

στεως δικαιοσύνη οὕτως λέγει·
τῆ καρδία σου· τίς ἀναρῆται ἐ
ρανόν; ἢ τίς καταρῆσεται ἐ
τοῦτ' ἔστιν· ἔστιν Χριστὸ
ἀλλὰ τί λέγει; ἐγγύς σου τὸ ῥῆμά
στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῆ καρδία
ἔστιν τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ
ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσης ἐν τῷ

The Seed of Abraham

in

Galatians 3:16...

and

Other Issues

A study in Paul's Epistle to the Galatian Church

Frank Selch

"O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,

And my refuge in the day of distress,

To You the nations will come

From the ends of the earth and say,

Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood,

futility and things of no profit." Jer.16:19-20

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Introduction

The New Testament makes the following declaration to the reader in chapter 3:16 of the Epistle to the Galatians that *'...God made promises both to Abraham and to **his descendant**. God did not say, "and to your descendants." That would mean many people. But God said, "and to your descendant." that means only one person; that person is Christ.'* NKJV.

A crosscheck with the relevant text in Genesis reveals that there could be a problem with this statement, because there is no corroborating evidence in the ancient text cited. This lack of corroboration is extremely serious as it points to a possible/probable textual manipulation – not only by the author or a subsequent editor, but also by successive translators throughout the centuries. However, due to Paul's impeccable credentials it is most unlikely that he would have taken such liberties with the sacred text of his people. So who then?

In the following study I hope to show that such a conflict does exist here between this key-text in the *Epistle to the Galatians* and the event that is referenced in Genesis. What we have here is not just an isolated case of a textual problem that arose through carelessness of ancient scribes, but it points to the tip of an iceberg. A careful examination of the entire chapter of the Epistle reveals that there are several serious issues in that text, which requires more than just scant attention.¹ We need to ask therefore, why should such issues exist in the first place and whose benefit it would have served to falsify Scripture?

We are not dealing here with inanimate historical objects, like archaeological artefacts from the Canaanite or Herodian periods for example, but with subjective writings that have impacted lives throughout the millennia and still do today. Due to their potential impact on human lives, we have to employ reason alongside faith to make sense of what has been handed down to

¹ It is not the Galatian Epistle alone, but at least the Epistle to the Romans that also demands similar attention. Their author addresses similar issues and uses similar argument in support of his views.

us in these writings. By this I mean our research must make use of every exegetical tool available to us in order not to fall prey to Biblically incompatible thought patterns. A dominant view among Christians is that the N.T. derives its support from the Greek Septuagint, or LXX rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text. The reality is that in many cases the Old Testament quotes follow neither as I will show in this study!² This reliance by Christian theologians on the veracity of the LXX led to many distortions of the NT texts and consequently to much misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of Torah.

Much of what we know about our [distant] past comes through Archaeology. Yet, Archaeologists are constantly reasoning from incomplete evidence. They have no other choice and are often compelled to change their conclusions based on new evidence. This is as it should be!³ A similar principle ought to be applied here also! Furthermore, when we read the (so called) Old Testament, there is a consistency of thought from beginning to the end. Yet when we come to the New Testament... one finds that it is full of inconsistencies throughout. Should one not feel entitled for something better than having to accept things 'by faith' that cannot be substantiated? At the same time if new evidence comes to light that challenges some deeply entrenched views, should not reason and the fear of God compel us to

² The term Old Testament is a Christian term that was coined to signify the superiority of the New Testament. The correct term is T^enakh, standing for Torah, Prophets and Writings. For the purpose of this paper I have elected to use the standard Christian term 'Old Testament' due to its greater familiarity for the average reader and to highlight the connection between the general 'wrongness' of the term and the misuse of quotations from there to write or at least support NT theology.

³ From an article by Hershel Shanks, *First Person: When Is It OK for an Archaeologist to Speculate?*; published in *Biblical Archaeology Review*; Sept/Oct 2011

modify our established conclusions in the light of such fresh evidence?

Therefore, if we take it seriously that the early leaders of Christianity honestly believed that the church had superseded Judaism, that should help us to understand why NT editors could have taken it upon themselves to *'smooth-out'*, or eradicate issues that could have facilitated and prolonged a *'clinging'* to *'the old wineskins'* or Jewish roots. Recognizing this very fact, should spur us on to correct such edits in order to restore – if at all possible – the original thoughts governing these writings. I also hope to prove the likelihood of such edits by highlighting certain issues the author of the Epistle has with the *Law* (Torah), which play a major part not only in Galatians, but in all of Paul's Epistles. However, such questions raise the probability that an editor of a later period used Paul's credentials to redirect Gentile thinking concerning the origins of certain components of Christian theology.

For example, the issue concerning *'Paul and the law'* is a substantial one in the Christian world and frequently touches a raw nerve in the theological arena. Most commonly it is understood by Christian commentators that the Apostle declared in his letters an end to the 'tyranny' of Torah⁴ and proclaimed a complete liberty in the Spirit for the followers of Jesus. It also

⁴ The Hebrew word *Torah* is commonly translated as law. The correct meaning of Torah, however, is Instruction. Therefore, if we consider whether the law has been abrogated with the coming of Jesus, we need to examine his own attitude toward the Torah (Math.5:17), as well as ask whether humanity can really get by without God's instructions?

appears on the surface as if Paul of Tarsus⁵ is only drawing from a rich supply of ready support material in the *Old Testament*— or *Hebrew Scriptures*⁶; in order to substantiate his doctrinal claims. But... this is not totally true! A huge problem begins to emerge when the quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures, which are given as proofs, are tested against the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts, which underpin the vernacular versions of the Old Testament. Sadly, vast numbers of Christians have been taught mistakenly that the *Old Testament* can only be understood in the light of the New Testament.

The question we have to ask therefore, if there is a conflict, does the problem lie with the newer or the older material? Actually Paul helps us out here in 2 Timothy 3:16, viz. '*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...*'. There can be absolutely no question concerning the identity of the term '*Scripture*' used here by Paul; viz. he is talking about the Hebrew Scriptures. This, of course, establishes that any newer material must be subject to the correction of the *Hebrew Scriptures*— if so required. Therefore, if there is a conflict in terms of accuracy, we must also accept the testimony of the older material as proof and not the other way around. This means that any reading of the

⁵ Paul's Hebrew name is Sha'ul or Saul that may have been changed by a later editor to conform with the dominant vies of the Hellenistic part of the church

⁶ *Old Testament* implies that it is old and outdated. If Christians hold this to be true, then they have no right to use selected portions and reject others. Tⁿnakh is the Biblically correct title of the book, meaning 'Torah, Prophets and Writings' c/f Lk.24:44.

Septuagint LXX too must also submit to the scrutiny of the earlier Hebrew (Masoretic Text) text.⁷

Of course, if the NT texts cannot be trusted where does that leave the average Christian who built his salvation and justification doctrines on those texts?

What I feel necessary to highlight is that some of Paul's Epistles contain text portions that appear manipulated or squeezed to provide proof through the maxim '*it is written*' for certain NT claims, but are in fact either non-existent in the OT or otherwise serious distortions of the Hebrew or Greek.

The inescapable question that arises therefore and must be asked, whether the possibility exists that Christianity was severely manipulated in its earliest days to dislodge it from its Hebraic Roots. The theological factors highlighted in this study seriously influenced Christian theology in a negative way toward the Jewish people and their faith; i.e. Judaism.⁸ Was such a negative stance generated by the issues addressed here at least part of the

⁷ To assist the reader not familiar with these terms, the Septuagint or LXX is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was made during the 400-odd year Intertestamental Period covering the gap between Malachi and Matthew. Masoretic refers to the Masorah, or tradition, on how the Hebrew words should be pronounced, which also affects their meaning. This tradition was laid down during the early centuries of the Christian era by means of addition of a series of dots and dashes under the Hebrew letters to preserve the word meanings and ability to pronounce them since all words are written in consonants only. With the ongoing discoveries in the Dead Sea Scrolls it is generally agreed now by scholars that the Hebrew text of the Bible is older and more accurate than the Greek text of the LXX.

⁸ It is essential, in the name of truth, that we pay attention to that because attempts to destroy the Hebraic Faith have been ongoing since the rise of Hellenism in the days of Antiochus IV. Epiphanes in the 2nd Century B.C.E. My claim finds support from the Replacement Theology that was rife throughout the Christian era and is still alive this day—albeit often disguised by a variety of means. See my book *Replacement Theology* available from my website <http://theolivetreeconnection.com>

reason why the church punished anyone with death, who attempted to translate the Scriptures into a vernacular tongue?⁹ But how could the true message of the Scriptures even be discovered when the Latin and Greek texts often tell a different story from the Hebrew? One might say, but truth has been discovered, despite translation problems! Well said, but it can now be shown that forces in the distant past appear to have done much to manipulate God's message and thus created serious obstacles, which have made it exceedingly difficult for people to fully understand God's revelation to man via the Hebrew people.

But what evidence is there of such a suggested manipulation?

Firstly, as I have alluded to above and will explore further in this study, many quotes from the Old Testament used in the Galatian text are totally out of context. In the interest of textual integrity, such passages should not be called upon as support for the claims being presented and lend support to my assertion that the text reveals the hand of a later writer or editor other than Paul.¹⁰

Secondly, Paul seems to affirm, as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts overwhelmingly that “...*I worship the God of our fathers, **believing everything laid down by the Law (Torah)** and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust...*” (c/f. Acts 24:14-21).

⁹ The reader is referred to study the Waldensian persecution from the early 13th C. to the mid 17th

¹⁰ No court of law in the Western world would accept incomplete or obviously manipulated evidence as an adequate defence or accusation in any legal situation—unless it was totally corrupt

If, therefore, Paul upheld everything that is laid down by the Torah, how could he then claim that the Torah was a curse (Gal.3:10); viz. ‘...for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse—for it is written...?’ Did Paul consider himself under a curse?¹¹ It is written? Yes, in this passage, but there is no trace of it anywhere in the Old Testament. Such a thought formation is clearly an incongruity that requires us to seriously consider the possibility of an editor’s hand restructuring the Epistle for Gentile consumption, as well as creating an antithesis¹² to Hebrew/Jewish thought by setting up Greek mysticism and philosophical concepts as of equal [or even higher and thus preferable] value.

As I will show also, that there are substantial conflicts between many extant quotes in the Epistles that were harvested from the LXX and the Masoretic text!¹³ For this reason, I suggest, we

¹¹ Compare also Gal.3:13, viz. ‘*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...*’. If this is allowed to stand, then what did Jesus mean in Matthew 5:17-20 where he defended the ‘*Law and the Prophets*’?

¹² The term antithesis is defined as **1.** Direct contrast; opposition. **2.** The direct or exact opposite: Hope is the antithesis of despair. **3. a.** A figure of speech in which sharply contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in a balanced or parallel phrase or grammatical structure; **b.** The second and contrasting part of such a juxtaposition. **4.** The second stage of the Hegelian dialectic process, representing the opposite of the thesis.

¹³ The use of non-contextual quotes is equally rife throughout the Gospels, e.g. ‘*And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”*’ Matt.2:14-15. The reference is to Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt. And again, Matt.22:44 quotes to us that, ‘*The Lord said to my Lord...*’ (c/f. Mk.16:19; Acts 2:34), which is taken from Psalm 110:1. Although the Hebrew text leaves some ambiguity to the exact address, but the LXX removes it because it correctly translates the Hebrew in context to read ‘*To David...*’ rather than ‘*For David...*’! If the Psalm is a word of prophecy spoken TO David, then the meaning of the Psalm changes dramatically, because the term ‘*...my Lord...*’ would refer directly to David – not to a supernatural messianic figure, as assumed in Christian theology. A gloss in ancient MSS that ended up as part of the main text of Mark 7:19 (KJV) and copied by Luke (11:41) claims that Jesus abolished the dietary

must have [or find] the courage to assume a possible modification of the texts for the sole purpose of Gentile consumption. We also need to ask if it is really wise to go on following the traditional Christian practice to study the Hebrew Scriptures through the lens of the NT— contrary to the Apostle’s advice in the Timothy passage?

My question, therefore, in this study is whether we ought to seriously consider the possibility that Paul was not the only contributor to [all?] the letters promoted in his name, but that we are forced to contend also with the work of Jew-hating editors who sought to establish

- 1) their own theological position in a Greek philosophical/mystical framework through the use of allegory¹⁴, and
- 2) the superiority of a Hellenised Christianity over Judaism.

So, what is my purpose for writing this study? Is it to destroy what people have held as truth for twenty centuries in order to judaize Christianity? Most definitely this is not my objective!

Laws. Again such is an antithesis to Jesus’ own assertion that he had not come to abolish the Torah!

¹⁴ **Allegory** is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative dramatic, symbolic or pictorial form are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. For example, Aesop’s fables are often treated as allegories of moral or ethical significance for today. The tale of the *Phoenix* rising from its ashes is used as an allegory of rising above seemingly insurmountable problems or difficulties. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is an allegory of a Christian’s perceived struggle through life on earth.

However, as I alluded to earlier, there are many incongruities in the letters of Paul. A view that is surfacing today – especially on the Internet and based on these incongruities – is that Paul was a pious fraud; an approach I cannot regard as realistic or even remotely acceptable. On the other hand, many if not most Jewish people themselves tend to regard him as a traitor to Judaism who distorted truth to make a name for himself among the gentiles by creating a new religion in the Diaspora. Nevertheless, something seems wrong with the normative Pauline theology that is preached/taught in Evangelical circles.

My next question therefore is, was Paul an allegorist? That needs to be asked, since a) the wider use of allegorical interpretations of Scripture in Christian writings did not fully emerge until Origen who lived at the end of the second century and early third of the Christian/Common Era!¹⁵ But, b) whoever wrote the Galatian passage used an allegorical method to put his point across! So, was it Paul or someone else who came after him? It is nevertheless a difficult question to answer! Despite the fact that the use of allegory in understanding the Scriptures did come into vogue with Philo (an elder contemporary of Paul), there is little, if any, evidence that Paul ever had any association with him.¹⁶ There is nothing to suggest that Paul ever visited

¹⁵ The use of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures was made prominent through **Philo (the Jew) of Alexandria** (20 BC – 50 AD), but chiefly through Origen in the late 2nd C in Egypt.

¹⁶ **Philo the Jew**, was a hellenistic Jewish, Biblical philosopher born in Alexandria who used philosophical allegory to fuse and harmonize Greek philosophy and Jewish traditions. His method followed the practices of both Jewish exegesis and Stoic philosophy, but his work was not widely accepted. According to Philo, the literal sense [of a passage] is adapted to human needs; but **the allegorical sense is the real one, which only the initiated are able to comprehend** - akin to Gnosticism.

Egypt, the domicile of Philo; neither is there any evidence of Philo visiting Jerusalem or any of the places Paul frequented throughout Asia Minor and Greece. All these issues combined raise a serious question as to who actually wrote the Epistle; or – at least – who edited the passages under challenge in this study.

Through my studies of Hebrew and Greek, as well as Judaism in general, I acquired linguistic and hermeneutical tools that allowed me to test many things in the Bible. And in part, that guided me to the discovery of a substantial number of translation issues and outright distortions in the NT that do not need to exist in our days due to modern language skills available to anyone.

Furthermore, these distortions have led to considerable misunderstandings over the centuries concerning the Torah (i.e. law) and the standing of Jewish people in the sight of God with far-reaching consequences. My hope is that through studies such as this one, I may be able to bring a greater clarity and better understanding to Christian/Jewish relations; especially in the light of an encroaching Islam.

As Paul points out in Romans, God's salvation is intended for Jew and Gentile alike. However, 2000 years of hate-mongering by the church against the Jewish people have alienated both sides and created fear and distrust on a massive scale. My hope is that the findings highlighted in this study will contribute a little in removing the middle wall that is not even supposed to be there according to Paul's letter to the Ephesians (c/f. 2:14 ff.).

Shalom!

The Hebrew Torah Devalued...

A more than cursory reading of Galatians chapter three leaves the reader with the impression that *'law is a terrible thing, from which Jesus has set us free'*. Various terms used here also suggest that the author of the text under examination may not have had a very high opinion of the books of Moses; nor did he comprehend that the Torah was God's idea not that of Moses'!

When the text of the chapter is juxtaposed with the context of the Old Testament portions it refers to, it becomes quite obvious that a somewhat clumsy attempt was made here at dislocating the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from their God-given promises and inheritance.

Two main factors emerge: 1) the Torah (i.e. law) was a curse, and 2) the only value of the ancient text is in pointing forward to Christ.¹⁷ The foundation laid in Galatians creates a basis and an impetus for a total delegitimization of the Word of God as recorded by Moses in the first five books of the Bible— *‘Oh you foolish Galatians...’* (Gal. 3:1). So, from the beginning of the chapter, the reader is being conditioned to see the ‘law’ as an antithesis to the spirit, as well as all the good, God wanted to accomplish among the Galatian followers of Jesus; indeed the ‘law’ is regarded to be a curse to anyone really wanting to know God. The strength of the author’s argument truly comes to the fore in this, viz. *‘...are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?’* — referring to the law (Gal. 3:3)!

Let us be sure here that Paul is 100% correct when he states in Romans 3:28 that *‘...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law’* (Rom. 3:28). This factor is also confirmed in Gal.2:16; 3:22, which contains the core of truth that establishes the process of salvation from Abraham ad infinitum.¹⁸

¹⁷ Similar to the use of the term Old Testament (*see the earlier footnote*), I have used the NT terms Jesus and Christ in diverse places for the reader not familiar with discussions of this nature. The correct terminology would be Yeshua and Messiah or Mashiach

¹⁸ See also Rom.3:22,26; 4:16; Gal. 3:22; Phil. 3:9. The overwhelming evidence from Scripture is from its silence on the mistaken view that the Hebrews were EVER saved by a due process of law. For 3500 years to this day they have believed and still believe that their ‘salvation’ was by divine election through the Patriarch Abraham. Paul, in various portions of his letters to the Asian churches points out that the same process applies to Gentiles. The idea that salvation would come by a legal process would never have come from Jewish minds, but from superstitious minds among the gentiles. It seems that the confusion may have arisen in the post Temple era over application of Jewish Halakha that began to emerge after 70 C.E. and the Rabbinic

Notwithstanding this, the obvious message being clearly communicated in passage under discussion is that the Torah is detrimental to a relationship with God.

But, is this really the message Paul wanted to convey? I seriously question that, for we are told by Paul that ‘...*the law(Torah) is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*’ Rom. 7:12; and again ‘...*we know that the law(Torah) is good if one uses it lawfully...*’ 1 Tim 1:8! If Paul seemingly makes a complete back flip here in his theology, should one not question then why he told the Romans that the Torah is good and holy (!) in the first place?

This enigma grows exponentially if we consider that if Paul had sought to delegitimize the Torah of his people, the default consequence would also be a delegitimization of his Master Jesus. For Jesus said with much clarity in Matthew 5:17-19 that ‘...*do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Torah until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these Commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*”’ This statement establishes beyond any shadow of doubt that Jesus fully endorsed the Torah of Moses in all its fullness!

Council of Yavneh. In this sense, the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 holds far more information than is visible by a simple reading of the printed text.

Paul is clearly credited with the authorship of Galatians and therefore also with the Epistle's theological thrust. This raises the question, however, that if he is not responsible for its content, then who is?

Galatians 3:10

Beginning with verse ten, let us now examine how each verse stands up to scrutiny from the Old Testament; the author calls upon for reference. As it stands, the text of this passage reveals several severe and ongoing distortions of the Scriptures, forming a picture of which vv.16-18 are the focal point; viz.

'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them..."' Gal. 3:10

Furthermore, the Greek text of Galatians uses the term '*book of the law*'— a term that is however absent from both the Greek LXX, as well as the Masoretic texts in Deuteronomy. By using that term the author of Galatians suggests to the uninitiated reader that Moses is talking here about the entire Torah; i.e. the five books written by him. However, from both ancient texts it is obvious that Moses is talking exclusively about the conditions he stated in the '*G^crizim Covenant*' (Deut. 27:12, 26) — NOT about the 613 Commandments of Sinai. Paul would have understood that, so the question arises again, if Paul wrote the Epistle, did he not know the Torah of Moses? On the other hand, if Paul knew, then why distort the text and if he did NOT write

that portion of the Galatian text— who did and who used him as a pseudonym?

Whoever wrote these passages appears to have had limited understanding of the ancient Hebrew writings and continues to jumble segments from the Torah to formulate a theology that points away from its Hebrew foundation. The pattern of distortion continues in the next two verses to virtually negate the value of Torah!

‘But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet, the law (Torah) is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them’”. Gal. 3:11-12

The event of Sinai was never intended to *‘justify’* Israel, but to bless the world through them with the highest moral code ever known to man. Until that moment at Horeb, there is not a single record of a given deity ever revealing itself to its devotees in order to publish such a far-reaching, universally applicable and acceptable code of conduct. Contrary to what is implied in subsequent verses of this passage in Galatians, the Sinai event was never intended to alter any of the promises made to Abraham or to add conditions that would make Israel more lovable in the sight of God. He had declared (Gen. 22:18) that the descendants (seed) of Abraham would be a blessing to the nations. The opening line of v.11 of the Galatian passage in question is therefore already misleading, because the premise, upon which it is built is wrong. Firstly, as mentioned above, God did not give Israel the Torah to justify them. *‘For the just shall*

live by faith...' is actually misquoting the Habakkuk passage (2:4), which says, 'הִנֵּה עֹפֵלָה לֹא יִשְׁרָה נִפְשׁוֹ בְּוַצְדִּיק בְּאַמּוֹנִתּוֹ יִהְיֶה:'
'Behold, the soul of one who is puffed up [proud], is not upright in him and a righteous-one will live by [or have life by/in] his faithfulness!'

Verse 12 seems to echo the previous verse, but its context actually belongs to a totally different segment of scripture, i.e. Leviticus, whose context is ch.18:1-5, i.e. *'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which, if a man does, he shall live [have life by them] by them: I am the LORD'*.

The context of that passage highlights the life-giving nature of God's Commandments, as well as His injunctions and statutes. However, the way it is translated and due to being removed from its original context, it is made to appear that the keeping of God's Commandments places the keeper into a state of legal bondage, i.e. *'you do, or else!'* The statement in Gal. 3:12 therefore, *'...the Torah is not of faith...'*, is actually grossly misleading, because the execution of God's Commandments, etc. IS an act of faith; it demonstrates trust in the Almighty that His instructions (Torah) would be for the betterment of humanity [i.e. Israel in the first instance]. The monotheistic faith of Israel developed at a time in history when every household relied heavily on its own gods (Gen.31:19-29). It was easy to worship a visible idol, but it required enormous faith to accept that the instructions of an invisible, intangible deity could have a beneficial effect on the

believer.¹⁹ This benefit, or blessing, is emphasized by the second portion of the verse, that ‘...*the man observing them will have life through [or] by them.*’ In other words, God’s ordinances, Commandments and statutes **are life giving for those who organize their lives by them!**²⁰ This concept was understood by Moses some 1500 years before Galatians was written when he encouraged his people in Deuteronomy 4:7-8, viz. “*For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?*”

It is a gross error therefore to perceive the observance of God’s precepts as a legal means for obtaining righteousness.

How are Gentiles redeemed from a curse that was never upon them?

‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who

¹⁹ The term *faith* is a derivative from the Hebrew word for truth, viz. *Emunah*. This implies that whatever one believes must have its centre in truth and reality; viz. something can only be certified as trustworthy if it has been clearly established that it is so. In Christian circles this concept has been considerably distorted and became firmly linked to the *kerygma*, or proclamation of something assumed to be true (*see above*).

Also, salvation is firmly linked in Christian *salvation theology* to having faith in Jesus. Biblically this is not defensible, because not only the Hebrew texts, but all Greek texts as well, link it to *faithfulness*, which also was the salvation of Abraham; ditto Jesus, who was faithful even to the death on a cross; c/f. Luke 19:9!

²⁰ c/f. NIV, NRSV, RSV, ESV. The Hebrew word חַיִּים, which is translated here as a verb, can also be read as a noun as in Gen 3:20; Job 12:10, 30:23; Ps.143:2;145:16 et al— meaning ‘life’ or ‘[being] alive’. *See also* Psalm 1 and the ‘blessedness’ ascribed to those whose lives are Torah centred; c/f. Psalm 119!

hangs on a tree”)), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.’ Gal 3:13-14

This is a puzzling statement if Galatians was written to Gentiles alone and indeed a terrible construction if intended for a Jewish/Gentile congregation. The question arises therefore as to why would Gentiles need to be delivered from a curse, since they were pagans in the first instance and thus NEVER under the control, or guidance, of any Biblical Law or directive. Where is it written in Scripture that Gentiles were ever under a curse that could be related to someone being hanged [executed] on a tree? And who is this ‘us’ in verse 13? Paul was a Hebrew, but the letter is addressed to Gentiles, i.e. the Galatian Church! Did Paul regard himself as a Gentile also? Hardly, for in his letter to the Philippians he describes himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews; viz. ‘...of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee...’ (3:5).

I venture to say therefore that it is unlikely for Paul to write something that closely borders on blasphemy by suggesting that the Torah of God could ever be a curse. Bearing that in mind, how could Gentiles be said to have been under a curse— let alone the curse of the Torah? To imply that God curses those who disobey Him are under a severe misapprehension and confused in regards to the meaning of the expression.²¹ So, how

²¹ The term relates to the Exodus incident where it says that ‘God hardened Pharaoh’s heart...’. God is ALL good and therefore cannot commit an evil act. However, because God is ‘all-knowing’ and because He created the world with consequences for good and evil, right and wrong, it can be said of Him that He does certain things. In fact, when it says in Scripture that God pronounced curses, it literally means that He is

does this statement really relate to Gentiles where it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*”? When were Gentiles [in the context of the NT] ever hung on trees in relation to Torah? How could they ever be under any curse from God, when they never, ever were under any kind of covenant with Him in the first place? If any kind of cursedness could, or should be applied to Gentiles, it would only be the curses of the Garden of Eden and immediately beyond. But even there, God never cursed a living person except pronouncing a cursedness on the serpent and on the ground as a consequence of Adam’s action. The Hebrew word *arur* (cursed) is a passive form and implies a pre-existing condition that responds to an action. Space does not permit to enter into a full discussion on God’s passive actions throughout redemptive history. However, it is difficult to reconcile the curses alluded to in Galatians with the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, having said that, there is only one singular occasion in the entire Hebrew Scriptures when the Almighty declared that He will pronounce a [direct] curse on anyone who curses Abraham; viz. “*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse...*” (Gen.12:3)!

There is a further problem when the Deuteronomic passage (21:23) alluded to in Galatians is juxtaposed with the death of Jesus! During the period of Roman occupation, it was not uncommon to see the countryside littered with the bodies of dying men on trees, or stakes. Many times these men had

stating the consequence of a protracted action; i.e. ‘*Cursed (passive) is the one who makes a carved or moulded image...*’ Deut.27:15

committed no other crime, but to express nationalistic sentiments or to displease the Roman Governor in some way, who happened to be Pontius Pilate. These unfortunate Judeans, and/or Galileans, often hung there - dying an excruciating and painfully slow death of asphyxiation – sometimes over several days. Does that mean that they too were cursed by God because the Romans hung them on trees [read torture stakes]?²² Somehow, I feel that we are faced here with a difficult, unsustainable theological conundrum created by the author of the Epistle!²³

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. For almost two-thousand years the Jewish world has known little else apart from curses from the Christian/Gentile world. It is only over the last three decades that sectors of the Christian world have begun to reach out in some earnest to Israel and the Jewish people.

²² Luke makes reference to such executions in 13:1-2 where Yeshua challenges his listeners as to what degree of sin should be attributed to those victims

²³ Deut. 21:23 refers to someone being executed for a crime that he committed. From the crucifixion narratives it is quite obvious that people understood that the execution of Jesus was a political killing and not because he was a criminal deserving the death penalty.

Galatians 3:17-18

*‘And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make **the promise** of no effect.¹⁸ For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.’*

These verses continue to exacerbate the problem generated in earlier verses. From where does the author of Galatians obtain the notion that the Torah of Sinai was ever intended to annul the eternal Covenant the Almighty had made with Abraham? Another focal point is the ‘*promise*’! What is this promise? It is nothing less than the son who was promised by God to Abraham and Sarah (Gen.18:10; 21:1-7). Apart from a son, Abraham was also promised the Land (Eretz Israel) and that his descendants (pl.) would return there after several centuries of bondage to a foreign power.

If we analyse that also, it becomes readily apparent that there is a further conflict between the text of the Epistle and the books of Moses. The Covenant, God made with Abraham, was totally unconditional and there is no mention of an abrogation of that covenantal condition when Israel received the Torah at Sinai 430 years later. The promise God made to Abraham was that he and Sarah would have a son, which was fulfilled some time later. The second promise was the land— and that promise too, was faithfully passed on and reiterated by the Almighty to Isaac and confirmed to Jacob as already mentioned earlier in this study.

And... this progression is also carefully delineated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:6-13; viz.

⁶ But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, ⁷ nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” ⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. ⁹ For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

¹⁰ And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

The Galatian passage, however, seems to take a different tack. Though it is somewhat unclear, what exactly Paul is alluding to in this verse, but when he refers to children of the flesh in Romans 9, it seems obvious that he refers to Ishmael and his descendants as well as Abrahams’s offspring through Keturah. The Romans passage however conflicts with Galatians as according to Paul the physical descendants of the Patriarchs form an unbroken chain from whom the Messiah emerged. These physical descendants were the promise and the seed as Paul emphasizes, ‘...in Isaac your seed shall be called!’ The following three verses however appear to be a later insertion as they are a rather clumsy collection of statements. The mention of

the role change between Jacob and Esau is a clear allusion to the superiority of the church. Verses 12-13 leave no doubt for the reader that Paul believed God had brought about a change of preference. However, verse 13 is also out of context as there is no mention in Genesis that God hated Jacob's brother – apparently for no valid reason. The quote in Romans, however, comes from Malachi where it appears that God indeed hated Esau. Nevertheless, the context of the statement is a much later period than Esau's lifetime and refers to the destruction of the Edomites (Mal.1:3-8) due to their abominable conduct; King Herod was a descendant of Esau. In other words, it was not Jacob's brother that was hated by God, but the way of life of Esau's descendants several hundreds of years later.

I would also like to highlight here a related passage from Romans chapter 4, where Paul appears to be saying in the Galatian passage (3:17-18) that 'the promise and the law' are an antithesis. Not surprisingly, we find a passage in Romans 4:14 which seemingly actually concurs with that! Even so, in the same chapter, in verse 16 Paul contradicts this, e.g., *'Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that **the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...'***. The apostle states here clearly and unambiguously that, *'**Not only** to those who are of the law (i.e. Torah)....but also.....!'* The expression 'not only' emphasizes an automatic inclusion of those 'under law' – not an exclusion as intimated in v.14 and in Galatians. In other words, the Apostle acknowledges here very strongly that the people of Torah are not excluded from the promises! He says ***all the seed!*** That means

more than just one and cannot possibly refer to the Christians of the 21st century alone! Is it possible that the word ‘**only**’ was edited from Rom.4:14 because it supported a very uncomfortable truth—a factor overlooked in v.16?

It was God Who engineered the birth of Isaac at an impossible time in the life of Abraham and Sarah and secondly, God showed Rebecca in a dream, which child would bear the divine imprimatur. In other words a) it was not human effort that brought about the birth of Isaac — despite Sarah’s attempt at surrogacy, and b) Jacob did not take on the Patriarchy of Israel by political scheming — although some manipulation came into play from Rebecca — God had already declared the birthright before the birth of the child. Furthermore, Jacob did not invent the name Israel; it was virtually impressed upon him by God’s messenger after an intense physical and spiritual all-night struggle.

The question remains to be asked however, since all these promises to Abraham had been fulfilled, how can anyone entertain the notion that the Torah of Sinai could have been in any way intended to ‘*annul*’ them since all that information exists nowhere else except in the Torah?

Galatians 3:19 — what purpose then ... the law?

‘What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come...’

The author seems to be asking a purely rhetorical question here, because the answer plainly does not fit! To the best of my understanding the Hebrew Scriptures fail to substantiate such a claim as stated in the above verse.

So, was that actually written by Paul? The idea creates a considerable dilemma, because the Apostle presented himself with the best of credentials, being trained by Gamaliel, one of Israel's greatest ever 2nd Temple Torah scholars. Since the above verse raises a very serious question concerning the validity of the Torah, we need to ask, '*would Paul have made such a statement*'? Perhaps I need to say here that I am not questioning Paul's overall credibility and the authenticity of his letters. However, there are many places in his Epistles, which – when placed alongside the Hebrew Scriptures – suggest that significant sections in his original writings have been tampered with; and so with the above!

Firstly, the word law is an incorrect interpretation and should read Torah— meaning instruction. The reason I am questioning the author is based on the verb 'added'. Does he mean the commandments and ordinances of Sinai alone? If so, then he should say so, not use the word Torah! For the simple reason that the entire five books of Moses are Torah. They are instructions based on the accumulated life experiences — positive and negative — of a people and their walk with God. Paul alludes to that in Romans 15:4, viz. '*...whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*'. Unlike the Code of Hammurabi, or other ancient Law books, the Torah

requires an engagement of the human soul with the Divine and His purposes. The Torah speaks to the heart of man, seeking to evoke a response to the Creator's Spirit from the 'Imago Dei', the 'Image and Likeness' He had made (Gen.1:26-28).

The heart of this Torah is located in the Ten Commandments of Sinai, which I regard as the Constitution or Moral Code of our Universe.²⁴ Everything else flows out from there! The two tablets were the foundation God laid, upon which the children of Israel were meant to build their kingdom. A remarkable attitude by Israel toward God becomes apparent in that even before the Commandments were given Israel said, "*we will do*" (Exod.19:7-8) and only much later they said "*we will hear*" (Exod.20:19). This unconditional acquiescence by Israel implies that they intended to obey God's Word implicitly without a need to dissect it first; simply because God is God. They fixed forever the principle that doing [and understanding] was intrinsically linked to hearing (Ps.40:6-8); viz.

'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is

²⁴ A major obstacle to our understanding the Hebrew idea comes from the fact that the NT is almost entirely dependent on Greek texts. The underpinning Hebrew concepts are lost or disguised by the migration of the OT text from Hebrew into Greek over two thousand years ago and since. The Greek word *Nomos* which translates the Hebrew word *Torah* cannot accurately convey the intrinsic meaning of its Hebrew parent and thus are lost to the Gentile reader. The evidence for my claim comes from the witness of countless nations who have ordered their societies based on the Westminster blueprint that had its origin in the Ten Commandments. An examination of global cultures reveals that up to seven of the Commandments can be found among the core statutes that hold human society together—irrespective of colour and religion. What makes the Torah unique is its insistence on an absolute, ethical monotheism!

written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your Torah is within my heart.” c/f. Isa.1:11,13 ff.; Jer. 31:33.

These instructions, encapsulated in the simple word *Torah*, were regarded by Moses to be the greatest gift [a] God could give to His people, viz. ‘...for what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Deut. 4:7-8.²⁵ Moses regarded the Torah to be a blessing and the difference between life and death, viz. Deut.30:19-20. Indeed, Jesus himself endorsed the Torah in his Sermon on the Mount when he said that, ‘...do not think that I came to destroy the Law [Torah] or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [uphold] Matt.5:17.²⁶

Although the Hebrew Scriptures are essentially the rule of life for the Jewish people, they contain much wisdom that may be applied to all humanity; i.e. especially the Ten Commandments, which are a blueprint for a responsible and successful life to those who are willing to order their lives accordingly [let the reader understand correctly]. The Commandments are the gateway to true freedom, which was ultimately recognized by the lawmakers of great nations, who used significant portions from these Scriptures to construct their parliamentary systems of

²⁵ *ibid.* At the time of the Exodus Israel was the only nation that was being formed on the framework of an absolute, ethical monotheism. Not only was this monotheism something unheard of in the ancient world, the social component declaring the equality of all human beings, by the Torah, was something radically new. Truly, the concept that all people could live in security with one another was radically new for the ancient world.

²⁶ See Romans 3:31

governance. Today the West (incorporating most formerly Christianized nations) enjoys a relative freedom and security because of those Commandments, Precepts, Ordinances and Testimonies enshrined in the Torah. Yes, it is important to acknowledge that a reason for giving the Torah to Israel had to do with transgressions committed for thousands of years prior to Sinai due to ignorance of God precepts, but the main reason was to bless mankind and to provide us with the means of true freedom. Israel was not freed from slavery by crossing the Reed Sea, but gained freedom when the Israelites eventually understanding the meaning of Torah. America's history shows us that the black slaves did not gain any freedom by being released from their servitude. Rather, they gained their real freedom when they learned to read and write and take responsibility for their own lives among other free people, as well as embrace the varied codes of ethics and morals embedded in the Torah— as well as the wider T^enakh (Old Testament).

What purpose then is the law? James writes, *'...he who looks into the perfect law (Torah or instruction) of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does'* James 1:25. The Torah exists to bless a people devoted to God, as it says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, viz. *'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'*.

Jesus did not give many instructions, but when he did, he always pointed to the Torah. Not only did Jesus align himself with the

Torah of Moses, when asked about eternal life, his answer always pointed in the same direction (c/f. Matt.19:16; Mk.10:17; Lk.10:25; 18:18) i.e. the commandments! Although the Torah lists punitive measures for transgressions, its primary purpose was to avoid negative consequences or punishments incurred through ignorance by embracing the ways of God. According to Jesus, the Law, or Torah, was synonymous with eternal life!

The Paedagogue of Galatians 3:24

Galatians 3:24	
24 ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν· 5 ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν.	24 <i>Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.</i> ²⁵ <i>But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.</i>
<u>Literal translation from the Greek text above:</u> ²⁴ Therefore the Torah (Nomos) has become our pedagogue (teacher) into Christos [Messiah], in order that out of [or through] faithfulness we may be declared righteous.... ²⁵ but after the coming [arrival/establishment] of faithfulness a teacher is no longer required.	

Comment: In every generation teachers are needed to instruct the people of God in the ways of God. It is for this reason that Paul tells his Gentile readers that the Torah has become a schoolmaster to bring believers to the level of Messiah's faithfulness (c/f. Rom 3:22,26; Gal 2:16, 3:22,24,25; Phil.3:9; et al). Once such faithful living has been inscribed on the believers heart a schoolmaster may no longer be needful. However, he does not specify a time limit, except: *'after faithfulness has come [or arrived]'*. After thousands of years, Jewishness is synonymous to faithfulness to the God of Abraham and intrinsic to Jewish people. Therefore, just as this same faithfulness was intrinsic to Jesus, his followers also need to acquire that same faithfulness in order to reveal the nature of the Creator to the wider creation (Rom.8:19 ff.). Faithfulness to God and His people needs to become such an intrinsic quality among believers.

There is much evidence, which suggests that Paul's writings were at some time compromised and tampered with. Therefore, we need to find the courage to subject the letters published under his name to considerable scrutiny by bringing the light of the Old Testament to bear on the works published in his name. Due to the influence Paul's letters have had over the Millennia, his work must be able to withstand being tested against the Scriptures he himself lauded as evidence for his teachings (2 Tim. 3:16). We are now living almost 2000 years since these matters were written and are therefore justified, on the negative testimony of Church history alone, to insist on a test of these writings against the weight of this history. Paul himself had declared; viz. *'...each one's work will become clear; for the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work, which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward...'* 1 Cor.3:13-14. Indeed the book of Acts tells us that

even the Bereans had searched the scriptures against Paul's teachings— are we not compelled for the sake of righteousness to do the same? We must have the courage to test what is written it against the Torah that we may not be led astray.²⁷ Based on the evidence from Paul's writings alone (*see above*), it is unacceptable to claim that one or two verses of a Greek epistle are sufficient to declare the Torah invalid or irrelevant without adequate proof from the more ancient texts themselves.

Most translations render the Greek text of this passage thus, '*the law was our tutor...*'. The Greek tense here is in the perfect; therefore, the rendering of the NKJV is a reconstructive and deliberate mistranslation since similar passages exist in the Hebrew Scriptures where the perfect tense is rendered in the present continuous. For example in Genesis chapter three (v.22) our translations read uniformly, '*...then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become (same word; Gr. gegonen; γέγονεν) like one of us, to know good and evil..."*' Gen.3:22; and elsewhere, '*...as this thing has been done (γέγονεν) by my lord the king...*' 1 Ki.1:27; c/f. Mal.1:9 et al.

The word γέγονεν (Gr. gegonen, perfect tense) is rendered here in the present continuous and thus establishes a fact on the ground in the here and now— not an event in the past. However, when we look at the Galatians verse (24) in question here, only two versions, the NASB and the ASV translate it as 'has become' – and thus IS – the KJV, NKJV, ESV, RSV, NRSV, Jerusalem

²⁷ Acts 17:11 tell us that '*...the Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonican and searched the Scriptures...*'! What Scriptures did these Bereans search? None other than what we are doing here, i.e. the T'nakh.

Bible, Good News all put the past tense ‘was’ or similar thereby indicating an event of past history — not something that is providing a dynamic input into the here and now. Other versions like the NIV become quite creative in rendering the term, viz. ‘... *the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ*²⁸ *that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law...*’ NIV 3:24-25. Then here is how, surprisingly, David Stern also puts it, ‘...*the torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came...*’ (v.24) Complete Jewish Bible— also past tense: Torah has been and gone, over, kaput, finished! And finally the LEVEL 66, a youth-focussed version tells the reader, ‘...*the law controlled us and kept us under its power until the time came when we would have faith. In fact, the law was our teacher. It was supposed to teach us until we had faith and were acceptable to God. But once a person has learned to have faith, there is no more need to have the law as a teacher*’ Gal.3:23-25.

Yet, the simple reading of the passage tells us that ‘...***the Torah (Nomos/Law) has become (or IS) our paedagogue (teacher) into Christ [Messiah]...***’. In other words, we need the Torah to bring us to a level of spirituality where – eventually(!) – it will become embedded, or written, in our hearts (Jer. 31:31). Nowhere is there a single word that the Torah would ever become obsolete; it remains our teacher and the teacher of those who come after us— an eternal pedagogue to train us in the ways of righteousness until we attain to a Messianic spirituality that matches the vision of Isaiah 11!

²⁸ Or ‘*charge until Christ came...*’ (NIV footnote)

A major part of the problem of course is not just those verses above, but the people the epistle addresses. Who are the ‘we ... *that were kept under guard by the law*’? The Galatians were Gentiles and did not have the Torah, so, whom was the law guarding or was Paul talking to Jews only when he speaks about the law ‘*having been our tutor*’ [my paraphrase]? But then, the author begins to mingle images in chapter four concerning *cosmic elements* and *of adoption and sonship* that veer right away from the overall picture the Hebrew Scriptures paints of God’s purposes for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It shows clearly that there is only room for spiritual heirs as flows from the following. ‘*...if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise...*’ Gal 3:29. Concerning the Torah he goes on to question as to ‘*...what purpose then did the law serve?*’ His answer is, ‘*...it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made ...*’ Gal.3:19 (see above). Uh, oh! What transgressions? Paul himself states that until the Torah came there was no transgression in the world (c/f. Rom.4:15)! However, he also says that, ‘*...for until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law...*’ (Rom.5:13).’ Since Paul separates the terms sin and transgression, is it possible that he differentiates here between unintentional sin and wilful sin; a point of view strongly reflected in Romans chapter seven?²⁹

There is definitely a problem here within the above reasoning in Galatians. Taking all these points into account, who will not

²⁹ The Torah defines sin under two categories: 1) unintentional sin and 2) wilful sin or transgression

come to the conclusion that the Torah was bad news and to get rid of it can only be a blessing?

However, if we look at the situation from the perspective of the Hebrew slaves, it is quite easy to arrive at a different conclusion. If one bears in mind that the Torah was given to a nation of slaves who had no idea of self-government or of regulating the communal life of some two million people divided into clans and tribes, we could also arrive at a conclusion with a different outcome. I mentioned earlier the case of the American negro slaves... !³⁰ Slavery existed as a legal institution in North America from 1619 and continued mostly in the Christian South until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865. When the black people were eventually given their physical freedom, no-one was at hand to explain to them what that really meant for them. The outcome was more misery and exploitation of the former slaves. By contrast, the Almighty did not merely bring the Israelites across the Reed Sea, but he gave them the most precious possession ever gifted to a people, the Torah —and with it the means of staying a free people and to teach others likewise. It says in the scripture that ‘God engraved the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone’. *‘However’, say the Hebrew Sages, ‘do not say charut (engraved), but cheirut’* — meaning Freedom (c/f. James 1:25). For there is no true Freedom without knowing how to live, especially without knowing the ways of the Torah (Instructions) of God; He alone is able to provide true Freedom

³⁰ The term ‘negro’ is used here in a historic sense only to highlight the fact that there were no white slaves to be contrasted with black slaves. No derogatory meaning whatsoever is implied.

for humankind (Ps.119:45; 146:7; James 1:25).³¹ Nevertheless, that freedom is meant to be protected through accountability and acceptance of responsibility for one's life and actions.

The Words of the Torah are Non-Negotiable

'For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself...' (Gal. 5:14)

This statement is true in a midrashic³² sense since a love and reverence for God and man is presupposed in the daily recitation of the Sh^ema.³³ However, it is not true when read as a stand-alone quote for Gentile consumption, because the first part of the sentence is misleading. Anecdotal evidence has it that allegedly the Hebrew Sage, Hillel, was asked by a would-be convert to Judaism if he could explain the [whole] Torah **whilst standing on one foot**.³⁴ This is what he said, *'You shall love the Eternal One, your God, with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with everything that is in you' and 'whatever is unacceptable to you do not do to your neighbour'. This is the Torah and the rest is commentary— now go and study!*³⁵

³¹ The Chafetz Chaim, *Pirkey Avoth*, p.132.

³² See earlier footnote on 'midrash'

³³ Lev.19:18

³⁴ Hillel was an elder-contemporary of Yeshua, who also used the same quote as part of the more complete statement; c/f. Matt. 22:37; Mk.12:30; Lk.10:27

³⁵ The Torah is not fulfilled simple by loving one's neighbour, but by fulfilling our duty toward God and man. This is what Hillel pointed out to his enquirer when he challenged him to study; he did not mean just Lev.19:18, but the entire Torah since that is what is contained in the Commandments.

Most Gentiles have no knowledge of the deeper wisdom of Judaism, therefore to quote the so-called Golden Rule by itself, as fulfilling the Torah, is definitely misleading and far from helpful for Christians or anyone, for that matter.³⁶ Furthermore, v.14 is only half of Hillel's quote as it omits the command of devotion to God and is consequently not entirely true.

Therefore, if Jesus endorsed the Torah's eternal validity in line with his Jewish understanding, why would Paul regard it as a curse? Surely such a notion should be regarded as absurd?

I have shown elsewhere that the term 'law' does not exist in the Bible and the term Torah applies to all of the five books of Moses. So what was added then, the Commandments? Jesus stated that not even a yodh would be removed from the entire Hebrew Scriptures!

In order not to go beyond the intent of this study I will draw this segment to a close with a brief look at a passage in Deuteronomy. Here we have Moses asking the following question, viz. *“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day; Deut. 4:7-8?* Therefore, when I ponder the above passages from Galatians, I cannot help but ask myself

³⁶ It is only in recent times that matters have come to light, which show that virtually all of Yeshua's teachings find their source in the Tenakh and the sayings of Torah Sages predating Yeshua. Due to a lack of understanding the *Golden Rule* was attributed to Yeshua and for almost two-thousand years considered sublime to anything Judaism had to offer. Now we know that many of Yeshua's teachings lean heavily on the sayings of the sages who preceded him – especially Hillel and Shammai.

some very difficult questions, especially one, ‘*who – apart from Paul – contributed to this epistle?*’

The idea that the Torah came into being ‘only’ because of transgressions is reprehensible, utterly unbiblical and unworthy of any serious Bible student worth his salt. If we see the Torah only as law, then that passage has merit. However, if the Torah is meant to be a way of life for God’s people, that statement is unworthy of a man of Paul’s stature and a travesty of the Word of God. But then, the question remains, did Paul actually write those troublesome passages in the first place?

If not Paul... then who?

The Seed of Abraham

*‘Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God [**in Christ**,³⁷] that it should make the promise of no effect.¹⁸ For if the inheritance is of the law, it*

³⁷ *‘**in Christ**’ is not in the better Greek MSS and is found only in the KJV, the NKJV translations among the major versions of the Bible

is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.'
Galatians 3:16-18

The Galatian passage under discussion here has far-reaching tentacles. In fact, they reach all the way back to Genesis 3:15. There, of course, we find the origin of the conflict between the 'seed of Eve' and that of the serpent. Throughout the dominant Catholic centuries the Douay Rheims version of the Bible conditioned its readers that the mother of Jesus, through her son, would eventually crush the serpent's head.³⁸ Consequently, the seed of Eve has always been understood in Christian theology to represent a coming deliverer, which has been interpreted since the early days of Christianity as being Christ/Messiah and seemingly confirmed here by the Galatian passage.

However, if the Galatian passage is understood correctly in context, the Genesis image changes also, because it permits us to read Gen.3:15 in the plural. Therefore, reading that verse from such a plural perspective the emphasis shifts from a 'future' seed and what emerges is that the offspring/descendants of '*serpent-creatures* [let the reader understand]' will continue to bite at the heels of the children of Eve. However, *they (the seed or descendants)* will end up crushing the serpent's head altogether in due time. The Creator foreshadows in that passage that human beings would have power available to them (from God) to defeat

³⁸ Roman Catholic theology has always considered the seed of Eve to be the seed of Mary. According to the Douay Rheims Bible, it is [Mary] who *would crush the serpent's head.* Gen.3:15; viz. [15] "*She shall crush*"... Ipsa, the woman; so divers of the fathers read this place, conformably to the Latin: others read it ipsum, viz., the seed. The sense is the same: for it is by her seed, Jesus Christ, that the woman crushes the serpent's head.

the serpent that persistently gnaws at their heels. Adam and Eve received what they desired, viz. the ability to choose between good and evil. What they had not counted on was, from that moment on they and their descendants' would have to struggle continuously with an evil inclination that opposed everything that was good. The Apostle Paul identified it as the struggle between the flesh and the spirit (Rom.7:13-25; 8:1-8; Gal.5:16-25).³⁹

There is an enormous significance in these verses from Galatians chapter three and in their author. There is also an entire theology that rests on those verses, for which there is no precedent or confirmation anywhere in the Scriptures. This theology has identified Gentile Christians to have become the spearhead in God's redemptive process with the Jewish people kind of tagging along in a mission all of their own. I firmly believe, based on the available Biblical texts, that we are faced here with a considerable problem.

Although the Jewish people have failed to uphold God's Torah as they had been intended to, they have exercised immense faith in His promises for 2000 long years that He will restore them to the land of their forefathers. Not only have they exercised such an immense faith, they have also protected the veracity of the Hebrew Scriptures to the smallest letter. Despite a terrible

³⁹ When we read about the '*tree of knowledge of good and evil*' in Genesis (2:17) we are looking at something far deeper than our English words reveal. The word knowledge stems from the Hebrew root יָדָע (to know), which also describes in the Bible the human act of reproduction (Gen 4:1,17; et al). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that Gen. 2:17 has a lot more to say than what meets the eye. In fact the term knowledge implies a deep intimate acquaintance with good and evil on a divine level. It is that very factor why the first humans were not equipped to deal with at that point in time. What Adam and Eve acquired was a permanent conflict between a good and evil inclination (*see* Romans 7). This necessity to choose is further highlighted by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11-20, but he also includes the remedy.

dispersion among all the people of the earth, the Jews have remained an identifiable people in spite of persecutions no other people had ever been subjected to.⁴⁰ At the same time, Christianity's triumphalist global church is struggling to remain afloat and to retain a degree of relevancy in the 21st century.

An Influential Epistle

The book of Galatians is one of the most influential Epistles in the NT. It has also, most likely, contributed more than any of Paul's letters to the separation between Synagogue and church and the ensuing *Replacement Theology* of Christianity; especially in Dispensational circles since the appearance of the Schofield Bible.⁴¹ The comment '*Israel of God*', mentioned in Galatians 6:16, has been regarded since the early days of Christianity as pertaining to the church and is today a rock-solid pillar in all of Christendom. This thinking was also assisted by the Sarah/Hagar allegories (4:24,25). Galatians is of course also highly influential in the *One New Man/Neither Jew & nor Greek*' doctrine [Jews always had to cast off their Jewishness to become real Christians – whether it was cultural or religious]; despite the fact that Gentile Christians were [and still are] free to retain their culture identity.

⁴⁰ The entire Tenakh stands as a witness against the Jewish people. It highlights their transgressions against God in a powerful way. If they, as is asserted by many scholars, wrote the Bible during the exile to justify their existence, why would they include so much incriminating material that could be used against them?

⁴¹ See my book *Replacement Theology* available from my website <http://theolivetreeconnection.com>

However, what I believe underpins these notions is a key Christological passage that incorporates an allegorical interpretation of a key passage from the Hebrew Scriptures, which refers to the *seed of Abraham*. After struggling with it for many years, I felt strongly compelled to take a closer look at this passage through the filter of the Old Testament concerning its veracity and theological soundness.

The text of Galatians 3:16 gives the appearance as if the Apostle Paul is saying that the only [true] seed of Abraham is ‘Christ’! This is deeply problematic, because for many centuries the person of ‘Christ’ was not regarded to have any historical significance, for according to some theologians it was [and still is] only the ‘*Christ of faith*’ that mattered. Certainly in Roman Catholicism the racial/historical origin of ‘Christ’ was of little consequence because he was the *incarnate God*; the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was only of significance to fulfil prophecy, but unconnected to the race of his parents. Therefore, in many theological circles – until fairly recently - *Christ* is regarded to have a hybrid personality, whose historical origin is of no, or at best, of little consequence⁴² and Christians are often unaware that he was/is Jewish. It puzzles me, why precious little consideration is given by the bulk of Christianity to the fact that Christians worship a Jewish God, follow a Jewish religion, read a Jewish Bible and trust a Jewish Messiah for their eternal

⁴² Liberation theology, which is preached among the poor of developing nations, advocates the view that ‘Christ’ is incarnate among the poor of any race or culture. He can, therefore, be Mexican, African or Palestinian, etc – his physical origin is largely immaterial

salvation!⁴³ Whilst anyone who studies the Bible is easily able to follow the historical dealings of God with the Hebrews/Israelites, the NT offers no such opportunity. Not only is the very origin and existence of Jesus, aka Christ, shrouded in a fog, the texts that speak of him fail to give a consistent account. This shortcoming in the NT writings enabled Christianity to market a hybrid, gentile only Christ who is capable of existing independent of his historical origin.

Therefore the above passage under discussion here, assists in reinforcing this view, because it also removes Abraham's direct offspring via Isaac and Jacob from their [or any] historical inheritance.⁴⁴ Please, let me be clear, the proclaimed Christ (Messiah) of the NT is a physical descendant of Abraham. However, the 2000 year intervening gap between Abraham and Jesus plays such a significant role in redemption history that we cannot make such a leap without considerably distorting the entire story.

⁴³ The German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg advocates a less than traditional christological approach because of three shortcomings he sees in the "Christology from above" approach, such as: 1) Christology from above presupposes the divinity of Jesus, but, according to Pannenberg, Christology's most pressing and important task is to present reasons for the affirmation of the divinity of Jesus, not merely presuming such divinity from the outset. 2) Along somewhat the same line, Christology from above has difficulty in "properly weighing the significance of the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth." The focus, when viewed from above, is already on the God/man union, but this is the very concept that the life of Jesus, or the events in the life of Jesus, is supposed to proffer. 3) The tenability of Christology from above, according to Pannenberg, is contingent upon one's ability to stand in God's position and "follow the way of God's son into the world." We are in no such position.

⁴⁴ Donald Robinson is quoted by Peter G. Bolt and Mark D. Thompson as saying, that *'...there is one olive tree, representing one spiritual seed of Abraham, whose 'natural' form is that of Israel after the flesh. But Paul never gets to calling this tree 'Israel' simply.* Peter G. Bolt and Mark D. Thompson, Eds., *Donald Robinson Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Australian Church Record: Sydney; 2008) p. 219

For this reason, we need to exercise great care in interpreting the true meaning of the Biblical texts and what they are intended to convey to us! It is important, therefore, that we understand the two Testaments in the correct order of their significance. This means, whatever is written in the New must find a full and unambiguous support from the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the Hebrew Scriptures, or OT. Why? Simply because in the very last book of the Old Testament God declares through the prophet Malachi, viz. *'I am the LORD, I do not change...'* (Mal. 3:6). If the Almighty is indeed the unchanging God, He revealed Himself as, then we must also be able to trust that His Word remains unchanging from eternity to eternity. It is not possible that He would declare one thing and when it suits Him abrogate an earlier decree. It is this changelessness, which separates Him from all other ancient deities— especially the god of Islam, Allah!

Paul himself makes it very clear that the New must be understood through the lens of the Hebrew Scripture in his letter to Timothy (2 Tim.3:16). Indeed, one should not hesitate to ask the hard question, whether Paul would have dared before the face of God, to call his own writings 'Scripture'. Nevertheless, such thinking may run contrary, to what many believe, that the Old must be understood through the lens of the New! On the other hand, some translations (NIV, Good News, J.B. Phillip's NT) inadvertently do present the view that the Old Testament holds authority over the New, by artificially using it as a support structure for the theological assertion of that verse by making the

Galatian verse (3:16) read, i.e. *'the Scriptures say...'*⁴⁵ And, there are some translators who introduce Christological terminology by artificially capitalizing words, e.g. *Seed*, as if to make certain the word impacts the reader with the right message! This is patently wrong because the translator thus puts his own subjective twist on the text he is creating in the new language and he is not transmitting the original meaning. Therefore, if it can be established from the Hebrew Scriptures that there is a singular *seed* who will lay claim to Abraham's heritage, the case is closed— Israel is past tense and the church [alone] is the forerunner of the Kingdom of God on earth.

What we find therefore in this passage is a highly skilled use of allegory to explain the ancient Genesis text in terms of NT philosophy.⁴⁶ The author of that text portion — be it Paul or a later editor — reinterpreted the plain meaning of the older text according to his perspective of the '*Christ*' event. However, if we treat the Galatian text in question as an allegory by accepting the editor's interpretation without serious cross-referencing with the ancient texts, we find ourselves on a collision course with other, related passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, for example in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet states, *'Thus says the Lord: "If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant,*

⁴⁵ No Greek text actually mentions the word scripture, but what is written simply says, οὐ λέγει, which is in the third person singular and could mean '*he/she or it says...*'. This construct was obviously a problem to the translators, hence the varied forms in the different versions.

⁴⁶ As I pointed out elsewhere, the use of allegory in Christian writings did not fully blossom until Origen in the late 2nd/early 3rd century

so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them” Jer. 33:26 (c/f. Lev.26:42-45). This statement by Jeremiah concurs with a plain, non-allegorical reading of the Galatian passage, which affirms that when God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 22 et al, He actually meant the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This consideration is upheld by the fact that anyone reading the Hebrew Scriptures prior to the compilation of the New Testament would have understood the Genesis passage in that manner. Please bear in mind that the book of Leviticus, which foreshadows Jeremiah’s comment above is also part of the law (Torah) and thus falls among the writings endorsed by Jesus (Matth.5:17ff; c/f. Luke 24:44).

Below is a reproduction of the Greek Galatian text of the passage I intend to discuss. Parallel in the same table is the English translation according to the NKJV and a [my] literal translation from the Greek that speaks of the alleged singularity of the ‘seed’. Following on from that are the English and Hebrew texts of the corresponding passage in Genesis 22:17ff. as references for the Galatian text.

What should be evident from this comparison alone is that there is a substantial inconsistency between the Genesis and the Galatian texts.⁴⁷ Although the KJV uses *seed*, the NKJV and the RSV use the plural form *descendants*.

⁴⁷ I view these inconsistencies as deliberate since we are not dealing here with translations alone, but with highly subjective interpretations of the ancient Hebrew and Greek text.

<p>Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though <i>it is</i> only a man's covenant, yet <i>if it is</i> confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "<i>And to your Seed,</i>" who is Christ. ¹⁷And this I say, <i>that</i> the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ*, that it should make the promise of no effect.</p> <p>Gal 3:15-17 - NKJV</p> <p>***</p>	<p>Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω· ὁμως ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται. ¹⁶ τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἄλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός. ¹⁷ τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγωνὸς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.</p> <p>(Nestle-Aland Text)⁴⁸</p> <p>***</p>
<p>* NOTE: In the Greek MSS only the Byzantine Text retains the term. Apart from the King James Versions all modern vernacular texts also omit '<i>in Christ</i>' as inauthentic.</p>	

⁴⁸ Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. (1993, c1979). *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) (427). Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies; Gal 3:15-17

Literal translation from the above Greek text	
<p>‘Brothers, according to man I speak. Yet when a man validates a covenant/testament no-one sets it aside or adds provisions. But to Abraham were spoke the promises and to his seed. It does not say* ‘to seeds’ as if to many, but as of one ‘and to your seed’, which is Christos. But this I say, a covenant [that] was established beforehand by God could not be revoked or abolished by the law which came 430 years later.’</p>	
<p>* The Greek term οὐ λέγει (ou legei) used here is simply in the third person sing., but specifies neither gender nor subject</p>	
Genesis 22:17-18	
<p>¹⁷ ...blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which <i>is</i> on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ By your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves— because you have obeyed My voice.” NKJV</p>	<p>¹⁷ כִּי-בֵרַךְ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהַרְבֵּה אֲרַבֶּה אֶת-יִרְעֶךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שֵׁפֶת הַיָּם וַיִּרַשׁ יִרְעֶךָ אֶת יַעֲר אֲיִבָּיו: ¹⁸ וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזִרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ לְעַב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּת בְּקוֹלִי: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</p>

The above verses represent a major theological/christological factor in establishing who the Christian Jesus is. It is a key passage from which it is alleged that, according to Scripture, ‘Christ’ is indeed the [true and only] heir to the promises of Abraham— end of debate.⁴⁹

By extension, this projects the sense that the Jewish people have been replaced by the Christian church as the [true] heirs to the Kingdom of God. Not only were they replaced by the Christian Church, in fact, the implication is according to the statement in Galatians, they were never on God’s radar in the first place for such an inheritance— since Abraham’s true descendants (by projection) were the Christians, two-thousand years in the future! Therefore, when the disciples of Jesus asked if he was about to restore the Kingdom to Israel they had lived on assumptions all along! What I find to be a challenge, however, is that the Hebrew Scriptures (see table on next page) clearly project the promises of Abraham onto his physical descendants, via Isaac, onto Jacob. They are almost identical in their wording, yet they are speaking to different men, i.e. Abraham and Jacob— separated by Isaac’s generation.

⁴⁹ What misleads many is the ‘Remnant Factor’! The Hebrew prophets projected the sense that not all who were born from the stock of Abraham would remain true to the Mosaic faith. They clearly foreshadow that when the terrible DAY of the LORD came, only a remnant would enter the Kingdom of God. *‘I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness...’* Zeph.3:12-13. But, there is also the sense that such a remnant was spread throughout the world as indicated in v.20, viz. *‘...at that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,’* says the Lord.’ This latter hope is expressed by Jewish men around the world in their morning prayers each and every day

<p>God’s word to Abraham (Gen.22:15ff.):</p> <p>¹⁵ Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶ and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only <i>son</i>—¹⁷ blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply <u>your descendants as the stars of the heaven</u> and as the sand which <i>is</i> on the seashore; and <u>your descendants</u> shall possess the gate of their enemies.¹⁸ By your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”</p>	<p>God’s word to Jacob (Gen.28:14ff):</p> <p>¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: “I <i>am</i> the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give <u>to you and your descendants</u>.¹⁴ Also <u>your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth;</u> you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and by your seed all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.¹⁵ Behold, I <i>am</i> with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”</p>
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Please note that, whenever we read descendants and seed in the above texts, they always translate the same Hebrew word ‘*zerah*’. One should ask therefore, why does the Galatian passage not include Jacob’s seed as well? After all if it is Jacob’s seed

that will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south (see above)— surely the Hebrew word ‘*zerah*’ cannot refer to just one single seed emerging thousands of years later?

Authorship of Galatians

There has been a considerable amount of discussion in scholarly circles concerning Gal 3:16 and the nature of the ‘*seed*’. The verse alleges that Abraham produced a special ‘*seed*’ to whom this promise was made (who would germinate 2000 years later) and that seed was [the] *Christ*. The author of the verse emphatically denies that [the] *seed* could have anything but a singular, unitarian meaning and apply to anyone else except *Christ*. This is not just a translation issue, because it comes to us via the Greek version of the Galatian text. That claim is quite ancient in Christian theological circles, however, when one seeks a confirmation from the Genesis text a paradox arises since there is nothing there that would sustain such a claim. It is an allegorical understanding that is clearly read, and then written, back into the text, thus creating a serious hermeneutical error.⁵⁰ This problem, however, is not created by theological commentaries on the Genesis portion, because our difficulty exists in a very important New Testament book considered to be infallibly inspired! Truly, if the latter were the case, there should also be a complete harmony between the Galatian and Genesis texts. Alas; there is not! I am not questioning an initial

⁵⁰ *Exegesis* means to extract a meaning from a given text portion, but *eisegesis* is to read a meaning into the text.

inspiration of the text, but since its initial compilation many minds have influenced its transmission throughout the centuries.

But what are the implications in the absence of such a harmony? It would render the Galatian Epistle untrustworthy!

Therefore, what can we discover from the following Genesis reference?

*‘...God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for **in Isaac your seed shall be called...**”’* Gen.21:12

This passage makes undoubtedly clear that there is a generational progression in place, by which God will bring his promises to pass, i.e. *firstly* via Isaac. For that reason it is now no longer possible to look to Abraham alone, as Galatians suggests, but also to: *‘...in Isaac your seed shall be called...’*

Elsewhere, God speaks virtually identical words with an identical promise to Jacob on his way to Haran; viz. *‘...in you and in your seed (בְּרַיְךָ) all the families of the earth shall be blessed’* Gen.28:14. If therefore, the seed in the discourse with Abraham refers to Christ (i.e. Messiah) alone, according to Galatians, who then is the seed in that passage and in the one above?

Of course, some may argue that this means Christ AND his spiritual descendants. However, if we follow such a claim through to its logical conclusion a Muslim could also make the same claim, which indeed they do in any case! Muslims, in fact, claim that Ishmael is the true heir of Abraham and Muhammad

the fulfillment of all prophecy! As the Galatian passage is written, there is nothing which precludes such a possibility since the leap is straight from Abraham to *Christ* or Muhammad.

The Genesis passage, however, clearly outlines the path of God's redemption from Abraham via Isaac (Gen.17:19) and – eventually – Jacob. And this is highly significant, because if we make the leap re the promises of God from Abraham to *Christ* one automatically bypasses Isaac and Jacob and thereby nullifies the events of Egypt and Sinai— as well as all the prophets and everything in-between. All the promises of God to the physical descendants of Jacob become meaningless and super-cruel divine gamesmanship.

If, therefore, the sole focus of God's dialogue with Abraham on Mt. Moriah was Christ, then the story of the Israelites' struggle is a cruel, cynical and pointless divine hoax since God knew from the start that Israel would fail and the Law would also fail, because all these failures were designed to bring everyone to Christ!

However, the story of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the creation of a people utterly devoted to God and who would eventually testify to the veracity of the Torah as the Moral Code⁵¹ of the Universe. The story of the Hebrews not only reveals the relationship between the Creator and His creatures, but tells the story of an absolutely faithful,

⁵¹ Strictly speaking I consider the Ten Commandments to be the Constitution, or Moral Code of the Universe upon which everything hangs. Although the Universe is a physical place, it is constructed out of a moral fibre that links every molecule. The Commandments are the Constitution and the Torah is the way of implementation.

loving, compassionate and merciful deity—a story unequalled in human history. It reveals an utterly trustworthy deity unparalleled among the objects of human worship. And it is precisely this factor, which is so vitally important for the entire human race! That knowledge could only have come to us via the struggles of the children of Israel; through their successes and failures. If their history is immaterial and there is this giant two-thousand year leap, what is the point of their existence in the first place?

Furthermore, if the link is directly from Abraham to *Christ*, then what is the point of the dialogue in Gen.35:12 where the Almighty reaffirms his earlier promises with the patriarchs, viz. ‘*The land, which I gave Abraham and Isaac **I give to you**; and to your descendants (Hebr. zera; sg.) after you I give this land.*’?”

The Textual Dilemma of Gal.3:16

Once we consult the Hebrew text in relation to this verse, both the author of the Greek NT text as well as the translators end up in a real quandary. What creates a problem is the Hebrew word for seed זרע, which occurs in the Hebrew texts exclusively in the singular form. Although the word is written in the singular, it is unquestioningly a plural/compound noun like water, heaven, face, sheep or a bag of seed, etc.

You might say, ‘so what is the problem? Isn’t that the intent of the Galatians passage?’ That is correct to some extent, but the author is referring his readers to the book of Genesis as support

for his reasoning that the ‘seed’ is intended to point to a single unit of being alone; i.e. Christ! It is this apparent proof, which the author of Galatians provides that nullifies the Galatian Christology; a factor that is supported by the fact that the Greek LXX renders the Hebrew word זרָה also in the singular, e.g. τὸ σπέρμα [Gr. *to sperma*]. But then, when it comes to the translations from Greek and Hebrew into English, an enigma begins to surface.

Both ancient languages, Hebrew and Greek, use this plural noun in all cases in the Genesis text, so I feel compelled to ask, what gave the translators the clue that they should render the ancient languages into vernacular tongues in a way that concurred with the Greek of the Galatians 3:16 text?⁵² What prompted the translators to assume that there is a change to the meaning of the Hebrew word *zera* between v. 17 & 18; that the former should be translated in the specific plural and the latter in the more generic *seed* or similar in the NKJV for example?

Let us look how the other major versions render that passage:

Bible Version	Genesis 22:17	Genesis 22:18
Good News Bible	<u>Descendants (pl.)</u>	Descendant (sing.)
Jerusalem Bible	Seed [annotates ‘descendants’ in margin]	Posterity
NASB (1995)		Seed

⁵² Allegorical Theology has provided the looking glasses from the earliest times of Christianity, by which the church fathers interpreted the Scriptures

ASV	Seed	Seed
ESV	Seed	Offspring
KJV	Offspring	Seed
NIV	Seed	Offspring
NKJV	<u>Descendants</u>	Seed
NRSV	<u>Descendants</u>	Offspring
RSV*	Offspring	<u>Descendants</u>
Masoretic Text	<u>Descendants</u>	זְרַעְךָ - your seed (sg.)
LXX (Septuagint)	זְרַעְךָ - your seed (sg.) τὸ σπέρμα σου – your seed (sg.)	τὸ σπέρμα σου – your seed (sg.)

In my view the problem is not that [Paul] uses the singular seed to make his point. What concerns me is the fact that he appears to be adding commentary to the text; i.e. what the Scripture says and what it doesn't. Now, some scholars say that the Apostle is merely using midrashic tools to make his christological point!⁵³ However, that doesn't hold water because of the conflict between Galatians 3:16 and the actual Genesis text. Once we understand and acknowledge that conflict even the allegorical approach must be abandoned.

⁵³ The term *midrash* stems from the Hebrew verb *to seek*. **Midrash** (Hebrew: מדרש; plural *midrashim*, lit. "to investigate" or "study") is a homiletic method of biblical exegesis. The term also refers to the whole compilation of homiletic teachings on the Bible. Midrash is a way of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings. It fills in many gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at.

The overwhelming evidence, from the above translations, indicates that many of the translators understood the plurality in the Hebrew word for seed. It is also noteworthy that almost half of all major translations (e.g. Good News Bible, Jerusalem Bible, NIV, NKJV) arbitrarily render the Hebrew word both plural and singular— as if to somehow make it fit the NT text. What is particularly disappointing is that the *Complete Jewish Bible* follows the same pattern. Despite the fact that David Stern renders the Genesis passage correctly in the plural, in his translation of Galatians 3:16 he slavishly follows the Greek NT text perpetuating the misconception that **the Genesis text pinpoints** the *seed* of Genesis 22:17-18 to be a singular expression; in order to signify the Messiah. This is of concern to me because David Stern's translation is of great significance as it targets a largely Jewish/Messianic audience.

On the one hand, when we read the Genesis text in the *Complete Jewish Bible* he is correct in his translation (compared with the sense/context of the Hebrew text). He is also correct in telling his readers that it is **the descendants (plural!) of Abraham** '*who would be greatly multiplied*', and by them — yes, most translations render the noun here also in the plural — the nations of the earth would be blessed. But, on the other hand, when we come to Stern's translation of the Galatian passage in question, he changes tack and tells his readers that the Scriptures actually '*speak of one*'. He also expands the text by saying, '*it doesn't say 'and to seeds' as if to many; on the contrary, it speaks of one*

— “*and to your seed*” — *which is the Messiah*’.⁵⁴ This however is not correct as it is not stated in the Genesis text. Although Stern follows the mainstream, even in his translation one cannot find a corroboration for the Galatian claim. It is therefore deeply troubling when we read the following on his introductory page of dedication:

*‘Praised are you, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, who gives the **Torah of truth** and the Good News of salvation to His people Israel through his son Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.’*

Either the Torah is true or it is not— there cannot be a perhaps or maybe! Regardless of how one may wish to manipulate the Galatian text, the problem remains. The discrepancy between Galatians and Genesis should therefore be of deep concern to all, especially in the light of 2 Tim. 3:16, where Paul tells Timothy that, ‘*...all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete...*’. We have these words from the pen of the same Paul who allegedly wrote the Epistle of the Galatians. Paul makes it so clear that ‘*all Scripture*’ is profitable ...for correction, etc. There cannot be the slightest doubt that Paul referred here exclusively to the Hebrew Scriptures. All of the above is the result of drawing the Hebrew Scriptures alongside the NT to shed light on a series of inconsistencies highlighted above.

⁵⁴ David Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*, (Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.: Maryland: 1998), p.1454

What about Martin Luther?

Here is the man who inspired the Christian (i.e. Protestant) world and who made a name for himself with his phrase *sola scriptura*. Countless people put their trust in him that such is exactly what he practiced. Therefore, one might feel that Luther's translation should be 100% reliable! The reality is different and the following is but a small example. The following excerpts are from the German Version of the Lutheran Bible:

[Gal. 3:16] *Nun ist die Verheißung Abraham zugesagt und seinem Nachkommen. Es heißt nicht: und den Nachkommen, als gälte es vielen, sondern es gilt einem: 'und deinem Nachkommen' (1. Mose 22:18), welcher ist Christus.*⁵⁵

Here is the passage referred to by Luther (1. Mose 22:18), including v. 17 for context:

[Gen. 22.17] *'...will ich dein Geschlecht segnen und mehren wie die Sterne am Himmel und wie den Sand am Ufer des Meeres, und deine Nachkommen sollen die Tore ihrer Feinde besitzen;*
[22.18] *und durch dein Geschlecht sollen alle Völker auf Erden gesegnet werden, weil du meiner Stimme gehorcht hast.*

The German word '*Geschlecht*' literally means 'gender, seed, race or people'. Luther, however, uses another, different word

⁵⁵ In German prefixes and suffixes often determine the case or number – so in this case. Luther tells his readers that the Scripture doesn't say 'many', but 'one alone'. The problem is that no Biblical texts has that!

'*Nachkommen*' i.e. offspring, descendant (s), heir(s), as well, to translate the Galatian passage. It is a very clever use of words due to the meaning of the word *Geschlecht*, which — like seed or people is a plural noun that can also function in the singular! The term has several meanings, i.e. gender, as in male or female but can also refer to a tribe or an entire people of the same genetic origin. Although the Genesis translation is correct, for reasons that are indeterminable at this point in history, Luther also used the much more restrictive word, i.e. *Nachkommen*, meaning descendant(s), in the second part of v.17. This noun reflects the same Hebrew and Greek words respectively; both of which use the plural noun that he also translates as plural in Genesis by means of the article. Nevertheless, Luther reverts back to the more inclusive term *Geschlecht*, which in this context can only be given a plural meaning— NOT a singular as inferred by Galatians. Yet, in the Galatian passage however, Luther uses the word *Nachkommen*, whose number is determined by the article— in this case singular, but which – in turn – is in conflict with the Genesis text. In other words, Luther agrees that the Galatian passage is an allegorical Midrash – not an actual reference to the Genesis passage.

The Conflict

There is definitely a conflict between some of the verses of this chapter and the 'seed' verses of Genesis, because Paul refers to himself, as well as to other [Israelites] as the seed of Abraham. Based on the research presented here, it is my opinion

that this conflict is so serious that it must be brought out into the open. What raises a special concern, is the absence of a translation which presents the full picture, despite the fact that several versions get at least some points correct. Martin Luther kept on preaching '*Sola Scriptura*', yet he set out to create his own theological interpretation of the ancient documents. What saddens me is the reality that all translations contributed considerably in an attempt to shut the Jewish people out of the redemptive process one way or another. The Christian world seemingly has spared no effort to prove that the Jewish people have ceased to play a part in God's plan of Redemption; indeed, not just the Jewish people, but their Scriptures as well.⁵⁶

The main conflict is that we have agreement between the Hebrew and Greek texts in Genesis, but this is not acknowledged in the Greek text of Galatians. So, we need to ask, if the LXX agrees with the Hebrew, where did the author of Galatians 3:15-17 — be it Paul or someone else — get the notion from, that there is a special emphasis in Gen.22:18a on the singularity of the word seed and it should therefore be interpreted in an allegorical way pointing to a Hellenistic Christ?

It is very interesting to note that it is only the NKJV and the NIV that follow in their translations of Gen 22:16-18 the lead of Galatians, whereas the other translations – including the LXX – agree with the Hebrew text. However, the conundrum arises when the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible, the Good News Bible, Complete Jewish Bible, the Phillips New Testament et al, insist

⁵⁶ *ibid*; Robinson argues that salvation did come to a remnant of the Israelites, but the rest will be saved by the Gospel through the Gentiles; p.91

in the Galatians passage that *'it is Scripture'* which indicates the singular nature of the *'seed'*. Some others though, like ESB, RSV, NRSV render the Greek literally by *'it says'*— without committing themselves to either God or the Scriptures. Most major translations of the Galatians text, however, infer that it was God Himself *'... [Who] says...'* (see all Greek texts, Vulgate, KJV, NASB, ASV, NKJV).⁵⁷

Having been confronted with these varied interpretations, maybe we should then ask, *"if it were the case that Scripture did say what is reported in Galatians, why does it not exist in the Genesis text?"* If the New Testament means the Hebrew Scriptures, when it says *'it is written'*, then any reader should be able to locate that quote somewhere within the body of the Hebrew Scriptures— lest there is a secret book somewhere no-one knows about? However, if there was a secret book of *'Scripture'* somewhere, we would all be in trouble anyway, because if that is missing [though we know of its existence] what else has been hidden; etc., etc.

Therefore, is one justified to ask, *'has some reconstruction taken place here?'* In my view and based on the evidence presented above, there has been and all of us are forced to live with the consequences!⁵⁸ Not only are there consequences, but these are dire for Jewish people and Gentiles alike!

⁵⁷ The fairly recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their scientific study, increasingly provide proof that the Hebrew version of the Scriptures is the oldest known to man. The DSS confirm that it is the Masoretic text, which is older rather than the LXX, as had been assumed until not so long ago.

⁵⁸ If a Gentile editor took it upon himself to reconstruct or re-direct the outcome of the intent expressed in the Genesis text, then he has brought to nought the credibility of

It is a fact, nevertheless, that the Galatians passage does not agree with either the Hebrew text or the LXX. Indeed, if we are willing to accept the implications of the argument presented in v.16, then we should also have the freedom to discard virtually the entire Hebrew Bible from the time of Abraham onwards. Coupled with the rejection of the Sinai Covenant in the Book of Hebrews there is nothing left in the Old Testament that has any value. Indeed, based on such a reading, the Hebrew Bible 'has become an Old Testament and nothing more!'

On the one hand we have several major translations telling us that the descendants (pl.) of Abraham will inherit the promises, yet on the other hand we have the Epistle to the Galatians tell us that there is only a single seed to whom that applies when the opposite is the case. Eugene Peterson in the very popular *Message* translation puts it this way, viz. ¹⁵⁻¹⁸ *Friends, let me give you an example from everyday affairs of the free life I am talking about. Once a person's will has been ratified, no one else can annul it or add to it. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant. You will observe that Scripture, in the careful language of a legal document, does not say "to descendants," referring to everybody in general, but "to your descendant" (the noun, note, is singular), referring to Christ.'* However when we turn to Genesis in the same translation, Galatians stands hugely contradicted by this, viz. ¹⁵⁻¹⁸ *The angel of God spoke from Heaven a second time to Abraham: "I*

the NT author implicated here. It must be remembered that we are not dealing here with a legend concerning some Greek deity, or even the musings of a philosopher, but a document purporting to be the infallible word of God. If that was falsified, where does it stop?

*swear—God's sure word!—because you have gone through with this, and have not refused to give me your son, your dear, dear son, I'll bless you—oh, how I'll bless you! And I'll make sure that your children flourish—like stars in the sky! Like sand on the beaches! And your descendants will defeat their enemies. All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me."*⁵⁹

And this is how the New Century Version puts it, speaking to Abraham, viz.¹⁷ *I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. They will be as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, and they will capture the cities of their enemies.*¹⁸ *Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed, because you obeyed me.'*⁶⁰

Now, the same Bible tells the reader of Galatians, that ‘...¹⁶ *God made promises both to Abraham and to his descendant. God did not say, "and to your descendants." That would mean many people. But God said, "and to your descendant." that means only one person; that person is Christ.* Why this double talk in a document that is declared infallible? Surely the error cannot be with the Hebrew or the LXX texts since they precede the New Testament and are in full agreement on this passage? So why do the above translations disagree in the Genesis translation among themselves? Were some of them attempting to harmonize the offending text of the Hebrew Bible (OT) with the NT in the light

⁵⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, Copyright 2002

⁶⁰ Genesis 22:17-18; *New Century Version (NCV)* Thomas Nelson Publishers

of a prevailing Theology of Replacement that has existed since the earliest days of Christianity?⁶¹

Irrespective of this, a very serious question arises, why is this

Version	Occurs
KJV*	226
NIV	37
ASV*	224
ESV	40
NASB	58
NKJV	66
NRSV	42
RSV	45
LXX* (Grk.)	226
MT* (Hebr.)	287

Fig.1

segment in the Greek text there in the first place? Could Paul have made such a monumental error, this highly trained Pharisee and student of the great Gamaliel? The Hebrew word for seed זָרַע occurs 287 times in the Hebrew text (*see fig.1*) of the Hebrew Scriptures and ALWAYS in the singular.⁶² It is plain from the

major translations that the translators

understood the plural nature of the noun and rendered it as such in most cases. Surely, we need to ask, what did those translators think when they arrived at the Galatian passage— surely they must have recognized that there was a problem. And again, if the modern translators did recognize the problem, why was it not addressed since most people today do not have the opportunity to study Hebrew and Greek and so discover the textual discrepancies for themselves?

How come the Galatian passage is there in the first place— if it was indeed written by Paul? Did he not know his Torah?

⁶¹ See my book *Replacement Theology* available from my website <http://theolivetreeconnection.com/>

⁶² Although the word appears as a singular noun, most translators agree that it should be translated in the plural and therefore read *descendants* and thus point to the physical descendants of the Patriarchs.

Is it possible therefore, that there was another hand active in this epistle? If so, we must ask, why create such a distortion that so obviously demands the rejection of the Israelites as heirs of the ancient promises? Where will it lead, that if one begins to challenge the veracity of the NT text – especially the letters of Paul, regardless of version? Could we be opening a Pandora’s box that may prove impossible to shut?⁶³

From the evidence at hand, it is impossible to deny that there is a considerable conflict between the two passages; yet is a resolution possible?

What we really have before us is a confirmation that virtually all translators agree with the inherent plurality in the word זָרַיִ (zera) of Genesis 22 by rendering it that way. What is also obvious is that the translators of the NKJV, for example, arbitrarily applied the terms ‘descendants’ and ‘seed’ to the identical Hebrew word in the same passage of text. Seeing there was no other ancient Scriptural source available to the author of Galatians, apart from the Masoretic text and the Greek LXX — both of which also agree here — how come the interpretation by the author of Galatians is so far removed from the truth?

What matters greatly here is the fact that the person of Christ was artificially placed into a theological role, for which there is no foundation in the Scriptures— despite a plethora of attempts to make the Genesis text say so.⁶⁴ As mentioned above, the passage

⁶³ A disproportionate number of key OT quotes found in the New Testament are seriously distorted versions of the originals in the Tenakh.

⁶⁴ Allegorical interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures and the creation of the concept of ‘Original Sin’ led the early church fathers to believe that the coming of a deliverer was

is clearly nought but an allegorical midrash to highlight the significance of the ‘Christ-event’. Irrespective though of who wrote it; in all likelihood it was intended for the Galatian audience alone— not as ‘Scripture’ due to the serious conflict with the Genesis text.

I cannot help, but question a Paulian authorship, because there is another matter that is pushing its head up for recognition and that is of considerable significance for Christianity. This ‘*Seed Christology*’ teaches unequivocally that the physical descendants of Abraham must move over to make room for the [mostly Gentile] Christians as the *true heirs* of the Abrahamic promises.

The outworking of this can be seen in the relationship of utter contempt the Orthodox Church⁶⁵ in Israel has for the Jewish people. This contempt is not only visible among many of the Christian Clergy in Israel, but coming to the fore among many Christian pilgrims from various parts of the Earth.

This concept of ‘Replacement’ receives further support from the overarching theology of Galatians in its apparent diminution of the importance of the Torah, or law (3:18-25).

already promised by God in His interlude with Eve in the garden. The Douay Rheims Bible clearly shows the prevalent theological view among R.C. scholars. If this is taken to the full extent, then something is amiss when the Creator expresses His intent to destroy the earth, but changes His mind on account of Noah. If God had a Messiah in mind who would only emerge 4000 years later, when He spoke to Eve, then He must have only pretended to be so angry with Noah’s generation (Gen.6:5-8)!

⁶⁵ ‘Orthodox Church’ refers here to the entire Christian body - exclusive the Messianic movement. The denominational body called ‘The Orthodox Church’ is largely comprised of Greeks, Armenians, Russians and Arabs who are radically hostile to the Jewish people and consider them intruders into what they consider an exclusive Christian domain since 70 C.E.

In Conclusion:

J have no misgivings that the topics raised in this paper are of far-reaching significance! I also know that I am challenging some deep-seated, fundamental beliefs of Christianity and many cherished doctrines are rooted therein. These issues also touch on the very thing that was dearest to Jesus' heart, viz. an ethical application of knowledge. This is not about more theology or spiritual know-how! What this is about is a practical application of what we already do know. As James puts it, '*...faith without deeds is dead...*' and Paul agrees with him; (c/f. Rom.4:13-22).

In the beginning I made the assertion that the NT presents us with a considerable number of problems in terms of misquotations and mistranslations from the Hebrew Scriptures. I

then set out to prove that not only do these issues exist, but successive translators appear to have ignored them throughout the centuries that the Scriptures have been translated into vernacular tongues. I firmly believe that if we tackle these issues with courage and grapple honestly with various non-biblical church dogmas and preconceived ideas, we may be able to move forward with a doctrine of salvation that incorporates both Jew and Gentile from a truly Biblical perspective. The vision Paul puts forward in many of his epistles is one of (spiritual and theological) unity between Jew and Gentile. Yet, after two thousand years of Christianity we are nowhere near the fulfilment of that dream. Where is the One New Man that should have emerged by now after 2000 years of Christianity? He is not in the Church Universal and I cannot find enough convincing evidence that he can be found in the Messianic Movement either!

This means that we have missed something somewhere, which should therefore elicit from us a strong desire to find the answer. We clearly owe it to the generations to come to seek an explanation why this *New Man* has not emerged after 2000 years and why the Jewish and Christian worlds are no closer in real terms than they have been throughout the millennia. One major contributing factor that continues to divide the two sides is the issues addressed in this paper, namely the Torah and the seed of Abraham!

What I have sought to establish in the above is that the author, or perhaps a later editor of Galatians attempted to prove that the Mosaic Law is dead and gone. For him the Law is a curse and

utterly incompatible with faith. He also seeks to establish that God Himself told Abraham 430 years earlier that it was the [coming] Christ who would be the true heir to the promises He made to him and Sarah. All of that is done by misquoting passages from Genesis to prove that the promises could not have been made to the natural descendants.

When I speak with people concerning these issues, I am frequently appalled at the paucity of understanding what this 'law' really is. And it is the material I discussed above, which is a major contributor to the problem.

I would like to use an example from modern life to support my point. Many 'western style' nations have developed legal systems for the good of their people. These systems tell their respective citizens that they have certain liberties, for example in using roads and highways and generally feel relatively safe within the borders of their nation. However, they do not have to consult those underpinning legal documents on a daily, or minute by minute basis to know what to do. Does one have to consult a traffic manual every morning to use the roadways or drive a motorcar to work; etc, etc. One does not have to be told that stealing, or to murder someone is wrong, etc. We do these things by faith, trusting that we have memorized the rules for a given situation and act accordingly, trusting that everyone else is obeying the same rules/laws. However, do our governments discard the original documents upon which those rules are recorded? Would anyone say that these documents are now no longer required? I seriously doubt it! Indeed, many nations and large organizations have written constitutions, which underpin

and enshrine those rules for posterity, as a foundation and safeguard for the generations yet to come.

Nevertheless, I always have the option not to follow the rules and so do my own thing. The consequences will be all mine to bear. I cannot excuse myself and say, *'Oh, I did not wish to be a legalist and so I acted out of faith!'* It will not work, for if I destroyed someone's life or property because I did not follow the law of my country I will have to face the appropriate penalty. Also, if I wish to travel to a specific destination in a foreign country, I need to follow the markers left by others who had gone before me. I do not have the option to say, *'O I will just go in any direction, my destination can be any place!'* Nor can I afford the luxury of attempting to drive a car in a foreign country and not know the road rules—chances are I will break some out of ignorance and be punished!

The Epistles of Paul appear to tell us again and again that the law/Torah – and everything related to it - is obsolete; only faith counts. Many of these Epistles contain apparent quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures in support of thoughts expressed by their author. What I have shown here is a widespread practice of using such quotes, albeit out of context and many times distorted. I am suggesting in this study that there is something very wrong with the way texts from the Hebrew Scriptures have been used to prove NT issues. Concluding this study we have to say that there are considerable and easily recognizable problems in our translations, which should be investigated if Biblical Truth is important to us.

An old scouting rule tells us that if our compass is set wrongly at the starting point of our journey, there is no way we will arrive at our intended destination. ■

Selah!

Where to From Here?

This is quite likely the most difficult question of all. It is relatively easy to find fault, but immensely more difficult to provide a solution to the problem.

There cannot be any doubt that Christianity is in serious trouble



Fig. 2

as a global spiritual movement. On the positive side, the Christian movement has influenced the world enormously in turning more than a billion and a half people from an overt

paganism and the accompanying idolatry to a professed monotheism. However, this monotheism is not Biblical, because

it spread itself abroad in a Trinitarian form and never managed to eradicate pagan behaviour and practices from the midst of its own ranks by any means.⁶⁶ At best it has camouflaged paganism with a thin veneer that eventually began to crack in the years after WW II. That Christian veneer, however, has continued to crumble ever since and is vanishing away in the storms of this age. In Fig.2, for example, we can see intelligent men, in the 21st century dressed in women's frilly attire parading the skull of a long-dead priest in the streets of France to celebrate the patron saint of Brittany!!

Virtually daily someone arises who challenges any remaining vestige of Christian influence on communal life. Yet, there is never a credible counter challenge! Is it possible that this failure is based in the fact that Christianity has never truly entered the hearts of people, but remained a religion of ideals, forms and rules— while accusing Judaism of legalism?

The renaissance and the enlightenment did considerable damage to religion as a whole! I also believe the failure of Christianity since WWII, to provide the world with a solid bastion of moral strength, has widened the cracks made earlier in a weakened system and may now be responsible for its own demise. Failing to lead the world into the age of technology with a strong moral and ethical perspective indicates the inherent flaw of the system. Is it possible that there is a connection with the restoration of

⁶⁶ Christianity has permeated much of the world. However, Christian groups throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, India and the Latin American Countries have not abandoned ancient pagan rites and practices within their cultures; rather they syncretized them with Christian rites. Some tribes in Vietnam sacrifice chickens and drink their blood mixed with wine at Christian rituals; in the Philippines and South American countries demonic rituals are mingled with Easter rites and other R.C. festivals; etc.

Israel as a nation that Christianity also began to deteriorate as a global spiritual influence?

Since then the world has moved toward a blind optimistic proclamation that the pursuit of wealth would lead us to a Shangri-la of perpetual bliss. However, this super optimism has not fulfilled the hopes and dreams of modern man either. In fact, as Francis Schaeffer puts it in his book, *The God Who Is There*, man is now confronted with a dichotomy of an elevated, optimism in a brighter future, but that sits precariously poised over a meaningless logic.⁶⁷

Every global religion exists due to its myths, but they never claim any more. People may worship trees, stones, fire, or mystical beings, but somehow it does not occur to them, or it is immaterial to them, that they owe their existence to a higher force. This very thing was observed by the Hebrew prophets more than 2500 years ago. Yet, today even Christian worship has descended into meaningless observances without content in what often rivals entertainment venues. Religious language and songs have descended to a level where they still contain ‘god-words’ albeit without a deeper meaning. As time has moved on, Christianity has virtually abandoned any reliance on historicity and embraced concepts that are located in a faith without substance. As I pointed out elsewhere in this study, what matters to most of Christianity is a Christ of Faith⁶⁸ not a historical reality. So much in modern Christianity is based on faith

⁶⁷ Francis A.Schaeffer, *A Christian Worldview*, Vol.1 *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (Crossway Books: Westchester, Ill; 1982), p.57

⁶⁸ See page 5

concepts that are totally contrary to rationality because they have been deprived of content. The bottom line of the matter is that the traditional model of church has failed humanity. But then, did the alternative models of church have a greater success?

In this paper I have attempted to highlight how portions of the very book that should provide us with solid content, actually demands that the believer puts his trust in a totally unverifiable language.

Contrasting the above is the text of the Old Testament, presenting us with historical factors some of which are staring us in the face today; i.e. the Jewish people and the Hebrew Scriptures.

The original followers of Jesus had their faith tied solidly to history, which declared that something extraordinary had happened in Jerusalem— in addition to the rich history of their people originating in Egypt and beyond with Abraham. However, as time moved further and further away from that period, these physical markers laid down over thousands of years also disappeared into the mist of history. Accompanying this fading process was a gradual distortion of the historical writings handed down through generations of Hebrews. And, as the Gentiles drifted further and further away from their Jewish source, the veracity of the Christian versions of the Bible also seem to have deteriorated correspondingly as demonstrated above.

So where can we go from here?

I believe that the Jerusalem Council laid down fairly clear guidelines that should still be effective today. They pointed out that there is an entry level into our walk with God— a minimal code of ethics.

Every time I read that passage in Acts 15, I wonder whatever happened after that period in history. We are really left without any clue as to how the early ‘Christians’ conducted themselves; did they go to Synagogue, did they develop their separate houses of worship? What about their manner of worship? Did they continue in the temple as the rest of their people? But then, what about those living outside Israel in the Diaspora? On what basis did they establish their worship services? How was the Church of Rome, for example, established in the first place? These are questions that have never been answered in a letter like *‘The Acts of the Apostles’*! What we do know is that the followers of the Way DID worship in the temple in Jerusalem because the Book of Acts attests to it! This means that for forty years after Jesus his followers had no problem with the sacrificial system or the Hebrew way of life. This also means that Paul’s theology either did not reach Jerusalem or the ‘believers’ in Jerusalem did not accept his reasoning.

What we do see though after the destruction of the temple is a major shift to a mystical interpretation of Jesus’ life; two major contributors to this thought-form are the *Gospel of John* and the *Book of Hebrews*. Both of these books contain material, which is solidly non-Hebraic and often outright hostile to the Jewish

people, with a confused understanding of Covenant⁶⁹ and Torah. Both books reflect a heavy Platonic influence with a pounding emphasis on the ‘upper-story real world’ that is only barely reflected in this one.⁷⁰

What I have highlighted in the pages of this study underscores the need for a solid, Hebrew Scriptures-based research into the texts of the NT; especially the Epistles. There is much good in them, however, there is also sufficient evidence that an honest re-appraisal of the NT as Scripture needs to take place.

In my mind there is no question that, based on all the available evidence from the NT, the way of faith for Gentiles was derailed by Hellenistic and other influences. In doing so, the historic Jesus of Nazareth was **a)** alienated from his own people, and **b)** replaced by a Christ of faith who is disconnected from his own Hebraic roots. Platonic and later Aristotelian thought-forms have assisted in developing a religion of ideals that was promoted in Western forms and rules totally disconnected from their ancient source and the people out of whom it had taken life.

There is a way forward, but that requires courage and commitment to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Covenants He made with their descendants. I believe that it is only in unity with them that this earth will see the true redemption and the dawn of the true Messianic Age.

⁶⁹ By anti-covenant I understand the Covenants from Abraham onwards. For more detail please consult my article *The Covenant in Hebrews 8 & 9*

⁷⁰ This division is strongly emphasized in much of Christian art throughout the first millennium of Christianity

As I said, the Jerusalem Council still has things to teach us today. I believe that it offers sufficient evidence that Kepha (Simon Peter), Yaakov (James) and the others opened the door to Gentiles to come into the fold on a faith basis; albeit linked to certain restrictions rooted in God's Covenant with Noah. However, once they joined up, they would have been expected to learn, as Hillel had taught.

Gentile mankind is extremely frail in spiritual terms and highly susceptible to all kinds of superstitions. And, as I pointed out in my example of the black American slaves, unless a slave is trained in how to live as a free person, his chances of survival are minimal. The Torah is the perfect example of how a loving Sovereign provided His subjects with a constitution upon which they could build their lives and live as free people. James, in his letter, makes it clear that the Torah is an instrument of liberty — not of bondage as preached by the church (James 1:25).

Finally, the Scriptures never teach that man could find acceptance before a holy Creator through an observance of a set of rules, rather by a freewill acknowledgement of Him as the supreme ruler. Through the Noahic Covenant, the Gentiles always had access to God in the manner of Abraham. That has never changed and can be observed in Ruth, the Moabitess, who became the ancestor of King David, the epitome of God's Ruler on earth.

The Torah is God's gift to Israel, and by extension to all humanity, to serve as a sure guide to peace on earth for all who desire to know the living Creator God. That God, however, must

become a living reality among all who call upon Him. His presence must be allowed to invade every nook and cranny of our lives, each and every day; especially our homes. Nothing must remain hidden from Him. Not that anything could be hidden, to be sure, but voluntarily exposed to Him by a free-will gesture and a repentant lifestyle.⁷¹

Selah!

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⁷¹ By repentant is meant a continuing turning from a self-centred and self-serving way of living to another and God-centred way.

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KJV, NKJV, NIV, RSV, NRSV, Jerusalem Bible, Living Bible, Philips New Testament, New American Standard Bible, American Standard Bible

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