask a doctor to rip off the arms and legs of her unborn silently-screaming baby while still within her womb. We are reaping as we have sowed...

"But, wait a minute," one might say, "These evils are not espoused by mainstream Christianity." While this may be technically true, mainstream Christianity has set the stage whereby they have become possible. When we got away from the entirety of "thus saith the LORD," and began to 'pick and choose' the commandments we wanted to follow, we stepped onto the slippery slope and have been slowly slipping ever since; the pace is simply accelerating today.

Consider this, there literally hundreds of Christian denominations and sub-denominations. Most all of them claim to be led by the Holy Spirit and many of them have significant variations in their doctrines. Why all the confusion and are these various doctrines really the work of the Holy Spirit or do to lack of true Biblical understanding? Can we, therefore trust the doctrines which openly violate the Law and teach that it is honorable to do so? Should we really expect that the Most High will protect us from this onslaught of evil that the Bible warns will characterize the last days? We often hear pastors preach the following message from their pulpit:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Of course, most pastors fail to point out that this statement, made to King Solomon, referred to Israelites who would humble themselves, pray and turn from their wickedness. But that aside, can we not “take hold” of the promises made to Israel? Of course we can as we have seen, but we have also seen that doing so involves our obeying the Creator and observing his Law—just like Caleb, Ruth, Messiah, and Paul have taught us. Have we really turned from out “wicked ways?” Given all the elements of pagan worship in our religious lives, have we really turned from our wickedness? Did Messiah not warn us that we will be judged for our transgressions of the Law?

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:19-23)

And John echoed this warning toward those who would claim to be believes but ignore the commandments of the Law.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:4)

It is a sad fact that mainstream Christianity today is guilty of the same sins that characterized the sect of the Pharisees in Messiah’s days, when they placed some of their own traditions over the commandments of the Most High. If Messiah were to walk into one of our churches today during a ham and egg fellowship breakfast following an Ishtar sunrise service, would He commend us or level the same accusations that He leveled at the Pharisees?

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of Elohim by your tradition? This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and

honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:8-9)

As you attempt to grapple with question, remember the watchword of the Protestant Reformation “Sola Scriptura”⁷⁶ and try do a better job following it than they did. If you find the entire Bible saying one thing, and your tradition saying, “yes, but Paul teaches...” go back and review just what the “Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6) really meant in his letters. When, in your mind, Paul once again agrees with the Messiah’s words and the “other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16), then you will be back on track and again in accordance with “thus saith the LORD” rather than the “tradition of men.”

As you become more conversant in understanding Paul, you will then be ready to discuss these issues with your Pastor, prayerfully and humbly. No matter what the reaction, stick to the entire Word of the Most High and let Scripture properly interpret Scripture. While religious zeal may be commendable on the part of believers, it is also very important that Biblical truth accompany the zeal. After all, John exhorts us to, “Worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

The truth is that the Word of the LORD, as contained in His Law and Prophets is forever. And the true saints of the end-time will be characterized by a spirit of obedience to the commandments of the Most High.

Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Yahoshua. (Revelation 14:12)

And we know that during the millennial reign of Yahoshua, he will once again establish before men the Torah of His Father and make the Torah the Law of the entire earth.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the Elohim of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law (‘Torah’), and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

And as you prayerfully consider the Law of the Most High for your own life, remember to remain prayerful, humble, and observe His Law—His Torah—for His glory and the glory of His Son. May the Most High richly bless you in your walk with Him.

⁷⁶ Solely the Scriptures