

Ma'ase ha-Torah “Works of the Law”

The phrase “works of the law” (which is sometimes rendered “deeds of the law” in the KJV) appears only nine times in the New Testament and only in Paul’s writings: Rom. 3:20; 3:28; 9:32 & Gal. 2:16 (3x); 3:5; 3:10 (In Gal. 3:10 the Aramaic has “Works because of the Law”) This phrase, “works of the law”, is best understood through its usage in Gal. 2:16. Here Paul writes:

*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law,
but by the faith of Jesus Christ,
even we have believed in Jesus Christ,
that we might be justified by the faith of Christ,
and not by the works of the law:
for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.
(Gal. 2:16 KJV)*

If we consider this passage carefully we can see that Paul uses this phrase to describe a false method of justification, which is diametrically opposed to “faith in the Messiah”. To Paul “works of the law” is not an obsolete Old Testament system, but a heresy that has never been true.

The term “works of the Torah” has shown up as a technical theological term used in a document in the Dead Sea Scrolls called MMT which says:

4QMMT (Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah) (Some of the Works of the Law)	Galatians
<i>Now we have written to you some of the works of the law, those which we determined would be beneficial for you... And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him... (4QMMT (4Q394-399) Section C lines 26b-31)</i>	<i>Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Yeshua the Messiah, even we have believed in Yeshua the Messiah, that we might be justified by the faith of Messiah, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified....Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. (Gal. 2:16; 3:6)</i>

This heretical doctrine laid out in MMT is based on twenty-four purity regulations about which the Essenes held a stricter halacha than their Pharisaic counterparts, and which they believed would be reckoned to them as righteousness. Apparently Paul’s opponent takes “righteousness/justification” in this passage of MMT to mean “salvation”. Paul however argues that it is faith in Messiah and not these “works of the law” by which we are saved.

When Paul speaks out against “works of the law” it is like a Baptist preacher speaking out against “Latter Day Saints”, he does not mean the words according to their literal meaning, he has nothing against “Saints” who live in the “Latter Days” he is using the Mormon’s theological technical term to refer to their theology.

There can be no doubt that Paul sees “works of the law” as categorically bad, yet Paul calls the Torah itself “holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12), certainly Paul does not use these phrases to refer to the Torah itself as obsolete, but to a heresy, a false theology that was never true.

**Essenes and Pharisees on Habakkuk 2:4
(Galatians 3:11)**

<i>Essenes on Hab. 2:4</i>	<i>Pharisees on Hab. 2:4</i>
<p><i>"And the Righteous shall live by his faith' (Hab. 2:4b) The interpretation concerns all the Doers of the Torah in the House of Judah, whom Elohim will save from the House of Judgment because of their works and their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness." (Habakkuk Commentary)</i></p>	<p><i>Again came Isaiah and reduced them [The precepts of the Torah] to two [principles], as it is said, Thus saith the Lord, [i] Keep ye justice and [ii] do righteousness [etc.].(Is. 56:1) Amos came and reduced them to one [principle], as it is said, For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me and live.(Amos 5:4) To this R. Nahman b. Isaac demurred, saying: [Might it not be taken as,] Seek Me by observing the whole Torah and live? — But it is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said, 'But the righteous shall live by his faith' (Hab. 2:4). (b.Makkot 24a)</i></p>

Was the Law Only a Schoolmaster? (Galatians 3:23-29)

Often when I share with Christians that the Torah is everlasting, for all generations, they respond by saying, “But the law was just a schoolmaster to bring us to faith in Christ.” By this they allude to Galatians 3:23-29 which reads in the Greek as translated in the KJV:

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.
24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.
26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.
27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
29 And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.
(Gal. 3:23-29 KJV)

But what does this passage really mean?

To begin with we must look at this text as translated from the original Aramaic:

23 But until Trust comes, the Torah is guarding us, while we shut up to trust which is ready to be revealed.
24 Therefore the Torah is a tutor for us unto Messiah, that from Trust we might be justified:
25 But when trust comes, we are not under tutors.
26 For you are all sons of Eloah by the Trust of Yeshua the Messiah:
27 For those that in the Messiah were immersed, have put on the Messiah.
28 There is not Jew and not Aramean; there is not servant and not a son of freedom, There is not male and not female: for all of you are echad in Yeshua the Messiah.
29 And if you are of the Messiah, then you are ... the seed of Avraham, and heirs by the Promise!
(Gal. 3:23-29 HRV)

There are a number of key differences between the Greek and Aramaic, and this passage gives us a perfect example of why it is important to study these passages from the original Aramaic rather than from their Greek translations.

The Greek uses the phrase “under the law” in verse 23, where the original Aramaic actually reads “the Torah is guarding us”. Since “Under the Law” was a false teaching that was never true and not an obsolete Old Testament system (as some have wrongly taught, see our recent article [What do You Mean.... “Under the Law”?](#))

The Greek uses the phrase “no longer” in verse 25 where the Aramaic simply reads “not” which wrongly implies a change from an Old Testament system to a New Testament system, thus propagating the idea that “under the law” refers to an obsolete Old Testament system that has since changed.

Finally the Greek has the word “schoolmaster”/“tutor” in the singular in verse 25 while in the Aramaic it is in the plural. The Greek thus wrongly implies that the tutor(s) or schoolmaster(s) that we are not under in verse 25 is the Torah from verse 24, while in the Aramaic the singular tutor/schoolmaster in verse 24 is being contrasted with the plural tutors/schoolmasters in verse 25.

In this text the Torah is described as a tutor (or schoolmaster) that leads us to faith. This tutor however is not leading the world to faith, but individuals to faith. We have always been justified by faith even in “Old Testament” times. In fact Paul himself in Galatians derives this idea from the TANAK (Hab. 2:4 and Gen. 15:6). The TORAH leads an individual to Messiah and faith. This in no way implies that the Torah should not be kept.

If a man goes to law school and becomes a lawyer, can he then ignore everything he was taught by his professors when he goes on to practice law? Of course not. The fact that we learn from someone to attain a certain goal, does not mean that we can then cease to follow what we have learned.

Notice that in the Aramaic (but not in the Greek as expressed in the KJV) we shift from “tutor” (v. 24) to “tutors” (v. 25) in the Greek they are both singular. In the Aramaic “tutor” (the Torah) which guards us is being contrasted with being “under tutors” paralleling the false “under the law” theology (that is, proponents of the Under the Law theology are trying to get you to exchange the Torah as your Tutor (singular) for them as your tutors (plural)).

The Greek as expressed in the KJV misunderstands all of this by failing to render the plural in vs. 25, and by using the phrase “under the law” in verse 23 where the Aramaic instead says that the Torah was guarding us. And finally by using the phrase “we are no longer under” in the Greek as expressed in the KJV verse 25 wrongly implying that something has changed. We have never been “under the law” and we were never meant to be “under tutors” (these under the Law teachers) but instead the Torah was meant to guard us from false teaching and be our Tutor.

For more on the false Under the Law teaching see our recent article [What do You Mean... “Under the Law”?](#) The Torah is indeed a tutor, or schoolmaster, which guards us from the false teachings of other schoolmasters, such as those teaching the false “under the law” theology which was not an obsolete Old Testament system, but a false teaching that was never true. The Torah brings each of us as individuals to faith in Messiah, a faith that in itself will compel us to remain faithful to the teachings of our schoolmaster, the Torah.

Under the Law

The phrase “under the law” appears only twelve times in the Greek New Testament and only in Paul’s writings:

(Rom. 3:19; Rom. 6:14-15; 1Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 3:23; Gal. 4:4-5; Gal. 4:21; Gal. 5:18)

It is important to note that the phrase “under the law” is used in the Greek New Testament in several places where it does not appear in the original Aramaic text:

(Rom. 3:19; 1Cor. 9:21; Gal. 3:23)

The phrase “under the law” was actually read into each of these three verses by the Greek translator. But how should we understand the phrase “under the law” in the other nine instances where it appears both in the Aramaic and in the Greek:

This phrase may best be understood from its usage in Rom. 6:14-15:

*For sin shall not have dominion over you:
for ye are not under the law, but under grace.
What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law,
but under grace? God forbid.
(Rom. 6:14-15 KJV)*

If we look at this passage carefully we can see that Paul sees “under grace” and “under the law” as diametrically opposed, one cannot be both.

“Under the law” then, is not an obsolete Old Testament system, but a false teaching, which was never true.

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There can be no doubt that Paul sees “under the law” as categorically bad, yet Paul calls the Torah itself “holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12), certainly Paul does not use the phrase “under the law” to refer to the Torah itself.