



OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

REACH TEACH ENCOURAGE DISCIPLE



AUGUST 2011
EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT



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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

Outreach Israel Ministries and TNN Online

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

There is only one assembly of chosen ones/elect, the congregation of Israel, of which all Believers in Messiah are a part. God does not have two groups of elect: Israel and "the Church."

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be followed and studied by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the saints after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website

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OIM UPDATE

August 2011

The long, hot days of Summer are once again upon us—as the age old challenges of whether to serve God or wealth—continue to dominate the worldly machinations of people around the globe. These days of worldwide financial instability and uncertainty, being constantly debated among the populace, bring to mind some wise and comforting words uttered by the Messiah Yeshua. He communicated some key thoughts to a multitude of listeners, who in their own era, had their own concerns about daily subsistence:

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [wealth, NASU]. For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, *as to* what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?...Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own**” (Matthew 6:24-25, 31-34, NASB).

Without reservation, Yeshua turned the hearts and minds of His audience away from the worries and cares of the day, toward seeking the righteousness of the Father. For those of us who follow Him today, this advice remains sound and hopefully employed.

Knowing that fears can often overcome faith, this month's lead article describes the blessing of being **“Empowered by the Spirit.”** Being reminded of the words of Yeshua that talk about the Divine connection born again Believers have to the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit, should give us the confidence required to continue to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness, even in the troubling economic uncertainties that permeate our world. Hopefully, all of us will be reminded of the responsibility we have to be of service to His work on Earth, despite financial circumstances that have the potential to take our eyes off of Him.

Also included in this issue of OIM News is an important FAQ entry recently added to the TNN website on **Galatians 5:2-3**. In many parts of the broad Messianic movement, the question “Are Gentiles obligated to keep Torah?” is being asked in increasing frequency. Many answers have been issued to this, but they are not necessarily that engaged with either the Biblical text or contemporary scholarship. I am sure that the response, of Outreach Israel and TNN Online to this question, is going to surprise many of you—but that you will appreciate our “innovative” approach!

Finally, we want to thank those of you who responded to our recent request to help out with our **Prison Ministry Outreach**. Your sacrificial offerings confirm to us that the Lord is using His people to continue His work! May the Lord bless you for unconditionally serving others without expecting anything in return!

Advancing His Kingdom until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

by Mark Huey

The words and instructions shared by Yeshua with His Disciples during the moments steadily leading toward His betrayal, humiliation, and execution—should give today's Believers great confidence in the Divine work that is expected of them by the Holy One of Israel. After demonstrating the essence of servant leadership, and describing how He will return to the Father, Yeshua declared that after He was gone the Spirit of truth would be sent to take up residence inside of His followers:

“And I will ask the Father, **and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).

Imagine what the Disciples must have been thinking when they heard this. After faithfully following Yeshua, and learning about His walk of righteousness for over three years, their Teacher had announced His departure. Instead of establishing a Messianic state that would overthrow the Romans and correct many of the wrongs rampant in the prevailing Jewish religious leadership—Yeshua was going to leave, and His Disciples were going to instead be responsible to carry His message forward to the rest of the world, with the indwelling power of this Holy Spirit. Observing their stunned reaction to this revelation, Yeshua immediately elaborated in order to assuage any misgivings or concern evident in their expressions of consternation:

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.** He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:18-21).

Apparently, the relationship between Yeshua and His Disciples had been so intimate, that their expressions revealed a loss similar to a child losing both parents. Without hesitation, Yeshua calmed their fears by telling them that He would not only come to them, but that they would have comfort as the Holy Spirit took up residence inside of them as His followers, and they would be able to commune with God. *The close fellowship that the Disciples had with their Master would not be lost.* When we look at Yeshua's message to them in John 14-15, did the Disciples at all have an inkling that the New Covenant prophecy of Ezekiel 36:25-27 was in the process of fulfillment (cf. Luke 22:20)?

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances**” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The excitement of considering a new heart and a new spirit, able to fully obey the commandments of God, had to be overwhelming to remember, given all of the events that transpired around the Last Supper. The Disciples were probably confused, and a bit unable to digest all of the words the Lord told them. Were they going to be the sole recipients of this blessing, or were there others to be included? One of them named Judas (not Judas Iscariot), asked a logical question, about the extent of the blessings available by receiving the Holy Spirit. He was told how the ability for the Father and Son to come to someone, via the presence of the Holy Spirit, was accessible to anyone:

“Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you’” (John 14:22-26).

Yeshua’s response also interjected two key components, which will evidence the presence of the Holy Spirit within a person. Confirmation is to come with a new heart of flesh indwelt by the power of the Spirit of God, and a genuine love for the Lord coupled with a willful obedience to His word. On the contrary, those who do not love the Lord will not keep His words. The obvious contrast between those who believe and receive the Holy Spirit, and those who do not—will be evident by their actions—not their words or intentions. One either loves the Lord, with a heartfelt desire to keep His instructions—or one does not love the Lord, perhaps considering His words as simply nice platitudes or expressions that could be uttered by any human being with at least a modicum of a moral compass.

However, for the person who truly believes in Yeshua and the eternal salvation He provides, *His words are the ultimate in truth*. What He has stated must be taken very seriously. In fact, Yeshua told His Disciples immediately earlier, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). This declaration, in and of itself, makes belief in Him and His atoning work essential, if anyone desires reconciliation with God.

Before turning to quell troubled hearts in the moments before His execution, Yeshua affirmed that the Helper or the Holy Spirit would not only teach His Disciples all things, but bring back to remembrance what He had declared. In order for any of us to be teachable and recollect what has been said by the Messiah, hearts of stone must become softened to His words, followed by heart-changing belief in order to receive His indwelling presence.

Indwelt with the Spirit

Being indwelt with, and empowered by, the Holy Spirit—was surely an awesome reality that the Disciples no doubt began to ponder, as they listened to Yeshua’s words. Throughout the Tanach or Old Testament, which recorded the history and exploits of the Ancient Israelites, there are multiple accounts of how the Holy Spirit used various individuals to further God’s will for His people. Perhaps the Disciples, as they heard Yeshua’s teaching to them about the Holy Spirit, began to contemplate the account of the seventy elders who received the same Spirit as Moses, in order to prophesy to those in the camp. *Could they be so blessed?* As it had been written, Moses declared that he wished that all would receive the Spirit:

“So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed *Him* upon the seventy elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do *it* again. But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. So a young man ran and told Moses and said, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, answered and said, ‘Moses, my

lord, restrain them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? **Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!**'" (Numbers 11:24-29).

The Disciples might have also thought about the glorious exploits of the different judges and prophets of Israel. These were figures who were indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, when challenges had arisen from some of Israel's archenemies, or when stern rebukes and admonitions needed to be issued to those in rebellion against Him, or when promises of deliverance to the repentant needed to be declared:

"And when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. **And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel.** When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim" (Judges 3:9-10).

"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. **So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon;** and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him" (Judges 6:33-34).

"**Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah,** so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon" (Judges 11:29).

"**Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon [Samson] mightily,** and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes *of clothes* to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house" (Judges 14:19).

"When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. **And the Spirit of the LORD came upon [Samson] mightily** so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands" (Judges 15:14).

"**Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you [Samuel] mightily,** and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you" (1 Samuel 10:6-7).

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and **the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.** And Samuel arose and went to Ramah" (1 Samuel 16:13).

"And it will come about when I leave you that **the Spirit of the LORD will carry [Elijah] where I do not know;** so when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although *I* your servant have feared the LORD from my youth" (1 Kings 18:12).

"**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,** because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners;" (Isaiah 61:1; cf. Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22).

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!’ And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard *Him* speaking to me” (Ezekiel 2:1-2).

When the Disciples heard Yeshua’s claims about the Holy Spirit coming to indwell them, did they really think about figures like Samuel, Saul, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel? Did they at all contemplate what the Spirit of God had done through others down through the ages? Is it even possible that some of the Disciples might have thought that the time Yeshua spoke about here at the Last Supper, was that which had been prophesied by Joel?

“And it shall come to pass afterward, **that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;** your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29, RSV).

One can only imagine what thoughts were circulating in the heads of the Disciples, as they heard Yeshua tell them that they would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is why after giving them some reassurance for their troubled hearts, Yeshua not only repeated His statement that He was going back to the Father, but He said that they would have a great peace unlike that available in the world:

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go from here” (John 14:27-31).

Time began to run out with the moments Yeshua could spend with His Disciples, as Judas Iscariot and the Roman cohort would arrive soon to arrest Him. It was at this point, though, that Yeshua gave some of His most profound instructions about what it meant to be indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and letting the Holy Spirit accomplish God’s will through His own. Yeshua declared that He is the true vine and that His followers are the branches attached to the vine. The direct connection, between Yeshua and His followers, is what allows anyone to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:1-8).

Yeshua communicated here that the essence of bearing fruit for the Kingdom, comes when one abides in direct connection with God. Disciples of the Messiah may be considered to be extensions of Him and His indwelling power. But notice that in the midst of this description it is abundantly clear that apart from His empowerment, disciples can really do nothing. *This statement, when fully considered, is extremely humbling.*

Did Yeshua declare that fruitfulness in the Kingdom, is merely an extension of letting the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit achieve God's work? Given the horticultural analogy of a vine with branches bearing fruit, confirms that this is exactly what was stated.

For many who get caught up in good human works, this can be difficult to understand. After all, are there not many wonderful, positive things that people do that on the surface appear to be an extension of God's work on Earth? God-seekers and theologians have been debating this conundrum for millennia, but based on what has transpired over the centuries, does anyone really want to claim that *their own* good human works have contributed to God's eternal plan? This is why it is so imperative that we each **make sure** that we are attached to the vine, and that the good works we perform are truly generated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Empowered by the Spirit

While contemplating the questions presented by the words of Yeshua, His First Century Disciples—and by extension us today—wonder about the difference between the Lord's work through human vessels, and perhaps good works that are generated by just the human will. Yeshua said that the need to completely depend upon Him is required, if one wants to truly bear the fruit of service:

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you" (John 15:16).

The Lord has uniquely chosen each born again Believer to serve Him and bear fruit. Such a declaration does not sound like this is a matter of human choice, but that it is rather God's providential decision to choose and appoint various people for His tasks. Elsewhere, though, we see that what God has prepared for us are not the choices we make to love Him or obey Him, but the good works that He expects us to perform (Ephesians 2:10). There is definitely a mystery present at times, as we evaluate the sovereignty of our Creator, and our human ability to make freewill choices. If this confuses you, as it has confused many Bible readers over the centuries, my advice is **for each of us to make sure that the Lord abides within us, and that all of our actions are genuinely guided by Him.**

Communicating the reality that God empowers a human vessel with His Holy Spirit, to bear fruit, is something confirmed throughout the Apostolic Scriptures. God's people are to serve as a kind of living sacrifice, and they are to pray without ceasing. They are to be constantly entreating the Lord as they are filled with His Spirit, as they resist the temptation to sin, and as they perform good works:

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which* is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Messiah Yeshua" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Just considering these two examples, one can conclude that part of being a fruit-bearing branch of the Almighty, is definitely attributed to a mind which focuses its thoughts on communion with the Holy One. This does not mean that as the expression goes, "One is so Heavenly minded that he is no Earthly good." One has to instead be focused on the ways of Heaven, so that the reign of Heaven can break the stronghold of the sins of Earth! Being humbly and willingly sensitive, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, is critical as one walks with God and accomplishes His will. ***Only by being united to Yeshua the Messiah, and by being empowered by the Spirit, will the good works that the Father desires us to have be truly manifest!***

Galatians 5:2-3: I have encountered a Messianic Jewish teaching that states that only the Jewish people are obligated to keep Torah, because they are circumcised. Is this what Galatians 5:2-3 really communicates? I am confused.

FAQ??
tnnonline.net/faq

“Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law” (Galatians 5:2-3).

It is true that in various sectors of Messianic Judaism, particularly those which promote a bilateral ecclesiology of the Kingdom of God composing two sub-groups of elect, Israel and “the Church,” that it is believed that only Jewish people are really supposed to follow the Torah. Non-Jewish Believers can keep the Torah if they wish, but it is not required or really expected of them.^a Galatians 5:2-3 is offered as a proof text in support of this position, as the non-Jewish Galatians who would be circumcised in the First Century, would apparently make themselves obligated, the same as any Jew, to keep the Torah.

Is this interpretation of Galatians 5:2-3, a viable one? According to one rather popular Messianic teacher, at least: “Galatians 5:3 is irrefutably simple to understand.” He goes on to conclude, “If the plain meaning of the text is true” then “every person who is not Jewish is not obligated to keep the whole Torah.”^b When one encounters any remark or statement, by any Bible teacher, on any topic, to the effect that something is “irrefutably simple,” “airtight,” “watertight,” or “fireproof”—be careful because this is a very good indication that there has not been enough detailed examination of the subject.^c What is required, for adequately evaluating what Galatians 5:2-3 communicates, is not only placing these two verses within a wider scope of statements seen in Paul’s letter, but going into more detail from the Greek source text and adequately triangulating a variety of scholastic perspectives.

Is it possible that the Messianic Jewish view of only the Jewish people being “obligated” to keep the Torah, based on Galatians 5:2-3, has not probed the text enough? Galatians 5:2-3 are actually not easy verses to evaluate, partially because Paul says “I testify again...,” a clue that he could be repeating remarks previously made when he visited the Galatians in person (cf. Acts 13:13-14:28). In Galatians 5:2-3, we are certainly reading the Galatians’ mail, and are injecting ourselves into an ancient problem.

Textually speaking from the English alone, the immediate context of Galatians 5:1, 4, gives us some important clues as to the setting Paul addresses, regarding why he is insistent that the non-Jewish Galatians do not go through circumcision:

^a This is generally the position represented by Daniel Juster and Russ Resnick (2005). *One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations.* Available online via <<http://umjc.org>>.

^b D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), pp 236, 237.

^c Cf. Matthew 12:37.

“It was for freedom that Messiah set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Messiah, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Galatians 5:1, 4 indicates that the issue in view is the non-Jewish Galatians having been freed from slavery to sin, and by going through circumcision, they would be returning to a spiritual condition that they should have left behind in paganism (cf. Galatians 4:8).^d While in other places in Galatians, it is easily discerned that the “justification” in view regards one’s identity as a member of God’s people (Galatians 2:15), the “justification” seen in Galatians 5:4 has to regard the Galatians’ salvation status as well. Those Galatians, who would go through circumcision, are to be considered as having fallen from grace.

One significant feature of the “circumcision” (Grk. verb *peritemnō*, περιτέμνω) referenced throughout much of Galatians—but most specifically here—is how those of both the male and female genders are in view. Galatians 5:3 says, *panti anthrōpō peritemnomenō* (παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ). While it may seem rather strange to us, this clause is best rendered with **“every human being who receives circumcision,”** as the generic *anthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος) for humankind is employed. Realizing that both the male and female genders are in view, the “circumcision” spoken of throughout much of Galatians has very little to do with a medical operation on the *glans penis*, but instead has to do with the ritual of an ancient proselyte to Judaism. “Circumcision” in Galatians may largely be considered a shorthand way of Paul saying: “become a Jewish proselyte/convert.” Becoming an ancient proselyte to Judaism involved circumcision, water immersion, and the presentation of an offering (b.*Keritot* 9a).^e Females becoming Jewish proselytes partook of the latter two.

Interpreters of various positions on Galatians 5:1-4 should be able to recognize that the Apostle Paul is not criticizing circumcision as a medical practice here. What Paul is directly going after, though, is an inappropriate theology of circumcision present within much of First Century Judaism. Being ritually circumcised as a proselyte to Judaism, will not merit one a proper standing before

^d This begs a variety of questions regarding what the “days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:10) were, which the Galatians were accused of keeping. They were tied “to the weak and worthless elemental things” (Galatians 4:9).

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 editor’s article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?”

^e “Just as your forefathers entered the covenant only with circumcision and immersion and sprinkling of blood through the sacrifices, so they will enter the covenant only through circumcision, immersion, and sprinkling of blood on the altar” (b.*Keritot* 9a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

For a further discussion, consult T.R. Schreiner, “Proselyte,” in *ISBE*, 3:1009-1010.

the Creator God. Yet, the Judaizers/Influencers, who had been agitating the non-Jewish Galatians, did advocate that becoming a Jewish proselyte was necessary to be a genuine part of the people of God, *and* possess eternal salvation (cf. Acts 15:1).

A standard position that is seen of Galatians 5:2-3, only slightly modified by some leaders in today's Messianic Jewish movement, is that the non-Jewish Galatians being circumcised would make them be obligated to keep the Torah. This is something witnessed in the views of Galatians commentators:

- F.F. Bruce: "Circumcision as a minor surgical operation is neither here nor there, but circumcision voluntarily undertaken as a legal obligation carries with it a further obligation—nothing less than the obligation to keep the whole law. He who submits to circumcision as a legal requirement, necessary for salvation, accepts thereby the principle of salvation by law-keeping, and salvation by law-keeping implies salvation by keeping the whole law."^f
- Richard N. Longenecker: "Paul wants to make it plain that with circumcision comes obligation 'to obey the whole law.'"^g

There are interpreters who hold the doing of the Torah in Galatians 5:3 as a matter of what identified ancient Jews,^h and various others who will look at the doing of the Torah in Galatians 5:3 as a matter of the non-Jewish Galatians trying to earn their salvation. The correct interpretation of Galatians 5:3, regarding the matter of the Torah, has to weigh Paul's rather severe warning of telling the non-Jewish Galatians **that they will be cut off from grace** (Galatians 5:4). The doing of the Torah in Galatians 5:3, as only some matter of obligated Jewish identity, does not at all serve as an adequate counterweight to being cut off from grace or salvation. *A loss of God's favor present in Yeshua's sacrifice is in view.* Richard B. Hays further observes,

"As the apostle has affirmed repeatedly...the Galatians have already been embraced into God's people through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, entirely apart from any action on their part. Thus their seeking covenant membership in some other way constitutes a tragic rejection of God's grace in Christ."ⁱ

N.T. Wright also has some statements of accuracy on Galatians 5:2-3, which need to be factored in:

"If you get circumcised, you are committing yourself to keeping the whole law, the entire Jewish **Torah**. It isn't just a minor ritual requirement, which can then go comfortably alongside commitment to the Messiah...The only point of getting circumcised is if you are then intending to submit, in every other way as well, to the full discipline of the Jewish synagogue."^j

^f F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 230.

^g Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), 227.

^h James D.G. Dunn, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 266.

ⁱ Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:313.

^j N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 62.

Wright's remarks are more reflective of the sociological position in which any of the non-Jewish Galatians, going through the process of becoming circumcised as a proselyte, would find themselves. First Century Jewish circumcision was not the same as the medical circumcision of the Twentieth Century, administered by a surgeon (even if for some possible Biblical reasons). It was something that committed one fully to the Synagogue and what they wanted you to do. And, for the non-Jewish Galatians, who are attested to have been saved and thus reckoned as God's own by the salvation of His grace in Yeshua (Galatians 1:6-7), becoming circumcised as proselytes would be tantamount to saying that God's grace was not enough. Perhaps if circumcision were offered as a First Century medical operation, various non-Jewish males could go through with it as an appropriate remembrance that at a later point in his progression in his relationship with God, Abraham was circumcised (Genesis 17:24; cf. Romans 4:10-13). Circumcision in much of First Century Judaism, though, was a densely packed theological and national symbol—which many Jews fought and died for in the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E. (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:60-61; 2:46). Circumcision reckoned one not only as a Jew, but as *not being* a pagan Greek or Roman.

Examining the statement, **"I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law"** (Galatians 5:3, RSV), there have been some key suggestions made that the language employed here might have to do with some kind of oath taking. Hans Dieter Betz observes, "The formula of oath seems to be in place because of the stubbornness of the Galatians who, in spite of what they have been told before, remain naive with regard to the implications of becoming circumcised."^k Ben Witherington III also indicates how "A close examination of Ancient Near East covenanting procedures, including those followed by the Israelites, shows that the sign of the covenant was often connected with the oath curse that went with the covenant, in fact symbolized the curses that applied if one didn't obey the covenant stipulations."^l Both Betz and Witherington have interjected some thoughts into what Galatians 5:3 may involve, which can better aid us in understanding why the non-Jewish Galatians being circumcised as proselytes, would be tantamount to them being cut off from God's grace in Yeshua.

What if Galatians 5:3 includes an echo of a kind of oath that proselytes to Judaism would have been forced to take, in order for them to be steadfastly committed to keeping the whole Law? This certainly does have a precedent, as the returned Jewish exiles from Babylon made a public commitment to not only keep the Torah, but actually be cursed, if they were ever found disobeying any of its instructions:

"Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, are joining with their kins-

^k Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 259.

^l Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 366.

men, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes" (Nehemiah 10:28-29).

For the First Century Jewish Synagogue, it is not difficult at all to envision various religious authorities requiring proselytes to make a vow to keep the whole Torah, and in the process for such proselytes to acknowledge curses crashing down upon them for breaking it in any way. Given the significance that many of today's Pauline scholars have given to Paul's usage of "works of law" in Galatians (2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10) and the Qumran document 4QMMT,^m it should not be surprising that the Qumran community required its members to make an oath to keep the Torah of Moses, and in the process be reminded that God's wrath would come down upon any of those who would break it:

"These are the regulations that govern when they are gathered together as a community. Every initiate into the society of the *Yahad* is to enter the Covenant in full view of all the volunteers. He shall take upon himself a binding oath to return to the Law of Moses (according to all that He commanded) with all his heart and with all his mind, to all that has been revealed from it to the Sons of Zadok—priests and preservers of the covenant, seekers of His will—and the majority of the men of their Covenant (that is, those who have jointly volunteered for His truth and to live by what pleases Him). Each one who thus enters the Covenant by oath is to separate himself from all of the perverse men, those who walk in the wicked way, for such are not reckoned a part of His Covenant. They 'have not sought Him nor inquired of His statutes' (Zeph. 1:6) so as to discover the hidden laws in which they err to their shame. Even the revealed laws they knowingly transgress, thus stirring God's judgmental wrath and full vengeance: the curses of the Mosaic Covenant. He will bring against them weighty judgments, eternal destruction with none spared" (1QS 5.7-13).ⁿ

It is entirely reasonable to propose that Galatians 5:3 includes an embedded reference to some kind of oath for ancient Jewish proselytes to keep "the whole Law" (*holon ton nomon*, ὅλον τὸν νόμον). The proselyte procedures the non-Jewish Galatians would go through, would be administered by non-Messianic authorities, people who did not believe in Yeshua and would not take into consideration the new status of human beings in Him (Galatians 3:28). (The Influencers' error themselves, as addressed throughout the Epistle to the Galatians, was in making ritual proselyte circumcision an issue for entry into God's people, and not faith in the Messiah and His accomplishments.) And in the case of whatever sect of ancient Judaism may have been administering the proselyte circumcision procedure, Betz notes that to the Qumran community "keeping the whole Torah meant for them additional requirements, which made their observance more radical than that of ordinary Jews."^o More than just observing commandments of the Pentateuch proper, with "the whole Law," could be intended.

While being ritually circumcised as a Jewish proselyte, and in the process making an oath to keep the whole Torah, could very well be what is more fully

^m Consult the editor's article "What Are 'Works of the Law?'"

ⁿ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 132.

^o Betz, 260.

involved in Galatians 5:3—why would Paul be so strident to tell the non-Jewish Galatians: “you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4; cf. 2:21)? He could have just said something to the effect, “You are misguided” or “You are deceived” or “You have gone astray” here, because being circumcised is surely a Torah commandment—and one which Paul himself says later has value (cf. Romans 2:25; 3:1-2).

An extremely important, albeit quite obvious component, to properly understanding Galatians 5:3, “**he is under obligation to keep the whole Law**” (NASU), is actually reading what the Greek source text says: *hoti ophēiletēs estin holon ton nomon poiēsai* (ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι). While most contemporary English translations have something along the lines of “under obligation” (NASU) or “obligated” (NIV/NRSV/ESV/HCSB), these renderings communicate the sense of a verb, when a noun is actually what appears in the source text. While Jews and Messianic Jews being “obligated to keep Torah,” has become a prolific sound bite in some quarters, based on Galatians 5:3—what if “under obligation” is not at all the best translation for what is witnessed in the Greek source text? Not enough interpreters have not adequately examined what the Greek actually says.

The Greek noun *ophēiletēs* (ὀφειλέτης), in its most basic sense, means “*a debtor*” (LS).^p While it can mean “**one who is under obligation in a moral or social sense,**” it can also mean “**one who is in debt in a monetary sense,**” as well as “*one who is guilty of a misdeed, one who is culpable, at fault,*” “in relation to God, *sinner*” (BDAG).^q The term *ophēiletēs* appears in Matthew 6:12, where Yeshua directs His disciples to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” In the view of TDNT, “those who accept circumcision are debtors to the whole law,”^r and no one can deny how in the KJV/NKJV, *ophēiletēs* is translated with “debtor”: “**that he is a debtor to do/keep the whole law.**”^s

The proper rendering of *ophēiletēs* as “debtor” makes good sense, in light of the inference that the non-Jewish Galatians who are circumcised as proselytes will fall from grace. Their motives are clear: they “are seeking to be justified by law [lit. ‘in law’; *en nomō, ἐν νόμῳ*]” (Galatians 5:4). Does this mean that these people will find themselves no longer seeking justification in the Messiah and what He has accomplished? It has to mean this, in order for their circumcision to merit their being cut off from God’s grace in Yeshua. If membership in God’s people via ritual proselyte circumcision were *only* in view in Galatians 5:2-3, then one would expect the Galatians being accused of only being misguided or deceived. Most critical to be recognized, is how the condition of a “debtor” in the Apostolic Scriptures, is often that of a person who lives in an unredeemed condition of sin and guilt. James D.G. Dunn notes, “The play on words between verses 2 and 3 should be noted: Christ will not benefit them (*ōphēleseī* [ὀφελήσει]), but, instead, they will be in debt (*ophēiletēs* [ὀφειλέτης]) to the law.”^t

^p LS, 580.

^q BDAG, pp 742-743.

^r F. Hauck, “*ophēiletēs*,” in TDNT, 748.

^s Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 430 renders Galatians 5:3 with: “**he is indebted to keep the whole law.**”

A picture of Galatians 5:2-3 should be forming, which has: adequately taken into consideration First Century Jewish background, the Greek source text, and the reality that the non-Jewish Galatians who become ritually circumcised as proselytes will be cut off from God's grace in Yeshua. Consider this interpretation of Galatians 5:2-3:

1. The "circumcision" in view has been required by the Judaizers/ Influencers in order for the Galatians to be "really" reckoned as members of God's people.
2. Paul says that if the Galatians go through with this, then they will be regarded as debtors to keep the whole Torah.
3. Being a debtor to the Torah, could very well have involved some kind of a loyalty oath that the proselyte would have to exclaim, something with precedents witnessed in Jewish history. One who is found to break the Torah then (cf. James 2:10), as a debtor, would call God's curses and wrath down.
4. Why would being regarded as a "debtor to do the Torah," merit being cut off from God's grace in Yeshua? Because in Yeshua, born again Believers are to no longer be regarded as such debtors. He has freed all redeemed men and women from the curse of the Torah declared upon Torah-breakers (Galatians 3:13). To regard oneself as some kind of "debtor to do the Torah," and if found breaking the Torah incur its curse, would be tantamount to the Galatians saying that Yeshua had not really broken the curse of Torah-breaking via His salvation.

Galatians 5:2-3 are loaded First Century words, which were delivered by the Apostle Paul to severely dissuade the non-Jewish Galatians from becoming ritual proselytes to Judaism. The reason he says "You have been severed from Messiah, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4), is because Paul knows that in becoming proselytes, they will make themselves into debtors to keep the Torah. In going through the proselyte procedure (cf. Galatians 3:10), they will have likely declared that the curses of the Torah come down upon them if they ever break it—which would run contrary to Yeshua's sacrifice having canceled the Torah's curse (Galatians 3:13).¹ The spiritual center of who these people are will become focused on justification via the Torah—not Yeshua the Messiah and a steadfast reliance on what He has accomplished. In going through the proselyte procedure, the non-Jewish Galatians will accept a premise of salvation-by-ethnicity (m.*Sanhedrin* 10a:1), and all of the requirements demanded by a non-Messianic Jewish community—which will accrue to them as a form of spiritual debt, which can never be nullified as they will be cut off from Messiah.

No one, however—including a Jewish Believer—is to be regarded as a

¹ Dunn, *Galatians*, 265.

² The issue in Galatians 5:2-3 does not pertain to the salvation status of Jewish Believers, who would not have gone through a ritual proselyte circumcision. Peter's word of Acts 15:11, though, should be well taken here:

"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they also are."

It is also true that a Jewish non-Believer, like any other unredeemed member of the human race, stands under the curse of the Torah.

For Jewish proselytes today from Christian backgrounds, it is useful to remember that they have to renounce faith in Yeshua in order to complete the process.

“debtor to do the Torah,” because as Paul had said earlier to those in Galatia, “Through [the Messiah] everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39, NIV).^y

It should be obvious that the Messianic Jewish idea one may hear of Jews and Messianic Jews being “obligated” to keep the Torah, which is likely to claim Galatians 5:2-3 as support, has not investigated the original context and setting of these verses thoroughly enough. If as proposed, “debtor” is the correct rendering of *opheiletēs* (ὀφειλέτης), and this depicts a condition of one being a sinner without regeneration via the gospel—then no one, Jewish or otherwise, wants to be in the situation depicted by Galatians 5:1-4 of having to be in slavery and be cut off from Yeshua.

While historically, verses like Galatians 5:1-4 have been interpreted as the Apostle Paul speaking against the continued validity of the Torah for the post-resurrection era, the targeted issue is actually making sure that one is not “a debtor to do the Law.” While the Epistle to the Galatians is clear that God’s Torah is not to be regarded as a means of justification, we can be agreed that all born again Believers following *ton nomon tou Christou* (τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ), “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), which the CJB rightly extrapolates to be “the Torah’s true meaning, which the Messiah upholds.” This is to be focused around Yeshua’s teaching on Moses’ Teaching, principally found in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7). Yeshua the Messiah came to fulfill the Torah, He directed His followers to keep it (Matthew 5:17-19), and Paul says in Galatians that we are to fulfill the Torah with love for neighbor being paramount (Galatians 5:14; cf. Leviticus 19:18).

While there has been a significantly polarized debate in various sectors of the Messianic movement, as to whether or not non-Jewish Believers are “obligated to keep Torah,” Romans 8:12-13 directs us in another direction: “brethren, we are debtors [*opheiletia*, ὀφειλέται], not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live” (RSV). Born again Believers, regenerated by the Spirit, are not to be regarded as “debtors to keep Torah.” They are instead “debtors” to grand work of Yeshua the Messiah (Romans 8:11). As Romans 13:8 says, “Owe nothing [Grk. verb *opheilō*, ὀφείλω] to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.” Being in Yeshua, regenerated men and women are to have the clear presence of the Holy Spirit within them, but as “debtors” to the Lord and His work, they have *no debt of sin* from Torah-breaking that needs to be paid any longer—the only “debt” that they are to have is one of love toward God and neighbor, the foremost of the commandments.^w

Those in Messiah are all certainly expected to obey Moses’ Teaching, but the responsibility of such obedience is with the definite aid of the Spirit infilling their hearts and minds, and is surely guided by the impetus of love. Those who are in Messiah and have been spiritually regenerated, are to be regarded as people of the

^y Note the presence of the verb *dikaioō* (δικαιόω), which the RSV and NASU render as “freed.”

^w Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17)^x He has inaugurated (Luke 22:20). This includes the promise not only of a permanent atonement for sin and forgiveness—releasing redeemed people from being “debtors to do the Torah”—but in the place of being a debtor, the New Covenant promises to provide a definite supernatural compulsion to obey, which only being “a debtor to do Torah” (cf. Galatians 5:3) would surely not bring. As Romans 8:1-4 says,

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Those who walk in the Spirit, should naturally be those who keep God's Torah.^y Rather than being in slavery (Galatians 5:1), one should consider how James the Just says, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). Following the Torah as one who has been freed from sin in the Messiah Yeshua, is quite different than following the Torah as one who is to be regarded as a debtor.

Can Galatians 5:2-3 be used to imply that within the Messianic movement today, only Messianic Jews have a real requirement incumbent upon them to keep the Torah, and non-Jewish Believers do not? No one should argue against how Messianic Jews might feel more comfortable and have fewer obstacles, keeping many parts of the Torah (i.e., those areas that much of Protestantism has classified as the so-called “ceremonial law”), given the fact that it is a definite component of not only their spiritual heritage, but their ethnic heritage. The real stakes, though, about following the Torah—and the deplorable complacent trend witnessed in various Messianic sectors, on distinctions to be rigidly maintained (and enforced) among God's people^z—have a great deal to do with the *universal availability* of all people on Earth to receive God's Spirit.

If all of the redeemed in Yeshua are to receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit, then an obedience to the commandments of the Torah, compelled on by the Spirit, should naturally follow. (Much of this obviously has to occur and be facilitated within the right, local community of Believers—which in some places may be [significantly] lacking.) Yet, with some Messianic Jews claiming that non-Jewish Believers should really not be keeping the Torah, this could be taken as a nullification of the Lord's decree, “I will pour out my spirit on **all flesh** [*kol-basar*, כָּל־בָּשָׂר]” (Joel 2:28, RSV). Is the Holy Spirit supposed to write God's commandments on only *some* of His people, or *all* of His people? The answers to this question, in the short term, unfortunately, are likely to divide more and more teachers and leaders, than bring them closer together.

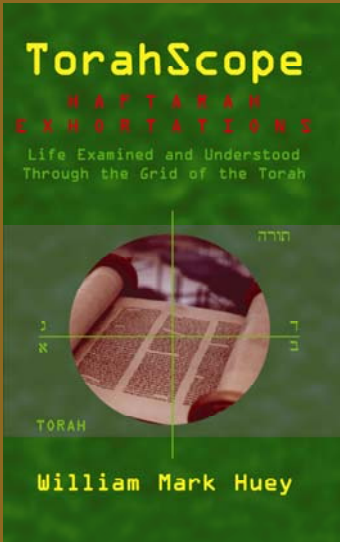
^x Consult the editor's article “What Is the New Covenant?”

^y For a further discussion, consult the editor's article “One Law for All,” especially under the sub-section “Sanctifying Grace: A Supernatural Compulsion to Obey God More and More.”

^z Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “One Law as Replacement Theology.”

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