



Torah vs. Grace

Glad You Asked!

Dear Jewish Voice,

Since we are saved by grace, why do the Messianic Jews always go back to the Torah? What does the Torah include - the Talmud?

Isn't it legalistic to follow the Old Testament and in fact condemned by Paul in Romans 4? "For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath."

~HB, Los Angeles, CA

Dear BB -

Thank you for writing. This is a highly debated topic and an issue of much misunderstanding. Although I can't cover it exhaustively, I am glad to address the issue and hopefully bring some light and perspective.

The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - sometimes called the "Books of Moses." In these books we find "His" story of creation: the wondrous creation of the universe and of mankind; the establishment of a People and a Land set apart for all time to reveal the One True God to the World - His existence, His love, His ways.

These books contain 613 commandments, however, these commandments were not given to the Israelites while in bondage as a means of redemption - they were given to an already redeemed people as a guide of how to live as a redeemed people. (In fact the Hebraic meaning of Torah is "teaching unto life" - not "law" in our modern definition). The redemption of Israelites was unearned - God heard their cries in Egypt and rescued them because of their need and His compassion.

He then set out to fashion them into a Holy Nation, a Kingdom of Priests, to show forth His glory.

We receive salvation by grace alone - but once we have received this great gift, how then shall we live?

not to destroy, but fulfill "(or bring fullness to, or rightly interpret). "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these commandments and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven..." (Matt. 5:17-19)

This has not changed in the New Covenant through Yeshua (Jesus). We receive salvation by grace alone - but once we have received this great gift, how then shall we live? 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

As the New Testament had not yet been written, we can be certain that the Scripture in reference was the Old Testament. Also, Yeshua Himself declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law (the Torah), or the Prophets; I am come

...these commandments were not given to the Israelites while in bondage as a means of redemption - they were given to an already redeemed people as a guide of how to live as a redeemed people.

Yeshua Himself declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law (the Torah), or the Prophets; I am come not to destroy, but fulfill "(or bring fullness to, or rightly interpret).

By Yeshua's own words, we come to understand that the Law is not for salvation, but for learning and teaching for the redeemed to live a pleasing life unto God. He does not say that those who break the commandments and teach others to do so will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but that they will be least. There is something beneficial in learning the whole counsel of God! We also see that the Torah has not passed away as heaven and earth still remain.

By Yeshua's own words, we come to understand that the Law is not for salvation, but for learning and teaching for the redeemed to live a pleasing life unto God.

Some may argue that "if Yeshua fulfilled the Law, then we don't have to!" However, that is not what the verse actually says in the original text. In the Greek, the word He uses is pleroo {play-ro'-o} which Strong's concordance renders "to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full" as the most relevant definition. Many New Testament Scholars have also considered that Yeshua was using the Hebrew idiomatic popular then and now in discussing Torah issues. When rabbis contend over the correct meaning of a Scripture, they use the phrase "destroying the Torah" for misinterpreting the Torah and "fulfilling the Torah" for rightly dividing the Word.

So where does all this confusion come from regarding law and grace, as if one nullifies the other? I think it is simply a tradition of misunderstanding. Grace is not the opposite of Law, or Torah. For God's grace actually *teaches* us Law as we see in Titus 2:11,12: "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, TEACHING us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present age.*"

Referring back to Romans 4, in the context of the verse quoted, Paul made it very clear that the realization of Abraham's righteousness and the passing on of the promise was not because he was able to keep the Torah, but rather because of his faith, or trusting in God. In the author's way, this issue is looked at from several angles, and this is the conclusion. "*Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*" Romans 4:16

Another aspect to consider is that God's enemies throughout history, as well as His future nemesis the antichrist, have the hallmark of being anti-Torah and outlawing the keeping of His Word. Therefore I think it is not healthy to have antipathy toward God's Torah, or any portion of His Word. The antichrist is called the "man of lawlessness." We must assume that the "law" this antichrist is against is the Law of God, the Torah – I'm sure it's not that he is known for breaking the speed limit! In a time of great deception and "gross darkness," it may only be His Word that is the light for our path and the discernment to preserve against divers winds of doctrine that may deceive even the elect.

Sarah