

Defending the Apostle Paul:

Weighing the Evidence

***Sha'ul of Tarsus:
An Apostle, a Christian, a fraud,
or a Torah observant Jew?***

***by
Paul F Herring***

Copyright Information Page:

Copyright © 2012
by
Paul F Herring.

All rights reserved worldwide.

No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author.

Table of Contents:

[Introduction ...](#)

[My View of the Apostle Paul ...](#)

[Supporting Evidence ...](#)

[Paul's Character ...](#)

[The New Understanding Regarding Gentiles ...](#)

[Conflicting Evidence ...](#)

[Addressing the Conflicting Evidence ...](#)

[Conclusion: Weighing the Evidence Presented ...](#)

[Appendix: Works of the Law](#)

*“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. **Outdo one another in showing honor.** ... serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **Live in harmony with one another.** ...Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.** ... Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good.** (from Romans 12: 9-21)*

Introduction:

I have found it necessary to revisit this important question. Please refer to my first attempt to answer this important question – ‘The Apostle Paul: Disciple or Fraud’ (downloadable from www.circumcisedheart.info).

One of the foundational issues I see in much study, interpretation and debate about New Testament theological narratives and personalities, is that we are all coming to the text with presuppositions, even when we don’t recognize that we are.

A large part of the reason for this comes from the fragmentary nature of our historical and chronological understanding; the corrupted nature of the text, along with the inevitable interpretative and even deliberately biased choices made in the multiple translations that have taken place over the 1900+ years since the autographs were composed.

Where is the proof that such challenges and such presuppositions exist?

Let’s consider just the view we have of the Apostle Paul¹. There are in fact, a great range of views of the Apostle Paul. Just as an example, a book ‘Four Views on the Apostle Paul’² has just been released in which four notable biblical

¹ While his Hebrew name was Sha’ul, to ease the readers engagement and comprehension of this article I will stick with his ‘Christianized’ name Paul, which has a certain appeal to me, and with the common but questionable (by some at least) title Apostle.

² ‘Four Views on the Apostle Paul’ by Thomas R Schreiner, Luke Thomas Johnson, Douglas A Campbell and Mark D Nanos (2012). The four views are essentially a Reformed view; a Catholic view; a Post-New Perspective view and a Jewish view.

scholars argue for four significantly different takes on who and what Paul was. I will come back to some of the arguments from this book.

But all of these very different views still see the Apostle Paul as essentially an advocate for the claims of Yeshua/Jesus as the Messiah.

There are an increasing number of voices though that dispute even this; that argue that the Apostle Paul was out to discredit the religion of the Jewish people, that he was really a liar, a hypocrite, an egocentric and dishonest preacher who only sought to promote his own status and views which were very contradictory to the proto-Judaism of his day. Some question whether he was even a Jew and argue that he was a Roman!

Add to this the very strong evidence for the corruption, both the redacting (editing) and interpolation (added material) of some parts of his epistles; the apparent discrepancies between the chronological narratives in the epistles compared with other books of the NT; as well as, some of the quotations of the Tanakh (OT) being clearly different and even contradictory to the original text they quote³!

The number, breadth and variety of divergent views is ample proof that the Apostle Paul's letters can at the very least be 'cherry-picked'⁴ to argue for very different and opposing views. Many who do this would appear to do so in a diligent and most sincere manner, and yet still end up with very different understandings.

So, with such divergence (and confusion!), how can we hope to approach this question and bring even a little clarity and resolution to the enigma that is the Apostle Paul?

I would like to suggest what is essentially a scientific approach; that is I will try to use a scientific method from the historical sciences.

Historical scientists essentially proceed by inferring history from its results; that is they reason from clues back to causes.

³ Some scholars give the Apostle Paul such a high, almost God-like status that they accept he could change the text of the Tanakh to suit his interpretative style! This appears partly due to being so reliant on how they interpret Paul to describe Jesus, that they speak of 'Jesus in Paul' and almost make Paul (and Jesus) to be God!

⁴ "Cherry picking is the act of pointing at individual cases or data that seem to confirm a particular position, while ignoring a significant portion of related cases or data that may contradict that position." – Wikipedia.org

Further than this they investigate various hypotheses to see which hypothesis, if true, would best explain the known data.

This may sound simple but where there are a number of possibly adequate competing hypotheses, this can prove very difficult. Also to establish a casual claim, that is a valid and logically consistent link between the 'probable' events of the past and our current understanding or interpretation, this scientific approach requires the identification of three things:

1. Evidence that the cause proposed was present;
2. Evidence that on other occasions it has demonstrated the capacity to produce the effect under study, and
3. That there is an absence of evidence, despite a thorough search, of any other possible causes.⁵

So I propose to primarily use the approach of putting forward an historical hypothesis, and then, while trying to, as best as possible, take into account the other contributing factors such as textual redaction; demonstrate that my hypotheses best explains the known data. That is, that my 'view' of the Apostle Paul is the 'best fit' and therefore most likely the true view.

I will try to establish what I believe was the understanding and approach of the Apostle Paul; both where he saw himself in the scheme of things; what his view of Yeshua was; what his view of the significance of the resurrection was; and what the historical and societal conditions were within which he was operating and into which his words had contextual meaning and 'audience – relevance'.

Once my pre-suppositions have been articulated, I will then demonstrate which portions of Paul's epistles strongly support this hypothesis, as well as how other NT writings support this position.

Once I have put forward this hypotheses, I will then consider the apparently conflicting evidence and try and demonstrate how it best fits all this evidence as well; the chronological questions; the character questions; the doctrine questions and the historical ramifications.

As part of my investigation of the contrary evidence, I will try to show where the text as we have it, clearly does not agree with my hypothesis or view, and why such text is almost certainly corrupted or an interpolation (added to the

⁵ Scriven, 'Causes, Connections and Conditions in History' p 249-250

original). I will also try to show how certain 'texts' can be re-interpreted within this framework and view so that they are no longer seen as presenting the Apostle Paul as a fraud or alternatively as the progenitor of a new religion.

I do not expect this short book to be totally comprehensive, especially in terms of the investigation of conflicting evidence. However, if my hypothesis is in fact the best fit for all the evidence in total, then it will generally be able to effectively address other evidence that is presented that may appear to be contradictory.

As at this stage in the redemptive history of the world, we are not privy to all the facts and all the truth, our conclusions can not hope to be totally without question. There will still remain room for questions and the need to accept at least a small degree of tension and tentativeness in our conclusions. Let us begin.

My View of the Apostle Paul:⁶

I will first present my understanding of who the Apostle Paul was and then try to show how this is confirmed through evidence from his writings; the writings of other NT authors and from other historical evidence.

I believe that the Apostle Paul was and remained his entire life a Torah observant Jew; a Pharisee and even more, a Pharisee from a particularly strict sect of the Pharisees. I believe that he was from the Diaspora, that is, that he had grown up outside of the Land of Israel (in Asia-Minor), and therefore within a Hellenistic culture, though clearly living within a Jewish community within that culture that was still able to practice its faith. I will refer to the faith of Israel in Paul's day as 'Judaism' or proto-Judaism though the orthodox Rabbinic Judaism of today developed after this time.

I believe that the Apostle Paul was a Torah scholar of the very highest order who studied under the leading Rabbi's of his day, but who also understood very well the Hellenistic philosophies of his day such as Platonism, Stoicism, and Cynicism.

I believe that the Apostle Paul did in fact have a revelation about Yeshua that convinced him that the Resurrection was for real; that Yeshua was the 'end-times' Messiah, and that therefore the Coming Age, the Kingdom of God was dawning; in a sense that it was early morning, a time where the present evil age still existed but that the New Age was entering and that this meant a new way, a new time and approach had also arrived.

Until the dawning of this Coming Age, the God of Israel, while he has always been the God of Israel, was not in a sense the God of the Gentiles. Israel had been called to be a light to the Gentiles. Gentiles who saw the light, who became God-fearers could expect to have a place in the age to come, but they were still guests in the Kingdom, they were not full and equal members of the Kingdom of God. Only by becoming Jews could they become full and equal members⁷.

⁶ While I have developed this view over some years and it is demonstrated to some degree in a number of my older articles such as 'Circumcision: A Step of Obedience' and the first article on this question, 'The Apostle Paul: Disciple or Fraud', I am much indebted to Prof. Mark Nanos, who essentially presents a very similar view in all his books and articles and has done a great deal more study and scholarship to clarify, support and document this view. I strongly recommend perusal of his books, and articles, at www.marknanos.com

⁷ This was essentially the position taken by the great Rabbi's Hillel and Shammai (early 1st century CE).

Until his Damascus Road revelation, the Apostle Paul had most likely shared this position. He now needed to re-assess his understanding of the times; now that he believed the world had entered the 'end-times'. It is vital that we appreciate that from his Torah based understanding of redemption and salvation, the Apostle Paul did not need to change his Jewish customs and traditions and most definitely, he did not need to change his Torah-observant behaviour⁸.

He would have clearly rejoiced though that he now knew that the long-awaited Jewish Messiah had arrived! He would clearly want to share that joy and knowledge; to join with the sect of Judaism that had already, for the last 2-3 years or so, been rejoicing in this knowledge⁹.

But I believe that the Apostle Paul saw something that perhaps no-one else saw, not even any of the 12 Apostles and original disciples of Yeshua at the time, and that it would not really be until the events at Cornelius' House some 10+ years later that the rest of the disciples would be fully convinced of Paul's new understanding.

That new understanding was that Gentiles were now able, to become full and equal members in the Coming Age WITHOUT becoming Jews¹⁰.

That is, the God-fearers, those Gentiles who attended synagogues to learn about the One True God of the Universe, could now become equal members in the family of God; have equal status as children of Abraham, without becoming Jews. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul believed it was even vital that they DIDN'T become Jews; and that they didn't undergo the 'works of law' or 'circumcision'.

A crucial definition is in order here. The term 'works of law'¹¹ that the Apostle Paul uses frequently, for example in Galatians, does NOT mean obeying Torah (Law). Both this term and the use of 'circumcision' in this context were metonyms for 'the actions of proselyte conversion'. While the Rabbi's have known this all along, it was only with the rise of the 'New Perspective' on Paul

⁸ For some details on this issue, I recommend my article 'Righteousness Before Messiah' at www.circumcisedheart.info

⁹ The historical and textual evidence appears to indicate that the Damascus Road event occurred around 33-34 CE some 1-3 years after the resurrection. I hope to flesh out some of this detail further on in this book.

¹⁰ A crucial aspect and perspective to view this statement from, it to appreciate that God has always remained the God of Israel; he did NOT replace Israel with the Church or make the Church the 'Israel of God'.

¹¹ Please see appendix for a little more analysis of this important and very misunderstood phrase

that scholars like James DG Dunn came to understand and document this important understanding.

The Apostle Paul did not want them, at least corporately, to undergo proselyte conversion as had been the norm, because if they all did, then the great end-times prophecy to Abraham could not be fulfilled. Abraham had been promised that he would one day be the father of many nations. This led to huge problems as I will come to.

It is possible that Yeshua had explained the implications of full Gentile inclusion, but it is not obvious that the Apostles had grasped this revelation. Certainly it would appear that Peter needed some significant prompting and help to appreciate that something new had occurred in Cornelius' house.

In having this incredible revelation about Gentiles becoming full and equal members of the family of God, that is children of Abraham, but not becoming citizens of Israel, I believe that Paul then desired to be involved in promoting this belief.

He also believed he was empowered as an agent or emissary (Hebrew = shaliach, translated to apostle in English) to the Gentiles. He believed that in bringing Gentiles into the faith in the One True God he was hastening the arrival of the Coming Age.

As I will detail later, to convince these Gentiles, who were joining the Jewish communities and becoming part of Jewish sub-groups who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, that they were to remain Gentiles, was a most difficult challenge because of the societal protocols and expectations of both the Roman administration as well as the Jewish communities which these Gentile believers had joined.

As Prof. Mark Nanos explains: *"The mixing of multi-ethnic peoples within a specific ethnic cultural system is a messy proposition"¹²!*

The Apostle Paul believed that his mission was to announce the good news of the beginning of the full restoration of Israel. He believed that part of the proof to his fellow Israelites would be the rejection of idolatry and unrighteous behaviour by many Gentiles as they joined Israel in worshipping the One True God. He believed that this historically unique movement, where a great many God-fearing Gentiles were joining with Jewish communities to recognize and

¹² Quoted from 'Four Views of the Apostle Paul'

honour the Creator and King of the Universe, would also lead many Jews to recognize the validity of the Messiahship of Yeshua.

Supporting Evidence

Having now given a basic outline of who the Apostle Paul was and what he saw as his mission and life's work, I would now like to give supporting evidence for:

1. The Apostle Paul's beliefs, attributes and actions, as well as,
2. His character traits.

The historical context also needs to be investigated to confirm whether or not it clarifies and implicitly argues for these conclusions.

The Apostle Paul was and remained his entire life a Torah observant Jew:

Firstly, from his own words:

"So the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ... For we know that the Torah is spiritual" (Romans 7:12-14)

"For it is not those who hear the Torah who are righteous in God's sight, but **it is those who obey the Torah who will be declared righteous.**" - Romans 2:13

"Do we, then, nullify the Torah by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold Torah." - Romans 3: 31

"For in my inner being **I delight in God's Torah**" - Romans 7:22

"Keeping God's commands (Torah) is what counts." -1 Corinthians 7:19

"We received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles **to the obedience that comes from faith.**" - Romans 1:5.

That is obedience to Torah.

"Finally, brothers, **we instructed you how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For **you know what instructions we gave you** by the authority of the Lord Yeshua." -1 Thessalonians 4:1,2.

The instructions of God i.e. Torah.

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to **the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.**" - 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

He was teaching Torah.

"Now, in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah we command you, brothers,

to stay away from any brother who is leading a life of idleness, a life not in keeping with the **teaching** you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you must imitate us, that we were not idle when we were among you." - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7. Again, the teaching of Torah.

"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Messiah Yeshua." - 2 Timothy 1:13

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." - 2 Timothy 2:2. Note that Paul declares that he had many witnesses to his teaching of Torah.

"... and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." - Philippians 3:17. Note here, and in 2 Thessalonians 3:7 above, the call to imitate the lifestyle of Paul and the other messengers or 'apostle's'/agents of Yeshua.

"I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers." - 2 Timothy 1:3
Note his likening of his lifestyle to his forefathers; that is to other Torah observant Jews.

"We know that the Torah is good if one uses it properly." - 1 Timothy 1:8

"What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. **Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."** Since we have these promises, dear friends, **let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body** and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. - 2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1

Note both the positive quoting of the Tanakh and the further endorsement of it, by his call to obey Torah through purification, a commandment of Torah.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." - Ephesians 6:1-3.
Again, note the endorsement and support of commandments of Torah, specifically the 10 Words.

Secondly, from the words/writings of other NT authors (here Luke is quoting Paul):

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. **I believe everything that agrees with the Torah** and that is written in the Prophets, - Acts 24:14.

“When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, **which they could not prove**. Then Paul made his defense: **"I have done nothing wrong against the Torah of the Jews** or against the Temple or against Caesar." - Acts 25:7-8

"The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that **according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.**" - Acts 26:4-5

“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, **I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.**" - Acts 23:1.

In speaking to the highest Jewish court in the land, and arguing that he had fulfilled his duty to God, he is arguing that he is Torah observant.

“Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, **I am a Pharisee**, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." - Acts 23:6.

Here Paul is arguing that it is not the breaking of any of the commandments (mitzvot) that brings him as an accused before the court, but his advocacy for the resurrection of Yeshua and hence the coming resurrection of all. This was very much a Pharisaic and Jewish belief.

"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of Torah and highly respected by all the Jews living there." - Acts 22:12.

After Paul's Damascus road experience, it is a Torah observant Jew who visits him. Clearly The Way, this sect of the proto-Judaism of the day that believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, were at this time composed of Torah observant Jews.

“When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and **all of them are zealous for the Torah.**" - Acts 21:20.

This verse is further confirming the Torah observance of the believers in Yeshua

and in giving this as encouraging news to the Apostle Paul, they are including him by inference as Torah observant.

“Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. **Then everybody will know** there is no truth in these reports about you, but **that you yourself are living in obedience to Torah.** - Acts 21:24

Some of the Pharisees argued vigorously, "We find nothing wrong with this man." - Acts 23:9. It is doubtful they would have said this about Paul, if he was not following Torah.

“For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.” - Gal 1:13-14.

While there are a number of issues with this translation and the general context of this statement that I can return to, it should at least be clear of Paul’s grounding in Torah, Torah-observance and in observing the ‘Oral Torah’, the ‘traditions of the fathers’.

“After three days Paul called a meeting of the local Jewish leaders. When they had gathered, he said to them: "Brothers, although I have done nothing against either our people or the traditions of our fathers, I was made a prisoner in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans." - Acts 28:17.

You may note an issue here. Luke tells us that even at the very end of Paul’s life, he was still observing Torah AND the ‘traditions of the fathers’, the Oral Torah. I will return to this question when I discuss the (apparently) conflicting evidence.

The Apostle Paul also stated that we should be imitators of him as he was of Yeshua – 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:4. Yeshua was unquestionably Torah observant.

There are at least two other ways in which we can see the faith and behaviour of the Apostle Paul was Torah based. They are that he observed the Feasts, the Festivals of God, and that he condemned the Hellenistic and pagan practices of the Gentiles in the Roman cities where he was helping to establish Messianic communities of The Way.

Paul observed and/or supported many of the Feasts, New Moons (Yom Teruah) and the Sabbath, either by a direct reference to it, by attending the festival, or making a supportive reference to it:

- Shabbat(Sabbath): Acts 13:14-16; Acts 18:4; 4:16
- Pesach (Passover) – 1 Cor 5:7; Acts 27:9
- Festival of Unleavened Bread – Acts 20:6
- Shavuot – 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16
- Yom Teruah – 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16 (New Moon Day, Rosh HaShannah)
- Yom Kippur – Acts 27:9 (the Fast Day)
- Sukkot – Acts 18:21

Paul also stated: **“Your boasting is not good. Don't you know the saying, "It takes only a little hametz to leaven a whole batch of dough?" 7 Get rid of the old hametz, so that you can be a new batch of dough, because in reality you are unleavened. For our Pesach lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed. 8 So let us **celebrate the Seder** not with leftover hametz, the hametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth.”** (1 Corinthians 5: 6-8). While he is clearly using observance of the Passover as an analogy to introduce a higher purpose here, there can be no doubt that he is supporting the observance of the Passover Seder.

Paul also condemned paganism. I present here just a couple of examples. **“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Messiah.”** Col 2:8

The most likely reading and understanding of the terms ‘philosophy and empty deceit’, ‘elemental spirits of the world’^{13, 14} and even ‘human tradition’ refer to Hellenistic or Greek mindsets. So we see first here that Paul is arguing against a Greek and pagan mindset. While the term ‘human tradition’ may sound similar to ‘traditions of our fathers’, he is clearly speaking to Gentiles here about their traditions. The ‘traditions of the fathers’ or Oral Torah, are not as clearly ‘human’ as they were believed to have initially come from the Almighty and

¹³ ‘Elements’ (Greek word ‘stoicheion’ - Strong’s #4747) – translated variously as rudiments, elemental things, elementary principles.

¹⁴ Clearly this is contentious. James Dunn argues that the term in Col 2:8, *“the elemental spirits of the world”* is a Jewish reference (*“The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a commentary on the Greek text”* James D. G. Dunn, p150). The problem is that he uses Gal 4:9 as support, yet this passage is clearly addressing Gentiles before they knew God and thus is addressing Greek/pagan mindsets, not Jewish ones.

relayed through the spoken words of Moses.

The term 'philosophy (Strongs #5385) and empty deceit' is clear cut. The word 'philosophy' is not found anywhere else in Paul's letters or the New Testament. The use of the word 'philosophers' is found in Acts 17: 17 where it is used to describe some Epicurean and Stoic Greek philosophers¹⁵. For more on this context of Colossians 2, I recommend my article 'Colossians 2:16 and the Sabbath'.

FF Bruce (and some other scholars) in 'Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free' refers to an Iranian Gnostic myth that was current in the Near East at the time. In the literature of this myth the term "the elementary principles" is used to refer to the stellar spirits which were identified with the heavenly bodies. Thus, the Apostle Paul was arguing against this Gnosticism or paganism.

We also see the terms asceticism and worship of angels in Col 2:18 **"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on **asceticism and worship of angels**, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,"**

The term 'worship of angels' was clearly Gnostic as it was condemned by the Rabbis in the Talmud (eg. Amora R Judan). If any Jewish sects did participate in such a practice they were certainly not mainstream proto-Rabbinic but rather, very liberal and Hellenistic.

*"Still stronger opposition than that evoked by prayer to, and worship of, the **angels** was aroused by the views that made the angels partners in the creation of the world; and needless to say, the tradition that the whole world was created by angels, **inculcated by various Gnostic doctrines**, appeared even to apocalyptic circles (which assigned a considerable role to Princes, and angels, and even to angels of destruction, and angels of Satan, Belial and Mastema [hatred]) to be in conflict with Israel's Torah.*

In condemnation of the worship of angels a Baraita teaches: 'If one slaughters. . . to Michael, the Prince of the Great Host. . . it is as flesh offered to idols.' - "The Sages – Their Concepts and Beliefs" by Ephraim Urbach.

Plato introduced dualism which led to Gnosticism and this involved asceticism¹⁶

¹⁵ Further support is seen in 'Palestinians & Diaspora Judaism in the First Century', Christianity & Rabbinic Judaism (1993) by Louis Feldman, where he states that no rabbis distinguished themselves in philosophy or wrote any treatise in Greek nor did they use any Greek philosophical terms in the talmudic corpus (of the time).

¹⁶ Asceticism: Extreme self-denial, self-mortification and austerity. A doctrine that the ascetic life

– this is a mode of living that is a far cry from any typical Jewish lifestyle.

Some argue of evidence at Qumran for the Jewish sect the Essenes, embracing a form of asceticism, but there is evidence that this was partly due to Hellenistic influences. Certainly Yeshua did not himself embrace asceticism.

“These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and asceticism, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” - Col 2:23.

Asceticism is a mode of life that included dietary limitations, (but not the dietary laws of the Torah) and to which the phrase in verse 23 above is so clearly referring to, is Gnosticism¹⁷.

While it may be true that such a form of ascetic Judaism (or ‘non-conformist’ Judaism to use FF Bruce’s term), was present in Colosse there appears little evidence for it. On the other hand there is good evidence for the existence of Egyptian cults that practiced ‘absurd asceticism’ (to use Schurer’s term):

“And so we find that since the third century B.C. Egyptian cults had come to be very widely practised throughout Greece generally. Besides these, other Oriental worships, and that in strange admixture, are also to be met with particularly in the islands of Greece and in Asia Minor.”

– “The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ” Schurer p301.

Thus, there is plenty of evidence that asceticism has its foundations in Greek (Pythagorean) and Egyptian or Persian cults, not in Judaism and that the Apostle Paul clearly rejected paganism and Hellenism.

Paul’s Character:

It appears that even the Apostle Paul’s character is questionable. There are a number of passages which appear to suggest he was not, at least in his direct

releases the soul from bondage to the body and permits union with the divine. As the TaNaK and 1st Century Judaism taught the unity of soul and body and rejected the immortality of the soul, asceticism then is a Platonic/Hellenistic not Hebraic or Judaic belief. FF Bruce rejects the argument that the Colossian heresy is some form of Gnostic Essenism based on what is missing from the text such as there being no mention of ‘ceremonial washings’. Another scholar, Ephraim Urbach indicates that asceticism is not Judaic: *“The reasons for this opposition were many and varied; we shall mention only those that give expression to the antithesis between the Halakha and asceticism.”* (p447) ‘The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs’ (Halakha/Halacha means ‘the way’ or right living).

¹⁷ see Marvin Wilson, ‘Our Father Abraham’ p 169

interactions with others living out of a Torah observant lifestyle. Again, before we look at this ‘conflicting evidence’, let us consider the supporting evidence.

His words such as the Corinthians love chapter, his Ephesians exhortation on marriage, his statement on peaceable living in Romans 12 and the brilliant description in Romans 9-11 of how Gentiles can be grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree of Israel are, in my opinion amongst the most beautiful and powerful words ever written and continue to be amongst the most quoted words in history.

Add to this his summation of the commandments of God in Gal 5:14 which is also brilliant, even though just a rewording of some of Leviticus 19 (essentially, he repeats like Yeshua, that for those who love God – i.e. those who adhere to the first 5 Words of the 10 Commandments, are to also love their neighbour – the second 5 Words).

Here he stated: “For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Here are a few quotes from Acts and Peter’s epistles that, at least to some degree speak to the character of Paul:

“But Sha’ul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” - Acts 13:9-10

“As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.” - Acts 13:42-43

“So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.” - Acts 14:3

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” - Acts 14:14-15

“... it seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,” - Acts 15:25

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a believer?" Paul replied, "Short time or long--I **pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am**, except for these chains." - Acts 26:28

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**” - Acts 17:11

“**As his custom was**, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them **from the Scriptures**, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Yeshua I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah, " he said. **Some of the Jews** were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.” - Acts 17:2-4

“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as **our beloved brother Paul** also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. Indeed, he speaks about these things in all his letters. They contain some things that are **hard to understand, things which the uneducated and unstable distort**, to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.¹⁸ - 2 Peter 3:15-16

While perhaps not as reliable a witness to his own character as the words of his contemporaries, he did speak to his character a number of times:

“For it is we who are the Circumcised, we who worship by the Spirit of God and make our boast in the Messiah Yeshua! We do not put confidence in human qualifications, even though I certainly have grounds for putting confidence in such things.

If anyone else thinks he has grounds for putting confidence in human qualifications, I have better grounds: circumcised on the eighth day, by birth

¹⁸ Many scholars question the authenticity of 2 Peter. If Peter was the author, it seems unlikely (given the chronology) that he would have seen all of Paul's epistles, though the 'all' here need only refer to those Peter has read or heard about. The fact that Peter both calls Paul a 'beloved brother' and acknowledges some difficulty in the interpretation of Paul's epistles does I believe lend some credence to this letter. I seriously doubt though that Peter would have implied that Paul's epistles were indeed 'Scripture' though, especially as Paul clearly did not see his own efforts as such.

belonging to the people of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew-speaker, with Hebrew-speaking parents, in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee, in regard to zeal, a persecutor of the Messianic Community of Yeshua, in regard to the righteousness which in Torah, found blameless"¹⁹ - Phil 3:3-6

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” - Philippians 3:17

“Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of **my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.**” - 1 Corinthians 4: 16, 17

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” - Philippians 4:9

“because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know **how we lived among you** for your sake. **You became imitators of us and of the Lord;** in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so **you became a model to all the believers** in Macedonia and Achaia.” - 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-7

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Messiah Yeshua. I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the **teachings, just as I passed them on to you.**” - 1 Corinthians 11:1-2

“In the name of the Lord Messiah Yeshua, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For **you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.** We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but **in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.** - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9

“Until I come, **devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture,** to preaching

¹⁹ You might ask how can someone (Paul) guilty of complicity in the murder of some of his fellow Jews consider himself blameless? As a Torah observant Jew, he would have understood that through Yom Teruah, the Days of Awe and Yom Kippur, he could repent and be forgiven and thus stand blameless before the Almighty.

and to teaching.” - 1 Timothy 4:13

“But as for you, **continue** in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how **from infancy** you have known the **Holy Scriptures**, which are **able to make you wise for salvation** through the faith of Messiah Yeshua. - 2 Timothy 3:15

“For **everything that was written** in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the **encouragement of the Scriptures** we might have hope.” - Romans 15:4

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.” - 1 Corinthians 15:9 -11

“In my earlier letter I wrote you not to associate with people who engage in sexual immorality. I didn't mean the sexually immoral people outside your community, or the greedy, or the thieves or the idol-worshippers - for then you would have to leave the world altogether! No, what I wrote you was not to associate with anyone who is supposedly a brother but who also engages in sexual immorality, is greedy, worships idols, is abusive, gets drunk or steals. With such a person you shouldn't even eat! For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Isn't it those who are part of the community that you should be judging? God will judge those who are outside. Just expel the evildoer from among yourselves”. 1 Corinthians 5: 9-13

Paul was from the Diaspora:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of Gamli'el in every detail of the Torah of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today." (Acts 22:3).

Note that it is Luke who is writing and confirming this. Being from the Diaspora gives some insight into why Paul would originally have been less likely to have known about Yeshua and why he was better equipped than most to be an emissary to the Gentiles.

This should also help explain how he had such a great understanding of the

Hellenistic philosophies of his day such as Platonism, Stoicism, and Cynicism. This understanding is very evident in his Colossians and Philippians epistles.

I discuss this in my 'Colossians 2:16 and the Sabbath' and my 'Re-evaluating Philippians 3' articles.

The new understanding regarding Gentiles:

It is my contention as I have already intimated, that the Apostle Paul was the first Israelite to be given the revelation that Gentiles now could become ‘joint heirs’, that is, members of the Kingdom with equal status to the natural born children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (without becoming Jews, that is, without proselytization). If the generally accepted chronologies are correct, Paul was given this revelation around 33-35 CE. It would not be until around 45 CE that the Apostle Peter would have the same revelation directly confirmed to him through the Cornelius episode. This new revelation was then confirmed by the leaders of the Messianic community around 49 CE with the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)²⁰.

Two portions of Paul’s epistles that speak of this new revelation are Ephesians 3 and Col 1:25-27.

“It is a consequence of this that I, Paul, am a prisoner of the Messiah Yeshua on behalf of you Gentiles. 2 I assume that you have heard of the work God in his grace has given me to do for your benefit, 3 and that it was by a revelation that this secret plan was made known to me. I have already written about it briefly, 4 and if you read what I have written, you will grasp how I understand this secret plan concerning the Messiah. 5 In past generations it was not made known to mankind, as the Spirit is now revealing it to his emissaries and prophets, 6 that **in union with the Messiah** and through the **Good News** (of the Kingdom of God) the Gentiles were to be **joint heirs, a joint body and joint sharers with the Jews** in what God has promised.” - Ephesians 3:1-6

“I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the **word of God in its fullness** -- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is **now disclosed to the saints**. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is **Messiah Yeshua in you**, the hope of glory.” - Col 1:25-27

You will note here that Paul is speaking to Gentiles; that he is arguing that it was by direct revelation and not purely from the study of the Tanakh, that Paul was made aware of this ‘end-times’ plan, of how Gentiles could become equal members of the Kingdom of God, thanks to the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua.

We also see that Paul believed his was he was empowered as an agent or emissary (Hebrew = ‘shaliach’, translated to ‘apostle’ in English) to the Gentiles.

²⁰ See my ‘*Circumcision: A Step of Obedience?*’ article for details on this.

This new revelation that Gentiles, who were joining the Jewish communities and becoming part of sub-groups who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, were to remain Gentiles, was a most difficult challenge because of the societal protocols and expectations by both the Roman administration as well as the Jewish communities.

If this is the correct understanding of Paul's revelation; we would expect him to primarily spend his energies convincing the God-fearing Gentiles (who by definition were already attending synagogues) to more fully participate in the Jewish communities they had some relationship with. At the same time, this new revelation changed nothing in terms of how the Jewish people were to relate to God through their covenants and their Torah observant lifestyles.

Thus we would expect to see/read of Paul encouraging Jews to maintain their Jewishness and Gentiles to join their Jewish communities in observing the commandments but doing so without the rites of proselytization.

Even a cursory view of the history of Rome and its provinces at the time will indicate that such a situation would be most difficult. The Jewish people had special dispensation to avoid the standard cultic ceremonies and means by which the Roman people worshipped and paid homage to the 'gods' of Rome. Part of this 'deal' involved a daily tax to Rome at the Temple in Jerusalem. While, it had been acceptable for Gentiles to attend the Synagogue on the Sabbath where possible, they were still expected to observe all the cultic practices of the Roman 'religion'.

To now follow Paul's lead and have these Gentiles become Jewish in their practices and religious observances without being able to claim the special Jewish dispensation was hugely problematic. It was a problem for the Jewish communities because it threatened their special status, as well as a problem for the Gentiles who were now being 'disobedient' in their behaviour and even in their homes, to their Roman 'religion'.

No wonder Paul called these Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua in Rome 'strong', as they would both have faced some serious opposition!

What is the historical evidence for this situation, this very new situation that would have brought considerable societal disruption? While Prof. Mark Nanos spends some considerable time addressing this evidence, I will only briefly touch on it here. I do most strongly recommend Nanos' ***The Mystery of***

Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters' for great detail on this evidence and approach.

I will just give a few examples for now:

Here is an excerpt from a commentary on Tacitus, a Roman Historian (65 – 120 CE) who wrote about Nero's fire of 64 CE:

"Rome was destroyed by fire in July 64; Tacitus' story suggests that the Christians were killed in the same summer. The early Christian tradition adds some details, such as the decapitation of Paul and the crucifixion of Peter. There is no reason to be skeptical about these traditions, although it must be noted that there was a very old tradition that Paul was executed in Hispania (First letter of Clement 5.7).

*Why did Nero blame the Christians? The answer may be that they were living near the place where the fire started: the eastern part of the Circus Maximus. It should be noted that the **first Roman Christians were Jews and probably lived with the other Jews. (The separation of Judaism and Christianity probably took place in the second quarter of the second century CE.)** One of the Jewish quarters in Rome was just east of the Circus, near the Capena Gate. It is described by the Roman author Juvenal as a slum area:...*

***That there were Christians living among the Jewish proletariat, is also suggested by the presence of a very ancient church, the SS. Nereo ed Achilleo, which is, in a venerably old legend, connected with Peter's last days.** Both the Capena Gate and this church are situated on the Appian Road, which was also connected with the last days of Peter. So, there were Jews living near the place where the fire started, and there was another reason to suspect the people near the Capena Gate: their part of the city was not destroyed by the fire. But Nero could never punish the Jews of Rome: there were thousands of them. The Christians, on the other hand, were an easy target.*

Moreover, there may have been some element of distorted truth in the accusation, because the Christians believed that Rome would be destroyed during Christ's return. They must have responded enthusiastically when they saw "Babylon" burning, and in fact, Tacitus tells us that at least some of them pleaded guilty, i.e. admitted something that their interlocutors interpreted as a confession." - from <http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/christianity/tacitus.html>

And: ***"The result of this was that to almost every one of the Jewish communities of the dispersion there was attached a following of "God-fearing"***

Gentiles who adopted the Jewish (i.e. the monotheistic and imageless) mode of worship, attended the Jewish synagogues, but who, in the observance of the ceremonial law. restricted themselves to certain leading points, and so were regarded as outside the fellowship of the Jewish communities. ...

Now if we ask ourselves what those points of the ceremonial law were which these Gentiles observed, we will find them plainly enough indicated in the passages already quoted from Josephus, Juvenal, and Tertullian. All three agree in this, that it was the Jewish observance of the Sabbath and the prescriptions with regard to meats that were in most general favour within the circles in question.” P314 Schurer “The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus”.

Note that Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, known in English as Juvenal, was a Roman poet active in the late 1st and early 2nd century CE.

In this respect, Juvenal is a good example, for his words display some of the derision felt by most ‘elite Roman’ pagans with respect to Jewish rituals: “There were three things in particular which the educated world of the time made the butt of its jeers, viz. the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh, the strict observance of the Sabbath, and the worship without images.

While in Plutarch it is seriously debated whether the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh may not be due to the fact of divine honours being paid to this animal, Juvenal again jokes about the land where “the clemency of the days of old has accorded to pigs the privilege of living to a good old age,” and where “swine’s flesh is as much valued as that of man.”

Then as for the observance of the Sabbath, the satirist can see nothing in it but indolence and sloth, while he looks upon Jewish worship as being merely an adoring of the clouds and the skies.

It would appear again that contemporaries with a philosophical training had, in like manner, no appreciation whatever of the worshipping of God in spirit”. Schurer ibid p295.

This would certainly indicate that the Gentile elite would not be impressed with any gentiles who became God-fearers and started observing these ‘rituals’.

The following references are from ‘The Mystery of Romans’ by Mark Nanos: ***E. Judge and G. Thomas, in ‘The Origin of the Church at Rome’, observe similarly***

that those addressed in Romans are still meeting under the umbrella of the synagogues rather than forming their own church (p. 91)

J. Ziesler, 'Paul's letter to the Romans', p. 18: 'The Romans as a church had some sort of relationship with the synagogue'

Brown and Meier, 'Antioch and Rome', argue throughout that the dominant Christianity at Rome had been shaped by the Jerusalem Christianity associated with James and Peter, and hence was a Christianity appreciative of Judaism and loyal to its customs (p. 110)

Cited by Wedderburn, Reasons, p. 51. Cf. Brown and Meier, Antioch and Rome, pp. 110-11. 'In fact, it is possible that the Christians in Rome continued to be part of the Jewish communities and synagogues for a long time as there are several references to synagogue meetings in "Shepherd of Hermas" (ca. 100-140 CE)'

So I hope that these few references may at least offer some evidence of the proposition that the Gentile believers in Yeshua were not only joining the Jewish communities as much as possible, but that their inclusion as 'uncircumcised' members would have created considerable tension and debate, that can be seen very clearly in Paul's letters when approached from this perspective.

Conflicting Evidence:

Having now given an outline of my hypothesis, my presumptions and approach to reading and understanding the Apostle Paul, we are ready to address the significant amount of (apparently) conflicting evidence. While I may not be able to address all the criticisms adequately and have answers to all the clear conflicts, I hope that the weight of evidence will remain in favour of the approach and perspective I have introduced here.

Paul's character:

"To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law." 1 Corinthians 9:20

Perhaps one of the most challenging verses with respect to the Apostle Paul's character is 1 Cor 9:20. It is a most normal and natural tendency to assume on reading this verse that Paul is speaking about his behaviour here, his lifestyle; his obedience to, (or disregard for) Torah.

Let us assume for a moment that this reading is correct and that there is no redaction here, that is, that the Apostle Paul actually said this, and meant it in this way. In fact, let's even expand it to include the verses 19 through to 23 as below:

"19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. " 1 Cor 9:19-23

Under this understanding, Paul is a chameleon. He is one minute a Jew and the next not; one minute 'outside the law' and the next not; in fact, he is anything and everything he needs to be for expediencies sake. He therefore displays duplicity and dishonesty. He is not authentic and certainly not Torah-observant based on this reading and interpretation.

If we had no other way of interpreting this passage, it would be a serious impediment to the introductory argument I have presented here about the righteousness and integrity of Paul. By itself, it may not tip the scales; but if there are many such statements, then there is a very serious question to be addressed.

Before I address this passage though, I must say I find it quite incredible that a number of biblical scholars will appear to recognize the problem of Paul's apparent expediency here, and in other places, and excuse it as acceptable to win people to Christ! It is not acceptable; it is never acceptable to dupe people into anything; even if it is good for them. Gaining good through dishonest means is never righteous.

So what's wrong with this reading? How should this passage be seen properly in context? There are two crucial elements to be understood.

Firstly, this declaration is rhetorical; Paul is explaining his rhetorical approach²¹ in debating the revelation of Yeshua as the Messiah and revelation of Gentile inclusion.

Secondly, we need to have some appreciation of the dialectic approach that the Pharisees and Jewish scribes used when debating Scripture.

Consider his audience here. While his letters were being read to both Jew and Gentile, Paul is trying to convince his God-fearing Gentile audience to remain Gentiles, and NOT to get 'circumcised'; not to go through the whole 'works of the law' process (Jewish proselytization rituals) and become Jewish.

Because, as he states in Gal 5:3, if they do instead become Jewish they will be obligated to keep the whole Torah; all 613 mitzvot.

"I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole Torah" Gal 5:3

²¹ Prof Mark Nanos explains this far better and in much more detail than I present here. I highly recommend his article here - <http://marknanos.com/1Cor9-Leuven-9-4-09.pdf>

Paul has made it very clear here that being Jewish means obeying the whole Torah. If his listeners, his Gentile audience saw that he, clearly a Pharisee and a Jew did not keep the whole Torah, his argument would have no support whatsoever. His behaviour alone would falsify to his argument! He wouldn't convince anyone, because they would clearly see his duplicity, his inconsistency in practice as his words would not match his deeds!

Chapters 8 to 10 of 1 Corinthians is essentially a section of rhetorical argument. From 1 Cor 8: 1-3, we see that he is addressing some 'knowledgeable' (but not knowledgeable about God) readers.

“1. Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.” - 1 Cor 8: 1-3

The Apostle Paul was clearly a great teacher. He was able to appreciate who his audience were; where they were at and work from that place of understanding or lack there-of, to the place he wanted them to end up. That is, he adapted his teaching; his writing and preaching to suit his audience. This is sometimes called 'rhetorical adaptability' but it simply means being a good teacher (today we may often do 'pre-tests' before we start teaching a topic to ascertain where are students are at, and then after teaching a topic we give post-tests to see what they have learned. The results of the pre-test may alter what and how we will teach the topic; the approach; the depth and breadth, etc.).

Where do we see Paul indicating where his audience is at? Consider 1 Corinthians 3:1-3:

“1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Messiah.

2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,

3 for you are still of the flesh.”

He is here explaining that these Gentiles are still quite ignorant when it comes to the ways of God and His end-times plan. He is conceding that he will need to use a different approach to that he would use with say, fellow Pharisee's for example; that is Jews who have been brought up in the ways of God; who have the oracles of God and are very much 'spiritual people'.

Using this teaching style, this 'rhetorical adaptability', the Apostle Paul may start with ideas and concepts that they will easily understand, but ultimately he

will lead them to very Jewish conclusions and to endorsing behaviours which represent appropriate communal, religious and moral behaviours for Gentiles living within Jewish communities.

So we can expect him to lead them to understanding that God is truly One; that to love the One True God is to then love our neighbour; that they are not to knowingly eat 'idol food', and so on (see the Jerusalem edict of Acts 15).

So the point being made in 1 Cor 9:19-23 is in summary; if Paul is arguing with Jews; he will use Jewish arguments, he will approach the debate with the standard Jewish dialectic²² for example. After all, he was a Jew, he couldn't therefore '*become (as) a Jew*'. Behaviourally, he was either Torah observant or he wasn't. He couldn't just be so some of the time!

As I have tried to show in the first part of this article, the Apostle Paul was most emphatically Torah observant; therefore, he simply couldn't behaviourally, 'become a Jew'! But when using various styles of teaching and debate; he could, and did, alter his arguments and teaching to suit his audience. When they were Jewish; he assumed a much greater 'spiritual maturity' and Torah knowledge and taught from this base. As a teacher of Torah and Messiah, he was indeed 'all things to all people' in his teaching approach (1 Cor 9:22).

It is also interesting to note that Luke writes in Acts 17 about Paul's very use of this 'rhetorical adaptability' approach when speaking to the men of Athens. Luke informs us that Paul starts with the Greek's recognition of their Gods and their idols of these gods; but then having started with a degree of acknowledgement and agreement to 'hook' his argument onto something his audience are familiar with, he ultimately rejects their gods and idols. He explains that their position was out of ignorance, but that now they no longer need be ignorant, and then he introduces them to the One True God and His Messiah Yeshua.

So here as well we see another NT author and disciple of Yeshua, giving an example of Paul's teaching approach, which is consistent and supportive of the approach I have argued for here with 1 Cor 9:19-23.

Further though, I think it important, both for this apparently conflicting passage and for some of the others I am about to address that we look at what the typical Pharisaic approach to Torah discussion, debate and learning was.

²² Dialectic: The practice of arriving at a conclusion by the exchange of logical arguments, usually in the form of questions and answers.

We see this approach exemplified in Yeshua's discussion in Matt 5:17 where we can imagine that some Pharisees have listened to Yeshua's argument and disagreed with some aspect of it. So they have very typically replied 'You are destroying Torah!'²³. The Pharisaic approach was not only dialectic, but very forceful and passionate and zealous. If they felt someone else had even just some minor point of Torah wrong; then this could lead to having the entire Torah wrong, because everything was about how to act in response to God's instructions (Torah = instructions). If some minor error lead to unrighteous behaviour then it in a sense 'destroys' Torah.

To the Pharisees and to the Rabbi's of today, EVERY commandment is as important as every other one for this very reason. To most of us non-Jewish believers, we look at the 10 Words for example and say that 'You shall not murder' is far more important than 'You shall not covert' for example. This is not their more 'spiritually mature' approach.

So how does Yeshua (in many ways a Pharisee himself, as Prof David Flusser demonstrates so powerfully) respond. In the same way! He states (paraphrasing), 'I did not come to destroy Torah but to properly teach, enact and live Torah!'

It is the zealotry, the fervour, the forcefulness of this Pharisaic approach that I wish to draw to your attention, because I believe this very much epitomises the way the Apostle Paul speaks and writes and it can often be taken as arrogant or belittling of others, when it is not.

So let's look next at Galatians 2.

“6 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ...

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

²³ Flusser explains in his seminal book 'Jesus' that to 'fulfill the Torah' was to correctly interpret and enact it and to 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret in incorrectly. It was apparently quite common for Pharisees in arguments with each other to shout 'You are destroying the Torah!' or 'I am fulfilling Torah!' Two examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10. Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfill' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean: Gal 6:2 *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Torah of Messiah.”* Romans 13:10 *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of Torah.”* This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfill' it).

12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Messiah Yeshua, in order to be justified by faith in Messiah and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

I include verse 6 as some may read this as rather arrogant and even condescending of the great work of the leaders among the Apostles and disciples. I believe though that this is typical of the very forthright approach that is evidenced in the writings and saying of the Pharisees; of Yeshua himself and even of many Rabbi's and Jewish scholars down to this very day. I certainly hold my breath at times when I try to have some degree of discussion and debate with my very wise Jewish friends. Some of the responses can sound almost unfriendly in their directness.

I think it for good reason that native-born Israelites are given the nickname 'sabra'²⁴!

Note in verse 11 that Paul is having a full on difference of opinion with the Apostle Peter! This is serious stuff, Peter walked with Yeshua; Peter was one of his right-hand men; Peter was at the transfiguration. Peter surely has seniority (though it appears that Yaa'cov or 'James' – Yeshua's brother was the main leader of the Messianic community in Jerusalem). Paul has confronted an elder, he has rebuked an elder, one of the 12 Apostles, along with other leading disciples/apostles such as Barnabas. Perhaps Paul's character should be questioned?

What about 2 Cor 12:16? Didn't the Apostle Paul state that he was deceptive in his dealings with the Corinthian Church here?

²⁴ The allusion to the fruit 'sabra' is to a tenacious, thorny desert plant with a thick hide that conceals a sweet, softer interior, suggesting that even though the Israeli Sabra are rough on the outside, they are delicate and sensitive on the inside.

“But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.” – KJV

“Let it be granted, then, that I was not a burden to you; but, crafty fellow that I am, I took you with trickery!” – Complete Jewish Bible

“But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, YOU SAY, and got the better of you by deceit.” – ESV

The KJV and the Complete Jewish Bible both seem to have the Apostle Paul here stating that he was ‘crafty’ and tricked the Corinthians with trickery or guile.

The ESV though seems to have added a couple of words that perhaps give a different slant, when it states, referring to the Corinthians, that ‘you say’, ‘I was crafty and got the better of you by deceit’.

So which is it? How have others translated the Greek or understood this verse; how does this verse sit in context; was the Apostle Paul really ok with acting immorally and unethically and using a crafty and deceptive approach?

I think most translations miss the real intent of the Greek in this passage. I believe The Apostle Paul is saying that some argue that he has been deceptive and then he goes on in v17-18 to declare that he was NOT!

Firstly, check the context. In 2 Cor 11 he is telling the Corinthians that they have been deceived by the craftiness of some. He then adds more to this argument against them to argue in 12:16 that whoever has been deceiving them has also argued that he, the Apostle Paul is the one deceiving them!

Look now at how both JB Philips New Testament and, a paraphrased version like The Message translators phrase this. It should be clear that they see it as I describe:

“All right then,” I hear you say, “we agree that he himself had none of our money.” But are you thinking that I nevertheless was rogue enough to catch you by some trick? Just think. Did I make any profit out of the messengers I sent you? I asked Titus to go, and sent a brother with him. You don’t think Titus made anything out of you, do you? Yet didn’t I act in the same spirit as he, and take the same line as he did?” 2 Cor 12:16-18 – JB Philips version

and The Message has:

“And why is it that I keep coming across these whiffs of gossip about how my self-support was a front behind which I worked an elaborate scam? Where’s the evidence? Did I cheat or trick you through anyone I sent? I asked Titus to visit, and sent some brothers along. Did they swindle you out of anything? And haven’t we always been just as aboveboard, just as honest?” 2 Cor 12:16-18 - The Message.

So it should now be clear that the more consistent and contextually valid translation and interpretation (remember, ALL translations are interpretations), is that the Apostle Paul is telling the Corinthians that he never imposed on them for anything (read all of the preceding 2 Corinthians 11 again to get a better grasp of the context), and IF he had done so, THEN he would have been as a villain, taking the Corinthians with guile or trickery.

This passage was brought to my attention by someone arguing that the Apostle Paul is a liar and that this passage proves in his own words that he used deception and trickery, that he considered the end justified the means. I can see how such a conclusion is possible and even most likely if you rely on only one version; if you extract the verse from its immediate and overall context; if you also begin with the presupposition that the Apostle Paul was a fraud.

However, without needing to be a Greek scholar, I think a little in-depth and contextual study aided by the reference to a number of translations can show that such an understanding is really untenable.

While we may all wish to approach the NT with a simple and trusting methodology, and would prefer not to have to engage in serious scholarship and the study of extra-biblical material to help gain contextual relevance, sadly such a simplistic approach can easily lead to some serious errors being made.

So here again are some words of the Apostle Paul which may appear on a cursory viewing to suggest his character is suspect. A closer inspection though again refers to a consistency and an honesty, that we would surely expect.

Addressing the Conflicting Evidence

I believe that the timing of this event is relevant and helps us appreciate the circumstances and context. Most scholars believe it was in 48 CE or early 49 CE. That is, after the Cornelius event of 45 CE and before the Jerusalem Council of later in 49 CE. That is, Peter had experienced that Gentiles were being accepted by God without first becoming Jews, that is without undertaking or even beginning to undertake the rites of proselytization; the 'works of the law' or 'circumcision' rituals. And yet not all of the 'church', the Messianic community, had fully accepted this change (this acceptance was hammered out at the Jerusalem Council only months later).

What does Paul accuse him off? He accuses him of having first accepted the equal status of the Gentile believers and demonstrated this through table fellowship and then, when confronted by the 'circumcision party' (those of 'The Way', who had not yet fully embraced this new reality), Peter had now changed his tune and was no longer sharing table fellowship with 'uncircumcised' Gentiles (as had been the requirement of the traditions of the fathers).

If Peter had indeed done this, then Paul's confronting him is valid and reasonable. Certainly we Gentiles, living our 'sheltered' Western lives may see his approach as 'over the top', but as I have tried to explain, this was the Pharisaic way.

This whole scenario sounds plausible and consistent with Paul's great zeal as a Pharisee. Despite Peter's time with Yeshua and his obvious commitment and devotion, I believe it is Paul's deeper theological wisdom and appreciation that led to his being the driving force behind understanding the full implications of the Cornelius event and the 'end-times' fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. Paul is no better person than Peter; as a Torah scholar of the highest order (as I argue) though, I would expect him to be the one to first see any inconsistent or unintentionally hypocritical behaviour and rightly seek to address it for the benefit of the message, the Gospel.

The historical evidence is that at that time, and for some years after, the Gentile followers of Yeshua were observing Shabbat; the festivals and the food laws²⁵. A very good reason for this was that they had joined their local Jewish communities (containing both Jews who believed in Yeshua and many who didn't). In this context; in this environment, they were clearly NOT eating idol meat.

²⁵ See my article on 'Colossians 2 and the Sabbath' for more detail.

So when Peter withdraws from table fellowship it was NOT because he had been eating idol meat, or that the Gentiles had been and he had accepted their ungodly behaviour.

Communal eating practices were very significant in Yeshua's day. This quote from an article on Table Fellowship might help set the scene a little:

“Judeans tend(ed) to make sense of a chaotic world by structuring that world in terms of maps of persons, places, and things. A map of persons as regards meals will typically mean unease about sharing food with those with whom there is no common system of values. A map of places with regard to meals will typically mean a concern about proper diet, the proper preparation of food, and proper serving utensils along with washing them (they observe the tradition of washing cups, pots, and bronze kettles-- Mk 7:4). A map of things pertaining to meals will typically manifest itself in a concern about which foods are proscribed and prescribed. Issues related to holiness and purity and pollution and defilement are open to fierce intramural debate and disagreement.

Disagreement on what constitutes purity divides the Pharisees from Sadducees, Judean from Samaritan, the Qumran community from the rest of society, and the Jesus group from the religious elite. The desire to regulate purity and holiness is driven by a concern to maintain the values and meanings that support a specific way of life of a group or society. Purity practices and distinctions embody the values of groups and ultimately define a way of life, draw lines that mark out boundaries, and mark off relationships with outsiders. These boundaries determine who is in and out, pure and impure, and loyal and disloyal to the group ethos.” – see ‘Jesus’ Open Table Fellowship of The Marginalised’ by Dietmar Neufeld

And: “Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions. Eating is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships.... Food sharing creates solidarity ... food is life”

If it is true that the table that Peter was sharing in Antioch was a ‘kosher table’, then his removing himself from this table fellowship when certain ‘circumcision’ men arrived, had nothing to do with eating idol food, as they weren’t eating it! The historical evidence supports this contention.

If instead, these Gentiles were NOT in the process of proselytization or already proselytes, then to share table fellowship with them (even though it was a kosher table) was not considered ‘proper’ or pure by some groups (especially strict Pharisees).

So what was most likely?

Peter shared Paul's understanding that the Gentile followers of Yeshua could share the table with them and even have a reasonable place of honour at the table. When Peter fears the reproach of the visiting men of the 'circumcision', men believing that the Gentiles need to undertake the 'works of the law' to enjoy such fellowship, he withdraws temporarily from such fellowship. Paul then accuses him, and all who join him, rightly of hypocritical behaviour.

Thus, again this passage's context is about the 'rites of Jewish identity' issue, NOT idol food.

I possibly need to repeat that 'works of the law' is a term for Jewish proselytization; like circumcision, it is a metonym for going through the rituals to become a Jew. No-one is justified or 'saved' by undertaking these rituals. All are only justified by Torah obedience, though this means slightly different things to Jew and Gentile²⁶.

So now, I recommend that you re-read Galatians 2 above and see if you now see it differently and perhaps no longer as evidence against the good character of the Apostle Paul.

I might add as an aside that I find the recording of this dispute as positive evidence for it's very authenticity. If the authors of the NT had wanted to present some propaganda, some narrative that they had embellished for their own personal agenda in some way, then we would be less likely to read of such a serious dispute.

Another common argument against the character of Paul is his apparent over-reference to himself. A typical refrain is: *"It should be evident that Paul is at least as concerned with making a statement about himself as he is in communicating what he believes to be the truth about God."*²⁷

Before we look at a classic example where Paul refers to himself a lot, a think it vital to return to and reconsider the position that Paul found himself in (or choose to put himself in).

For the first decade or so since the resurrection, followers of Yeshua had not

²⁶ Please see my article 'Circumcision: A Step of Obedience?' for more on this.

²⁷ From <http://www.judaismvschristianity.com/paulthe.htm>

really had to consider the role of Gentiles, other than those who fully joined Israel as proselytes. It appears though, that when Paul had his Damascus Road experience, he was almost immediately placed in the position of reaching out to the Gentiles, as the emissary (apostle) to the Gentiles (and initially, most likely, the only one).

If his revelation was around 33/34 CE and the Cornelius event around 45 CE, then it appears that for some years, it was really only Paul who was considering how Gentiles could be 'grafted in', in some new way.

Consider how Nanos²⁸ describes this outsider status and the resultant persecution that followed:

“Paul was an outsider to Galatia (4:12-20); in fact, he is the only one from elsewhere of whom we can be certain. And Paul’s message—to the degree that it offered inclusion of gentiles as full and equal members while opposing their participation in proselyte conversion—ran counter to prevailing Jewish communal norms for the re-identification of pagans seeking full-membership, at least according to all the evidence now available to us.

Pursuit of this non-proselyte approach to the inclusion of pagans confessing belief in the message of Christ resulted in painful disciplinary measures against Paul from the hands of Jewish communal agents to whom he remained subordinate, but in ways that he considers mistaken, for he refers to this as “persecution” (Gal 5:11; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24).

It is not difficult to imagine that pagans convinced by Paul’s gospel that they were entitled to understand themselves as righteous and full members of Jewish communities apart from proselyte conversion, but rather on the basis of faith in a Judean martyr of the Roman regime, would also, in due time, meet with resistance from Jewish communal social control agents.

Might not the resultant identity crises of those non-proselyte associates develop along the lines of the situation implied for the addressees of Paul’s (Galatian) letter?”

So, given the very lonely and challenging path that Paul had begun, without any support from the Jerusalem 'church' in these early days, we can expect that he felt a good deal of isolation and the need to defend himself as he was fully committed to his revelation and understanding.

²⁸ 'Locating Paul on a Map of First-Century Judaism' Mark Nanos, p20

Now consider this passage from Paul:

“21 But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.

23 Are they servants of Messiah? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.

24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;

27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 2 Cor 11: 21-28

Note firstly the rhetorical nature of this passage. He is ‘speaking as a fool’; he is ‘talking like a madman’.

That is, note that he is using hyperbole (a common Hebraic approach) to make his point that he is very much Jewish; very much a zealous and committed emissary; but that as a result of his initially, very singular and lonely task, he has been greatly persecuted by both his own people and the Gentiles.

He has suffered much and yet also had it very much on his heart to support the followers of the Way, the believers in Yeshua as the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile throughout the Diaspora.

When I read this and other similar passages with this appreciation of his unique position, I don’t see a self-centred and arrogant man; but someone sharing the challenges that he has faced in his race because of the greatness of the prize when he crosses the finish line.

Here is another one of these apparently conflicting and questionable passages: *“5 I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles”²⁹.*

²⁹ The word ‘APOSTLE’, Greek for ‘messenger’ or emissary (*shali’ah* in Hebrew), was a term applied

*6 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.
7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?
8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.
9 And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.
10 As the truth of Messiah is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.
11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!" 2 Cor 11:5-11*

The language, even after translation may sound somewhat strange to us, but I think a couple of points are worth emphasis. Firstly, the term 'apostle' translated from shali'aḥ in Hebrew and meaning messenger does not in itself require any divine appointment or even appointment by the mouth of Yeshua. While it may be true that Yeshua did indeed appoint the first 12 apostles to represent the 12 tribes of Israel, the appointment of a replacement for Judas was not directly by Yeshua (lots were cast with the understanding that the Spirit of the Almighty would guide them to the correct choice).

So, while no-one could claim to be one of the 12 Apostles other than by having been selected by Yeshua himself or by the other 11 apostles, to call yourself a 'messenger' to the Gentiles was not to contradict any direct command of God, or to go against the explicit and acknowledged instructions of Yeshua.

In fact, if we take the Apostle Paul's word for it, Yeshua did in fact give him this commission. I also see the witness of Annanias as evidence for this commissioning.

to the disciples of Yeshua whom he had sent out to preach his message, and occasionally also applied to other missionaries of the first few years. The word "apostle" occurs around 79 times in the New Testament. Normally, the term 'apostle' was used to denote someone of special eminence such as the original 12 disciples, but it is also used at times inter-changeably with disciple ('*talmid*'). The Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and John called the special 12, disciples, but Mark and Matthew often also called them apostles, though without any clear differentiation. In Luke, there is a clear distinction, with the 12 being called Apostles. Clearly there was an understanding that the 12 Apostles had been appointed by Yeshua, although Judas' replacement, Matthias was not directly chosen by Yeshua. In a similar way, it would appear that Sha'ul can claim some form of endorsement/selection as another Apostle. Unlike the first 12 who represent the 12 Tribes of Israel, Sha'ul can clearly be seen from the historical and biblical evidence to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. The witnesses to Sha'ul's commissioning would be those who were travelling with him and some in Damascus, especially Annanias.

While Paul's comment with regard to being compared with the 12 Apostles may sound strong and even to some come across as arrogant, if seen within the context of his 'rhetorical adaptability' it can be seen as an effective tool of persuasion.

*"1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,
2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.
3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures³⁰,
4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.
7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.
8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." 1 Cor 15:1-11*

Here we see the Apostle Paul clearly articulating his lowly position with respect to the 12 Apostles and to Yeshua's brother James (Yaa'cov). I appreciate that this can be seen as contradictory to the previous passage (2 Cor 11: 5-11), as in 1 Cor 15:9 Paul states that he is the 'least of the apostles' and in 2 Cor 11:5 that he is 'not in the least inferior to these super-Apostles'.

Again, it is vital to consider both the context and his use of 'rhetorical adaptability'. In 1 Corinthians 15 we see a short factual narrative on the death

³⁰ While I am quoting 1 Corinthians 15 as a means to evaluate the character of Paul, there is a phrase here, as commonly interpreted, that cannot be correct. While it can be argued that the Scriptures (see the phrase 'in accordance with the Scriptures') do intend prophecy about the death of the Messiah, nowhere does the Tanakh explicitly state or even imply that a man's death, even the death of an innocent man, could pay the price for the sin of other men. In fact, the Tanakh states the exact opposite. This is a huge issue that I will deal with elsewhere. In the context of the theme of this book, I believe the problem here does not impact on the character or integrity of Paul.

and resurrection of Yeshua, followed by a very brief description of who Yeshua appeared to. In this short historical narrative, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that he was initially opposed to (he 'persecuted') the followers of Yeshua. In this context, he displays his appreciation of his humble position, of how it was only through the great grace of the Almighty that he his eyes were opened to the truth of Yeshua as the Messiah and that from this very humbled beginning, why he then worked so hard to try to overcome the pain he has caused.

Now consider the 2 Corinthians 11 passage. First, appreciate that his letter, while sent to a Jewish community in Corinth, it is primarily addressed to Gentile believers within this community of faith. When speaking directly to these Gentile believers, the Apostle Paul often uses the approach of assuming a fairly limited knowledge of Torah, and will also often refer to common Greek/Hellenistic understandings and concepts. We see this in a great many of his epistles, for example, it is very evident in Philipians 3 and Colossians 2.

What is the evidence that he has used this 'rhetorical adaptability' approach here?

Consider these verses:

2 Cor 11: 1 "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!"

2 Cor 11: 16-17 "I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool."

2 Cor 11: 19: "For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!"

2 Cor 11:21 "... But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that."

While anyone, Jew or Gentile can be a fool if they reject the ways of God; it was a common approach in Paul's day to call Gentiles 'fools', because they did not know the oracles of God. This understanding was in part derived from the Tanakh, from verses³¹ like Ps 14:1 (which Paul actually quotes in this context in Romans 3), or Proverbs 16:22. So Paul here, is trying to use their approach, their way of thinking and work from their position of a more limited understanding of Torah and Tanakh, than if he were just addressing his fellow Jewish brethren.

Thus, he is stating that from the perspective of these Gentile God-fearers, he is not inferior in his knowledge of Torah to the Apostles to Israel, appointed by

³¹ "The fool says in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good." Ps 14:1
"Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly." Prov 16:22

Yeshua. So, when understood in context as a rhetorical device, the Apostle Paul is not being contradictory or disingenuous at all.

If this rhetorical approach is recognized, I believe Paul's apparently contradictory passages are seen as not contradictory at all, but consistent with his teaching method in trying to be the 'apostle to the Gentiles'.

Chronology & other inconsistencies between Paul's epistles and other NT books:

Trying to determine the chronology of the Apostle Paul's life and travels is challenging.

There is limited information; some of which appears contradictory and while we have a number of epistles to factor into this chronology, the period to cover is actually quite long, from around 33/34 CE to 68 CE. That is, over 30 years!

In a casual reading of his letters and the information about his life available as well in Acts, I don't believe we would easily recognize a period being spanned of some 34 years.

Dr J Paul Tanner has given a convincing overview of this chronology and makes some important comments in his introduction, including:

"Any attempt to reconstruct a chronology for the events in the life of Paul must admit to some degree of approximation, though we can 'come close' to dating certain aspects of the Apostle's life. In reviewing the scholarship of others, two key decisions have strong bearing on most everything else. The first is the date that one presumes for the crucifixion of Christ." (Tanner assumes 33 CE/AD), and "The second is the date of Paul's ministry at Corinth. Acts 18:12 mentions that Paul was brought before Gallio who was proconsul of Achaia (lower Greece). The year of his office was from early summer of AD 51 to early summer of AD 52.

Thus, Paul's stay in Corinth had to overlap with the administration of Gallio. Although most scholars agree on this date for Gallio, they differ over the exact years that Paul was in Corinth. Had Paul recently arrived in Corinth when Gallio took office, or was he already near the conclusion of his Corinthian ministry (which lasted at least 18 months – Acts 18:11)? Hence, some will date Paul's arrival in Corinth as early as Dec AD 49, while others will date it in the spring of AD 51. Most attempts to reconstruct a chronology for Paul's life will be made as a result of working backward and forward from the date of Paul's time in Corinth. This accounts for a slight difference of a year or two in most schemes.

*Inevitably, one must also make certain assumptions on certain other matters. The fourteen years mentioned in Gal 2:1 for Paul's 2nd Jerusalem visit are probably fourteen years from the time of his conversion rather than fourteen years from the 1st Jerusalem visit mentioned in Gal 1:18. Also, most time periods should probably be understood on the basis of "inclusive dating" (whereby a portion of a year would be counted as a full year). This is the common understanding of most scholars. I also assume that Paul's 2nd Jerusalem visit (Acts 11:30; Gal 2:1) for the purpose of famine relief is distinct from Paul's visit to Jerusalem for the "Jerusalem Council" (Acts 15), and that Paul wrote Galatians before the Jerusalem Council.*³²

Some argue that the chronology in Acts 9 (by Luke) is in conflict with that given in Galatians 1 (by Paul). They see a conflict between the 'immediately' of Acts 9:20 and that in Gal 1:17.

In Acts 9: 19 -30 we read:

*"Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and **immediately** he began to proclaim Yeshua in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" But Sha'ul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Yeshua is the Messiah. When **many days** had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Sha'ul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket. **When he came to Jerusalem**, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned of it, **they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.**"*

And in Galatians 1:15-22 we read Paul's account of his initial travels after the Damascus Road event:

³² See <http://paultanner.org/English%20Docs/SpecialArt/Pauline%20Chronology.pdf>

*But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did **not immediately consult with flesh and blood**, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; **but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.***

*Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. **Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.***"

Now let's look at how Dr Tanner lays out this chronology, from around 33-35 CE:

1. At Jerusalem

- a. Witnesses the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58)
- b. Participates in the persecution of the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:1-4)
- c. Receives authority from the High Priest to go to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9:1-2)

2. Experiences at Damascus

- a. Confronted by Jesus on the Damascus Road and converted (Acts 9:3-8; 22:5-11; 26:12-18)
- b. Ministered to by Ananias of Damascus (Acts 9:9-19; 22:12-16)
- c. Initial testimony at Damascus (Acts 9:19-22; 26:20)
- d. Departure to Arabia (Gal 1:16-17), which probably occurs between Acts 9:22 and Acts 9:23 – referring to the 'many days had elapsed'
- e. Return to Damascus (Gal 1:17)
- f. Attempt to kill Paul by Jews during the reign of Aretas IV (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33)

3. Return to Jerusalem (3 yrs after conversion – Gal 1:18) – in summer of 37 CE

- a. Befriended by Barnabas (Acts 9:26-28)
- b. Stays 15 days with Peter and visits with James (Gal 1:18-19)
- c. Hellenistic Jews attempt to kill Paul (Acts 9:29)

4. Departure to Tarsus

Christians bring Paul to Caesarea and send him off to Tarsus. There he ministers in the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21-24).

Note: During Paul's tenure in Syria-Cilicia, Peter is used to initiate the inclusion of Gentiles in the church (Acts 10–11).

5. Activities at Antioch

- a. Church at Antioch develops from persecution that arose in connection with Stephen (Acts 11:19)
- b. The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to investigate the activities of Antioch (Acts 11:22)

*c. Barnabas goes to Tarsus and returns with Paul to conduct intensive teaching ministry (Acts 11:25-26) – Spring 43 CE?*³³

I find Dr Tanner's chronology here reasonable and consistent. Note that when Paul states that he *'did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me'*, he is NOT saying he did not immediately start speaking of Yeshua in the synagogue each Sabbath. He appears reasonable to assume from the limited detail given that once he had regained his sight, he proclaimed Yeshua in the synagogue, then departed to Arabia for some time, and then on returning to Damascus, he again began to proclaim Yeshua before heading off to Jerusalem for the first time.

Note though that the Acts 9 account does not mention the side-trip to Arabia during the 2-4 years (most probably around 3 years), from the Damascus Road event to the arrival in Jerusalem. Does this omission by Luke suggest that Paul is in error and dishonest in Galatians? I can't see this as very likely. Luke appears to have no reason to mention the excursion to Arabia; we are not even told why Paul mentions it. It does not seem valid to me that to argue that this suggests Paul is being dishonest.

If you have any other questions regarding the chronology of Paul's life, I would recommend checking out Dr Tanners full chronology at the link I provided above.

Differences in the Damascus Road narrative:

One argument presented against the apostleship of Paul is that there are three accounts of Paul's Damascus Road experience in the Acts of the Apostles (authored by Luke).

Acts 9:3 -9

"3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?...

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

³³ Note: Herod Agrippa I initiates a persecution against Christians and has James the apostle killed. Peter is freed, and Agrippa is struck by God in AD 44 (Acts 12). Note that the details recorded in Acts 11-12 may not be in strict chronological order, so that the events of 11:27-30 (including the famine) may be after Agrippa's death. Acts 12:25 would then resume the story of Paul.

Acts 22:6-11

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?...

9 **Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.**

Acts 26:11-18

12 "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.

14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me ..."

There may be some differences in these narratives, but I think it is relatively easy to harmonise them, as they are not unequivocally contradictory. More significantly though, the three accounts, even though two of them are Luke quoting Paul, are all written by Luke. Any discrepancies then are surely either the fault of Luke or the subsequent transcribers and translators! Surely, we can't lay any blame for any possible or apparent discrepancies here at the feet of Paul.

Given the number of questions that I encountered regarding apparent discrepancies in these narratives, I will give some more detail.

Firstly, the fact that there are differences; that the accounts are not all identical (even though all written by Luke), is actually good evidence for their veracity and for the reliability of the witnesses.

This can be seen in these quotes which discuss the same issue of witness testimony in terms of the resurrection narratives.

Retired judge and lawyer/solicitor/barrister Herbert C. Casteel (*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, College Press: 1992 p. 211):

"The internal evidence of the resurrection accounts: Each of the four Gospels gives an account of that first Easter Sunday when Jesus arose from the tomb. **When we first read these accounts it appears they are in hopeless contradiction.** Matthew says it was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who went out to the tomb. Mark says it was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of

James, and Salome. Luke says it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them, and John mentions only Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, they all mention different people to whom Jesus appeared on that day.

Does this mean that these are false reports, made-up by dishonest men to deceive us? **On the contrary, this is good evidence that these are truthful accounts**, because people who conspire to testify to a falsehood rehearse carefully to avoid contradictions. False testimony appears on the surface to be in harmony, but discrepancies appear when you dig deeper. True accounts may appear on the surface to be contradictory, but are found to be in harmony when you dig deeper."

Legal writer Clifford, in discussing the "minor variations test" for authenticity of evidence, notes that differences are EXPECTED from witnesses (*Leading Lawyers' Case for the Resurrection* Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, 1996 p. 61):

"The minor variations test. ... Whilst truthful witnesses complement each other, a judge would not expect them to describe the same incidents in precisely the same way. If they did, that would point to conspiracy. Sometimes there may not be total uniformity in the order of events. One anticipates variations when two or more people testify about the same incident."

It is interesting that some in-depth recent work on these events, by John Wenham, a biblical scholar (*Easter Enigma*, Baker: 1992, rev. ed.) describes a similar pattern. So, pp.10-11:

"I first became interested in the subject in 1945 when living in Jerusalem not far from the old walled city. I got to know the sites in and around the city intimately. I had no real doubts that the gospel writers were honest and well informed people, providentially equipped by God to give the church a sound account of these events, **but I was by no means committed to the view that the accounts were correct in every detail.** Indeed I was impressed in my early studies of the resurrection stories by **the seemingly intractable nature of the discrepancies.**

It is by no means easy to see how these things can be fitted together while remaining strictly faithful to what the writers say. But an insatiable curiosity made me want to know who did what and why each writer put things so. **Reading all I could and studying the Greek text carefully, I gradually found many of the pieces of the jigsaw coming together.** It now seems to me that these resurrection stories **exhibit in a remarkable way the well-known characteristics of accurate and independent reporting, for superficially they show great disharmony, but on close examination the details gradually fall**

into place."

German classical historian Hans Stier: "the sources for the resurrection of Jesus, with their relatively big contradictions over details, present for the historian for this very reason a criterion of extraordinary credibility."

So, are the three accounts of the 'great light' to seriously contradictory, or do they fit the criteria of being believable 'witness testimony'?

The Acts 9 narrative is Luke writing from memory of what he knew; the Acts 22 and Acts 26 versions are Luke quoting the Apostle Paul. Note that in quoting the Apostle Paul, Luke's 2 accounts may differ but he does not have Paul contradicting himself.

Event	Acts 9	Acts 22	Acts 26
Great light	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sha'ul falls to ground	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sha'ul hears voice	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sha'ul blinded	Yes	Yes	Not told, but 'sent to open eyes'
Men – see light	Not told either way	Yes	Yes
Men – hear voice	Yes	?	Not told
Men – understand voice	Not told	No. Many versions have that they didn't hear; a number that they didn't understand.	Not told
Men fall	Not told	Not told	Yes

In Acts 9 we are told the men stand 'speechless' or 'dumbstruck'. This does not negate that after a moment of being 'dumbstruck' by the light and voice, that they also fall. So this is not necessarily contradictory either.

The issue of whether the men with The Apostle Paul also heard the voice (of Yeshua) is an interesting one though.

Here is how some argue that these accounts are 'hopelessly contradictory':
"In Acts 9:7 we are told that the men travelling with Paul hear a voice; in Acts 22:9 that they didn't hear the voice; and in Acts 26:14 that only Paul heard the voice. Thus, these details are totally contradictory." - paraphrasing

Looking at a number of translations we see a consistent message in Acts 9:7 that the men did hear the voice, but we are not told if they understood it. The translations also give a consistent message in Acts 26:14 that only the Apostle Paul heard the voice (in Hebrew). Acts 26 does not tell us whether the other men heard the voice at all.

For Acts 22:9, I checked some 32 English versions on Biblegateway.com and 20 of them have that the men 'did not hear the voice'. Of the other 12 some have that they heard but did not understand.

The Greek word used here for 'hear' or 'heard' is 'ακούω' (Strong's G191). Strong's tells us that G191 can mean 'hear', (in various senses) or 'to understand' or 'be reported'. So even the word 'listen' can be a suitable translations as in Matthew 10:14 "And if anyone will not receive you or listen (G191) to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." Clearly then in Matt 10:14 G191 means means 'understand'.

In Romans 10:17 "So faith comes from hearing (G191), and hearing through the word of Messiah.". Also here then the meaning is also clearly to 'understand'.

So given that this Greek word can mean either hear or understand, does its use in Acts 22:9 mean that the men heard absolutely nothing or that they didn't understand what was heard?

While we can't be certain, if we expect some consistency in Luke's writings and he has already told us in Acts 9 that they did hear the voice, then the meaning of 'understand' certainly has the higher probability.

The fact that whether the men 'heard/understood' or did not 'hear/understand' in Acts 26 is an omission of detail, not a contradiction of this detail. Appreciate that in Greek there is really no contradiction between Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9. Provided you use the relevant meaning of 'ακούω' (G191) in each of these verses then one is just stating that the men heard and the other that they heard but didn't understand. In other words Acts 22:9 gives a little more detail, not a contradictory reading.

We might ask though how could the men have seen the light and not be blinded when Paul was, and also hear the voice and yet not understood it as Paul did?

Firstly, I think it relevant to mention that Luke informs us that Ananias in Damascus actually tells the Apostle Paul (rather than the Apostle Paul informing

him), that The Apostle Paul had had a vision of Yeshua and Yeshua had spoken to him.

“... And laying his hands on him he said, Brother Paul, the Lord Yeshua who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” – Acts 9:17

This narrative is good support for the whole event and a fair inference can be drawn here that the other men had not been blinded as well. It would seem the vision, while having some impact on the other men, was specifically directed at the Apostle Paul.

These men were all travelling back from the Hellenistic Sadducean High Priest in Jerusalem. Given that much of the disputation against the followers of Yeshua (for example those involved in stoning Stephen) were from Hellenistic cities like Alexandria (and the Sanhedrin was largely composed of Hellenists as the High Priests were installed by Rome), it is possible that these men were even citizens of Damascus and Greek speaking Jews (who had not also had the Hebrew education that the Apostle Paul had had). Therefore, it is possible that they heard Yeshua speaking in Hebrew and could not understand the language. Thus, it would then make sense to learn that they heard the voice but did not understand it.

Regardless of whether such conjecture is close to the truth, there clearly is little contradiction between these three accounts of whether the men ‘heard/understood’ (G191) the voice. From this Greek word ακούω and the combining of all three versions it should be clear that whatever the full details of the miraculous event were, the men HEARD but did not UNDERSTAND.

So the differences in these 3 accounts by Luke are minimal and fit the expectations of subtle differences between witness testimonies and recollections, which help confirm rather than negate these testimonies.

Another argument against Paul is that he directly disobeyed his teacher and Rabbi, the revered Gamaliel I. In Acts 5, we read Gamaliel’s instructions to leave the Apostles be:

Acts 5:33-40

*“33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.
34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.*

35 *And he said to them, Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.*

36 *For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.*

37 *After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.*

38 *So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and **let them alone**, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail;*

39 *but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God! So they took his advice,*

40 *and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”*

Note that this occurred fairly soon after the outpouring of the Spirit at Shavuot (Pentecost) and was therefore some 2-3 years before the events on the road to Damascus. While it is possible that Paul was involved in the persecution of Yeshua’s followers at this time, the first mention of him is at the stoning of Stephen, which most scholars place as occurring some 2 to 3 years after these events of the Shavuot in the year of the resurrection. If 2-3 years had elapsed, isn’t it possible that Gamaliel had by now changed his instructions, or that for some reason unknown to us, they were no longer considered binding on his pupils. Also, we need to appreciate that our understanding of what it means to ‘... *keep away from these men and let them alone* ...’ may be a little different from theirs, as you will note that in heeding Gamaliel’s advice they still beat up the Apostles!!

Another common argument is that the 12 Apostles to Israel made it quite clear that Gentile followers should not eat meat offered to idols, whereas the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul said that idols are nothing, and that therefore it was ok to eat such meat. Again, this is totally missing the rhetorical approach that Paul used to lead his Gentile audience from their pagan practices into following the Noahide Laws which included, as per the Jerusalem Council, NOT eating meat sacrificed to idols. On this point, I would refer you back to the evidence already quoted from Schurer in “The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus”.

This evidence highlights that the ‘church’ in the Diaspora, even as late as the end of the 1st century CE, were following Jewish food laws. In ‘*The Mystery of Romans*’, Prof. Mark Nanos also spends some time showing how the Apostle Paul was in fact supporting obedience to the Noahide Laws by the Gentile believers in Rome.

Conclusion:

I am sure there are still a number of arguments against the discipleship and apostleship of Paul that I have not addressed here, but I hope I have shown that when the great weight of positive evidence is weighed against some potentially contradictory evidence which, on more intense inspection does not appear contradictory at all, but just misinterpreted or misunderstood, we should find that the positive evidence is significantly stronger.

That is, we find that the ‘best fit’ for the evidence available is that the Apostle Paul was indeed not only an amazing Rabbi in his own right, but also that he was in-fact a great disciple of Yeshua and the greatest messenger of the message of the Resurrection to the Gentile World!

Clearly, there are redactions though, that is, we can also be quite sure that his works have been significantly edited in places, and intentionally so³⁴, to change the message towards one that argues against his Torah observant lifestyle and example.

Some of the more obvious examples being Gal 3:16³⁵, 1 Thess 2:14-16³⁶, and Romans 10:9³⁷.

I would also recommend a reading of my article ‘Re-evaluating Philippians 3’³⁸ to better appreciate the Apostle Paul’s knowledge of Hellenistic practices.

When we consider the very common interpretative errors such as:

- reading ‘works of the law’ in Galatians as referring to the Torah; to the commandments of God;

³⁴ The historical evidence that the very anti-Semitic, Marcion was the first to try and compile all of the epistles of the Apostle Paul into a coherent collection, should alone give pause for caution.

³⁵ I strongly recommend a careful reading of Frank Selch’s article on ‘The Seed of Abraham’ which specifically addresses this redaction – see http://www.theolivetreeconnection.com/index_html_files/The%20Seed%20of%20Abraham.pdf

³⁶ See ‘Some thoughts on 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 at <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/1%20Thess%202.pdf>

³⁷ See my article ‘Romans 10- toward the autograph’ at

<http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/romans-10-toward-autograph.html>

³⁸ <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Re-evaluating%20Philipians%203.pdf>

- the failure to appreciate his use of a number of Hebraisms, as well as some Hellenistic concepts;
- and even his use of rhetorical adaptability,

we should see how easily these errors result in serious misunderstandings of the Apostle Paul, both his person and his message.

What can we do to combat these issues?

Should we discard his epistles because of these problems as some do?

Should we discard the rest of the New Testament because similar issues occur throughout all its books³⁹?

Should we discard and disown our Creator because He did not keep these Biblical texts in pristine and perfect condition, as we might have expected Him to?

I say an emphatic NO!

The King of the Universe is a King who hides, a King who at times even hides that He hides⁴⁰! Seeking His Truth and a relationship with Him was not meant to be too easy! Nothing of true worth ever is. He is the great pearl in the field for which we should sell everything else we possess.

To truly know Him is to love Him.

To love Him, is to seek Him with all our heart, our mind and our strength.

We should not be put off by the obstacles that others have placed in our path; we should not leave those stones on the path so that others more blind than us may trip over them; and if they already have, we need to help them get back up and begin again walking the narrow Way, the Way to the true Centre of our World, the Way that Yeshua tread before us; the Way that he opened up for Gentiles.

³⁹ See my article on the Greek NT and the LXX at <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Greek%20NT%20%20and%20the%20LXX%20dec11.pdf>

⁴⁰ See some short posts on this intriguing aspect of the Almighty at <http://globaltruthinternational.com/> and at <http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/>

Is it my more earnest hope that I have helped you to appreciate the message that the Torah observant Apostle Paul shared; the message that directs us all towards the Creator and King of the Universe. I also expect though that some may still have important or troublesome questions and still feel some unease or perhaps are as yet, still not fully convinced.

If so, I pray that you will find the time to read the many articles referred to here and in particular the books of Mark Nanos. Please also feel free to submit any questions you feel I have not addressed.

Paul F Herring

M.Sc., Dip. Tchg., MACS (Snr) CP

October 2012 – updated January 2013

www.circumcisedheart.info

Appendix:

Works of the Law: A Much Maligned and Misunderstood Phrase:

*“For by **works of the law** no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”* - Romans 3:20

This phrase has been, and continues to be so wrongly interpreted, that there is almost a universal consensus of error! That is, both those who see the Apostle Paul as a very important figure in the foundation of Christianity; and those who see him as a total fraud and counterfeit promoter of a pagan religion, see this phrase as referring to keeping or doing the commandments, that is, keeping Torah⁴¹.

The famous and highly respected Christian scholar Dr James DG Dunn did eventually recognize to a large degree, what this phrase actually means and this was part of the introduction of a new appreciation of the Apostle Paul's Jewishness called the 'New Perspective on Paul' (this new movement and recognition amongst Christian scholars began in earnest around 1982). Why I think there are some still some significant errors in the understanding of these 'New Perspective' scholars, I believe that they have appreciated and articulated the most significant issue of how it should NOT be interpreted⁴².

Until this 'New Perspective' movement or James DG Dunn et al, most Christian scholars and preachers had thought that when the Apostle Paul uses this phrase he means 'the commandments of Torah' and that he speaks disparagingly about them when addressing Gentiles.

This is a very serious and crucial error of interpretation. It results in a totally false understanding of Galatians and of Paul's teaching in general.

⁴¹ Greek versions of the Bible translated the Hebrew word meaning 'instructions' (Torah) as 'nomos' and in turn this was translated to 'law' in English. Neither word is a good choice as they both convey a much more limited and even legalistic meaning. It is also important to recognize that the word Torah can also have several meanings today as it is sometimes used to refer to the five books of Moses, or to the whole of the Tanakh (OT) or it may even be used to refer to the 'Oral Torah'. Frank Selch explains this well in his 'Torah: Divine Instructions or Mosaic Law'

⁴² The 'New Perspective' makes the mistake of expanding the 'rites of Jewish proselytization' such as circumcision to include other Biblical mandates such as the Sabbaths and Festivals which are not really 'rites of passage', but have a more universal application and relevance.

While I detail this in my book 'Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing the Evidence' I will discuss a little of the detail in this short article.

To repeat, the understanding of this phrase is vital to the perspective we take on the Apostle Paul. Here is a common (mis)-understanding of a well known Christian scholar:

“In context, no reader of the Book of Galatians can reasonably conclude the definition of Paul’s idea “works of the law” as meaning ‘circumcision’, once they have carefully read the first 3 chapters, this is a fact. ... “works of the law” means “doing the righteous things of Torah”

The phrase ‘doing the righteous things of Torah’ means obeying the Commandments, i.e. obeying Torah.

With such emphatic phrases such as ‘this is a fact’, many still clearly do not see the phrase ‘works of the law’ as referring to doing the Commandments. This also has very significant implications in terms of the whole argument regarding whether or not the Apostle Paul was ‘pro-Torah’, that is a Torah observant Jew, or whether he was a founder of a religion that was effectively anti-Torah, because it rejects the argument that obedience to the commandments of God is a necessary part of salvation.

If as this Christian scholar argues, this phrase does ‘in fact’ mean ‘obeying Torah’ or ‘doing the commandments of Torah’, then it is very strong evidence that the Apostle Paul was anti-Torah and clearly not a Torah observant Jew.

Can we demonstrate from a critical analysis of the use of this phrase (found only in the Romans and Galatians epistles) which meaning most properly fits the context?

I believe we can, and especially if we start with Romans 3:20 *“For by **works of the law** no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”*

This phrase has the logical form:

“For <condition A>, since <cause B>”

or more clearly, “<Condition A> is true because of <Cause B>”.

That is, <Cause or Reason B> leads to the conclusion of <Condition or Statement A>.

So here we can see that Paul states that:

‘Because through knowing Torah (law), we know what sin is, that is, what it means to act un-righteously, therefore we can state that no-one can be made right before God (justified) by ‘works of the Torah/law’.

Now we can analyse this passage by inserting our alternative understandings of **‘works of the law’** into this logical construct, and see whether either, or any actually make sense, that is, if the cause, or reason (the ‘because of’ or ‘since’ statement) can be seen to reasonably lead to our understanding of ‘works of the law’.

First, let’s insert the ‘rites required for Jewish proselytization’ in place of ‘works of the law’.

So Romans 3:20 now re-phrased reads:

“For we can state that no-one can be made right before God (justified) just by undertaking the rites required for Jewish proselytization, since through knowing Torah (law), we know what sin is, that is, what it means to act un-righteously.”

Romans 3:20 is then stating that just being a Jew, or becoming a proselytized Jew does not bring ‘justification’ (and by inference, salvation). Even a Jew can sin. The implication being that it is NOT enough to be a Jew; one must be obedient to Torah, just as Yeshua stated when asked what must one do to enter eternal life (remember, he was asked this question by those who were already Jewish and therefore knew God and Torah). I would think most Torah observant people would then agree with Paul and this statement.

The second use of this phrase in Romans, Romans 3:28 states: *“For we hold that one is justified by faith **apart** from ‘works of the law’.” (ESV).*

Here we see that Paul is effectively saying the same thing by stating ‘justification’ comes through the obedience of faith⁴³ and therefore is separate or at least not dependent only on the ‘rites’ of Jewish identity. Again, this makes perfect sense.

Thus, using this understanding of the phrase, we have a logical, consistent and Torah-affirming statement.

⁴³ See my article on ‘The Faith of Jesus’ to appreciate what ‘faith’ really means. Also discussed in the Hebraic Mindset articles – see www.circumcisedheart.info

Now let's turn to the alternative view presented and assume 'works of the law' means 'doing the commandments of Torah', or 'obeying Torah' (not just the rites/rules of Jewish identity).

So let's again re-word Romans 3:20 with this understanding and see what we get:

"For we can state that no-one can be made right before God (justified) by doing the commandments of Torah, since through knowing Torah (law), we know what sin is, that is, what it means to act un-righteously."

Clearly the first section, the conclusion or 'for' part is incorrect. So if we didn't have the 'since' section, the cause or reason, we could read the phrase and state, as some anti-Torah preachers do, that obeying God will not justify us (and they might even argue that that's because of original sin).

But look closer, we need to arrive at this version via the cause or reason, the 'since' section. So this statement now simply reads: *'Because Torah brings a knowledge of what is sin, we can not be justified by obeying Torah'!*

Read that again, mediate on it: *'Because Torah brings a knowledge of what is sin, we can not be justified by obeying Torah'!* This is a nonsensical statement, only a fool, a very confused and totally illogical person could write such nonsense. Such nonsense would never have stood any test of time. The Apostle Paul, whatever he was, was not this foolish!

Consider in the same manner Gal 3:2 *"Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?"*.

Appreciate, that to a Hebrew, 'hearing with faith' means doing. To hear is to obey; the Sh'ma begins 'Hear O'Israel, ...', meaning OBEY. To 'hear with faith' means to 'obey through trusting God' or to 'trust God and His Word and obey', that is 'to trust Torah and obey'.

So, again substitute 'doing the commandments of Torah' for 'works of the law' in Gal 3:2 and you get:

"Did you receive the Spirit by doing the commandments of Torah, or by trusting God and obeying (the Torah)."

To put it even more simply, it would read: **‘Did you receive the Spirit by obeying Torah or by obeying Torah!!’**. This is clearly wrong, as there is no contrast here. It makes no grammatical sense to say ‘Did you receive A by doing B or by doing B’.

Instead, replace ‘works of the law’ by ‘undertaking the rites required for Jewish proselytization’ in Gal 3:2 and you get: *“Did you receive the Spirit through ‘undertaking the rites required for Jewish proselytization’ or by obeying Torah”*.

This makes sense. Undertaking circumcision et al, whether at 8 days old or as a Gentile proselyte does not give anyone the Spirit of God; it is doing His will (obeying Torah) that bestows His favour and Spirit. So this version of Gal 3:2 gives us a phrase with a true contrast and real choice to make.

Therefore we again see that of the two alternative understandings for ‘works of the law’ contrasted, the understanding that it means “undertaking the rites required for Jewish proselytization” fits both logically and biblically.

There are other alternative understandings for ‘works of the law’ such as David Stern’s version in the Complete Jewish Bible where he has translated it as *‘legalistic observance of Torah commands’*.

Let’s try the same process with Stern’s interpretation and using Romans 3:20. To repeat, we have the logic structure:

<Cause or Reason B> leads to the conclusion of <Condition or Statement A>.

So here we would then have:

‘Because through knowing Torah we know what sin is, that is, what it means to act un-righteously, therefore we can state that no-one can be made right before God by “legalistic observance of Torah commands’.

Or perhaps even more clearly in Gal 3:2, we would have:

“Did you receive the Spirit by ‘legalistically observing the Torah commandments’, or by trusting God and obeying the Torah.”

This, if true would suggest you need to obey Torah but you must not do so legalistically, whatever that means in reality. It sounds like a challenging tightrope to walk.

You may also have serious difficulty determining the reality of what 'legalistic' means from an Hebraic perspective as well.

It is not and cannot be 'legalistic observance of Torah' but is instead, as the Greek makes clear 'works of the law' meaning Jewish rites of proselytization. Add to this the Hebraic understanding (from the Sh'ma, from 'Hear O'Israel' – Deut 6:4, etc.) that to 'hear with faith' means to heed the Torah and obey in actions.

So therefore we can see that Gal 3:2 "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" to mean: 'Did you receive the Spirit of God through (just) becoming Jewish or by obeying Torah'.

The Apostle Paul then repeats the exact same message in verse 5-6: "5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?"

Verse 6 shows that this is his intent. Abraham acted on his belief – he was righteous BEFORE he was circumcised and became the first Hebrew.

Abraham trusted and acted on that trust in his interactions with God and his neighbours. This was why and how Abraham was given the Spirit of God; this is how we are given the Spirit of God – not by rites of proselytization (including physical circumcision) but by our trusting actions (our faithfulness). So, Abraham's circumcision was not the thing that gave him the spirit, etc. It was clearly an act of obedience to God, but he was already righteous before he and the males of his household undertook this act.

How do we tell if people have the Spirit of God and to what measure it is poured out in them? By their actions, by their obedience to Torah, exactly as the Apostle Paul is stating here.

It is also informative to consider one other place where the Apostle Paul uses this term and that is, its use in Galatians 3:10. There are some issues with the whole question of a 'curse'. As I think I have previously indicated, Frank Selch addresses this in a number of places, but perhaps most comprehensively in his 'Seed of Abraham' article where he also shows that Gal 3:16 is clearly a redaction.

Consider Gal 3:10 though: *"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the (Book of the) Law", and do them."*

Based on the LXX and Masoretic text it should just be Torah, not Book of Torah.

"A curse on anyone who does not confirm the words of this Torah by putting them into practice.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!'" –Deut 26:27

But also consider that this quote is from the Mt Gerizim blessings and cursings covenant. Clearly the Jewish people were told here what curses would come their way for various infractions of the Torah. Thus if any Gentile's undergo the 'works of the law' and become Jews, they too must naturally be under these same blessing and curses.

So consider, if ALL a Gentile was to do was the 'rites of proselytization' (works of the law), and he thought he could rely on this as sufficient for 'justification' before God, he is wrong, because as a Jew he must obey ALL of the Mt Gerizim covenant or be cursed.

What about the verses Gal 3:11-12 – they definitely appear problematic to me as they stand:

"11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for The righteous shall live by faith.

12 But the law is not of faith, rather the one who does them shall live by them."

Verse 11 seems totally contradictory. To live by faith is to obey Torah! This is confirmed by Habakkuk 2:4 which the Apostle Paul actually quotes: *"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the*

just shall live by his faith.” – KJV

To attain life through ‘trusting faithfulness’ is to trust God and be faithful to Torah; that is to obey Torah. So if we understand the statement that ‘no one is justified before God by the law’ to mean no one can find salvation by being obedient to Torah, then this is clearly wrong. If the Apostle Paul meant that the existence of the Torah did not justify anyone, then this could be correct as it needs to be enacted, it has no power to save if it just remains as written words on a page.

What I see as more likely though, is that the redactors (possibly Marcion himself) just removed ‘erga’ from the Greek phrase ‘erga nomou’ (‘works of the law’) and simply replaced it with ‘nomos’.

Try replacing the full ‘works of the law’ phrase and then consider the understanding we get:

“11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the ‘works of the law’, for The righteous shall live by faith.

12 But the ‘works of the law’ is not of faith (it may be an act of faith, but in itself it is not obeying Torah), rather the one who does them (mitzvot of Torah) shall live by them.”

These verses now seem in perfect harmony with the earlier statements regarding the limited efficacy of the ‘works of the law’.

To repeat, in verses 11 & 12 there are two passages quoted from the Tanakh - Habakkuk 2:4 & Leviticus 18:5⁴⁴. Both speak emphatically to the righteousness found through obeying Torah! If Paul did use the term ‘Law’ here (meaning Torah) then it appears he was attacking the efficacy of Torah obedience.

If so, then he was totally schizophrenic, as in trying to support such anti-Torah sentiments, he has used pro-Torah references from the Scriptures!

Sadly, this is not the only place where subtle redactions and

⁴⁴ “... *But the righteous will live by his faithfulness*” - Hab 2:4 “*So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.*” - Lev 18:5

interpolations have made it much more difficult to uncover the true Paul and his intended message.

Once we appreciate what the Apostle Paul meant in his use of the phrase translated ‘works of the law’, we can then recognize that the whole of Galatians is about the question of Jewish proselytization for these new Gentile believers in Yeshua.

Now we come to the very challenging v13-14:

“13 Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree— 14 so that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

To quote Frank Selch here: *“To the best of my knowledge there is no evidence anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, which declares that a Jewish man or Messiah would have to become a curse so that ‘...the blessing of Abraham might come upon Gentiles...’! There is no prophecy anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, which promises the Spirit of God to anyone, simply because the Messiah/Christ took on a curse that was supposed to rest on gentiles. On the contrary, it is written that the Gentiles would be blessed if they blessed Israel (Gen 12:1-3)— something for which Israel is still waiting.”⁴⁵*

The passage from the Tanakh referred to here: *“22 And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”* (Deut 21:22-23), really does not seem to fit the context of this discussion regarding ‘works of the law’ at all. Thus it may well be a later interpolation.

Even if the Apostle Paul did add these verses himself, there is no Biblical mandate that one man can be cursed and so remove the potential curses from other men. The Tanakh clearly states that we are all

⁴⁵ See Seed of Abraham – available from <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/frank/The%20Seed%20of%20Abraham.pdf>

responsible for our own sins. So this subtle introduction of the blood atonement doctrine here must surely be a redaction. Notice though that the Apostle Paul goes on to refer to Abraham again and to the Abrahamic covenant.

It seems to me that the Apostle Paul is arguing that Gentiles can come into fellowship through the Abrahamic covenant. In a similar way to how the Jewish people have a covenant because of what Abraham did (though this does not individually absolve them of the responsibility of Torah obedience), the Gentiles have a covenant with God because of what Yeshua did⁴⁶.

Now we come to a clear redaction in Gal 3:16. As this does not significantly impact my thesis here and as Franks Selch has dealt with this verse much more comprehensively, I again refer those interested to his article 'The Seed of Abraham'.

Here we begin to see the hand of the redactors (the editors), as the phrase quoted as being from the Tanakh (the Old Testament), is not actually in the Tanakh. However, there is an instruction given through Moses, where God did tell the Jewish people that that needed to do ALL the commandments, not just some, not just the rites of Jewish identity for example, or they would face some curses.

"If you are not careful to do all the words of this Torah that are written in this Book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting." - Deut 28:58-59

I would recommend you again try the substitution approach we have been using and it should be very clear here as well, that it makes perfect sense to say that to JUST do the '*rites of Jewish identity*' rather than ALL the commandments (mitzvot) is not enough.

⁴⁶ I explain this in some depth in 'The Tripartite Salvation Paradigm' – <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Tripartite%20Salvation%20Paradigm%20first%20draft%20feb2012.pdf>

Now, the most vital thing to DO, if you are convinced that the understanding of '*works of the law*' I have put forward it correct, is to read all of Galatians in one sitting replacing '*works of the law*' by '*rites of Jewish identity*' as you read.

You will now, no longer see any real hint of an anti-Torah bias in this epistle. You should also now appreciate that this whole epistle focuses on this very question of 'should Gentiles who have come to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah become Jews?' and the Apostle Paul's answer, and the consequential answer of the Jerusalem Council was NO.

While I hope this logical analysis of competing understandings for the phrase '*works of the law*' has convinced you both of the helpfulness and validity of this approach and the conclusions we have arrived at it, is not all plain sailing.

There still remains a couple of significant issues with Galatians though, even once we remove the misunderstanding and application of '*works of the law*'.

For example Galatians 4:22-31 is very commonly misinterpreted.

Almost universally commentators and most readers would be easily led to believe that the two covenants contrasted here are the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant through Messiah Yeshua.

While this is a possible understanding, the issue is that it seems so at odds with so much of Paul's letters such as Romans and in particular Romans 9 where he speaks so strongly of Gentiles being grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree and becoming part of the Commonwealth of Israel.

Are we to read that here in Galatians, Paul has had a change of heart and now wants to denigrate the cultivated Olive Tree and equate it to Ishmael's son-ship? This seems highly unlikely!

What some scholars instead argue is that this discussion is a comparison between 2 different groups of gentile proselytes and two different pathways or attempts to become sons of The Most High God.

Contextually, it is important to appreciate that the Apostle Paul in this letter, is primarily addressing Gentiles. Josephus [Antiquities, 16.62] testifies that many Jews resided in Ancyra in Galatia [but that] the majority in the Galatian churches were Gentiles.

A number of passages help establish this historical fact.

Gal 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Here Paul appears to be informing his Galatian listeners regarding his previous state and in using terms like ‘among my people’ it seems clear he is speaking to others who are ‘not my people’, that is to Gentiles.

Gal 4:18-19 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Messiah is formed in you!

Note here also that Paul refers to his readers as ‘my little children’ – as apostle to the Gentiles, this also indicates that those he is addressing are Gentiles.

Gal 4:8-9 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Again, the phrase ‘formerly, when you did not know God’ would also appear to indicate that his listeners were not Jews and had therefore previously been ignorant regarding Yahweh.

I recommend that you read the whole of Galatians in one sitting and see that the context both before and after the challenging section of Gal 4:22-31 is focused on circumcision and, as already indicated, is speaking to gentiles about the issue of circumcision which is representative of

‘keeping the law’ (not just the written Torah but the Oral Torah as well) and becoming a Jewish proselyte.

In Galatians 4:22–31, the Apostle Paul makes a commentary on the story of Ishmael and Isaac.

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.

23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Unfortunately, this Galatians passage is often misunderstood as a contrast between the new covenant and the old covenant, and even between Christians and Jews.

What I believe Paul is doing here is comparing Ishmael to the Galatian Gentiles who are accepting the dogma that they must undergo a ritual proselyte conversion through means of circumcision in order to be reckoned covenant members with Israel. Like Ishmael, Paul says that they are “born according to the flesh;” (Galatians 4:23) specifically, the circumcision of their flesh. That is, their entry into the Kingdom is via a ritual, via a work rather than via faith in the saving power and redemptive act of the Messiah.

According to the rabbinic dogma, a proselyte through ritual conversion is called a “son of Abraham.” Ishmael was indeed a son of Abraham, but he was not the promised son of Abraham. Instead, he was a son by nature and by law. Paul compares those Galatian proselytes to children birthed from the covenant at Mount Sinai, where the Torah (law) was given. They are sons of Hagar and “under the law” because they have predicated or based their salvation upon observing a “work of the law;” that is, circumcision and the associated rites of passage.

In this analogy, the Apostle Paul compares Isaac to the believing Gentiles who predicate or base their salvation and covenant status upon faith, that is trusting the Almighty and being obedient to His Torah, not just becoming Jewish. Isaac is the son of the promise and God’s chosen heir of Abraham. As such, these believing Gentiles are the sons of Isaac/Sarah, Abraham’s “son by the free woman through the promise.” (Galatians 4:23)

They are sons of Sarah in that they have based their salvation upon faith in the promise of God. What is that promise that they have faith in; that they now trust in. It is that ‘keeping the Commandments’ maintains covenantal relationship with God and brings salvation both in the here and now and in the Coming Age.

Therefore, the two covenants being contrasted are not the ‘New Covenant’ and the Mosaic Covenant⁴⁷. They are the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinai covenant, both of which are parts of Torah.

Furthermore, the contrast is not between Jews and Christians, it is between Gentile believers who choose to undergo ritual conversion to Judaism and Gentile believers who do not.

Paul says of those who rely on faithfulness and do not become Jews, “And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.” (Galatians 4:28)

Note that most of the older manuscripts and even most of the newest

⁴⁷ There are actually many covenants in the Tanakh – I give some detail on these covenants in ‘Righteousness Before Messiah’ at circumcisedheart.info

translations read ‘these women are two covenants’, NOT ‘these women are the two covenants’. The difference here is that the addition of the word ‘the’ implies a contrast is being made between the Mosaic covenant and the Covenant through the Messiah.

Note also the reference in the quote *“Rejoice, o barren one ...”* is to Isaiah 54. This is a psalm about the great restoration of the Jewish people to their God and to their Land.

For Paul to use this reference to the future blessing of Israel and then proceed to denigrate Israel just doesn’t make any sense at all (if the traditional understanding is employed).

If rather, Paul is speaking of how Gentiles who are ‘children of promise’ will share in this great blessing of Israel’s, because they have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree, then it makes sense that Paul would quote this uplifting and encouraging passage, particularly to any believers facing persecution as the Philippians were and as the Galatians at this time were also, most likely in part from Jews of the mind and zeal that was in Paul before his recognition of the Messiah (Gal 1:23).

The further reference to Gen 21:10 and the ‘casting out’ of the slave woman also seems perhaps harsh and if directed at Jewish people most inconsistent with Paul’s other epistles.

Instead, look at Gen 21 from where this quote comes. Here we see that this quote is a statement of Sarah which Abraham struggled with, yet God vindicated Sarah’s statement and also explained how He would still support and bless the son of the slave woman.

In the same manner, if this argument is valid, in quoting Genesis 21:10 and calling for the ‘casting out’ of those who call for circumcision, Paul is saying not to have fellowship with these people who would force both circumcision and the traditions of men onto these truth seekers and in so doing blind them from the freedom and love that ensures when the heart rather than the body; when the spirit rather than the flesh; is circumcised (or dedicated) to Yahweh.

In conclusion then we see that in Gal 4:22-31 the Apostle Paul is also

speaking about whether Gentile followers of Yeshua should undertake the 'works of the law' and become Jewish or not. Thus, this passage is contextually relevant and also re-iterates the Apostle Paul's argument aimed at Gentiles, that they should remain Gentiles. This argument here does not address the Jewish people at all and thus does not speak either against, or in favour of, their commitment to Torah obedience.

In conclusion then, the whole of Galatians focuses on the question of 'works of the Law' and is therefore about the question of Jewish proselytization.

Notes:

"Because the word law is incorporated in the meaning of Torah, translators have opted for the simple solution to translate Nomos indiscriminately as law both in the Old and New Covenant writings"

- Torah: Mosaic Law or Divine Instructions by Frank Selch p 71

"The misleading translation of Torah as Law entered Western thought through the Greek text (the Septuagint)" - Oxford Companion to the Bible Editors B.M Metzger & M.D Coogan, p421

For more on the problem of using a Greek version of the Tanakh see my book *'The New Testament: The Hebrew Behind The Greek'* - <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B009XO0NQU>