

What Does “Under the Law” Really Mean?

A FURTHER STUDY

by J.K. McKee posted 10 June, 2011 www.tnnonline.net

In the discussion over the validity and relevance of the Torah for today's Believers in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), there is one particular issue that is a cause of significant confusion and consternation: **Is it not true that we are *not* under the Law?**¹ No responsible Bible reader can ignore or deny what passages like Romans 6:14 communicate: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” If we want to be honest with what the Bible tells us, then it is true that born again Believers are **not** under the Law.

Within a great deal of contemporary speech and jargon employed today, using a phrase like “under the law” is a colloquialism akin to “according to/in accordance with/by/defined by/via the law.” This is something that we have all used at one point or another. When we watch the news and see a reporter say something like “Under the law of the State of Texas murderers can expect to be given the death penalty,” the usage of “under the law” is intended to more accurately mean: “According to the law of the State of Texas murderers can expect to be given the death penalty.” For some reason or another, though, using the terminology “under the law” is a bit more common for some modern people than “according to the law.”

Challenges can certainly exist when terms, phrases, or expressions that are used in modern English (and in particular American English) are automatically assumed to mean the same thing in the Bible. When we see the phrase “under the Law” employed in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), does it mean “according to the Law”? It is probably safe to say that “under the Law” meaning some kind of obedience or adherence to the Mosaic Torah is deeply engrained into the minds of many Bible readers, being rather calcified into their psyche—and this is even found among some of the best expositors and theologians. **Only** by carefully analyzing the Biblical text can any of us get a good feel for not only what “under the Law” really means, **but also** recognizing where it legitimately appears in the original language. It also behooves us to be able to fairly diagnose what the issues are which necessitated the original Biblical use of the phrase “under the Law.”

A significant obstacle to be overcome as it regards the proper meaning of “under the Law” is what it means to our overall reading of the Scriptures. Is not being “under the Law” intended to convey that God's people no longer have to obey God's Law? Yeshua the Messiah not only upholds the validity of Torah of Moses in His teachings, but He actually assigns rewards and penalties to those who teach obedience to it, versus those who discount and disobey it (Matthew 5:17-19). In contrast to this, it is commonly concluded that when a man like the Apostle Paul taught that Messiah followers are not to be “under the Law,” it means that they should not be concerned with keeping that much (if any at all) of the Torah. If “under the Law” is interpreted as meaning obedient to the Law, then would someone like Paul be found to not only *contradict* the Messiah—but would he also be found to merit some kind of “least” status in the Kingdom?

I have certainly written on the topic of what “under the Law” really means before,² providing some worthwhile answers to the various Pauline passages, which if viewed carefully do not stand in contradiction to Yeshua's words upholding the relevance of the Torah. The issue largely pertains to what we interpret “under the Law” to mean: being Torah obedient *or* being something else. If born again Believers not being “under the Law” means something else, how does it affect our reading of various verses that are largely interpreted as meaning that Torah obedience is a thing of past, pre-resurrection history?

Because of how important Torah observance is—including practices like honoring the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher—to the broad Messianic movement, some further study on the issue of what “under the Law” really means is in order. More dialogue and consideration of what various theologians have said is needed. More

¹ This article has been reproduced from the forthcoming paperback edition of *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

² The author's article “What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?” has been reproduced in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

consideration for the ancient historical setting of the passages must be factored in. More reflection on the proper application of the instructions issued in the Apostolic Scriptures is doubtlessly required. But perhaps most critical of all, what is imperatively needed is a significant identification of those verses that actually use the Greek clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) for “under the law”—and those verses that do not use *hupo nomon*, but where an English version has used the rendering “under the law” for some (errant) theological reason.

This further study of what “under the Law” really means, will consider some of the strengths and weaknesses today’s Messianic Believers have, especially when a Christian family member or friend exclaims “We’re not under the Law!” Not only will this analysis provide some more detailed answers to those who are skeptical of a Messianic’s Torah obedience, but it is engaged with contemporary thought and opinion surrounding the terminology “under the Law,” and why “under the Law” meaning “obedient to the Torah of Moses” is a poor conclusion. Most of all, for the purposes of this further study, be aware that I have used the **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**. You will see that the RSV uses the phraseology “under the law” far more frequently than a version like the New American Standard (NASU) does, which I more commonly use. Using the RSV for this article will enable us to examine more Biblical passages, and consider whether or not a rendering like “under the Law” was chosen on linguistic, or some other grounds, by its translators.

The Source Language Issues Concerning “Under the Law”

Our ultimate appeal as Bible readers and examiners, as it pertains to what “under the Law” really means, has to be made to the source text that sits behind our English translations. It would not only be too convenient, but even a bit haphazard, for any of us to simply type in a few search criteria via some Bible software program for “under law,” and then conclude that the results include *just* the places where the Greek clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) appears. When one does such a search, *more* verses actually appear. The exegete has to be able to sort out those verses where *hupo nomon* or “under law” actually occurs, from those others where an English translation has chosen to use “under law” for reasons other than an essentially literal rendering.

In his position article appearing in Zondervan’s *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (which he labels as a modified Lutheran approach to the Torah), Douglas J. Moo rightly details how in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, “Paul uses the phrase ‘under [the] law’ (*hypo nomon*) eleven times (Rom. 6:14, 15; 1 Cor. 9:20 [four occurrences]; Gal. 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18). The omission of the article in each instance does not indicate that Paul is thinking of divine ‘law’ in general or of law as a principle...As the context in each case makes clear, the law to which Paul refers is the Mosaic law, the *tôrâ* [תּוֹרָה].”³ These are the same Pauline passages we will be primarily evaluating below as it pertains to what “under the Law” really means.

If one were to do a textual search of the Revised Standard Version with the search criteria “under law,” some additional passages appear where the clause *hupo nomon* does not appear in the Greek source text but where “under [the] law” does appear in English translation (Romans 2:12; Philippians 3:6; Hebrews 9:22; James 2:12). Other related passages of interest, where the English preposition “under” appears and where the Torah is being referred to in some way also should be noted (Romans 7:6; Hebrews 7:11). Within the New Revised Standard Version, Luke 2:27 can be added to the list of where “under [the] law” terminology appears, with *hupo nomon* absent from the source text. Recognizing all of this is important because your average Bible reader, and even many pastors, will be influenced by these English occurrences of “under [the] law,” and will frequently expel no effort to dissect these references any further.

As Messianic Believers, we need to be especially aware of how an English version like the RSV—which has been used in a great number of theological works for six decades or so—legitimately uses “under [the] law” for *hupo nomon*, and illegitimately renders other Greek clauses

³ Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 361.

as “under [the] law” in various places. We need to have informed answers to critics who believe that obedience to God’s Torah is not expected of born again Believers in the post-resurrection era.⁴

The Available Interpretations Concerning “Under the Law”

While it eludes many of your average laypersons, Christian *and* Messianic alike, there is certainly discussion within theological works as to how Bible readers should approach the Greek clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον), which is literally rendered as “under [the] law.” The Greek preposition *hupo* (ὑπό) is followed by the accusative case (indicating direct object) noun *nomon* (νόμον). Given the usage of a preposition like *hupo* with an accusative case noun, limits the array of possible definitions or applications. Surveying a selection of the available lexical definitions for *hupo* with an accusative case noun, *hupo* can either relate to being in a place, being subjected to some kind of an authority, or being in bondage to something. The following have been excerpted from a selection of Greek lexicons:

- Liddell-Scott: “with accus. of Place, *towards and under*, ὑπὸ σπέος ἤλασε μῆλα drove them *under*, i.e. *into*, the cave, Il.; ὑπὸ ζυγὸν ἤγαγεν Od.; ὑπὸ δικαστήριον ἄγειν to bring *under* or *before* the tribunal, Hdt.”⁵
- BDAG: “marker of that which is in a controlling position, *under, under the control of, under obligation* in ref. to power, rule, sovereignty, command, etc. w. acc...ὑπὸ τινα εἶναι *be under someone’s power* (Thu. 6, 86, 4; PSI 417, 36 [III BC] ὑπὸ τὸν ὄρκον εἶναι) Gal 3:25; 4:2; ὑφ’ ἀμαρτίαν Ro 3:9; ὑπὸ νόμον 6:14, 15 (both opp. ὑπὸ χάριν); 1 Cor 9:20abcd; Gal 4:21; 5:18; ὑπὸ κατάραν 3:10. ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα vs. 23. γινόμενος ὑπὸ νόμον Gal 4:4 (γίνομαι gd and Thu. 1, 110, 2 Αἴγυπτος ὑπὸ βασιλέα ἐγένετο). ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι vs. 3. συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἀμαρτίαν 3:22 (s. συγκλείω 2). πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν Ro 7:14. ταπεινώθητε ὑπὸ τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ θεοῦ...οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον *those who are under (the power of, obligation to) the law* Gal 4:5 (Just., D. 45, 3 [w. art.]; cp. X., Cyr. 3, 3, 6 τινὰς τῶν ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦς).”⁶
- Friberg Lexicon: “(2) with the accusative; (a) denoting place *under, below, underneath* (MT 8.8; JN 1.48); (b) denoting submission or subjection to authority, rule, command, power *under* (LU 7.8; GA 3.25); (c) denoting subjection or bondage to a moral force, such as sin (GA 3.22), law (GA 4.5).”⁷

These lexical references should at least give us an idea about the kinds of concepts we will need to sort through, as we evaluate what “under [the] law” really means. It is true that those who conclude that “under [the] law” means being obedient to the Torah, have available lexical definitions. At the same time, those who may conclude that “under [the] law” is some kind of

⁴ It needs to be absolutely stressed to the Messianic Believer reading that Hebrew translations of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures produced over the past century will be largely unreliable for any appeal to be made regarding the correct meaning of “under the Law.”

Among the verses where *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) actually appears in the Greek New Testament, the 1991 UBS Hebrew New Testament renders *hupo nomon* several different ways. This includes “hand (of) the Torah” or *yad ha’Torah* (יַד הַתּוֹרָה); Romans 6:14-15), “under (the) hand (of) the Torah” or *tachat yad ha’Torah* (תַּחַת יַד הַתּוֹרָה); Galatians 3:23), “to/for/by the Torah” or *l’Torah* (לְתוֹרָה); 1 Corinthians 9:20; Galatians 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18). These different renderings all demonstrate some distinct theological value judgments as to what *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” really means.

A neutral Hebrew rendering for the Greek *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) would best be *tachat ha’Torah* (תַּחַת הַתּוֹרָה) or “under the Torah,” or *tachat Torah* (תַּחַת תּוֹרָה) or “under Torah.” The Hebrew preposition *tachat* (תַּחַת) really does mean “under, beneath” (CHALOT, 389). Adding the noun *yad* (יַד) in various places, which can mean either “hand” or “power” (CHALOT, pp 127, 128), can certainly complicate things.

⁵ LS, 840.

⁶ BDAG, 1036.

⁷ BibleWorks 8.0: Friberg Lexicon.

condition or status that does not mean being obedient to the Torah, have enough open to them as well to make their case. We might consider how 2 Maccabees 7:36 in the Apocrypha uses the phrase *hupo diathēkēn Theou* (ὑπὸ διαθήκην θεοῦ), “under [the] covenant of God,” and how it could mean either being subjected to the power of God’s covenant *or* being in a place where God’s covenant is to be contrasted to an opposing negative force:

“For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life **under God’s covenant**; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance.”

The dialogue of Matthew 8:9 and Luke 7:8 does demonstrate how the preposition *hupo* can be used to speak of someone “under authority.” The centurion tells Yeshua in Luke 7:8, “I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me,” *hupo exousian tassomenos echōn hup’ emauton stratiōtas* (ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν τασσόμενος ἔχων ὑπ’ ἑμαυτὸν στρατιώτας). This being “under authority” *or* *hupo exousian*, though, is clearly within the context of a military chain of command.⁸

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, as part of Paul’s response to the errant slogan of the Corinthians, he retorts back with “I will not be under authority by any” (YLT), *ouk egō exousiasthēsomai hupo tinos* (οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπὸ τινος), attempting to expose the futility of those who think they can do anything. Here within Paul’s letters is definitely a usage where the preposition *hupo* in association with some kind of submission to an authority is intended—but where Paul’s logic is that with these Corinthians thinking that anything is permitted for them, with no authority supposedly to be submitted to, they will find themselves in bondage as sin will get the better of them.⁹

Within the lexical sphere, *BDAG* takes Paul’s statement in Galatians 4:5, “to redeem those who were under the law,” and identifies *hoi hupo nomon* (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον) as “those who are under (the power of, obligation to) the law.”¹⁰ Is this to be taken as Yeshua the Messiah being sacrificed so that Jewish people do not have to observe (any of) the Torah of Moses any more (discussed further)? Or, is being “under the Law” a negative spiritual condition which Yeshua’s sacrifice renders inoperative, in the lives of those who know Him? Later, in Romans 6:14-15, the Apostle Paul writes, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” The *BDAG* lexicon indicates here that the clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under law” is used twice, and that they are “both opp[osite] ὑπὸ χάριν,”¹¹ the clause *hupo charin* being “under grace.”

In a passage like Romans 6:14-15 we see *hupo nomon* serving as the definite antithesis of *hupo charin*—as born again Believers who recognize Yeshua are certainly those “under grace.” This should give Bible readers a significant pause to evaluate whether or not “under [the] law” really does mean obedient to God’s Torah. *Does it actually make any sense to not be obedient to God’s Law, but be a beneficiary of God’s grace?* Later in Romans 7:14, the hypothetical “I” sinner recognizes, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin,” *hupo tēn hamartian* (ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν). If *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” is contrary to *hupo charin* or “under grace,” then it should also be that *hupo tēn hamartian* or “under [the] sin” is contrary to *hupo charin* or “under grace.” And, if “under [the] law” and “under sin” are connected to one another as being a negative condition, would “under [the] law” really mean being obedient to God’s Torah?

Asking these kinds of critical questions, we are largely only left with the Biblical text and where the clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) actually appears, to determine what it really means by how it is used. While lexically speaking it is possible for “under the Law” to mean obedient to God’s Torah, it is also lexically possible for “under the Law” to mean a location of status that is to give way to people being “under grace” when they have Yeshua’s salvation. With this in mind, it is crucial for us to see what interpreters have said about what “under the Law” really means. Even

⁸ From a strict linguistic standpoint, “under authority of the law” would be something along the lines of *hupo exousian nomou* (ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν νόμου).

⁹ Be sure to have consulted the previous analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23.

¹⁰ *BDAG*, 1036.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

though Moo himself believes that obedience to the Torah was only a part of the pre-resurrection era, he is at least fair in summarizing the three main options of what “under the Law” could mean:

“We do not presume that ‘under the law’ must connote the same idea in each of its occurrences, although the stereotypical flavor of the phrase may point in this direction. Three general meanings of the phrase are popular: (1) under the condemnation pronounced by the law; (2) under a legalistic perversion of the law; and (3) under the law as a regime or power in a general sense.”¹²

It is safe to say that the **third** position of “under the Law” meaning obedience to the Mosaic Torah is the most common that one will encounter in today’s theological works, and certainly in popular preaching when it is declared that born again Christians are not to be “under the Law.” The **first** position of “under the Law” meaning subjected to the Torah’s penalties and condemnation declared upon Law-breakers is frequently found among interpreters who have a high view of the Torah’s ethical and moral instructions. The **second** position of “under the Law” relating to some kind of legalism is frequently found among today’s Messianics.

Is it at all possible that the clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) means some kind of legalism? As far as many of today’s Messianics go in evaluating what “under the Law” really means, is to assume that it just means “legalism.” Within the works of Messianic Jewish theologian David H. Stern, most especially including his *Jewish New Testament*, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, and *Complete Jewish Bible*, he takes the position that the Greek clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου), more accurately means “in subjection to the system which results in perverting the *Torah* into legalism.”¹³ He notably renders Romans 6:14-15 with,

“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace. Therefore, what conclusion should we reach? ‘Let’s go on sinning, because we’re not under legalism but under grace?’ Heaven forbid!” (CJB).

Justifying this translation, Stern remarks in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* that “The word twice translated ‘under,’ *upo* [ὑπό], means ‘controlled by’...or ‘in subjection to,’”¹⁴ which leads him to conclude that the best translation of *nomos* (νόμος) is “legalism,” rather than just “Law” or “Torah.” While perverting the Torah of God into legalism is surely something that is wrong, critics of the Messianic movement could legitimately attack Stern for subjectively rendering *nomos* as “legalism” in some places,¹⁵ and then as “*Torah*” in others where the Mosaic Law is certainly being referenced. While Stern’s works have certainly helped the Messianic community, it is notable that his JNT/CJB version is not a literal translation, and thus it cannot be used as a prime source work in refuting any anti-Torah attitudes that one may encounter in contemporary Christian theology. And, can “under legalism” really stand in considerable contrast to “under grace”?

Stern’s view of *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) or “under the Law” being akin to some kind of legalistic perversion/manipulation of the Torah, is not the only one which has been proposed by Messianics regarding what “under the Law” really means. Author Aaron Eby concludes in his book *Boundary Stones*,

“What then does being ‘under the law’ mean? The letter to the Galatians is not against obeying the Torah; it’s against using the ritual of conversion (circumcision) to become Jewish as a means of salvation. The ones relying on the conversion ritual are the ones ‘under the law.’...To be

¹² Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 361.

¹³ David H. Stern, trans., *Jewish New Testament* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), xxiv.

Here, Stern says that he follows the conclusions of Cranfield, *Romans* 9:16, 853.

¹⁴ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 374.

¹⁵ Places within the CJB where *nomos* or “law” has been rendered as “legalism,” and where “*Torah*” would seem more appropriate, include: Romans 4:13-14; 6:14-15; Galatians 2:21; 3:11-12; 5:4; Philippians 3:6, 9.

‘under the law’ does not mean being obedient to the commandments but to use one’s supposed legal Jewish status to give an excuse to sin.”¹⁶

Eby is correct that much of the polemic in the Epistle to the Galatians is issued against non-Jewish Believers being forced to become circumcised as ethnic Jewish proselytes, contrasted to how faith in Israel’s Messiah reckons all as members of God’s people. In fact, the language in Galatians 5:3 of *panti anthrōpō* (παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ) or “every human being” not being circumcised, would include women. “Circumcision” in Galatians, then, is largely a shorthand way of Paul referring to the ritual of a proselyte convert to Judaism. But does “under the Law” meaning a legal Jewish status at all stand up to scrutiny, when redemption from being “under the Law” (Galatians 4:5) as associated with some kind of confinement (Galatians 3:23), is crucial to Paul discussing a major condition from which people should be freed? In Galatians 5:18 he asks his audience, “But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.” Does this mean that if one is led by the Holy Spirit, he or she will not be a legal “Jew”?

A similar, albeit heavily modified view, of “under the Law” pertaining to a legal Jewish status as a circumcised proselyte, is also noted by Tim Hegg in his Romans commentary. His position is,

“In summary, then, ‘under the Law (Torah)’ means primarily ‘under the condemnation of the Torah,’ or may define those who are relying upon the Torah to give them a ‘Jewish status’ which they believe is the means of covenant membership. Thus...being ‘under the condemnation of the Torah’ is contrasted with ‘being under grace.’ Those who are ‘under the Torah’ are those who (whether Jews or Gentiles who turned proselyte) are relying upon their Jewish status...for covenant membership, and as such, remain under the condemnation of the Torah. In contrast, those who are ‘under grace’ have relied entirely upon God’s gift of salvation as a matter of His pure and sovereign grace.”¹⁷

To Hegg’s credit, he has tried to consider the role of the **first** position of “under the Law” meaning “under the condemnation pronounced by the law.”¹⁸ Yet within this, he has included the view of that “under the Law” also can pertain to those who seek a status of “justification” via their Jewish ethnicity, whether by birth or proselyte conversion, but are in error for doing so. This is much better than Eby’s view, as it seeks for “under the Law” to be an appropriate contrast to born again Believers being “under grace.” Yet, when “under the Law” or *hupo nomon* appears in the Apostolic Scriptures, is it really used to distinguish the ethnic status of persons—as either Jews, proselytes, or of the nations—or a **salvation status**?

Messianic interpreters of the New Testament are entirely right to question whether or not being “under the Law” means obedient to God’s Torah, not only in view of Yeshua’s steadfast word in favor of Torah obedience (Matthew 5:17-19), but also in how “under the Law” has to serve as an appropriate contrast to being “under grace.” But does “under the Law” meaning legalism, some kind of legal Jewish or proselyte status, or condemnation because one is relying upon his or her legal Jewish or proselyte status—really give us an appropriate counterpart to the redeemed being “under grace”? As a Messianic interpreter myself, I am not entirely convinced that any of these alternatives deals adequately with how *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) is used within the text.

Given the weakness of “under the Law” meaning some kind of legalism, all an interpreter like Moo can conclude is, “I will argue that it is only the third interpretation that can do justice to the evidence, that the second meaning is not present at all, and that the first may be included, along with the third, in some places.”¹⁹ While Moo asserts that the **third** position of “under the law as a regime or power in a general sense,” is the only one that can be consistently argued throughout all of the passages where *hupo nomon* appears—it is good that he recognizes that the **first** position

¹⁶ Aaron Eby, *Boundary Stones: Divine Parameters for Faith and Life* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2008), 33.

¹⁷ Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, 155.

¹⁸ Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 361.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of *hupo nomon* meaning “under the condemnation pronounced by the law”²⁰ may appear in some locations.

So what option of *hupo nomon* (ὕπὸ νόμου) or “under the Law” do we really need to be considering, and weighing into our deliberations of the various verses in question? This analysis of what “under the Law” really means will argue that “under the Law” meaning obedient to God’s Torah, is an unsustainable position to hold to, if Yeshua the Messiah truly bid His followers to keep the Torah *and* the New Covenant promise includes a supernatural transcription of Moses’ Teaching onto the hearts and minds of the redeemed (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27). This analysis of what “under the Law” really means will argue that the **first** position for it concerning a subjection to the Torah’s condemnation and curse declared upon sinners, can be consistently argued as the correct viewpoint for all of the places where *hupo nomon* appears in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

“Under the Law” meaning **subject to the Torah’s condemnation and penalties upon Law-breakers** serves as the only appropriate contrast to born again Believers being “under grace.” It recognizes the locational nature of the preposition *hupo*. It makes the antitheses of being “under the Law” versus “under grace” two different soteriological conditions: one that a person experiences when *unsaved*, subject to guilt from the violation of God’s statutes and ordinances; and one that a person experiences when *saved*, able to fully access God’s grace and mercy in the good news of redemption in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus).

New Testament Passages that Legitimately Use *Hupo Nomon* or “Under the Law”

There are eleven verses within the Greek Apostolic Scriptures that legitimately employ the clause *hupo nomon* (ὕπὸ νόμου) or “under [the] law” (Galatians 3:23; 4:4-5, 21; 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:20 [4x]; Romans 6:14-15). Following the lead of Moo, “To understand what Paul means by the phrase and thereby to evaluate accurately the significance of Paul’s claim that believers are *not* ‘under the law’ (Gal. 5:18; Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:20), we will examine each occurrence in its chronological sequence.”²¹ Do these passages have to be interpreted as “under the Law” equating to some kind of Torah obedience—*or* can they really be viewed as people standing under the condemnation of the Torah’s penalties? While most contemporary commentaries on Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans opt for the former view, we will probe to what degree any might explore “under the Law” relating to the Torah’s penalties, and/or the continued relevance of Moses’ Teaching for those who are no longer “under the Law.” Is the Torah to truly be considered irrelevant Biblical instruction for those who are “under grace”?

Galatians 3:23

“Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint [*hupo nomon ephrouroumetha*, ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα] until faith should be revealed.”

Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι,

Within his instruction of Galatians 3:21-25, the Apostle Paul communicates to his Galatian readers what the real purpose of the Torah is for, contrary to the claims of the Judaizers/Influencers who were demanding ritual proselyte circumcision of the new, non-Jewish Believers. According to them, only by being reckoned as ethnic Jews could these people even hope to be included among the ranks of God’s people. For the Judaizers/Influencers, it was the Torah and/or their man-made “works of law” (cf. 4QMMT) which were paramount for their identity. Paul’s thrust to the Galatians is that it is faith in Israel’s Messiah and His sacrifice for

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

sinful humanity that reckons a person among the redeemed. Contrary to the Torah being the center of one’s spiritual identity, a main role that the Torah is to play is to condemn and expose Law-breakers—with the guilt that they carry naturally guiding and directing them to the salvation and freedom available in the Messiah.

Any idea that the Torah is to be considered opposed to the promises of God in the gospel message is to be dismissed. Paul asserts, “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Galatians 3:21). The Torah, as spiritual and as holy and righteous as it may be (cf. Romans 7:12), was not given as to be a means of acquiring eternal life. Quite contrary to this, “But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ²² might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:22). The Word of God, the Torah and Tanach, decrees that all people have not lived up to the high and holy standard of the Creator: “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin” (ESV), the key clause of interest being *hupo hamartian* (ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν). Yet, only by being in a condition of “under sin” can anyone realize the great hope and value of deliverance in Yeshua the Messiah.

So, how are readers to view Paul’s further claim of Galatians 3:23: “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed”? A condition of being “held in custody under the law, locked up” (TNIV), is rightly discerned to be a pre-salvation condition for all persons. Two verbs are seen in the clause *hupo nomon ephrouroumetha sugkleiomenoi* (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι), “under law we were being kept, shut up” (YLT). The first is *phroureō* (φρουρέω), “to hold in custody, detain, confine” (BDAG),²³ like a jailed prisoner waiting for his trial to commence.²⁴ The second, *sugkleiō* (συγκλείω), regards “to confine to specific limits, confine, imprison” (BDAG),²⁵ and notably appears in Romans 11:32 where Paul says “For God has consigned [*sugkleiō*] all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.” This describes a universal state of sinfulness for all human beings that must exist, in order for God’s mercy to be truly shown to be mercy. In the estimation of John R.W. Stott, “both verbs [in Galatians 3:23] emphasize that God’s law and commandments hold us in prison, and keep us confined, so that we cannot escape.”²⁶ But is this the fault of the Torah and its instruction? No! It is the fault of all people being cursed by sin and their disobedience (Galatians 3:22).

Before Messiah faith arrives onto the scene in anyone’s life, a negative condition of living *hupo hamartian* or “under sin” (Galatians 3:22, NASU) is present, with people effectively jailed and locked up as prisoners “under the law” (Galatians 3:23). When Messiah faith arrives, men and women are washed clean of their sins by His shed blood (Galatians 3:26-27), and then the journey of faith begins—something which enables “the righteousness of God [to be] revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17, NASU). Being “under the Law” is a condition of condemnation resultant from an unredeemed person being “under sin.” Yet, those who possess faith in the Messiah of Israel, who have had the Torah’s instruction convict them and lead them to the salvation He provides (Galatians 3:24-25), no longer sit “under the Law.” They instead belong to Him (Galatians 3:29).

While he disagrees with this view, thinking that the Jewish people being forced to follow the Mosaic Law is actually being discussed in Galatians 3:23-25, Moo nonetheless has to recognize that people being subject to the Torah’s condemnation is an option before the interpreter. He describes, “If ‘under the law’ is exactly parallel to ‘under sin,’ then to be ‘under the law’ could denote being subject to the curse of the law. An additional reason for this interpretation comes in

²² Grk. *ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ); alternatively, if the genitive clause (case indicating possession) is taken as subjective, “by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”

²³ BDAG, 1067.

²⁴ “The terminology is consistent w. the Roman use of prisons principally for holding of prisoners until disposition of their cases” (Ibid.).

²⁵ Ibid., 952.

²⁶ Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 97.

[Galatians] 4:5, where those whom Jesus needs to redeem are those ‘under the law.’”²⁷ This is precisely the interpretation for “under the Law” that we should conclude fits Galatians 3:23 best, as the problem of human sin for all (*ta panta*, τὰ πάντα)—“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin” (Galatians 3:22, NIV; cf. Romans 3:9)—is being discussed. Yet Moo has to protest this, incorrectly concluding, “the assertion of v. 22 about being under sin is something of an anomaly in the flow of this context, speaking of ‘Scripture’ (rather than ‘the law’) and of ‘the whole world’ (rather than just the Jews).”²⁸ But why would the claim of Galatians 3:22 have to be treated as some kind of an anomaly, unless the condition of “under the Law” as affecting all sinners is to be discounted?

Is “under the Law” a condition experienced by all people who need salvation *or* not? Do not the Tanach Scriptures serve as God’s *torah* or Instruction? Elsewhere in Paul’s letters, texts aside from those of Genesis-Deuteronomy are actually referred to as “the Law” (1 Corinthians 14:21; quoting Isaiah 28:11), meaning that his usage of “the scripture” (*hē graphē*, ἡ γραφή) followed by “under the law” (*hupo nomon*, ὑπὸ νόμου) in Galatians 3:22, 23 need not imply that different parts of Israel’s Bible are being referred to; the Tanach Scriptures on the whole as *torah* certainly condemn sinners every bit as much as the Pentateuch proper. Moo has to claim that the presence of Galatians 3:22 is “an anomaly in the flow of this context,” precisely because all of sinful humanity being “under sin” *and* “under the Law” would *seriously weaken* his case that “under the Law” is just a condition of the Jewish people having to keep the Mosaic Torah.

The entire world is in need of redemption from the curse incurred by sin, violating God’s statutes and decrees. While it is quite commonplace among Galatians commentators to interpret Galatians 3:23-25 as a Jewish-specific issue resolved by the coming of the Messiah—and that *Jews themselves* are not expected to really keep any of the Torah in the post-resurrection era (discussed previously)—one of the major risks of interpreting the we/us/you pronouns in Galatians 3:23-25 along these lines is that it severely downplays the universal effects of Yeshua’s sacrifice for sinful humanity. Galatians 4:5 says that Yeshua came “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Is this just a redemption provided for the Jewish people, or for all people? Surely, being delivered from a status of “under the Law” is not just limited to the Jewish people. God’s instruction in the Torah should serve to point out *every individual’s sin* and their need for redemption—as the guilt and condemnation resulting from disobedience is to surely lead us to the only resolution: justification in the Messiah (Galatians 3:24).²⁹ An interpreter like G. Walter Hansen thankfully does note that more justice needs to be done to how God’s Torah curses all who break it:

“In the first case the law is related to all people without distinction, Jews as well as Gentiles. All are condemned as sinners by the law. In the second case the law is related to Jews. For a certain period of time, Jews in particular were held prisoners under the law. When we read the Mosaic law we can see how every aspect of Jewish life was restricted, restrained and confined by the law. In this sense the law was a jailer over the Jews.”³⁰

Hansen’s view that “All are condemned as sinners by the law” is an improvement over what many Galatians interpreters will say. Hansen’s two significant mistakes here are to think that confinement “under the Law” is resultant from the need to obey and follow the Torah, *and* that the Torah was intended to only restrict, confine, and penalize God’s people—rather than give them an appropriate way to live and be blessed (cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-13). It would be pretty ridiculous to argue that Torah commandments against idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, and those that would encourage proper business and farming practices were somehow restrictive and constrained. Resting on the Sabbath day was hardly to be a kind of “burden,” and holidays like that of Passover were to commemorate God’s miraculous deliverance of His chosen. Such Torah

²⁷ Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 362.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Be sure to have consulted the previous analysis of Galatians 3:24 & 25, where the clause *eis Christon* (εἰς Χριστόν) as either “to Christ” or “until Christ” has been evaluated.

³⁰ Hansen, 106.

instruction was to aid the Ancient Israelites in living lives of great blessing and prosperity! Even not eating certain meats to be regarded as unclean has its advantages.

The main issue being addressed is stated in Galatians 3:22 to be *common human confinement* “under sin,” with Galatians 3:23 following this up with how a condemnation status of being “under the Law” is nullified via faith in the Messiah. Within the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul is consistently refuting the idea that adherence to various “works of law” or sectarian *halachic* constructs are what will reckon one as a member of God’s people.³¹ Quite opposite to this, God’s Torah is to lead people to the Messiah *because of their sinfulness* and Law-breaking. All of those who are in the Messiah are reckoned as the Father’s own because of what the Son has accomplished (Galatians 3:27). Among major Galatians commentators, F.F. Bruce comes about as close as anyone as to recognize the universal significance of all people being “under the Law”:

“To be ‘under law’ is in practice to be ‘under sin’—not because law and sin are identical, but because law, while forbidding sin, stimulates the very thing that it forbids. As will be seen in 4.4, one purpose of the coming of Christ is the redemption of his people from their bondage ‘under law’...As Gentiles and Jews alike are ‘confined under sin’ in v22, so Gentiles and Jews alike are ‘confined under law’ here.”³²

Too frequently, today’s Christian readers of Galatians 3:23 will conclude that not being “under the Law” means not having to keep any of the Torah. In some cases, it means not only ignoring various commandments and statutes that regulate significant areas of human ethics and (sexual) conduct—but perhaps even disregarding the Ten Commandments or even not reading or considering God’s holy revelation in the Tanach Scriptures (Old Testament). Even though he seems to favor “under the Law” meaning some kind of obedience to God’s Torah, as something principally confined to the pre-resurrection era, Scot McKnight still has to advise readers of Galatians,

“[I]t is clear from the numerous quotations from the Old Testament found throughout Paul’s letters (as in Gal. 3:6-14) that Paul does not think the law is suspended in every sense. The law remains authoritative for him, and he quotes it as the foundation of his arguments...So as we move to our world with Paul’s statement now that faith has come we are no longer under the law, we know that the law has not been destroyed or annulled...The law is not the ‘contractual obligation’ under which the Christian lives. It was not designed to give us life before God (v. 21). But it remains valuable—highly valuable—for our clarification of ethics, as long as it is understood in light of what Paul teaches about its fulfillment (Rom. 10:4), the ‘law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2), and the impact that the Holy Spirit has on our relationship to the law (cf. chaps. 5-6).”³³

You should not get any disagreement from a Yeshua-faithful Messianic Believer about how the Torah **must be understood** in the light of His salvation work. But it is unavoidable how in a passage like Galatians 3:23, the interpretation of “under the Law” meaning obedient to God’s Torah has done significant damage to many evangelical Christians’ perception of the Torah’s value. The interpretation of “under the Law” meaning the Torah’s condemnation and penalties declared upon sinners will enable all of us to have a much healthier and useful approach to Moses’ Teaching, and its proper place in the lives of the redeemed.

Galatians 3:23 should be a reality that has been made manifest *in each one of our lives*. Prior to salvation, we each stood under the condemnation of God’s Law, having violated its statutes. Some of us knew we were dead guilty of transgressing many of God’s specific commandments. Others of us knew we were just guilty of doing wrong things, and that we would be pretty horrified if we ever stood before our Maker. Specific or general knowledge of sin and transgression does not matter in terms of standing condemned before the Creator, as James the Just specifies how one who “fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). Such an experience of guilt and fear before the Heavenly Father should have led each of us to the salvation

³¹ This is examined in much further detail in Chapter 11, “What Are ‘Works of the Law?’”

³² Bruce, *Galatians*, pp 181-182.

³³ McKnight, *Galatians*, 186.

provided in His Son (Galatians 3:24)! For as Paul had to remind his significantly confused Galatian audience,

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a [pedagogue]³⁴; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Galatians 3:25-26).

Those who are in the Messiah Yeshua do not need to have the Torah serve as some kind of a strict disciplinarian—only able to condemn. Born again Believers are to be able to fulfill the Torah (Galatians 5:14; cf. Leviticus 19:18), with the Messiah’s example in mind (Galatians 6:2).

Galatians 4:4-5

“But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law [*genomenon ek gunaikos, genomenon hupo nomon*, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον], to redeem those who were under the law [*hina tous hupo nomon exagorasē*, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ], so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν

Any reader of Galatians 4:4-5 can easily detect that Yeshua being born and offered as an atoning sacrifice, providing redemption, is the point that the Apostle Paul really wants his Galatian audience to fathom. Yet, is Galatians 4:4-5 speaking in terms of Yeshua the Messiah redeeming all people, *or* only being born as a Jew and in releasing all Jews from any need to keep the Torah? Most Galatians interpreters take Yeshua “born of woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4b), to basically mean that He was Jewish having to keep the Mosaic Torah as a way of life.³⁵ If the work of so-called “redemption” is the Jewish people being released from any need to obey God’s Law, then it is surely a rather *unimpressive* and under-whelming work! Galatians 4:4-5, especially given the wider message of adoption (Galatians 4:6-7ff), can only be best understood with “under the Law” meaning subjected to the Torah’s condemnation and penalties upon all human sinners.

Was Yeshua “born of a woman, born under law” (Galatians 4:4b), meaning that He was subject to the Torah’s curse? There should be no question that Yeshua Himself was sinless. 2 Corinthians 5:21 informs us, though, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Yeshua the Messiah, while Himself devoid of the fallen nature of man, nonetheless did participate in the human experience, with His sacrifice nullifying the curse of the Torah (Galatians 3:10). Bruce points out, “while Paul does not say so here explicitly...he remained free from sin—while ὑπὸ νόμον [*hupo nomon*], he was nevertheless not ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν [*hupo hamartian*].”³⁶ Yeshua bore upon Himself the condemnation of being “under the Law,” but He was never Himself “under sin.” Paul says in Romans 5:18b, “one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” Isaiah 53:11 may also be considered: “he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities.”

The significance of the verb *exagorazō* (ἐξαγοράζω), translated as “redeem” in Galatians 4:5—“to redeem those under the law,” cannot be overlooked here. *TDNT* informs us how “this term refers in the NT to Christ’s redeeming work, the stress now being on purchase to freedom from the law (Gal. 4:1ff.). God, of course, pays the price himself in Christ, meeting the law’s claim and thus giving true freedom through justification by faith (Gal. 3:24-25). Redemption is needed because the law is God’s holy ordinance and eternally valid. Hence in the transition to freedom

³⁴ Grk. *ouketi hupo paidagōgon* (οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν); a *paidagōgos* (παιδαγωγός) is best understood as a strict disciplinarian.

³⁵ Including, but not limited to: Betz, pp 207-208; Bruce, *Galatians*, 196; Dunn, *Galatians*, 216; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 171; Witherington, *Galatians*, 288.

³⁶ Bruce, *Galatians*, 196.

sinfulness is exposed and forgiveness is experienced in Christ.”³⁷ Also not to be overlooked, in order for readers to more fully appreciate the significance of the redemption Yeshua has provided, are Paul’s parallel arguments³⁸ witnessed between Galatians 3:13-14 and 4:4-6:

GALATIANS 3:13-14

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree” [Deuteronomy 27:26] -- that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

GALATIANS 4:4-6

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

When Galatians 3:13-14 and 4:4-6 are properly compared, the redemption that Yeshua has provided from “the curse of the law,” *tēs kataras tou nomou* (τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου), is the same as being redeemed from a status of *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου), “under the law.” Some readers of Galatians 3:13 would add to Paul’s statement something to the effect: “Christ redeemed [us Jews] from the {terrible} curse of [having to keep] the law.” Ben Witherington III comes the closest to this, arguing, “He came to set Jews free who were confined under the Law. The verb ἐξαγοράσῃ [*exagorase*] refers to redemption, a term appropriate if one sees those under the Law as enduring some sort of slavery or confinement... What needs to be stressed is that in both cases the ‘us’ who have been redeemed from the Law are Jewish Christians.”³⁹ Hansen is a bit more tempered, although he draws a similar conclusion: “to *redeem those under the law* means to set them free from both the obligation to keep the law and from the curse of lawbreaking.”⁴⁰

If there is some kind of a “curse” associated with the need to obey God’s Torah, then concurrent with the “redemption” Yeshua has provided—what was once wrong according to the Law of Moses and what once condemned people for their disobedience—not only no longer condemns people, **but can be disobeyed!** (Can such be now disobeyed with a sense of *enjoyment*?)

Galatians 4:4-5 is, by far, much better read from the perspective of detailing universal circumstances to humanity, where all find themselves in need of redemption from “under the Law”—subjected to the Torah’s curse, penalties, and condemnation upon Law-breakers. The “I” sinner of Romans 7:14 declares of his need to be redeemed and purchased from the Lord, precisely because “I am carnal, sold under sin,” *hupo tēn hamartian*. This is something that is endemic to all people, as Paul explains “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin” (Romans 3:9, ESV).

Who suffers from the basic elements of the universe (Galatians 4:3, 8)? Paul does say, “when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe” (Galatians 4:3). Is this just the Jewish people? Or is it all humanity? It is *actually easier* to see that ancient pagans suffered from “beings that by nature are no gods” (Galatians 4:8), from just a cursory understanding of Greco-Roman mythology. Still, many First Century Jews suffered from pagan influences, perhaps thinking that worldly elements like the “air, the water and the earth” (Philo *Life of Moses* 2.121)⁴¹ functioned on the breastplate of the high priest.

A wide array of Galatians interpreters, in some (limited) way, are actually forced to recognize the universal effects of Yeshua’s death in Galatians 4:4-5, in relation to His Incarnation and the curse of the Torah being remitted for all. Even those who think that “under the Law”

³⁷ F. Büchsel, “*exagorazō*,” in *TDNT*, 19.

³⁸ Cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, 216.

³⁹ Witherington, *Galatians*, 288.

⁴⁰ Hansen, 119.

⁴¹ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 501.

errantly means “lived as a Jew,” have to recognize the **humanity-wide significance** of Galatians 4:4-5:

- F.F. Bruce: “To be redeemed from existence ‘under law’ is to be redeemed from ‘the curse of the law’ (3:13). This redemption, according to 3:13f, was effected by Christ’s enduring death on the which a curse was pronounced.”⁴²
- John R.W. Stott: “Throughout His life He submitted to all the requirements of the law. He succeeded where all others before and since have failed: He perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law. So the divinity of Christ, the humanity of Christ and the righteousness of Christ uniquely qualified Him to be man’s redeemer. If He had not been man, He could not have redeemed men. If He had not been a righteous man, He could not have redeemed unrighteous men. And if He had not been God’s Son, He could not have redeemed men for God or made them the sons of God.”⁴³
- G. Walter Hansen: “To be *born under law* also means to experience the curse of the law against all who fail to observe all that the law requires (see 3:10). Although Jesus did fulfill all the requirements of the law, he still experienced all the conditions of sinful humanity under the curse of the law. He was subject to temptations, suffering, loneliness, and finally, on the cross, God-forsakenness and death.”⁴⁴
- Scot McKnight: “God sent his Son, and this Son lived under the law (though not under sin) so that he could absorb the curse of the law. Once the Son had done this, the barrier was knocked down between God and people (and between peoples), and they could become ‘sons of God’ (v. 5).”⁴⁵

Why “under the Law” in Galatians 4:4-5 has to mean “lived as a Jew”—as opposed to “under the condemnation of the Torah”—is so that interpreters can discount a wide array of future obedience to the Torah on the part of all Messiah followers. If Jewish Believers in Yeshua are no longer “under the Law” and do have to keep (any of) the Torah, then non-Jewish Believers certainly do not have to do it, either.

This is hardly the right picture of salvation for any of us to see the Scriptures depict. Sinful humankind is to be delivered from the condemnation declared by God’s Law upon those who disobey Him. The blessing of Abraham and the sacrifice of Yeshua, remitting the curse of the Law, are for “all nations” (Galatians 3:8, 14), which necessarily includes the Jewish people as well as the world at large. The adoption as God’s sons and daughters (Galatians 4:5-7a) is something that is surely available for all people who acknowledge the Savior—which many of the Galatians had forgotten. Yeshua, the Divine Messiah, was incarnated as a man so that **He might redeem everyone**. As Philippians 2:7-8 so significantly testifies, Yeshua “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

At the *very most*, readers can press some of the we/us/you language in Galatians 4:3-7 as meaning that the Jewish people widely knew that they stood “under the Law,” condemned sinners in need of help before the One God of Israel—surely much more than the pagans at large knew. Nevertheless, because of Yeshua’s Incarnation and participation in the human experience, redemption from being “under the Law” and adoption are available for all people. All can be reconciled to their Creator! Noting Galatians 4:5, “**in order that we might receive the adoption,**” James D.G. Dunn details how “As in iii.14 the ‘we’ is best understood as referring to all who had received the Spirit—Gentiles as well as Jews...thus answering to the generic condition of

⁴² Bruce, *Galatians*, 196.

⁴³ Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 106.

⁴⁴ Hansen, 118.

⁴⁵ McKnight, *Galatians*, 204.

humankind” as “enslaved under the elemental forces.”⁴⁶ Samuel J. Mikolaski’s conclusion is also well taken:

“*Born under the law* is that system the curse of which [Jesus] takes to Himself (cf. 3:13), and the restraints of which He experiences (cf. 3:23; Heb. 2:15)... *To redeem...those under the law* includes in this passage strictly not only Jews, but Gentiles also, for Christ delivers them from bondage as well, and Paul sees Gentiles under law (cf. Rom. 2:14, 15).”⁴⁷

Being “under the Law” or subject to the Torah’s curse, penalties, condemnation—and the attendant personal guilt—is a status under which *all people* suffer until Yeshua the Messiah arrives within their lives and men and women are redeemed from the guilt and condemnation of sin. Some people admittedly have more knowledge and understanding of the Torah and what they are guilty of breaking than others, but the anxiety they bear before a just Eternal God, and their knowing that they need resolution, is **still most pressing**. Coming at the right moment for the world—when the Jewish people surely needed an answer to their problems, and the Greeks and the Romans also needed drastic intervention—Yeshua was sacrificed so that all people might be remitted of the curse of the Torah, and be welcomed into the community of saints.

Galatians 4:21

“Tell me, you who desire to be under law [*hoi hupo nomon thelontes einai*, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι], do you not hear the law?”

Λέγετέ μοι, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε;

Most Galatians readers and interpreters take Paul’s word, “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?” (NIV),⁴⁸ as a reference to the non-Jewish Galatians being improperly persuaded and forced to live a life of observance to the Mosaic Torah, something which the Apostle Paul was dreadfully afraid of them doing. If Paul was really concerned with the Galatians keeping the Torah—even just what is often regarded to be the ethical and moral commandments of the Torah—then would he really be able to say later on, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14; cf. Leviticus 19:18)? Such a fulfillment of the Torah via love for neighbor is a definite recognition that Paul valued its instruction for holy living. At least an interpreter like McKnight slightly breaks ranks with others, considering “under the Law” in Galatians 4:21 to mean: “live according to the Mosaic law in such a way that Christ is eclipsed.”⁴⁹

It is to be appropriately recognized that Galatians 4:21 employs some kind of rebuking language, in order for Paul’s audience to be shocked, and consequently to rethink and reconsider what they might be doing. Richard B. Hays’ view is, “To be ‘under the Law’ is to be in a state of confinement (3:23) from which one needs to be liberated (4:5; cf. 5:18). Thus Paul’s choice of words is laden with sarcasm.”⁵⁰ Hegg similarly echoes, “Paul uses a bit of sarcasm: those who want to be ‘under Torah’ have apparently failed to listen to the very teaching of the Torah (or at least failed to listen to the Torah as Paul thinks they should have).”⁵¹ And for Hegg, Galatians 4:21 would be a place where “under the Law” should be interpreted as involving ritual proselyte

⁴⁶ Dunn, *Galatians*, 217.

Note how in Galatians 4:3 the preposition *hupo* legitimately appears for “under the elemental things of the world” (NASU), *hupo ta stoicheia tou kosmou dedoulōmenoi* (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι).

⁴⁷ Samuel J. Mikolaski, “Galatians,” in *NBCR*, 1099.

⁴⁸ Be aware of now the NRSV has improperly extrapolated *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” to be “subject to the law.”

⁴⁹ McKnight, *Galatians*, 230.

⁵⁰ Hays, in *NIB*, 10:300.

⁵¹ Hegg, *Galatians*, 167.

conversion,⁵² a mistake as serious as Abraham joining with the bondwoman Hagar to produce Ishmael (cf. Galatians 4:22ff).

Some readers of Galatians would take issue with those saying that sarcasm is found in this epistle. Perhaps *sarcasm* is simply not the best word, and we should instead prefer the description of Hans Dieter Betz in that what appears in Galatians 4:21 is, “In a somewhat ironic tone...”⁵³ Elsewhere, possibly in reference to how the Torah disqualifies from priestly service those who have damaged testicles (Leviticus 21:20-21; cf. 22:24), Paul emotes, “I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves!” (Galatians 5:12). But while it can be agreed that Paul’s word, “Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?” (Galatians 4:21), directs the attention of the Galatians to the fact that they have failed to listen and properly apply the lessons of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael—is obedience to the Torah’s instruction, as is commonly concluded, really the negative target?

Because of how most have been conditioned to read the Epistle to the Galatians, it is difficult for many to even consider the possibility that “under the Law” in Galatians 4:21 might relate to the condemnation and penalties of the Torah declared upon Torah-breakers. But is it so impossible for Galatians 4:21 to be read from this point of view? When we understand the complex situation that Paul addresses in Galatians, it is not at all impossible for his admonition here to be understood in this light, but it does require us to reorient our approach to his letter.

There was a sect of agitators in Galatia that said if you did not follow their “works of law” or man-made *halachah* (cf. 4QMMT), being circumcised and converting to Judaism, that you could not be included among God’s people.⁵⁴ Some expositors have thought that these agitators could have been using a platform of Torah observance to promote errant teachings related to Jewish mysticism,⁵⁵ which would be strongly opposed by the Torah (cf. Galatians 6:13). If this is the case, then to paraphrase, Paul was probably telling the Galatians, “You who want to be subject to the Torah’s penalties, do you not know what the Torah prescribes for your punishment?” A statement of *ironic rebuke* was necessary to shock the Galatians into recognizing that if they were to reject their previous spiritual course of generosity and openness—where they are actually said to have “received [Paul] as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus” (Galatians 4:14)—then they would find themselves “under the Law.” Is the alternative spiritual course one where they would find “Christ...formed in you” (Galatians 4:19)? *Hardly!* At the very least it would be a life dominated by having to keep the Torah like a debtor (Galatians 5:3, KJV), most devoid of the joy and tranquility of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, many theologians over the centuries have taken Paul’s letter to the Galatians out of its ancient Jewish context and have construed that this good Pharisee taught against God’s Torah and taught against the rite of circumcision. He did no such things; but he did place these things in proper perspective in regard to faith in the Messiah. When Paul later tells these Galatians, “Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Galatians 5:2), he is telling this group of people that if they think circumcision and proselyte conversion are the answers to their problems—then do not even think about it! He is not speaking to all people

⁵² Hegg concludes, “Here, ‘under the Torah’ (ὑπὸ νόμου) must be equivalent to ‘undergoing rabbinic conversion’...Here again, ‘under the Torah’ is used not of the Torah generally, or of the condemnation of the Torah specifically, but of the notion that observance of Torah (in this case, Oral Torah) is the required entrance into the covenant” (Ibid.).

⁵³ Betz, 241.

⁵⁴ Note how these “works of law” (Galatians 2:16[3x]; 3:2, 5, 10) are likely identity markers that would have defined an ancient Jewish religious sect, and how it followed the Torah (4QMMT). For a further discussion, consult Chapter 11, “What Are ‘Works of the Law?’”

⁵⁵ Cf. Mikolaski, in *NBCR*, 1100 on Galatians 4:9; Juster, 114. As the relatively new *Wesley Study Bible* notes indicate: “[Galatians 4:9-10] may refer to religious calendar observances that involve the movement of stars and planets, often believed in the ancient world to be controlled by spirits” (Joel B. Green, ed. [Nashville: Abingdon, 2009], 1428).

The issue of “days, and months, and seasons, and years” in Galatians 4:9 is less likely to do with Torah practices such as the Sabbath or Passover, and more to do with various ungodly rituals that the Judaizers/Influencers associated with them involving astrology and the occult. For a further discussion, consult the author’s article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?”

of all generations that circumcision is wrong (certainly as a medical practice), but places it in proper perspective, emphasizing that it is not a salvation issue. Inclusion among the righteous occurs via faith in God, beginning with the example of Abraham (Romans 4:9-11).

For those Galatians persuaded that the Judaizers/Influencers are right, and that inclusion among God's people is to be decided on the basis of circumcision status, Paul says “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by law; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). For those who would look to ritual proselyte circumcision for a status of justification, “Christ is become of no effect unto you” (KJV). And in turning away from a justification status reckoned on the basis of faith in the completed work of Yeshua the Messiah, a status of being “under the Law” would instead be found, as such Galatians would eventually find themselves apostasizing from Messiah faith and be once again in the company of the unredeemed.

Suffering from the penalties pronounced by God's Torah upon sinners would be an appropriate rebuke indeed, if the Judaizers/Influencers leading the Galatians astray “do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh” (Galatians 6:13, NASU). By following the example of such fleshly people (cf. Galatians 5:19-21), and rejecting Paul's instructions that focused on the Torah obedient example of Yeshua (Galatians 6:2) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24)—far from them finding themselves in obedience to God, they will inevitably be in disobedience to Him and **find themselves condemned by the very Torah they intended to be keeping!**

Galatians 5:18

“But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law [*ouk este hupo nomon*, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμου].”

εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμου

It is entirely reasonable and appropriate to recognize how born again Believers are to be “led by the Spirit,” *pneumati agesthe* (πνεύματι ἄγεσθε), as their lives in the Messiah are to be guided by the Holy Spirit that He promised to send to His Disciples: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13a). Contrary to a life lived by the Spirit, is one lived *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) or “under the Law.” Does this mean, as the NRSV extrapolates the clause *hupo nomon*, that Believers are “not subject to the law” and hence can ignore Moses' Teaching? This is, in fact, the conclusion of various readers—especially Lutheran readers—of Galatians. No submission or instruction of *any kind* to God's Law is believed by them to be required for those in the Messiah. As Hansen puts it, “The one who submits to the control of the Spirit is not under the control of the law.”⁵⁶

There is certainly a conflict present between those who are led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:18), and those who practice various “works of the flesh,” *ta erga tēs sarkos* (τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός):

“Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).⁵⁷

It should be fairly obvious to any reader that each one of the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21, most especially those of fornication and idolatry, are explicitly forbidden in Moses' Teaching and/or are spoken against prolifically throughout the Tanach (Old Testament). There is a significant problem if a life lived by the direction of the Holy Spirit is not one “under the Law,” if “under the Law” is defined as being obedient to the Torah. Immediately prior to listing these

⁵⁶ Hansen, 172.

⁵⁷ The hypothetical sinner's dilemma of Romans 7:15 can also be recalled here: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

various “works of the flesh,” Paul has spoken of what it means to fulfill the Torah via love, and the need to walk by the Spirit and rejecting the ways of the flesh:

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would” (Galatians 5:14-17).

A life that is led according to *the flesh*, and not according to the Spirit, is one which is **certainly not fulfilling the Law**. Hays is correct to point out, “Those who say that the Law is sufficient to overcome the Flesh do not recognize the time of crisis in which the church walks...”⁵⁸ The Torah is not enough to restrain evil inclinations in someone’s heart. But Richard N. Longenecker goes too far in concluding, “The antidote to license in the Christian life is not laws, as the Judaizers argued, but openness to the Spirit and being guided by the Spirit.”⁵⁹ This could be taken as a remark opposing Believers following any code of conduct or Divine statutes, or being aware of any prohibitive activities—as “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21) are certainly prohibited by God’s commandments! So, how are we to properly view the antithesis between a life led by the Spirit, and one “under the Law”? Hegg sees elements of both “under the Law” being condemnation upon sinners, and those looking for a Jewish ethnic status, at work in Galatians 5:18:

“[F]rom Paul’s perspective, ‘under Torah’ describes those who did not have the indwelling Spirit, and thus were neither ‘led by the Spirit’ nor were engaged in the conflict against the flesh. In contrast, those who were not under the condemnation of the Torah, nor who were relying upon their ‘Jewish status’ for right standing before God, were those who had come to rely entirely upon the promise of salvation through the Messiah.”⁶⁰

Hegg’s view that a life led by the Spirit will not result in condemnation issuing forth from the Torah should be appreciated; whether or not we can take a life led by the Spirit being in contrast to those who look to a Jewish ethnic identity, here in Galatians 5:18, does not work very well. Interestingly enough, though, a commentator like Dunn, while thinking that “under the Law” means subjected to the rules of the Torah—actually concludes that a life led by the Spirit results in the obedience of the promised New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:33-34. He summarizes,

“Paul’s exhortation here is aimed precisely at those who were being persuaded that the Jewish law provided the necessary directions and rules for their daily conduct, now that they had believed in Messiah Jesus. His concern, therefore, has been to show that a life-style determined by the Spirit gives them all they need and more. No external constraint or rule-book is capable of countering ‘the desire of the flesh’ adequately. What is needed is the Spirit, or alternatively expressed, the law written within (Jer. xxxi.33-4), to provide an inner drive of greater and more enduring strength, the supplanting of one motive centre (selfish desire) by another of greater power (the Spirit).”⁶¹

Galatians 5:18 is followed by a listing of both works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) *and* the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), laying out precisely the salvation significance of living a life forgiven and transformed by the power of the Spirit *versus* one “under the Law.” Here in Galatians 5:18, “under the Law” meaning subjected to the Torah’s condemnation and penalties upon sinners—and *not* some kind of Jewish ethnic identity—is the only viewpoint that will do the verse justice. As John Wesley concluded, “*But if ye are led by the Spirit—Of liberty and love, into all holiness. Ye are not under the law—Not under the curse or bondage of it; not under the guilt or power of sin.*”⁶²

Thinking that “under the Law” would mean being obedient to God’s Torah, could have Paul saying, “A life led by God’s Spirit means not having to keep God’s Law”—as though the

⁵⁸ Hays, in *NIB*, 11:327.

⁵⁹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 246.

⁶⁰ Hegg, *Galatians*, 200.

⁶¹ Dunn, *Galatians*, 300.

⁶² Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 697.

Torah which is "spiritual" (Romans 7:14) stands in stark opposition to the very Spirit which inspired it! Thinking that "under the Law" means subjected to the Torah's curse and penalties upon sinners, has Paul saying, "If you are truly led by the Spirit, you will not disobey God's Instruction and find yourself condemned under the Law." McKnight gets close to this conclusion, although he does limit the instructions to be observed by Messiah followers to just ethical and moral commands:

"Paul knew that when a person was controlled by the Spirit, that person was holy. He also knew that a person who lived in the Spirit lived in a loving way. Thus, he knew that the Old Testament moral guidelines and the teachings of Jesus on holiness, righteousness, and compassion would be confirmed by anyone who lived in the Spirit. This is important to remember. Paul's statement that the law of Moses cannot condemn anyone who lives in the Spirit would not and could not lead to moral anarchy (cf. v. 23)."⁶³

There is a definite advantage of interpreting Galatians 5:18—"But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law"—as relating to the condemnation and penalties declared upon Law breakers. In practice, most Christian readers will equate "under the Law" (*hupo nomon*) as just relating to keeping things they do not want to remember like the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times of Leviticus 23, or eating kosher—and not moral or ethical instructions. Yet, one of the most foolish statements anyone will ever read from a modern-day theologian, is seen in how Witherington concludes on Galatians 5:18, "Christians are no longer under the Law, not even under the moral law, as this context makes very clear."⁶⁴ While Witherington is among those who argue that a separate and independent "law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2) should instead be followed, today's Christians who have been cut off from Moses' Teaching are significantly hampered and neutered from fulfilling the very Law that Yeshua the Messiah came to show us how to properly live (Matthew 5:17-19; cf. Galatians 5:14).

Knowing that "under the Law" can mean being subject to the Torah's penalties, allows Galatians 5:18 to make much more sense to us. Those who are not led by God's Spirit are keen to break God's Law: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Romans 8:7). But in contrast, those who are truly led by the Holy Spirit will not be led to disobey the Lord, which would cause them to stand under the Torah's penalties. This is because people who are led by the Holy Spirit will naturally obey the Lord and be blessed—just as the Torah tells us, because the Spirit is to write God's commandments onto the redeemed person's heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27).⁶⁵

The Holy Spirit does, though, *go beyond the Torah*, manifesting itself in the fruit of a Believer's changed life (Galatians 5:22-23), providing discernment for life events where the Torah (or even the Bible on the whole) may not deliver any specific instruction. This is what Dunn properly describes as "a spontaneity and adaptability to the demands of each specific situation which rules applied whatever the circumstances can never match."⁶⁶ But the fruit of the Spirit is notably something "against [which] there is no law" (Galatians 5:23), as its virtues surely align with the righteous tenor of God's commandments. The Spirit *going beyond* the instruction of the Torah is to surely issue directions and guidelines to Messiah followers which correspond to the character of God demonstrated forth in its commandments.

⁶³ McKnight, *Galatians*, 273.

⁶⁴ Witherington, *Galatians*, 396.

⁶⁵ Consult the article "Torah and the Holy Spirit" by Mark Huey, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Galatians*, 288.

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law [*tois hupo nomon hōs hupo nomon, τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον*] -- though not being myself under the law [*mē ōn autos hupo nomon, μὴ ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον*] -- that I might win those under the law [*hina tous hupo nomon kerdēso, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω*]. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ [*me ōn anomos Theou all' ennomos Christou, μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ*] -- that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω· τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους

The key to properly understanding what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 is that these verses serve as a kind of ministry credo for him, with his stated intention, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Corinthians 9:19). 1 Corinthians commentators across the board, whose position on the validity of the Torah in the post-resurrection era tends to be more negative than positive, rightly recognize that the main thrust of 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 is Paul’s self-identification with a variety of audiences who will encounter his selfless ministry service for the Lord Yeshua. In the view of Hays, “Paul represents himself as a conciliator, seeking to overcome some cultural and ethnic divisions in order to bring people of all sorts into the one community of faith.”⁶⁷ J. Paul Sampley further concludes, “As Paul depicts his evangelistic efforts, his voluntary slavery to all *involves a fundamental and exemplary accommodation to people as and where he finds them.*”⁶⁸

1 Corinthians 9:20-22 is a little tough to follow, because twice in v. 20 the terminology *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under [the] law” is legitimately employed, whereas in v. 21 *ennomos Christou* (ἔννομος Χριστοῦ) or “in-lawed to Christ” is seen. The main point of these two verses is a level of ministry self-identification on the part of Paul to four distinct groups of people. We may safely assume that while four groups are mentioned, that these are largely *ad hoc* categories, though:

1. “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews” (1 Corinthians 9:20a): Does this at all mean that Paul only acts like a Jew when around Jews, and that we might justifiably consider Paul to think that his Jewish background and pedigree is relatively meaningless—in other words, that being a Jew means nothing to God? In spite of some of the various human limitations for the First Century Jewish community, and how Jewish ethnicity does not guarantee a Jewish person salvation, he does say elsewhere, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2).

The self-identification with the Jewish community that Paul may be more interested in, are sometimes suggested to be those various rites and practices that are not normative to day-to-day Torah living, like his participation in the Nazirite rituals in Acts 21:22-24. More significant, we should think, would be how the Jewish people should be the first to hear the good news of salvation in the Jewish Messiah (Romans 1:16), and with it a great deal of sensitivity issued for their

⁶⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 153.

⁶⁸ Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:907.

unique needs. Many of these needs will be cultural and sociological, though, and not necessarily Scriptural.⁶⁹

2. **“to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law”** (1 Corinthians 9:21b): The RSV has correctly rendered *hupo nomon* here as “under the law.” Is this status having to observe the Mosaic Torah as a way of living in obedience to God? Many readers take the second statement of v. 21 to be a kind of parallel remark about Jewish identity.

Contrary to this common conclusion, is it so impossible to see *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” here as relating to the condemnation of the Torah declared upon Law-breakers who are guilty? A significant part of Paul’s teaching elsewhere, such as in Romans 7:7-13 and the “I” sinner who especially struggles with obedience to God’s Torah—recognizing it as good, but also recognizing how his disobedience must be reckoned with—should not at all be overlooked. The Apostle Paul is surely concerned with the lives of those he encounters in gospel ministry, who know they are condemned by God’s Law as sinners, but do not really know what to do about it.

At the very most, 1 Corinthians 9:21b in association with 9:21a would suggest that while being “under the Law” and “under sin” is a universal condition to sinful humanity (cf. Romans 3:9; Galatians 3:22)—being “under the Law” would most especially be true of Jewish people who know they stand guilty before the Creator. Far from being ignorant of God’s Torah and the statutes they have broken, they know they need an answer to their dilemma. Yet, given how instruction from God is implanted onto the psyche of all human beings (Romans 2:14-15), there is a drive within all people to fix the problem of guilt for wrongdoing, as many know they have committed some kind of violation against the Supreme Deity who made the universe and has affixed certain absolutes for human behavior.

3. **“To those outside the law I became as one outside the law”** (1 Corinthians 9:21a): The RSV rendering of *anomos* (ἄνομος) as “outside the law” is not incorrect, but “without law” (NASU) is probably much better. It would seem very difficult, though, for *anomos* to mean “lawless” here, as though Paul would orient his behavior to a level of sheer unrighteousness. Anthony C. Thiselton indicates that those who are *anomos* concerns “Gentiles who are **outside** the revealed **law** of the OT and Judaism,”⁷⁰ with the NIV actually having “those not having the law.” While all to some degree have laws from their Creator imprinted into their makeup as humans made in His image, here what is probably in mind is how Paul had to argue about the God’s goodness and who Yeshua was using entirely philosophical means, as is witnessed in Acts 17:22-23 when arguing with the Athenians. There, Paul made note of the Temple to the Unknown God and associated it as being a memorial to the Holy One of Israel. He also had difficulty explaining the concept of the resurrection to many of those people.

4. **“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak”** (1 Corinthians 9:22a): Gordon D. Fee, perhaps a bit surprisingly, warns readers that “one must be

⁶⁹ Consult the author’s article “The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism,” appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* (2009 paperback edition), for some worthwhile thoughts about some of the First Century Jewish social challenges present in the Apostolic Scriptures.

⁷⁰ Thiselton, 703.

careful of too specific an identification with the ‘weak’...⁷¹ Many interpreters have associated the “weak” here with overly-scrupulous Believers, such as those who would not eat meat during the fellowship gatherings of various Roman Messiah followers (Romans 14:2). While this is possible, those who are *asthenēs* (ἀσθενής) could also just mean “the defeated, the demoralized” (The Message). Paul’s great compassion for the lame man at Lystra is surely to be considered here (Acts 14:8).

Also be aware of how earlier in 1 Corinthians it has been asserted how “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:26b-29). The weak could very easily be those of low birth, including those like slaves. Thiselton further observes, “the weak may mean those whose options for life and conduct were severely restricted because of their dependence on *the wishes of patrons, employers, or slave owners.*”⁷²

Paul’s intention with all of this is, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:23, NRSV). The four groups of 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 might be the main general groups that Paul encountered in ministry service. What other groups of people could Paul have added to his list? Is Paul a Zealot around Zealots? A Pharisee among Pharisees? Circumcised to those circumcised, and uncircumcised to those uncircumcised? Rich to those who are rich? Poor to those who are poor? Wise to those wise, and ignorant to those ignorant? Greek to those who are Greek? Roman to those who are Roman?

Leon Morris comments, “The apostle did not stand on his dignity, but adapted himself to the position of his hearers in a whole-hearted determination to win them for Christ.”⁷³ The issue in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 is actually in recognizing the various limitations of cross-cultural ministry, and how in order to be effective, one must put himself in another person’s place.

Within such cross-cultural ministry, with Paul going into the Mediterranean world into strange and diverse areas, he was going to encounter people who had no knowledge or initial inclination for really understanding the Law of Israel’s God. And as he says, he does try to identify with those “outside the law...that I might win those outside the law” (1 Corinthians 9:21a, d). Yet, Paul insists that he by no means is “without law toward God” (1 Corinthians 9:21b), *mē ōn anomos Theou* (μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ).

The real issue is how to understand Paul’s claim that he is “under the law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21c). The Greek here is *ennomos Christou* (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ), which YLT renders as “within law to Christ.”⁷⁴ If 1 Corinthians 9:21c were really communicating “under the Law of Christ,” then the Greek source text would read something like *hupo nomon Christou* (ὑπὸ νόμον Χριστοῦ). But this is not what appears. So, in what way is the Apostle Paul “in-lawed to Christ”?

Many interpreters connect 1 Corinthians 9:21c to Galatians 6:2, where the Apostle says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ [*ton nomon tou Christou, τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ*].” Thiselton states, “The phrase ἐννομος Χριστοῦ [is] **subject to the law of Christ.**”⁷⁵ Some view this as Yeshua’s teaching in His Sermon on the Mount, and it is surely justified to view “within law to Christ” as meaning the Messiah’s definitive interpretation and application of Moses’ Teaching. Hays somewhat protests, however, claiming that “Paul does not mean that he has acquired a new legal code of commandments to obey (such as the teachings of Jesus); rather, he is asserting that the pattern of Christ’s self-sacrificial death on a cross has now become the normative

⁷¹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp 430-431.

⁷² Thiselton, 705.

⁷³ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 135.

⁷⁴ “within the framework of *Torah* as upheld by the Messiah” (CJB); “in Messiah’s *Torah*” (TLV).

⁷⁵ Thiselton, 703.

pattern for his own existence.”⁷⁶ Of course, Yeshua did teach “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24),⁷⁷ and emulating the Messiah understandably involves a significant degree of self-sacrifice on the part of all born again Believers! But the Messiah’s service *and sacrifice* is predicated upon the validity of the Mosaic Torah. Craig Blomberg rightly affirms that “the law of Christ” involves some adherence to both the Messiah’s teachings and instructions seen in the Tanach Scriptures:

“God’s will is now summed up as Christ’s law (v. 21; cf. Gal 6:2), which probably includes both Jesus’ explicit teachings as well as the laws of the Old Testament as they now apply in light of the work of Christ.”⁷⁸

The standing question and debate between today’s Messianics and their evangelical Christian counterparts will be in *how much* of the Torah does Yeshua actually affirm for His followers *to keep*—with the latter arguing for less than the former.

Fee’s remarks on 1 Corinthians 9:21c are actually appropriate. He asserts, “I [Paul] am *ennomos* (lit. ‘in law’=subject to law) toward Christ. His point is plain: He wishes no misunderstanding of the word *anomos*, which would ordinarily mean to behave in a godless way. To be ‘as one without law’ does not mean to be ‘lawless.’”⁷⁹ Trying to understand the worldview and perspectives of those who are completely ignorant of God’s Torah, does not mean that a minister of the gospel like Paul all of a sudden becomes lawless and unrighteous. And interestingly enough, an interpreter like Fee—who does not think that obedience to the Mosaic Torah is expected in the post-resurrection era—still has to appeal to the New Covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:26-27 in his remarks about “the law of Christ.”

Fee’s weakness on reading 1 Corinthians 9:21-23, is that he thinks that Paul has an “apparently chameleonlike stance in matters of social relationships.”⁸⁰ Perhaps not unlike the Dominion Changelings or shapeshifters on the fictional series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, the good Apostle can alter his form or appearance for the sake of an audience. While self-identification with an audience, putting oneself in the place of another to better understand another, is good and most honorable—thinking that Apostle Paul **significantly altered** his behavior around different groups could see him not only legitimately accused of being a disloyal Jew, but also having dishonorable motives to others in proclaiming the Messiah. Within such a model *Paul shifts and accommodates himself to an audience*, flip flopping in his personality and practices to meet the moods of others, no different than a sleazy politician trying to win votes—kissin’ babies but later stealin’ their lollipops.⁸¹

The advantage of viewing *hupo nomon* or “under the Law” in 1 Corinthians 9:20b as meaning “condemned by the Torah as a sinner,” certainly works against any accusation that could be brought against the good Apostle that self-identification means a dismissal of one’s personal integrity. In spite of the need to identify with different groups of people, Paul kept the Law as interpreted and demonstrated by the Messiah in all of his activities (1 Corinthians 9:21). And, 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 lists only a number of possible ministry audiences that Paul could have serviced with the good news in the First Century. Some level of identification with them and their unique needs, conditions, and social position would be necessary in order to be effective. Paul surely knew that across the diverse landscape of the Mediterranean he would need to communicate the gospel in an as sensitive and meaningful way as he could to the varied segments of its societies.

Any person who knows he or she is going out into a wide world of people and ideas, *to declare forth the redemption of Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus)*, conducts some degree of research to

⁷⁶ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 154.

⁷⁷ Cf. Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23.

⁷⁸ Craig Blomberg, *NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 184.

⁷⁹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 430.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁸¹ This is a line attributed to the fictional U.S. national security adviser Jeffrey Pelt, in the 1990 film *The Hunt for Red October*.

know his or her audience. This does not mean that one adopts a pagan lifestyle or culture that is blatantly non-Biblical. It does mean that one does not show up at a place completely ignorant of paganism and the various social and cultural challenges one will encounter.

Romans 6:14-15

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace [*ou gar este hupo nomon alla hupo charin*, οὐ γάρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν]. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace [*hupo nomon alla hupo charin*, ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν]? By no means!”

ἀμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γάρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν. Τί οὖν; ἀμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμεν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μὴ γένοιτο

Many Christian theologians and Bible teachers, using Romans 6:14-15 as a proof text, in asserting that born again Believers are not “under the Law,” have commonly interpreted it as meaning that obedience to the commandments of the Torah or Law of Moses is not necessary for Messiah followers. While it is very true that Believers are not *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under law,” does this phrase really mean being obedient to God’s Torah? Given the emphasis within Romans ch. 6 on Believers being dead to sin (Romans 6:1-2, 7-13), immersed into Yeshua to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-5), and being crucified with Him (Romans 6:6)—how could an honest reader of this section of Paul’s letter think that he would somehow allow for disobedience to God’s commandments? Paul actually goes a little overboard⁸² in describing redeemed persons like slaves of righteousness, who have the steadfast need to be obedient to the Lord (Romans 6:16-19).

What are we to make of Paul’s statement in Romans 6:14: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace”? The Greek verb *kurieuō* (κυριεύω) means “to be lord or master of people or of a country” and “to have legal power to do” (LS).⁸³ Sin not being the master or lord of a Believer is directly connected to: “you are not under law.” It would be a mistake of anyone to somehow equate the sin-master and the Torah as somehow being the same; Romans 7:7 makes it clear, “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!” The Torah is something given by God (Romans 7:22, 25; 8:7); the Torah is not the agent of sin. The sin-master is, however, quite capable of using the Torah for the purpose of causing disobedience in weak and fleshly people (Romans 7:6, 8), which in turn will merit God’s condemnation upon such sinners.

Sin is never the master over a person who has been spiritually regenerated. Sin is not the master of a born again Believer, because Messiah followers have made that key declaration of “Yeshua/Jesus is Lord!” (Romans 10:9) and have recognized His supremacy within their lives. By so doing, those who trust in Yeshua are able to receive permanent forgiveness for their sins.

The common Christian understanding that one encounters, of “under law” or *hupo nomon* being obedient to God’s Torah, is most incorrect. Why it is incorrect can be fairly easy to see. Too many Bible readers have the viewpoint of “under the Law” meaning obedience to the Mosaic Law calcified in their minds, that they have become a bit constrained from thinking critically. Yet, there are two serious albeit obvious questions that should be asked from Romans 6:14-15:

1. Who is “under the Law”?
2. Who is “under grace”?

Sin is the master of the non-Believer, the one who has not received Yeshua (Jesus) into his or her life, being granted a permanent forgiveness of and a reprieve from sins. Sinners who have not recognized the Messiah are surely not “under grace.” The person who has not received forgiveness via the gospel of sins may be rightly considered to be *hupo nomon* or “under law.” The person who is not saved is “under law”—precisely because the unredeemed are subject to the

⁸² In Romans 6:16a he says, “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations” or “the weakness of your flesh” (NASU).

⁸³ LS, 458.

Torah's penalties and condemnation pronounced upon lawbreakers. Disobedience to the Torah is sin (1 John 3:4), and the consequence of sin is death and subsequent eternal exile from the Creator. Paul testifies further on in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The solution for human disobedience to God's Instruction, is receiving the gift of eternal life available in Yeshua the Messiah!

The Apostle Paul considers his Roman audience to comprise those who have received salvation in Yeshua, being considered people who are *hupo charin* (ὑπὸ χάριτι) or "under grace." The status of being "under grace" is not something granted to all, but is something that is **only granted to those who are spiritually regenerated** and have been forgiven of their sins (Romans 6:3-5). *Sin is no longer the lord of these people*; Yeshua is recognized as the Lord. Those who do not have salvation in Yeshua and are not "under grace," are instead "under law."

The Holy Spirit given to the redeemed is to compel obedience. Having the covering of grace means that redeemed people are not severely punished for their sins when they err, because they can instead confess their sins before God and receive immediate forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Paul is quite clear, though, that being "under grace" does not at all mean that Believers have a legitimate license to sin:

"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15).

The viewpoint of "under law" meaning obedience to God's Law, has done significant damage to modern Christianity. While some Messianics complain that contemporary Christians need to consider the value of practices like the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times of Leviticus 23, or kosher dietary laws—many Christians live, at the very least, in a state of minimal obedience to God, because even the ethical and moral commandments of the Torah are not allowed to guide their discipleship. *Even the remaining Nine of the Ten Commandments are sometimes ignored* (after the Fourth Commandment to keep the Sabbath). Only the Father in Heaven, most thankfully, can determine who is *and* who is not "under grace."

Many have never heard the idea that "under law" or *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) means being subject to the Torah's condemnation, and that being "under grace" or *hupo charin* (ὑπὸ χάριτι), means being provided with permanent forgiveness of sins and salvation. It is quite apparent, though, that when Romans 6:14-15 is read within the scope of Romans ch. 6 in total, that the Apostle Paul does not at all consider Moses' Teaching to be abolished or irrelevant for Messiah followers, who are to certainly obey God. A status of being "under grace" given to the redeemed cannot be used as a warrant to disregard the value of God's Law.

It need not be overlooked that equating "under law" with the Torah's condemnation upon sinners, and "under grace" with the salvation provided to the redeemed—is something that theologians and commentators have certainly had to consider. It is not an interpretation new to the Messianic movement. C.E.B. Cranfield confirms this for us:

"[Romans 6:14] is widely taken to mean that the authority of the law has been abolished for believers and superseded by a different authority. And this, it must be admitted, would be a plausible interpretation, if this sentence stood by itself. But, since it stands in a document which contains such things as 3:31; 7:12, 14a; 8:4; 13:8-10, and in which the law is referred to more than once as God's law (7:22, 25; 8:7) and is appealed to again and again as authoritative, such a reading of it is extremely unlikely. The fact that ὑπὸ νόμον is contrasted with ὑπὸ χάριτι suggests the likelihood that Paul is here thinking not of the law generally but of the law as condemning sinners; for, since χάρις denotes God's undeserved favour, the natural opposite to ὑπὸ χάριτι is 'under God's disfavour or condemnation'. And the suggestion that the meaning of this sentence is that believers are not under God's condemnation pronounced in the law but under His undeserved favour receives strong confirmation from 8.1..."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, pp 319-320.

Against: Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 365, although he does recognize "Traditional Reformed...exegesis has emphasized that the contrast here is between

"Under law" meaning the condemnation of the Torah upon sinners, is not a view you will see adhered to in most Romans commentaries—but it is surely a valid interpretational option. Paul in Romans 8:1 enthusiastically declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The venerable *NIV Study Bible* offers a similar, although slightly different, view for Romans 6:14:

"not under law. The meaning is not that Christians have been freed from all moral authority. They have, however, been freed from the law in the manner in which God's people were under law in the OT era. Law provides no enablement to resist the power of sin; it only condemns the sinner. But grace enables."⁸⁵

Cranfield finds support for "under the Law" in Romans 6:14 meaning subject to the Torah's condemnation and penalties, and *not* being obedient to the Torah, because of some key verses in Paul's letter where the value, integrity, and instructive purpose of the Law of Moses in holy and upright living for Believers are somehow all in view:

"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31).

"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

"We know that the law is spiritual" (Romans 7:14a).

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self" (Romans 7:22).

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (Romans 7:25).

"[I]n order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Romans 8:7).

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET [Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17-19],' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF [Leviticus 19:18].'¹ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law" (Romans 13:8-10, NASU).

Various Romans interpreters have taken the contrast seen in Romans 6:14-15 between being "under the Law" (*hupo nomon*) and "under grace" (*hupo charin*), not as a personal status of being condemned as a sinner versus being a recipient of salvation. They instead have taken this as a contrast between the previous age of sin and death, and the future eschatological Kingdom age in which God's redeemed in the Messiah are to already be considered living.⁸⁶ Of course, there should be no denying the Biblical reality that Yeshua "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4), and that born again Believers should consider themselves citizens of a future Kingdom of Heaven that will one day dramatically *and fully* arrive on Planet Earth at the Second Coming (Philippians 3:20-21).

But is it justified for readers to conclude that being "under the Law," meaning obedient to the Mosaic Torah, was just a part of the previous age dominated by sin—in which there was no

justification and condemnation. Christians are free from the law's condemnation, for their status 'under grace' has delivered them from the law...in which every infraction had to receive its penalty."

⁸⁵ *NIV Study Bible*, 1754.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:339-341; Moo, *Romans*, pp 387-398; Wright, in *NIB*, 11:542-544.

permanent sacrifice for human disobedience? In the view of N.T. Wright, Romans 6:14 means that "those who belong to Christ, who have died and been raised in baptism, do not live in the Adam solidarity, *and hence do not live under the law,*" to some degree meaning obedient to the Torah. He continues, thinking, "if one did live under the law, sin *would* indeed have dominion."⁸⁷ For Messiah followers to demonstrate any strong fidelity to Moses' Teaching, then, would be like saying that there has not been a move forward in salvation history with Yeshua inaugurating the new era of the Father's Kingdom.

Moo's assessment of Romans 6:14 is a little better, as he does acknowledge how here "To be 'under the law' means to be subject to the curse of the law that comes because of the inevitable failure to accomplish the law." He does continue, though, stating, "But confining the phrase only to the notion of condemnation fails to grasp the salvation-historical contrast that Paul sets up here."⁸⁸ And so thinking that "under the Law" means being subject to a past time period, Moo concludes,

"Under law'...is another way of characterizing 'the old ream'...To be 'under law' is to be subject to the constraining and sin-strengthening regime of the old age; to be 'under grace' is to be subject to the new age in which freedom from the power of sin is available....Those who are joined to Christ by faith live in the new age where grace, not the law of Moses, reigns."⁸⁹

No Messianic Believer who has experienced forgiveness from sins and an infilling of God's grace, should look down upon the true statements that Moo has made regarding freedom from sin available in Yeshua. *None of us should want to be subject to the powers of the old age when no permanent solution for a human sin problem was available.* Yet, there are strong and compelling reasons why making "under the Law" and "under grace," designations of the age of sin and death and the eschatological age of the Spirit, should be rejected.

While the salvation history motif of the two ages might seem to work for some of today's contemporary Romans commentators, it has a tendency to *factor out* the First Century behavior of the Roman readers of Paul's letter. Throughout the long history of Romans scholarship, too many have looked at Romans as just being a theological treatise, and not enough as an actual letter written to ancient Believers with some ancient issues needing to be resolved.⁹⁰ Yet, a quick survey of Romans chs. 9-16 will certainly reveal that ancient issues are indeed addressed in the epistle, and so we should not be surprised to think that Paul describing the Romans as not being "under the Law" and instead "under grace" (Romans 6:14-15), is designed to direct them in a correct spiritual path.

The main support that is offered, for the claim that God's Torah is to be associated with the pre-resurrection era of sin and death, is Paul's statement in Romans 5:20: "Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Here, it is said that the Torah was introduced just to see sin and death increase. But to associate the Torah *only* with the pre-resurrection era of sin and death is a definite mistake. Take important note of how Romans 5:20 also says "**grace abounded all the more.**" God's grace or *charis* (χάρις) was present in the pre-resurrection era *every bit* as much as God's Law, even with Yeshua's final atonement still to be offered in the future and some new realities to present themselves in the post-resurrection era.⁹¹

Cranfield, reflecting a Reformed perspective, helps us to frame Romans 5:20 from the point of view of a definite solution needing to be offered for the problem of *human sin*:

"If sin, which was already present and disastrously active in mankind, though as yet nowhere clearly visible and defined, were ever to be decisively defeated and sinners forgiven in a

⁸⁷ Wright, in *NIB*, 11:543.

⁸⁸ Moo, *Romans*, pp 388-389.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 389, 398.

⁹⁰ Consult the author's entry for the Epistle to the Romans in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

⁹¹ For some further thoughts, consult "The Significance of the Messiah Event," by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

way worthy of the goodness and mercy of God and recreated in newness of life, it was first of all necessary that sin should increase somewhere among men in the sense of becoming clearly manifest....When this is realized, it is possible to see that the law, even in its apparently negative and disastrous effects is, for Paul, the instrument of the mercy of God.”⁹²

As rudimentary as it may sound, the result of Romans 5:20 is Romans 5:21. Paul indicates, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20). The ultimate purpose was “that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21). Once the Law of God was established and given to Israel through Moses, human sin was able to be fully exposed for how despicable and worthless and damnable it truly was, **and it could then be decisively dealt with in the sacrifice of Yeshua**. Hegg appropriately concurs, “as the Torah points out the reality of sin, it also points to the inability of man to overcome sin on his own. In this way the Torah pointed to Yeshua, for it constantly directed mankind to the only remedy for his sin, namely, the salvation procured by the Messiah.”⁹³

In Romans 5:20, the Apostle Paul is sure to emphasize the fact that as human sin increased, God’s grace increased as well. In fact, while most often rendered as “abounded all the more” (NASU) or “increased all the more” (NIV) or even “multiplied even more” (HCSB), the Greek verb *hyperperisseuō* (ὑπερπερισσεύω) can actually mean “to cause someone to superabound in someth., supply lavishly” (BDAG).⁹⁴ The verb *hyperperisseuō* is “a strengthened form” of *perisseuō* (περισσεύω), which normally means, “to exist in abundance” (*Vine*).⁹⁵ When we examine these definitions we see that as the sin of humanity abounded to great levels, the grace of God abounded to a higher extent that was able to exceed and overcome the evil.

Those who take “under the Law” and “under grace” as representing two different ages, have to admit to their position’s weakness. Dunn indicates, “The distinction between epochs is not an absolute before and after Christ, since Abraham accepted the promise and was justified *κατὰ χάριν* [*kata charin*] (4:4, 16),”⁹⁶ recognizing how Abraham was justified according to grace. Wright also notes that for Romans 6:14-15, “the terms of [Paul’s] argument are on the two spheres in which humans can belong,”⁹⁷ which would lend support to the idea that a personal condition of being might indeed be a better way of viewing the passage. And, probably working from the paradigm that “under the Law” means obedient to the Torah, Bruce surprisingly concludes, “The law demanded obedience, but grace supplies the will and the power to obey; hence grace breaks the mastery of sin as law could not,”⁹⁸ which is surely to be the condition of those who are redeemed in Yeshua, as a status of being saved and “under grace” sees that Believers are transformed by the Holy Spirit and hence can obey God’s Torah.

Ultimately, the question that many of today’s Christians answer a staunch “No!” to, is: *Is God’s Torah a part of the future eschatological Kingdom age, or not?* Grace was definitely a part of the previous age of sin and death (Romans 5:20b), and those who are not covered by God’s grace in the Messiah are not to be regarded as people of the future Kingdom age. They are condemned as criminals by God’s Law and stand under its condemnation. However, while the redeemed in Yeshua are people of the future Kingdom age—before it has fully manifested—such a future Kingdom age indeed also does include a respected place for the Torah. Not only does the promised New Covenant inaugurated by Yeshua in the lives of His followers intended to see the Law of Moses supernaturally transcribed upon the heart and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17), but the famed word of Micah 4:1-3 (and also Isaiah 2:2-4) details how the nations are to come to Zion to be taught the Torah, thus inaugurating global peace:

⁹² Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, pp 292-293.

⁹³ Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, pp 128-129.

⁹⁴ BDAG, 1034.

⁹⁵ *Vine*, 6.

⁹⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:340.

⁹⁷ Wright, in *NIB*, 11:544.

⁹⁸ Bruce, *Romans*, 132.

"[M]any nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."⁹⁹

God's Torah certainly has a place in the future Kingdom age, and should not at all be exclusively consigned to the previous age of sin and death! But in order to arrive at such a future Kingdom age, when it is fully manifested and Yeshua reigns from Jerusalem—we each need to make sure that we stand under the covering of God's grace *and not* under the condemnation of the Law. ***We need to make sure that we have truly been saved and spiritually regenerated!***

In Romans 6:15, easily concerned about the conduct of the Roman Believers, Paul communicates, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" Unfortunately, many take a condition of being forgiven of their sins as a kind of self-justification to commit sin. But Paul would have no part of such an attitude or idea—and none of us living today should either!

Even though redeemed and blood-washed Believers are "under grace" and have been provided salvation in the Messiah, it does not mean that we are to ignore God's Instruction. Paul is clear to issue the direction, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). A life once lived under the condemnation and penalties of the Torah, bereft with guilt and anxiety before God, is not something to which anyone should want to return. God's grace overcoming the power of sin is not something that born again Believers are to provoke! If we are spiritually regenerated, our natural desire should be **to want to obey God and please Him as much as we can**, as His grace transforms us from within (Titus 2:11-12). This obedience grows as we seek more of Him, study His Word, and ask Him to convict us of areas of our lives that need improvement.

Are we allowed to sin and break God's Torah because we are not "under the Law," but instead "under grace" as redeemed saints? No. Prior to salvation, the master of the unredeemed is sin, a status which causes people to be "under the Law." When the Lord Yeshua becomes a person's Master, he or she changes and is "under grace." Born again Believers are not to find themselves "under the Law," *precisely* because they are covered by the blood of the Messiah. We are no longer subject to the condemnation pronounced by the Torah upon sinners, because sin is no longer our lord.

Believers who are born again and redeemed are not subject to the Torah's punishments pronounced upon sinners; **they are not "under the Law."** Romans 6:14-15 demonstrates our need to live responsibly being covered by God's grace, living in obedience to Him. If we have been spiritually regenerated, we need to take to serious heart what Yeshua had to endure to take away the penalty of *our disobedience* to the Law via His sacrifice (Colossians 2:14)! Being redeemed from eternal punishment should definitely be *a good motivation* for us to obey God.

Our faith in Yeshua does not nullify our need to obey God, just as Paul has said, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31, RSV). Torah obedience comes as we emulate our Lord and Savior, and are transformed by God's love.

⁹⁹ For a further review of Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4, consult the author's exegesis paper "The Torah Will Go Forth From Zion."

New Testament Passages that Do Not Use *Hupo Nomon* or “Under the Law” —But Have “Under the Law” in English

When one examines a mainline English Bible version like the RSV (and also its successor the NRSV), it will be found that there are *more* passages that use the phrase “under the Law,” or use the preposition “under” in some kind of association with the Law, although *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) does not appear in the Greek New Testament source text. Why have **other Greek clauses** that should not be rendered as “under the Law” been translated this way? Is it because of some kind of theological value judgment made on behalf of today’s translators and theologians?

A selection of significant passages in English Bibles where “under the Law” appears, but where something else is employed in the Greek source text, needs to be evaluated. These passages not only need to be evaluated because “under the Law” meaning Torah obedience has been inappropriately engrained into the minds of too many of today’s Christian people—but for what these verses actually communicate if “in the Law” or “by the Law” or “according to the Law” is to be a more appropriate translation for what appears. Only a targeted examination can tell what is really being stated to Messiah followers, requiring some careful attention to detail.

Just as in the previous section which examined the verses where *hupo nomon* legitimately appears, the second section of this article will focus on the verses in their likely compositional order (James, Romans, Philippians, Hebrews, Luke).¹⁰⁰

James 2:12

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty [*dia nomou eleutherias*, διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας].”

οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι.

New Testament expositors have a difficult time avoiding the fact that the message of the Epistle of James significantly relies upon the universal axioms of love for one’s neighbor, respect for one’s fellow human beings, and providing care and service to others in need—which are required of God’s people in the Torah and Tanach. That James the Just, half-brother of Yeshua the Messiah, expected his audience to follow *at the very least* the ethical and moral code of the Law of Moses, cannot be denied. James is very much concerned with the behavior of those who claim to follow God, but who disregard His commandments:

“If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ [Leviticus 19:18], you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’ [Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18], said also, ‘Do not kill’ [Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17]. If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:8-11).

What James refers to as *nomon basilikon* (νόμον βασιλικόν), “the royal law” (James 2:8), is further detailed to be *nomou eleutherias* (νόμου ἐλευθερίας), “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). Such a “law that gives freedom” (NIV) is widely considered to be the summation of the Torah to the high principle of loving one’s neighbor: “Do not take revenge, nor bear a grudge against the children of your people. You shall love your fellow as [you love] yourself, I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18, Keter Crown Bible). This can be undoubtedly connected to Yeshua’s imperatives

¹⁰⁰ This is, of course, according to a relatively conservative, evangelical evaluation of when these texts were probably written, as seen in the New Testament introduction works of those like Donald Guthrie or D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo. Also consult the relevant entries in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7), “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).¹⁰¹

Interpreters of the Epistle of James are divided as to whether or not there is really a major break intended between “the royal law” of love for God and neighbor, and the Torah of Moses. Is *nomon basilikon* something which is contrary to the Torah of Moses? Ralph P. Martin thinks, “The antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-48 make the same point, namely, that the new law of love sets a higher standard than Torah obedience can demand and produce.”¹⁰² But is the command to love one’s neighbor, Leviticus 19:18, really totally “new” to the First Century—or simply something that needed to be reemphasized and would be viewed as “new” by many in Yeshua’s and James’ audiences?¹⁰³

The issue of the Torah needing to be obeyed by Messiah followers—emphasized by James as “the royal law” focused around the directive to love others—is something that makes various commentators feel a bit uncomfortable. Moo has to still conclude, though, “the law in question here is not the OT law as such, but the OT as reinterpreted and imposed by Christ on his followers.”¹⁰⁴ No Bible reader can honestly disagree with the claim that the Messiah’s interpretation and application of Moses’ Teaching, as is principally seen in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7) and commented on by figures such as James, needs to be steadfastly remembered. Such an obedience with the Messiah’s self-sacrificial example of service and kindness to others as prime, is something that none of us should ever be found dismissing. Dan G. McCartney’s words are well taken here:

“[T]he law of the kingdom of God is complete, kingly, and liberating. The liberating law of the kingdom (i.e., Jesus’s view of the law), by which believers are to reckon that they will be judged, is also the law into which the godly gaze (1:25) and remember to do...[T]o behave as those about to be judged by the law of freedom is to remember mercy and justice and thereby to proclaim liberty. God is merciful and just; therefore, Christians must be merciful and just.”¹⁰⁵

That all born again Believers should be committed to following “the law of liberty,” whereby the ways of the Creator can be known and enacted to all human beings—the true thrust of Micah 6:8, “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”—is **paramount to a healthy and active faith in Messiah Yeshua**. James has stated earlier, “But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

So what is to be made of James 2:12, which the RSV has rendered with, “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty”? The clause in question is *dia nomou eleutherias* (διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας), with the preposition *dia* (διὰ). When used with a genitive case noun (indicating possession), *dia* should be viewed as “through, by means of, with; during, throughout” (CGEDNT).¹⁰⁶ The NRSV correctly changed the rendering of *dia nomou eleutherias* to “by the law of liberty,” following the KJV before it. The HCSB has the similar, “by the law of freedom.” Even a significantly paraphrased version like The Message has, “by the Rule that sets us free.”

¹⁰¹ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 462 also notes how “The theme of mercy is common in wisdom literature (Sirach 27:30-28:7).”

¹⁰² Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: James*, Vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 71.

¹⁰³ The term *kainos* (καινός), appearing in John 13:34, can “**pert. to being not previously present, unknown, strange, remarkable**” (BDAG, 496) or simply “*unknown, unheard of*” (CGEDNT, 90). Yeshua’s reference to *entolēn kainēn* (Ἐντολῆν καινῆν) or “a new commandment” could very easily relate to how *properly embodying* the Torah command to love had gone out of favor, and how “love’ [is] an *active* engagement rather than a mere emotional response” (J. Martin C. Scott, “John,” in *ECB*, 1196).

¹⁰⁴ Moo, *James*, 117.

¹⁰⁵ Dan G. McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), pp 149, 150.

¹⁰⁶ CGEDNT, 41.

Why a version like the RSV¹⁰⁷ chose to render *dia nomou eleutherias*—which would be best translated as either “by *the* law of liberty” (NASU) or “through the law of liberty”—with “under the law of liberty,” has to be because of theological reasons. A clause correctly rendered as “under [the] law of liberty” would be *hupo [ton] nomon tēs eleutherias* (ὑπὸ [τὸν] νόμον τῆς ἐλευθερίας). One can only speculate that those who render *dia nomou eleutherias*, “through/by the law of liberty,” as “under the law of liberty,” want such a law of liberty to be viewed as independent from the Torah of Moses *and* to supplant and replace the rightful position of the Torah of Moses in the hearts and minds of born again Believers. Such people are thought to not be “under the Law of Moses,” but instead “under {a separate} law of liberty.” Yet what the Greek of James 2:12 says is that people are to be judged “through/by the law of liberty,” which is correctly concluded to be the Torah of Moses as interpreted through the ministry and actions of Yeshua the Messiah, and early Messianic leaders like James the Just. Peter Davids rightly confirms,

“[T]he law of liberty,’ which, as has already been observed (cf. 1:25), is nothing less than the law of Moses as interpreted (and to some extent altered) by Jesus and the early church, which took its cues from Jesus. This standard, which focuses on the example of Jesus and thus the command of love, should cause all to examine their lives and channel them into obedience to Jesus’ commands (cf. Mt. 7:15-23; Lk. 6:43-45).”¹⁰⁸

Yeshua the Messiah surely upheld the Torah principle of love for God and one’s neighbor being primary, the same as various Rabbis like Hillel contemporary to His time (b.*Shabbat* 31a).¹⁰⁹ In fact, Yeshua requires that the righteousness of His followers exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20), whose human standard was fairly high. Given how adherence to their strict regulations can be impossible for many of us, entry into God’s Kingdom must be ultimately reliant upon His magnificent grace and mercy! Obedience to His Instruction, though, is still expected of the faithful who love Him and who want to please Him. J.A. Motyer’s observations on what the royal law involves, and how obedience is expected of the redeemed, are quite excellent:

“First, because it is *the royal law*, the law that in a special sense belongs to the king, we would *wish* to obey it—simply because he would specially desire us to do so. Secondly, because it is a command of the law of God, we *must* obey it. To dismiss it is to dismiss the facet of the Glory of God which it represents; to leave it to others is to say that it is immaterial whether this part of the Lord’s likeness is seen in me. It comes to us as a revelation of God, and with his authority, therefore we must obey it. But, thirdly, it is part of *the law of liberty*, and therefore we can obey it.”¹¹⁰

Romans 2:12

“All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law [*kai hosoi en nomō hēmarton, dia nomou krithēsontai, kai ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον, διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται*].”

“Ὅσοι γὰρ ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον, ἀνόμως καὶ ἀπολοῦνται, καὶ ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον, διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται

One of the Apostle Paul’s main intentions with the instructions of Romans chs. 1-3, is to help explain to the mixed assembly of Messiah followers in Rome that both Jewish and non-Jewish people are equally accountable before God because of the propensity of human sin. Pagans are doubtlessly to be regarded as sinners, because even though they have been shown the majesty

¹⁰⁷ The ESV, which is part of the same translation family, follows the same rendering of James 2:12 as does the RSV: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.”

¹⁰⁸ Peter Davids, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 118.

¹⁰⁹ “*What is hateful to you, to your fellow don’t do.*” That’s the entirety of the Torah; *everything else is elaboration. So go, study*” (b.*Shabbat* 31a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

¹¹⁰ Motyer, *Message of James*, pp 100-101.

of the Almighty in His Creation, they have been turned over to activities like idolatry and sexual immorality (Romans 1:18-32). At the same time, though, Paul’s own Jewish people will be held just as accountable before God (Romans 2:1-8). He explains, “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:9-11). Without repentance, no person will be able to escape His wrath (Romans 2:4-6).

What is communicated in Romans 2:12, as it appears in the RSV, is the assertion: “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.” That two groups of people are being referenced is obvious. The first is *Hosoi gar anomōs hēmarton, anomōs kai apolountai* (“Ὅσοι γὰρ ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον, ἀνόμως καὶ ἀπολοῦνται”), “for as many as without law did sin, without law also shall perish” (YLT). The second group is *kai hosoi en nomō hēmarton, dia nomou krithēsontai* (καὶ ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον, διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται), “and as many as did sin in law, through law shall be judged” (YLT). Most versions do not correctly render the clause *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ) as either “in law” (YLT) or “within the law” (*Lattimore*), and instead use “under the Law” (RSV, NASU, NRSV, ESV, HCSB, etc.) even though *hupo nomon* is noticeably missing.

Even with *en nomō* incorrectly rendered as “under the Law” in many Bible versions, in their deliberations Romans commentators have had to recognize the correct terminology that is used in Romans 2:12. Moo acknowledges, “Without the law’ translates the Greek adverb ἀνόμως, while ‘in the law’ translates ἐν νόμῳ.”¹¹¹ Dunn further states that in Romans 2:12, “ἀνόμως...[means] ‘lacking the law’ and ‘outside the law,’ and ἐν νόμῳ...[means] ‘with the law’ and ‘within the law.’”¹¹² It is not easy to find a specific reason from expositors why Bible versions typically render Romans 2:12 with “under the Law,” when *hupo nomon* is certainly what does not appear in the source text.

In Romans 2:12, one group is “without the law,” and another group is “in/within the law.” Who are these people? Moo is correct in his conclusion, “The division of the world into those who sin ‘without the law’ and those who sin ‘in the law’ corresponds to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.”¹¹³ In the First Century, the pagans did not have God’s Torah, but the Jewish people did. Paul highlights that those who are within the Torah “will be judged.” Those who not only have specific knowledge of God’s righteous and holy commandments, but also historical records of what happens when they are disobeyed (i.e., the Book of Judges), are surely going to be held seriously accountable—perhaps even more so than those pagans who are just turned over to sin because of their flat rejection of the One True Creator (Romans 1:26).

While Paul in Romans specifies how a principal purpose of God’s Torah is to define sin (Romans 3:20), this was not always the widespread First Century Jewish view of the Torah. In much of First Century Jewish thought, the view was that Jewish ethnicity guaranteed one a place in God’s Kingdom: “All Israelites have a share in the world to come...” (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1).¹¹⁴ Wright informs us how in Romans 2:12, “Paul may well be responding to an implicit Jewish interjection: ‘We at least have Torah; that sets us apart from the Gentiles,’” further observing how “Possession of Torah had become, in much Jewish thought, a badge of privilege, a talisman, a sign that Israel was inalienably God’s people. No, says Paul.”¹¹⁵ The purpose of possessing God’s Torah was not as a kind of get-out-of-jail-free card for judgment before the Eternal One, but instead to lay forth what His holiness and righteousness were all about (cf. Romans 8:1-4; 10:5-11).

Paul explicitly denies that having Jewish ethnicity will guarantee any of his people a place among the redeemed in the age to come, as *all human beings* are to be judged fairly before their Creator. Those who sit “within the {sphere of} of the Torah” (Romans 2:12), are ultimately no

¹¹¹ Moo, *Romans*, 145 fn#6.

¹¹² Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:95-96.

¹¹³ Moo, *Romans*, 145.

¹¹⁴ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 604.

Notable exceptions would, however, include “He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah.”

¹¹⁵ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:440.

better off than the pagan idolater—if there is no repentance before the Lord of All. In fact, possession and specific knowledge of the Torah will not be a huge benefit, unless what the Torah asks is correctly demonstrated forth by all those who hear it (Romans 2:13). Ironically enough, while there would be many Roman Jews who would agree with Paul that repentance for their sins of Torah-breaking is required before the Lord, that Torah knowledge without proper action is hollow, and surely acknowledge that all people will be judged by Him fairly—Paul interjects a thought that not all of the nations are as “lawless” as many of his Jewish contemporaries might think. Paul states,

“When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them” (Romans 2:14-15).

How can the nations observe God’s Torah, when they are those who do certainly do not sit *en nomō* or “in the law” (Romans 2:12)? It is because the pagans at large, as human beings made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26) and bearing intelligence from Him, *do have* a conscience and they *do have* a basic sense of right and wrong impressed upon them. Isaiah 24:5 does state how, “The earth [*ha’eret*, עֵרֶץ] lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.” The nations at large are very much accountable to their Creator for violating His Law and covenant. The kind of Torah instructions that the Jews could observe their pagan Greek and Roman neighbors keeping in their daily affairs, simply because God made all people to reflect His goodness and attributes to some degree, are largely thought to be the last six of the Ten Commandments. Stott observes,

“[S]ome Gentiles sometimes do some of what the law requires. This is an observable, verifiable fact, which anthropologists have everywhere discovered. Not all human beings are crooks, blackguards, thieves, adulterers and murderers. On the contrary, some honour their parents, recognize the sanctity of human life, are loyal to their spouses, practise honesty, speak the truth and cultivate contentment, just as the last six of the ten commandments require.”¹⁶

Paul is keen to inquire of the Jewish Believers in Rome whether or not, in their keeping of God’s Torah, that they ever be found violating it (Romans 2:17-29). He asks them questions like, “You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (Romans 2:21b-22). His poignant question is: “You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?” (Romans 2:23). The fact of the matter is that Jewish possession of God’s Torah (Romans 2:17) means relatively nothing if not acted upon properly. Ancient Jews who had knowledge of God’s Torah could be found to be Torah-breakers, and Ancient Greeks and Romans who had no knowledge of Israel’s God could be found at times to be actually keeping some of its statutes via their conscience. Hence, even without specific knowledge of the Torah, **all people** will eventually be found in some way to be accountable to the Torah (cf. James 2:10).

Paul does not want any of the Roman Jews to think that mere Jewish knowledge and possession of Moses’ Teaching will merit them any favors from the Almighty. On the contrary, these are to be people who instruct those from the nations in God’s commandments, as he acknowledges a Jewish responsibility to be “a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth” (Romans 2:20). At the very least, this would involve an exposition of those instructions which are frequently found to be impressed upon the conscience of every human being, and kept by those of the nations via some instinct imbued upon them by the Creator.

¹⁶ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 86.

Stott’s comments can only serve to highlight the importance of classical studies to supplement one’s examination of the Apostolic Scriptures, even though Jewish studies in the Second Temple period are ultimately more important. For some further thoughts, consult the author’s article “The Role of History in Messianic Biblical Interpretation.”

The thrust of Romans 2:12, as properly recognized by Cranfield, is how “While those who have sinned in ignorance of the law will perish (that is, will be condemned in the final judgment) even though they did not have the law, those who have sinned knowing the law (ἐν νόμῳ [*en nomō*] indicates the circumstances under which they sinned, namely, the direct opposite to those denoted by ἀνόμωσ [*anomos*] at the beginning of the verse) will be judged by God according to the standard provided by the law.”¹⁷ *This can only highlight the greater responsibility those who know of the Torah’s high standard have in their interaction to God.* And what would be the kind of specific failures to obey that are in mind here? Not keeping various sacred days? Not offering prescribed sacrifices? Not adhering to fair business or agricultural practices? These could certainly be included, yet the Torah issues that Paul is more concerned about regard basic morality (Romans 2:21-24; cf. Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:20).

Too frequently, the violations that those who claim to be Torah keepers commit, are not over outward practices like Sabbath observance, diet, or presenting a tithe (cf. Matthew 23)—but regard basic human interaction and familial relationships. These are the issues where all people will surely be found wanting, **but most especially those within the sphere of knowing God’s Torah.** This is why the Apostle Paul is not at all enthusiastic about those who boast because of their possession or knowledge of the Torah (Romans 2:17), as all will eventually be found as sinners to be Torah-breakers in some form or fashion (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12). On the contrary, any boasting is to be found in what our Heavenly Father has done via the work of His Son: “just as it is written, ‘LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD’ [Jeremiah 9:24]” (1 Corinthians 1:31; cf. 2 Corinthians 10:17).¹⁸

In Romans 2:12, the Apostle Paul describes the state of two different groups of people relating to the judgment of God upon sinners. Those who are *anomos* (ἀνόμωσ) or “without law” largely describes a behavioral pattern of those who live without God’s Divine Law, and will thus die in this manner. Whether one knows the specifics of God’s Torah or not in this case is irrelevant (even though enough of the Torah’s instructions are imprinted onto the minds of all people made in God’s image). The person turned over to sinful behavior, knowing whether something is sin or not, is still going to be judged by the consequences of such sin, given “up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” (Romans 1:24). By rejecting the Creator, they accept sin, and are delivered up to it and will be judged.

The second status is those who are *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ), correctly rendered as “in law” (YLT). This is referencing those who know the Torah of God, and from it know what is considered acceptable and unacceptable via its commandments. In the First Century, this would have largely concerned Paul’s own Jewish people—but today it would involve Jews and Christians equally, who as Bible readers have a widescale knowledge of Moses’ Teaching (even if underdeveloped in some areas). Those who sin with a degree of understanding of God’s Law will be held accountable by it. Such judgment is going to necessarily be much higher, because what is right and wrong is clearly laid out by the Lord and His commandments—whereas the person who just sins lawlessly, not knowing what God considers acceptable and unacceptable, may not be judged as severely (cf. Revelation 20:12-13).

Romans 2:13 further says, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” The NIV actually says “it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.” The word translated “doers” is *poiētēs* (ποιητής, sing.), “a doer, performer,” and “one who obeys or fulfils the law” (*Thayer*).¹⁹ It is used in James 1:22 where we are admonished, “But prove yourselves doers [*poiētēs*] of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” Its verb form, *poieō* (ποιέω), appears when Yeshua tells us “whoever keeps

¹⁷ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, pp 153-154.

¹⁸ 1 Samuel 2:1-2 may also be considered here:

“Hannah also prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy like the LORD, there is none besides thee; there is no rock like our God.’”

¹⁹ *Thayer*, 527.

[*poieō*] and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19b). Stott fairly observes, “That God has written his law on our hearts by creation means that we have some knowledge of it; when he writes his law on our hearts in the new creation he also gives us a love for it and the power to obey it.”¹²⁰ Yet, keeping (any of) God’s Torah without having repented of one’s sins (Romans 2:4) means that eternal judgment awaits, and with it a sure exposure of the various works the unsaved have performed at the time of condemnation (Romans 2:5). So, each one of us needs to make sure that we follow God’s Law via the New Covenant promise of permanent forgiveness and His Spirit inscribing it onto our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27)—something brought about by the salvation of Yeshua!

Romans 2:12 does not at all speak against obeying the Torah. Paul speaks of the state of the person who lives lawlessly or without the Torah, and then the state of the person who knowingly lives according to the Torah’s standards. If we know God’s Torah, then we will be held to its high standard—much more than those who do not know it. And ultimately, it is only the fair and just arbiter in the Creator God (Romans 2:16) who can welcome or exclude any human being from His Kingdom. The intention of Romans 2:12 is to highlight the significance of redemption for those who truly know and have been instructed by God’s Torah.

Romans 3:19

“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law [*en tō nomō lalei*, ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ], so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”

οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ, ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῆ καὶ ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ.

Romans 3:19 can be appropriately viewed as a summarizing statement of what Paul has stated previously Romans 3:9-18, which continues much of his motif that his own Jewish people are just as much sinners and guilty before the Creator as pagan Greeks and Romans. The good Apostle says, “What then? Are we Jews¹²¹ any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin [*huph’ hamartian einai*, ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι]” (Romans 3:9), then substantiating the universal consequences of sin with an entire litany of Tanach quotations:

“[A]s it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE [Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20]. THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING, THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS [Psalm 5:9; 140:3]; WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS [Psalm 10:7]; THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN [Isaiah 59:7-8; Proverbs 1:16]. THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES [Psalm 36:1]” (Romans 3:10-18, NASU).¹²²

Romans 3:19, as it appears in the RSV, asserts, “we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” Notably absent from the source text is the clause *hupo nomon* or “under the Law”; what appears instead is *en tō nomō* (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ) or “in the Law.” Noting the Greek of Romans 3:19, and comparing it to other clauses that appear in the Pauline letters, Dunn indicates for us,

¹²⁰ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 87.

¹²¹ Grk. *proechometha* (προεχόμεθα); “Are we better...?” (NASU). Versions like the RSV, ESV, and CJB add “we Jews,” and this is probably justified. But what immediately follows in the remark *proētiasametha* (προητιασάμεθα), “we have already charged,” would pertain more to the discussion that Paul is having with his Roman audience as “we.”

¹²² Nestle and Aland, *GNT*, pp 413-414; Aland, *GNT*, pp 525-526.

“ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ [*hosa ho nomos legei tois en tō nomō lalei*], ‘whatever the law says it says to those within the law’; not ‘under the law’ [NIV]—the distinction in Paul’s choice of prepositions should be observed. οἱ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ [*hoi en tō nomō*], ‘those within the law’; cf. οἱ τὸν νόμον ἔχοντες [*hoi ton nomon echontes*], ‘those having the law’ (2:14), οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον [*hoi hupo nomon*], ‘those under the law’ (1 Cor 9:20; Gal 4:5) and οἱ ἐκ νόμον [*hoi ek nomon*], ‘those from the law’ (4:14, 16).”¹²³

Dunn’s point is clear enough: the language of Romans 3:19 has “those within the law” and “not ‘under the law.’” The Moffat New Testament actually has a correct rendering here: “Whatever the Law says, we know, it says to those who are **inside the Law**, that every mouth may be shut and all the world made answerable to God.” What is seen in Romans 3:19 is the same as *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ) or “in law” appearing previously in Romans 2:12, the addition of the definite article being only a minor difference. However, given the large number of Tanach quotations that Paul has provided in Romans 3:10-18 preceding Romans 3:19, it is appropriate to identify “law” as involving much more than just the Pentateuch, as the Tanach Scriptures as a whole are more broadly in view. Moo states how, “‘those in the law’ are the Jews, who live within the sphere of the revelation of God given in the Scripture/law,”¹²⁴ in that Paul’s own Jewish people who know the Instruction of God, are the very ones who should be quite aware of its condemning function upon every human being as a sinner.

The issue in Romans 3:19 is the fact that God’s Instruction, in both the Torah and the Tanach, communicates to Paul’s Jewish people that the entire world is somehow “accountable” or “guilty” (NKJV) before Him. This is likely because of basic principles of right and wrong impressed on the human psyche via His image (cf. Romans 2:14-15). *Hupodikos* (ὑπόδικος) specifically means, “Under sentence, condemned, liable, subject to prosecution” (AMG)¹²⁵—a status for *pas ho kosmos* (πᾶς ὁ κόσμος) or the whole world. Paul continues in the next verse, stating, “since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20b), but for many Jews of his generation it was turned into various man-made “works of law” (Romans 3:20a) intended to separate them out not only from the nations, but even fellow Jews (discussed further). Quite contrary to the thought that only those who are *en tō nomō* or “in the Law” are expected to follow and obey it—the whole world will be held accountable, in some way, for violating God’s Instruction. Hegg’s observations on Romans 3:19 are well taken:

“[U]nder the Torah’ is a bad translation of τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ [*tois en tō nomō*], which literally would be ‘those in the Torah.’ ‘Under the Torah’ would be ὑπὸ νόμον, *hupo nomon*, which is found in 6:14, 15... [T]he expression here, ‘those who are in the Torah’ should be understood to mean ‘those who possess the Torah’ or ‘those who know the Torah.’ Thus, the phrase repeats the premise already given by Paul that the Jews were the first to possess the Torah (Scriptures) and thus those parts which clearly denote the universal sinfulness of man most surely apply to the nation to which God first revealed this truth.”¹²⁶

If the pagan world of the Greeks and the Romans is to be condemned for violating God’s Torah, then it stands to reason that the Jewish people who knowingly possess the Torah could be found even more condemned. The sacrifice of Yeshua for all people is the only answer to the sin problem that the whole world has: because God’s Law universally condemns everyone to eternal punishment. As Paul so eloquently communicated to the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome:

“For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at

¹²³ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:152.

¹²⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 205.

¹²⁵ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1422.

¹²⁶ Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, 69.

the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:22b-26).

Paul’s Jewish people who sat inside of the sphere of the Torah, knowing its statutes, should definitely know that the whole world—including themselves—stands *hupodikos* before the Creator. As Dunn indicates, “his object is...to show that their own scriptures place his own people just as firmly ‘in the dock’ along with everyone else.”¹²⁷ Given the thought of many First Century Jews that ethnicity, likely including possession of the Torah (cf. Romans 2:17), guaranteed them a place in the world to come (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1), Paul’s reorientation in Romans chs. 1-3 as the Torah chiefly defining and issuing appropriate penalties for sin could have been met with some hostility. Yet, Paul appeals to the words of the Torah and Tanach to substantiate this reality. Cranfield concludes,

“[E]verything which the OT says (including the things which are said about Gentiles) is indeed addressed in the first instance to the Jews and is intended for their instruction, so that, so far from imagining themselves excepted from its condemnations of human sinfulness, they ought to accept them as applying first and foremost to themselves.”¹²⁸

Because every human being is a sinner, be they those raised with the instruction of God’s Torah from the time of their birth *or not*, redemption is something that must be incumbent upon proper belief and trust in God. Paul is certain to inform his mixed Roman audience, “is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith” (Romans 3:29-30). Such faith for redemption and inclusion among His people is required of all, not just Paul’s fellow Jews. Witherington is right to state, “There will be no room for Gentile or Jewish boasting about ethnic or moral superiority when Paul gets through. All are equally in need of and indebted to God’s grace, and all should be as compassionate as God is toward the lost and spiritually blind.”¹²⁹ At least for the problems and challenges of the Roman assembly, perhaps Paul’s words would be able to communicate to all how their common identity was to be focused around them each being human sinners—yet those who were saved by Yeshua the Messiah *entirely* by the Heavenly Father’s favor toward them.¹³⁰

Philippians 3:6

“as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless [*kata dikaiosunēn tēn en nomō genomenos amemptos, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος*].”

κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος.

Within this piece of Paul’s letter to his dear Philippian friends, his intention is to warn them about possible troublemakers who might come disturb them, in particular those who might require them to be ritually circumcised as proselytes in order to be made acceptable to God (Philippians 3:2). Contrary to whatever they might claim to offer, the Philippians already have what they need via their circumcision of the heart (Philippians 3:3). Furthermore, having once been overly zealous for the traditions of Judaism and a persecutor of the *ekklēsia*, Paul himself has more to humanly boast about than any outsider who might try to come in and confuse the Philippians. But contrary to any Judaizers/Influencers who may come to Philippi, Paul knows that

¹²⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:152.

¹²⁸ Cranfield, *Romans* 1-8, 196.

¹²⁹ Witherington, *Romans*, 89.

¹³⁰ Due to space limitations in this publication, this article has not addressed Romans 7:6, which in the RSV has as, “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”

The clause of interest is *en kainotēti pneumatōs kai ou palaiotēti grammatōs* (ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος καὶ οὐ παλαιότητι γράμματος), better rendered as “in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of letter” (YLT), the preposition *hupo* (ὑπό) noticeably missing.

all of his human achievements—even in association with God’s Torah—are utterly meaningless compared to what the Messiah Himself has accomplished (Philippians 3:4-11). With this naturally comes the imperative for the non-Jewish Philippians to evaluate how *even more* worthless their own Greek or Roman achievements would be in light of Yeshua!

Paul does not want any man or woman to rely upon what they have done in the flesh to think that they are right before God (Philippians 3:4). His own personal pedigree includes being “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee [*kata nomon Pharisaios, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος*]” (Philippians 3:5). He further indicates how he was, “as to zeal a persecutor of the [assembly], as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Philippians 3:6). While Paul’s associating himself as being “blameless” (RSV/NASU) or “faultless” (NIV) does not mean that much to him, given his past mistakes as a persecutor of the early Believers—we do not encounter the clause *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” in Philippians 3:6.

While Paul’s life prior to encountering Yeshua the Messiah was one where his Jewish identity got the better of him—to the point of him ravaging the Body of Messiah (Galatians 1:13-14)—the intention of interjecting “under the law” into the English translation of Philippians 3:6 by the RSV/NRSV/ESV is one which is theological. It is intended to communicate that Paul’s life prior to knowing Yeshua was one where he was Torah obedient, and following his transformation he is no longer Torah obedient. In order to come to such a conclusion, though, one has to utterly ignore the many places within the Pauline letters where the Torah is upheld as a source of instruction and guidance for the conduct of Messiah followers!

What is instead claimed by Paul in Philippians 3:6 is *kata dikaiosunēn tēn en nomō genomenos amemptos* (κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος). The clause *hupo nomon* or “under the Law” is notably absent, because what instead appears is *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ) or “in the Law.” The clause *en nomō* here could be rendered with “based on the law” (TNIV) or “according to righteousness that is in law” (YLT). Peter T. O’Brien astutely explains how *en nomō* or “in the Law” in Philippians 3:6 is intended to convey the Torah as something from which Paul once regarded his “righteousness” as originating:

“[T]he following prepositional expression τὴν ἐν νόμῳ [*tēn en nomō*] makes it specific and defines concretely what is meant—it is that righteousness which is ἐν νόμῳ [*en nomō*]. This phrase has been taken instrumentally to signify ‘by [means of] law’ (Gal. 3:11; 5:4; cf. Rom. 2:12, 20) as distinct from ‘through the law’ (διὰ νόμου [*dia nomou*], Gal. 2:21) or ‘from the law’ (ἐκ νόμου [*ek nomou*], Rom. 10:5; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:21). Another interpretation, which also distinguishes ἐν νόμῳ from ἐκ νόμου of v. 9, understands the phrase to mean that righteousness which is ‘in the law’, is ‘rooted in the law’, or ‘rests in the law’.”¹³¹

Gerald F. Hawthorne renders Philippians 3:6 as, “With regard to a righteousness rooted in the law, I became a blameless person.”¹³² However, given Paul’s concurrent reference to himself as a persecutor of the assembly, what is more likely intended is Paul’s blamelessness being a commitment to ritual purity rather than the Torah’s pristine ethics. While such a condition of “righteousness” is certainly found in the Torah, it is not all enough to be regarded as eternally redeemed. The Apostle Paul desired a righteousness which was not of his own, but was absolutely focused around the Messiah and His atoning work (Philippians 3:9). This is a righteousness which understandably is not “based on law,” *ek nomou* (ἐκ νόμου), but instead is *dia pisteōs Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ). **True and everlasting righteousness is a status only found in Yeshua the Messiah!**

Elsewhere Paul has said that Yeshua was sacrificed “in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4), as the New Covenant power of transcribing the Torah’s commands onto the hearts

¹³¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp 378-379.

¹³² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 134.

of redeemed people is to be realized. Walking properly according to the example and guidance of the Lord is something that the Philippians were to surely do (Philippians 3:15-16). Yet, what Yeshua has done in providing redemption *and* what will occur in the future eschaton (Philippians 3:20-21) is to remain primary. Obedience to the Torah has to be focused around Believers “press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14), as born again persons live in accordance with their Savior’s direction (cf. Matthew 5:17-19).

Hebrews 7:11

“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law [*ho laos gar ep’ autēs nenomothētai*, ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς νενομοθέτηται]), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?”

Εἰ μὲν οὖν τελείωσις διὰ τῆς Λευιτικῆς ἱερωσύνης ἦν, ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς νενομοθέτηται, τίς ἔτι χρεία κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἕτερον ἀνίστασθαι ἱερέα καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Ἀαρὼν λέγεσθαι;

A significant thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews is in recognizing the superiority of Yeshua the Messiah’s priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:23-28), which offers a permanent atonement for human sin, when compared to the Levitical priesthood and its animal sacrifices that had to be offered over and over again. The author of Hebrews rightly testifies that “perfection [has not] been attainable through the Levitical priesthood” (Hebrews 7:11a), such a “reach[ing] the goal” (CJB) being eternal redemption and reconciliation with God. Obviously, an appreciation for what the Levitical priesthood and its animal sacrifices were is necessary, to appreciate the much greater and more significant priesthood of Yeshua and His own personal sacrifice.

Significant confusion abounds from the author’s parenthetical statement in Hebrews 7:11b, which the RSV renders as “for under it the people received the law.” The implication from this English reading is that the Ancient Israelites being given the Torah is predicated on the existence of the Levitical priesthood. Presumably one could conclude that if the Levitical priesthood is inferior to the Messiah’s priesthood, that the significance of Moses’ Teaching is to also be diminished. Hebrews 7:11b actually has some translation *and* perspective issues that need to be significantly evaluated.

Fred B. Craddock makes the key observation of how, “The NRSV inadequately translates ‘for the people received the law *under* this priesthood’ (v. 11),” further stating his view of how “The NIV more correctly captures the strength of the prepositional phrase: The people were given the law ‘on the basis of’ this priesthood.”¹³³ (This is largely because the NIB employs both the NRSV and NIV in its commentary, for to compare and contrast.) Yet his conclusion is, “This is to say not only that the relation between the law and the priestly system is inseparable, but that the law was based on the cultus.”¹³⁴ Paul Ellingworth similarly echoes, “Priesthood and law are indissolubly bound together; and within this relation, priesthood is logically prior.”¹³⁵

The contention that the Torah was given to Ancient Israel on the basis of the priesthood is, however, strictly incorrect—as can be easily detected from any survey of the Pentateuch. No Levitical priesthood or animal sacrifices could be established for Ancient Israel until the instructions that regulated such a priesthood, its sacrifices, and the Tabernacle were given to Moses by God. Donald A. Hagner notes how “The parenthetical comment concerning **the law** being given to the people on the basis of the levitical priesthood cannot be taken literally, since that priesthood did not precede the Mosaic law.” He further concludes, though, “What seems to be meant is that the priestly system is basic to the entire superstructure of the law.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Craddock, in *NIB*, 12:89.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Ellingworth, 372.

¹³⁶ Hagner, *Hebrews*, pp 103-104.

What is intended by Hebrews 7:11b is going to come down entirely to how we view *ho laos gar ep' autēs nenomothetētai* (ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς νεινομοθέτηται). Witherington indicates how “There is considerable debate about the phrase *ep' autēs*: does it mean ‘on the basis of’ or ‘with relation to?’”¹³⁷ Like those just quoted, his view is, “though the priesthood is dependent on the law for its very existence, the law is dependent on the priesthood for its ‘implementation,’ and so a law is enacted only for or given to the people in this matter when the priesthood is operating.”¹³⁸ The Torah of Moses is thought, then, to only be relevant with a Levitical priesthood present—in spite of it having key instructions regarding human ethics, morality, fairness, *relationships and sexuality*, and how God’s people are to live their day-to-day lives. While Witherington is incorrect in thinking that the Torah and priesthood are so interconnected it would be impossible to follow the Torah without a priesthood—he has specified precisely what is necessary for us to identify what Hebrews 7:11b could actually be communicating.

How should *ho laos gar ep' autēs nenomothetētai* be translated? Notably absent from this clause is the preposition *hupo* (ὑπό), which one would naturally expect to see appear if “under it” were a correct rendering. Instead, the preposition *epi* (ἐπί) is employed. Most appropriately, *epi* in Hebrews 7:11b is a “marker of perspective, *in consideration of, in regard to, on the basis of, concerning, about*, w. gen.” (BDAG), with this lexical entry further noting how “ἐπ’ αὐτῆς [*ep' autēs* means] *on the basis of it Hb 7:11*.”¹³⁹ So, on the basis of “it,” the Levitical priesthood, some action was to be performed to the Ancient Israelites.

While most Bibles communicate something to the extent that “through which the people received the law” (Hebrews 7:11b, *Lattimore*), it is necessary that we probe the significance of the verb *nomotheteō* (νομοθετέω), “to make law” (LS),¹⁴⁰ which Bruce says means “legislate.”¹⁴¹ The verb *nomotheteō* does appear in the Septuagint to describe the giving of the Torah by God to Moses: “the commandments that I wrote to legislate [*nomotheteō*] for them” (Exodus 24:12, NETS).¹⁴² At the same time, though, *nomotheteō* appears in various contexts where God’s Torah being taught to people is in view. Deuteronomy 17:10 notably says, concerning the Levitical priests, “And you shall do according to the word whatever they report to you from the place that the Lord your God may choose for his name to be called there, and you shall guard very much to do according to all things whatever is legislated [*nomotheteō*] for you” (NETS). The Levitical priesthood definitely had a Torah-prescribed responsibility to teach Ancient Israel God’s commandments (Deuteronomy 33:10),¹⁴³ to in other words “legislate” the people. That the verb *nomotheteō* can regard God’s people being taught His Law and commandments, is something witnessed throughout the Septuagint version of Psalms, where *nomotheteō* translated the Hebrew verb *yara* (יָרָא):¹⁴⁴

“Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he instruct [*nomotheteō* trans. *yara*] sinners in the way” (Psalm 24:8, LXE).

“Who is the man that fears the Lord? he shall instruct [*nomotheteō* trans. *yara*] him in the way which he has chosen” (Psalm 24:12, LXE).

“Teach [*nomotheteō* trans. *yara*] me, O Lord, in thy way, and guide me in a right path, because of mine enemies” (Psalm 27:11, LXE).

¹³⁷ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 244.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 244-245.

¹³⁹ BDAG, 365.

¹⁴⁰ LS, 535.

¹⁴¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 164 fn#36.

¹⁴² Cf. Psalm 84:6; 4 Maccabees 5:25.

¹⁴³ “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, and whole burnt offerings on Your altar” (Deuteronomy 33:10).

¹⁴⁴ [BibleWorks 8.0: LEH Lexicon](#) (Lust-Eynikel-Hauspie) notes how *nomotheteō* (νομοθετέω) “always transl. of יָרָא,” and can mean both “to give laws to” and “to instruct, to teach, to ordain.”

“Teach [*nomotheteō* trans. *yara*] me, O Lord, the way of thine ordinances, and I will seek it out continually” (Psalm 119:33, LXE).

“I have not declined from thy judgments; for thou hast instructed [*nomotheteō* trans. *yara*] me” (Psalm 119:102, LXE).

What would it mean for us to render Hebrews 7:11b as “**upon it the people were legislated,**” meaning that upon the basis of the Levitical priesthood Israel was to be instructed in the Torah? It is not a stretch at all to conclude that by the mid-First Century the Second Temple Saddusaical priesthood had *utterly failed* at such a responsibility—especially given the fact that the Sadducees were flat known for denying the resurrection,¹⁴⁵ the essential truth upon which Yeshua’s Messiahship and our faith in Him must ultimately be based.¹⁴⁶ That the First Century Jewish community was not properly “legislated,” meaning taught God’s Torah from the Temple priesthood, is easily witnessed. The Saddusaical priesthood was decisively impotent to instruct people in perfection—precisely because “the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:6a)—and a new priesthood, that of Yeshua the Messiah, needed to be established!

But if those of Ancient Israel were to once be taught the Law, “legislated,” upon the basis of the Levitical priesthood—what was to happen with Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood taking over? Was the Torah to be gone with it too? This is what most conclude. However, this is an insupportable conclusion when the New Covenant promise that the author of Hebrews appeals to *twice* (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17), involves God’s laws being written on the hearts and minds of the redeemed. In Hebrews 8:6 the author testifies, “the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises,” *epi kreittosin epangeliais nenomothetētai* (ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίας νενομοθέτηται).

If *epi kreittosin epangeliais nenomothetētai* in Hebrews 8:6 is rendered with, “upon better promises [it] has been legislated,” meaning the New Covenant enacted forth—we can see the relationship of Yeshua’s priesthood instructing the redeemed in Him **in the Torah**. Previously, God’s people were to be legislated/instructed in His Torah on the basis of the Levitical priesthood’s service, something which by the First Century had failed because of its Saddusaical occupants (Hebrews 7:28a). With Yeshua the Messiah on the scene, the New Covenant is to be legislated/instructed forth on the basis of the promises of the Messianic expectation and His superior priestly service (Hebrews 7:16b, 20-27), **most especially involving permanent forgiveness of sins**. By “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” and “[who] purif[ied] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14), can the New Covenant truly be legislated within those saved and transformed by the gospel and filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9:22

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood [*kai schedon en haimati panta katharizetai kata ton nomon*, καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν αἵματι πάντα καθαρίζεται κατὰ τὸν νόμον], and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν αἵματι πάντα καθαρίζεται κατὰ τὸν νόμον καὶ χωρὶς αιματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις.

Any reader of the Epistle to the Hebrews witnesses how its author is concerned with the sufficiency of the single sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah that offers a permanent solution to the human sin problem. While the author of Hebrews uses the referents of the Levitical sacrificial system in general, as well as the symbology of *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, throughout

¹⁴⁵ Mark 12:18; Matthew 22:33; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8.

¹⁴⁶ For a worthwhile exploration, consult N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

his treatise—he largely bases the superiority of Yeshua’s sacrifice to the animal sacrifices of the Torah by virtue of how, “But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26b), something which does not need to be repeated over and over again.

Leading up to this grand conclusion, the author of Hebrews communicates that “almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). Due to the sacredness of blood, as specified by Torah verses such as Leviticus 17:11—“For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life”—blood must be shed to provide atonement. *Only with* the shed blood of the Messiah can eternal redemption be accessible for sinful humanity (Hebrews 9:12). Yet, without the Levitical priesthood and its animal sacrifices, there would be no prototype to the priesthood of the Messiah and His final sacrifice.

The need to appreciate the animal sacrifices of the Torah, in order to appreciate the greater and permanent sacrifice of the Messiah, is needed for readers to truly grasp the significance of the message of Hebrews. Hebrews 9:22 in the RSV/NRSV/ESV reads with “under the law almost everything is purified with blood.” The Greek actually has *kata ton nomon* (κατὰ τὸν νόμον), “according to the Law” (NASU) or “according to the *Torah*” (CJB). William L. Lane comments, “The point made in v 22 *a* that almost everything is purged by blood is limited to the period of the old cultus by the legal qualification κατὰ τὸν νόμον [*kata ton nomon*], ‘according to the law.’”¹⁴⁷

Rendering *kata ton nomon* as anything other than “according to/by the law,” interjecting “under [the] law” or *hupo nomon* into a place where it does not appear in the source text, can only be explained as a value judgment made on inappropriate theological grounds. Yet, such theological grounds would be rather shaky when the New Covenant includes the supernatural transcription of God’s laws onto the hearts and minds of His people (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17).

Luke 2:27 (NRSV)

“Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law [*poiēsai autous kata to eithismenon tou nomou peri autou*, ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ],”

καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν· καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ

The scene of Luke 2:21-40 is generally familiar to Christian Believers who read the account of Yeshua’s birth and dedication every Winter during the season of Christmas.¹⁴⁸ However, given the significance not only of Yeshua’s circumcision and naming (Luke 2:21), but also the Torah-specified purification of the firstborn, today’s Messianic Believers are a little better equipped to understand what is being communicated when it is recorded, “When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22, NRSV). Luke 2:22, in either the RSV or NRSV, correctly renders the clause *kata ton nomon Mōuseōs* (κατὰ τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως) as “according to the law of Moses,” meaning that the parents Joseph and Mary were being compliant with the Torah’s instruction (Luke 2:23-24; cf. Exodus 13:2, 12; Numbers 3:13; 8:17).

While in the Temple, the narrative records how the devout Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) and the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36-38) encounter the infant Yeshua. They both issue great praises

¹⁴⁷ Lane, 47b:245.

¹⁴⁸ Consult the author’s article “The Christmas Challenge” for a fair minded Messianic approach to this Winter holiday.

and blessings to God because of His arrival, with Simeon liberally applying some Tanach passages to what Yeshua is anticipated to do (Luke 2:29-35; cf. Isaiah 40:5; 52:10; 42:6; 49:6; 46:13; 8:14).

Within the middle of this scene, the Torah obedience of Joseph and Mary is emphasized as Simeon is inspired by the Lord to enter into the Temple. Luke 2:27 in the RSV records, “inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him **according to the custom of the law.**” The clause of interest, which follows similar to what has appeared immediately prior in Luke 2:22, is *kata to eithismenon tou nomou* (κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου). The KJV renders this as “after the custom of the law.” Appearing with the accusative case (indicating direct object) participle *to eithismenon* (τὸ εἰθισμένον), the preposition *kata* (κατά) should be rendered as something along the lines of: “according to, corresponding to, with reference to, just as” (CGEDNT).¹⁴⁹ The REB offers a valid rendering with, “what the law required.”

The only reason that a version like the NRSV renders Luke 2:27 with, “to do for him what was customary under the law,” where the clause *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” is certainly absent from the source text, has to be one which is theological. It is a classic case of “under the Law” meaning “obedient to the Torah,” being so ingrained into the terminology or psyche of various expositors, that they think it is acceptable to speak of the compliance of Joseph and Mary in presenting the infant Yeshua at the Temple as them being “under the Law.” But with *kata to eithismenon tou nomou*, “according to the custom of the law” (RSV), being the far better rendering, what are we left with to evaluate why the NRSV changed “according...to the law” to “under the law”?¹⁵⁰ Even the relatively paraphrased Moffat New Testament is closer, having “the customary regulations of the law for him.”

Consider some of the grammatical points made by John Nolland in his Luke commentary (WBC) on 2:27, particularly his remark about phrases which use the Greek preposition *kata* (κατά) or “according to/concerning”:

“The use of εἰσαγέειν [*eisagein*] is in the NT mostly Lukan. κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου [*kata to eithismenon tou nomou*], ‘in accord with what was made customary by the law,’ occurs only here in the NT and is not found in the LXX, but Luke is fond of κατὰ τὸ [*kata to*] phrases (cf. esp. 1:9; 2:42; 4:16; 22:39; Acts 17:2). Despite its position περὶ αὐτοῦ [*peri autou*], ‘concerning him,’ should be linked to ποιῆσαι [*poiēsai*], ‘to act,’ and not to νόμου [*nomou*], ‘law.’”¹⁵¹

Why a version like the NRSV chose to render *kata to eithismenon tou nomou* with “what was customary under the law” is something we might never really know. Luke 2:27 lacks the clause *hupo nomon* or “under the Law.” Renderings for Luke 2:27 consistent with “according...to the law” are grammatically accurate.

Approaching “Under the Law” in the Future

Is the viewpoint that “under the Law” means obedient to God’s Torah, one which is sustainable—*or* should “under the Law” instead mean subjected to the Torah’s condemnation and penalties upon sinners? This article has argued that the latter position is the only one which can be held consistently throughout the relevant verses where the Greek clause *hupo nomon* appears in the Apostolic Scriptures, being the only appropriate counterpart to redeemed saints in Yeshua (Jesus) being *hupo charin* or “under grace.” It is also the only way that the Messiah upholding the continuance of Moses’ Teaching for His followers can be properly maintained (cf. Matthew 5:17-19). Unfortunately, this view has not been given a significant enough hearing among many of today’s contemporary Christian Believers, although “under the Law” being subjected to the Torah’s condemnation is surely a view that theologians and commentators have had to consider.

Because of how terminology like “under the law” is used in much of modern speech, not only in reference to the Mosaic Torah but also civil and governmental law—not to some kind of

¹⁴⁹ CGEDNT, 92.

¹⁵⁰ The ESV, which is part of the same translation family, thankfully does have “according to the custom of the Law.”

¹⁵¹ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9:20*, Vol. 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 119.

penalties enacted upon lawbreakers and criminals—each of us should commit ourselves to use a viable alternative. We need to make the conscious effort to train our minds to use phrases like “according to the law,” when some kind of definition of an offense as defined by either God’s Law or human law is in view. **This goes doubly for today’s Messianic Believers**, who need to be much more consciously aware of how they use the preposition “under” in their speech. For, they will not do themselves that much good if they speak of “under the Law” (*hupo nomon*) in Scripture pertaining to the condemnation upon sinners for violating the Torah, **but then** speak in terms of “under the law of the United States you must pay your taxes” when “according to the law of the United States you must pay your taxes” is really what they mean.

This article has also gone to some lengths to point out those places in English Bibles, where “under the Law” terminology is employed, but where the Greek clause *hupo nomon* is noticeably missing from the source text. Hopefully, this will stimulate a need for Bible readers to slow down a bit when examining various verses, and reflect upon passages a bit more carefully.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), © 1952, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.