

The WildBranch Ministry

*...thou bearest not the root, but the root
thee. Romans 11:18*

Frequently Asked Questions

Galatians 4:8-10: Is Torah Weak and Beggarly?

Anytime an association is made between the people of YHVH and Torah, there are a handful of knee jerk scriptures that are quoted that are supposed to put a sock in the mouths of anyone who dares to proffer such a relationship. I would like to spend some time in our teaching section on those scriptures. You know which ones I mean. The majority of texts that are brought up come from Sha'ul and his teachings. I believe it is an understatement to say that Sha'ul is misunderstood. My personal experience is that most 'Christians' I encounter know virtually nothing about his background or the source of his teaching. Scripture is clear about who Sha'ul was and still is, and about his perspective. Sha'ul is from the tribe of Binyamin (Philippians 3:5). Because of Binyamin's union with Y^ehudah, Sha'ul is called a Y^ehudah (Acts 22:3). Sha'ul was circumcised on the eighth day and is of the stock of Israel (Philippians 3:5). He is an Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). This is a Hebrew doublet teaching that he was Hebrew to the core. Most important of all is that Sha'ul worshipped the Elohiym of his fathers, believing (trusting) ALL things written in Torah and in the prophets (Acts 24:14). Everything that Sha'ul has written MUST be seen in light of these facts.

I would like to begin by listing some presupposed notions that are commonly taught and understood by most readers of the Brit Chadashah. Many times we find ourselves teaching deeper theology, which I shall call 'XYZ', that is based upon faulty 'ABC's'. These are statements and assumptions that would behoove us to ponder before teaching words and phrases from scripture.

Assumption No. 1

The word 'law' in the New Testament is referring to Torah or the law of YHVH.

Assumption No. 2

Any mention of feasts or observances are speaking of the seven feasts of YHVH.

Assumption No. 3

Jews are the only people who observe days, months, and years.

Assumption No. 4

Any negative comments Yahshua or Sha'ul make are directed at the Jews.

Assumption No. 4

The 'church' began at Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2.

Assumption No. 5

Israel is only those who come from the loins of Avraham.

We need to keep some of these assumptions in mind as we begin with Galatians 4:8-10.

"Nevertheless then, when ye knew not Elohiym, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after ye have known God, or rather are known by God, how turn ye to the weak and beggarly elements, unto which ye desire again to be in bondage. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."

It is always amazing to me to watch how quickly the right hand can betray the left hand. I read a commentary recently on this book, in which the writer carefully established the audience of Sha'ul's letter before blasting the obsolete 'law' as allegedly taught by Sha'ul in the schoolmaster comments in chapter 3. He spent a good deal of time establishing the fact that the letter was written to believing Gentiles who were being coerced by 'Jewish converts' to believe that in addition to salvation in Yahshua, they must obey Torah and be circumcised. In other words, the blood of Yahshua was not enough to save, and they needed to add Torah obedience as well. Now, in general, I would heartily agree. But after establishing that Sha'ul's audience was Gentile, he quickly turned the same audience into 'legalistic' Jews. Quickly the 'weak and beggarly elements' became Torah and the observances of days, months, times and years became 'Old Testament' observances. This is because if he would have remained with his initial audience, Gentiles, then he would have had a tough time explaining that those who worshipped other gods and 'knew not Elohiym' were Jews.

Let's talk about some of the terms and phrases that Sha'ul uses here. It is generally understood by most Christians scholars that it is the 'Jews' who did not 'receive' the Messiah, and it was the world (gentiles, nations) that did not 'know' him. This is drawn from several places, not the least of which is Yochanan 1:9-11

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world KNEW HIM NOT. He came unto HIS OWN, and His own RECEIVED HIM NOT."

This identification of Gentiles as being those who in the past worshipped other gods and 'knew not Elohiym', continues to fit the context of the letter which is generally to Gentiles. They are the ones, according to Yochanan the apostle, who did not KNOW the Messiah.

Before we tackle the 'weak and beggarly elements' let's go over assumption number one, that any mention of the law is referring to Torah or the law of YHVH. According to Romans chapter two, there is a distinction between the Torah of the God of Israel and the natural law of the Gentiles, not to mention Roman law, Greek law and a host of other laws actively followed by many at the time the Brit Chadashah is written.

Romans 2:14-15

"For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. . ."

The phrase 'works of the law' discussed by Sha'ul in the first three chapters includes Torah, but is not limited to Torah. Why? Because the nations did not have Torah. The nations were accountable to their own law and their own works. 'Works of the law' are ALL works and attempts to gain salvation through or by your own merit. If the Y^ehudim, who have the Torah of YHVH return to Torah for the purpose of 'gaining' or 'keeping' their redemption, then they are under the 'curse of Torah', according to Galatians 3:10-13. If, however, the Gentiles return to the worldly system they left behind for the same reason, then they are equally under the same curse. The 'curse of the law' is not the law itself, but our inability to keep it. If our deliverance is based upon the keeping of any 'law', and we are incapable of keeping them, then we are 'cursed'. Why is that so hard to figure out?

We are told by Sha'ul throughout many of his letters that it is the Gentiles who worship the 'unknown God' or flat out worship other deities and pagan gods. Sha'ul has not changed this pattern, to my knowledge. The next domino falls when we look at Torah being called 'weak' or 'beggarly'. This one is a hard one to stomach, but I have heard the instructions of YHVH called much worse. It would take up considerable time here to give you all the terms that YHVH uses to describe his commandments and instructions. Suffice it to say that most of the comments in the Tenakh, and the Brit Chadashah for that matter, that are made about Torah are also addressed to the nature of YHVH himself. Torah, we are taught, is holy, righteous, the truth, freedom, and the way to walk. Torah is light, life, good, and just. This is why He begins the gospel of Yochanan by stating that the 'word' of Elohiym IS Elohiym. One thing I can assure you, nowhere, and I mean nowhere, are the laws and instructions of YHVH ever called weak and beggarly. Torah, however, is incapable of delivering you from sin. This is only because Torah is not designed to deliver you from sin. Redemption is not found in obedience to Torah, for it is by grace through faith that we are saved. Torah is holy and good because it shows us how to live.

So, let's go on. Weak and beggarly are *'asthenes* and *'ptochos* respectively in the Greek. These are words that are dominantly translated as 'sick' and 'poor' in the Brit Chadashah (Mattityahu 19:21, 25:39; Luke 14:21; Acts 5:16; Hitgalut 3:17). The word 'elements' here is the Greek word *stoicheion*. This word in it's root means 'a way to walk'. It is best used in Colossians 2.

Colossians 2:8

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the RUDIMENTS of the world, and not after the Messiah."

Here we see again the direct relationship between worldly philosophies, vain deceit, traditions of men, and the rudiments or elements of the world. Here, and in our Galatians text, we have no references to the ways of our Creator as established and taught in the Tenakh. Although the Torah of YHVH is not designed to atone for your sin, it is dramatically different from the 'law' of the Gentiles in that it contains the issues of life. The 'works of the law' or our own works do not bless us, only the Torah of YHVH can do that (D'varim 11:27, 28:1-13). In our Galatians text, Sha'ul is saying, "I have delivered you from the sick and beggarly ways you used to walk, do not go back to your old ways." Once a person is free from bondage and can get up and stand, Torah then teaches us how to walk.

Sha'ul warns us in verse 9 not to desire to place yourself back in bondage again. The word bondage is the same word as a servant. Sha'ul spent a good deal of time explaining the two kinds of servants in the 6th chapter of the book of Romans.

Romans 6:17-18

"But 'Elohiym be thanked, that whereas ye were the SERVANTS of SIN, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being, then, made free from SIN, ye became the SERVANTS of RIGHTEOUSNESS."

We will take up this entire chapter in Romans a little later as it contains the famous, "we are no longer under the law" excuse. Suffice it to say, however, that the summary of this chapter is that man cannot be saved by the law because man does not keep the law.

Yahshua said it best in Yochanan 8:31-34:

"Then said Yahshua to those Y^ehudim who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We are Avraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Yahshua answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."

Yahshua, in Yochanan 8:28-29, had just finished saying that everything He says and does comes from the Father. The conclusion is that if one continues in the word, he shall be free, or one can remain a servant of sin. Trusting in the Messiah and continuing in the word of His father sets you free from sin. Nowhere is there EVER an intimation that the Messiah sets you free from Torah. It is the penalty of the violation of Torah that the Messiah has set us free from.

Now we come to assumption No. 3, the accusation that the observance of days, months, and times, and years, are 'Jewish' observances. Here we have the most profound case of blindness, for even the most cursory examination of the cultures of any civilization are filled with the study and observation of days, months, times, and years. Why, in an almost Pavlov way, do so many commentators jump to the conclusion that these are 'Jewish' observances? Who is our audience here? The Tenakh is full of warnings by YHVH to stay away from the astrologers, observers of times, and stargazers of the nations (D'varim 4:19, 18:10-11; Yesha'yahu 47:3; Daniel 2:2). These ungodly cultures sought the movement of celestial bodies to advise their lives and their futures. They depended upon heavenly formations as indicators of the coming wrath of the gods or the pouring out of their grace. Certain days and months were bad luck because of the positions of various constellations. These observances kept their followers in bondage to them. This verse has nothing to do with the ordained beginning of months, times, and years as given to us by our Creator from the very beginning. I would like to know what it is that lives within us that drives us to accept the teaching that Yahshua made obsolete the observances that His Father gave, but has no problem with the pagan observances of days, months, times, and years. I would take that a step further. Why does the Christian religion teach that man's laws are for today but God's laws are not? It has always been true that man, in general, cannot tolerate the 613 commandments of the God of Israel, and only rarely complains about the tens of thousands of laws propagated by his own country.

If Galatians 4 is taken in the context of ALL of scripture, then the reference here is to Gentiles who have been delivered from their 'own works' and are exhorted not to go back to them or their 'gods' for deliverance. Bondage is always in reference to sin. Torah is never called 'weak and beggarly', and ALL cultures observe their own days, and months, and times, and years. I believe that if you study scripture very carefully, you will see that the problem from the beginning has always been the pitiful behavior of man and not the validity of Torah. Next time we will discuss the two covenants of Galatians 4:19-31.

Shalom Alecheim!

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