

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 16/02/2013

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By Joseph F. Dumond

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Deut 5		Zephaniah 1-3	Gal 1-2
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The Decalogue Repeated (Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33)

Moses repeats the Ten Commandments to the younger generation. Comparing this chapter with Exodus 20, we see that God inspires Moses here to give an additional reason for keeping the Sabbath—“remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (5:15). So the Sabbath not only reminds us that God is our Creator, but it also points to Him as our Redeemer—the One who delivers us from spiritual Egypt, i.e., the dominion of Satan, society and our own sinful nature. The Sabbath day, then, signifies freedom and reminds us that we should share this freedom with everyone who is within our care and under our control (verse 14). Of course, heads of households must exercise great wisdom in this area when it comes to wives and houseguests who do not share the same beliefs.

The Fifth and Tenth Commandments also have wordings slightly different from those in Exodus 20. Notice the words “as the Lord your God has commanded you” in the Fourth and Fifth Commandments. These are not ten suggestions, and it’s interesting that God emphasized this concerning these two commandments when He inspired Moses to restate the Ten.

The fifth commandment is stated very positively, adding not only the same blessing for obedience promised in Exodus 20—“that your days may be long...in the land”—but also the words “that it may be well with you.” Obedience to this commandment is essential to maintain healthy families, which are one of the foundations of a stable society. The lack of proper esteem and respect for parents is one of the reasons that families in Western nations are in sad shape. World magazine recently reported, “A respected seminary professor [suggested] that the very concept of fatherhood may ‘now be passe’ for a high proportion of young people” (May 25, 2002).

In the Tenth Commandment, “wife” and “house” are in opposite order in the two versions, and Deuteronomy adds “his field.” The reason for that addition may be that no Israelite had a field of his own for 40 years after the Exodus, but now they were about to gain fields in the Promised Land. Realizing the Tenth Commandment prohibits coveting, it is interesting to consider Colossians 3:5, which tells us that covetousness is idolatry. Thus, the Tenth Commandment links right back up with the First Commandment. In this way, the Ten Commandments make a complete circuit.

“Face to face” in verse 4 does not mean the Israelites actually saw the face of God (see verses 5, 22-23; 4:12, 15). Even Moses did not see His glorious face. The expression implies close proximity—being confronted with God’s obvious presence—and God’s speaking to them on a level they could understand.

People accuse God of hiding from them, but in verses 23-27 we see man’s proclivity to hide—or at least keep his distance—from God. Of course, God mercifully understands (verse 28), and He expresses His longing for the time when they would have “a heart in them” to properly fear and obey Him (verse 29). A heart can be spiritually converted only when God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5-10; Deuteronomy 29:4).

Zephaniah

Introduction to Zephaniah—the Days of Josiah (Zephaniah 1)

The prophet Zephaniah prophesied during the days of King Josiah. We have no knowledge of his background except for what is given in verse 1 regarding his lineage. He was a fourth-generation descendant of Hezekiah. Most sources believe this refers to Hezekiah the king, which would make him a cousin of Josiah, though others correctly maintain that we can't know for sure. In favor, however, is the fact that his lineage is traced back four generations. Commentator Charles Feinberg remarks, "No other prophet has his pedigree carried back so far" (*The Minor Prophets*, 1990, p. 221). Thus, the Hezekiah mentioned would seem to be someone of distinction. Zephaniah's theme is the Day of the Lord, the time of God's intervention and punishment on the nations. "He uses the expression more than any other prophet of the Old Testament" (p. 221).

Zephaniah prophesied for a few years, beginning some say in the same year as Jeremiah, who began to prophesy in 627 or 626 B.C. Others place Zephaniah at a later date. Because there is no hint of Josiah's reformation in his writings, most scholars believe Zephaniah prophesied before the reforms began, though some believe the reformation was already underway. The words of the prophet in 1:2-6 do seem to indicate that he prophesied prior to any significant repentance by the nation of Judah—though this could be because the prophecy was meant primarily for the end time, the time of the Day of the Lord.

Indeed, Zephaniah's utterances have dual application. The Day of the Lord was a warning to seventh-century-B.C. Judah that God would punish them when their sins came to a climax—but, more directly, the words of the prophet mainly allude to the coming great Day of the Lord that is in the future. The language of 1:15 is identical to the description of the Day of the Lord as described in Joel 2:2: "A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." The prophet Ezekiel will later use language similar to Zephaniah 1:18, describing the time of the end when a man will deem his wealth (silver and gold) as totally worthless because it provides no shield against the terrible wrath of God (Ezekiel 7:19).

The message of doom apparently brought Judah to a degree of repentance, along with the warnings of Jeremiah and the leadership of King Josiah. Their great reform is described in 2 Kings 22:3-23:25. The repentance was short-lived though, lasting only through the lifetime of Josiah. After this, the people of Judah fell back into grievous sin, and the warnings of the prophets came to pass in some measure through the horrendous invasion by the Babylonians.

Idolatry Then and Now (Zephaniah 1)

God states that He will "utterly consume all things from the face of the land" (verse 2), including the "stumbling blocks" (verse 3)—"figurative of idols" (NKJV margin). A large reason for God's anger is Baal worship (verse 4) and because the people "swear by Milcom" (verse 5), an Ammonite god known elsewhere as Molech (see "Milcom," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*). The worship of Milcom or Molech was reprehensible to God. It included gruesome acts of infant sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35).

Of course, this did fit the situation in the wake of the evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon over Judah. Yet Zephaniah's prophecy, it must be remembered, is primarily for the end time, as it concerns the coming Day of the Lord. How, then, does the prophecy apply in these last days? Notice that God is going to stretch out His hand "against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (verse 4). Jerusalem today is a city of Jews, Muslims and various Christian denominations. Can these groups be labeled as idolatrous? Indeed, they can. As surprising as it may seem, many of their doctrines and practices are derived from paganism.

Judaism was eventually corrupted by Babylonian and Greek religion. Mainstream Christianity adopted many of the same concepts and, to gain preeminence over the Roman Empire, embraced still more and more from paganism. Islam arose out of a blend of Jewish and false Christian concepts and Arab mythology. Notice that the people are guilty of syncretism—worshiping God but with pagan concepts and practices, which is viewed by God as their worshiping false deities (compare verse 5).

Consider that Molech is "probably to be equated with...the Roman god Saturn or Mithra" (Jan Knappert, *Encyclopaedia of Middle Eastern Mythology and Religion*, 1993, p. 206, "Molech"). Mithra has been identified with Baal, the sun god. His birthday was celebrated in ancient times on December 25. The modern holiday of

Christmas derives from this ancient celebration and the Roman Saturnalia—in honor of Saturn, essentially the same god—which immediately preceded it. (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

In verse 4, the phrase “idolatrous priests” is left untranslated in the King James Version. It is the Hebrew *chemarim*. “The Hebrew root means ‘black’ (from the black garments which they wore or the marks which they branded on their foreheads)” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on verse 4). As we will soon read, Josiah removed the *chemarim* of his day (see 2 Kings 23:5). Yet it is interesting to consider that such “black-robed priests” could designate various groups today—from Catholic priests to Greek Orthodox presbyters to orthodox Jewish rabbis to many Muslim imams. This may be the “foreign apparel” of verse 8—in that case denoting gentile religious garb—although the subject of verse 8 could also be people who exploit others to become wealthy, enabling them to purchase exotic foreign clothing.

In Zephaniah 1:9, God says He will punish “all those who leap over the threshold.” The Nelson Study Bible says this “may refer to a pagan practice like one mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:5. The priests of Dagon would not step on the doorway of the temple to Dagon because the hands and the head of Dagon had fallen there.” Are there modern participants of Dagonism? Surprisingly, a case can be made that “the two-horned mitre, which the Pope wears, when he sits on the high altar at Rome and receives the adoration of the Cardinals, is the very mitre worn by Dagon, the fish-god of the Philistines and Babylonians” (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 1916, 1959, p. 215).

The “Fish Gate” of verse 10 “received its name from the fish market which was near it. Through it passed those who used to bring fish from the lake of Tiberias and Jordan” (JFB Commentary, note on verse 10). Perhaps this is actually a figurative reference here to those by whom the fish-god Dagon, alluded to in the previous verse, has come into Jerusalem. In the same context we are told of punishment to befall the “merchant people”—“lit[erally], the ‘Canaanite people’: irony: all the merchant people of Jerusalem are very Canaanites in greed for gain and in idolatries” (note on verse 11).

Yet for all this, far too many sit complacently, believing “the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil” (verse 12)—meaning He won’t do anything. The apostle Peter referred to such people as “scoffers...in the last days” who say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Yet, as the book of Zephaniah makes clear, the scoffers are sorely mistaken. Those sacrificing to false gods (participating in false worship) will themselves become a sacrifice of God if they fail to repent (verses 7-8; compare Isaiah 34:6; Revelation 19:21), slain for the sake of all mankind.

The Meek of the Earth Hidden (Zephaniah 2-3)

In verses 1-3 of chapter 2, Zephaniah addresses an “undesirable nation,” calling them the “meek of the earth.” The latter expression would seem to denote the Church of God—particularly when we view the prophecy in context as dealing mainly with the end time. Moreover, these people are described as those who have upheld God’s justice or righteous judgment, thus walking by His laws—again pointing to true Christians. The Church is described as a spiritual nation in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9-10). And it is certainly undesirable in the eyes of the world—as God’s people are, as Christ was, despised, hated and persecuted by the world (see John 15:18-20).

If these Christians will gather together (Zephaniah 2:1; compare Hebrews 10:25), seek God in prayer and study of His Word (see Zephaniah 2:3), and seek righteousness (obedience) and humility (same verse), they have an opportunity to be hidden and protected during the time of God’s punishment—in line with other prophecies that describe God’s faithful people being sheltered in a place of refuge in the end time (compare Revelation 12:14). Interestingly, Zephaniah’s name means “The Eternal Hides” or “Hidden of the Eternal”—which may have factored into the wording of Zephaniah 2:3.

Verses 4-5 foretell divine retribution to come on the people living in the land of the Philistines, here synonymous with Canaan—which, in an end-time setting, would appear to indicate the modern Palestinian people. The Jews, returning from captivity, will be given the former Philistine seacoast, including the Gaza Strip, which is now occupied by the Palestinians (verses 6-7). In verses 8-10, ruin is prophesied to come upon Moab and Ammon,

which are areas of modern Jordan, still the homeland of these ancient peoples. And this is said to be because of their pride and because they will have reproached God's people and threatened their borders. It is not clear whether the reproached and threatened people of God here are the physical Israelites or the spiritual people of God referred to in verses 1-3. If the latter, the whole passage would seem to be parallel with Isaiah 16, where Moab is apparently punished for refusing to hide God's outcasts (see highlights for Isaiah 16).

Verse 11 again shows the passage to be primarily an end-time prophecy, as people from all the shores of the nations will come to worship God after He utterly wipes out idolatry.

The chapter culminates with judgment against Assyria and its capital city Nineveh (verses 13-15). Babylon and other forces conquered ancient Assyria and laid waste to her proud capital in 612 B.C. No doubt this prophecy did in part refer to that ancient overthrow—as it was yet a few years away when Zephaniah wrote. But realize again that this is mainly a prophecy of the end of this age. Nineveh is directly parallel here with end-time Babylon, speaking the same words and suffering the same penalty (verse 15; compare Isaiah 47:10-11). So it is likely that the prophecy is primarily aimed at Assyria of the last days—a German-dominated European superpower also known as Babylon (see highlights for Isaiah 10)—and its future seat of power. The prophet Nahum, as we will later see, prophesied against Nineveh around this time too. And in his prophecy there is also a very close parallel between Assyria and end-time Babylon.

Zephaniah 3 begins with an indictment against Jerusalem, probably representative of the Jewish nation as a whole—and perhaps even of all Israel in the end time, since Jerusalem was the ancient capital of all 12 tribes. Four specific charges are brought against the people. Verses 3-4 indict four classes of leaders for their corruption, and God promises He will bring them to justice. The priests not only don't teach the laws of God, "they have done violence to the law"—they despise and ridicule God's law as being a yoke, burden and curse that has been "done away with" or "annulled." God warns that He has judged other nations and His nation should expect no less. Yet sadly, the people continue to rebel (verse 7). In Zephaniah's day, there was a measure of repentance at the time of Josiah's reforms. And in the future, all Israel will at last repent, as we see later in this chapter.

Verse 8 describes the return of Jesus Christ to fight the nations gathered against Him (compare Revelation 19:19). An interesting feature about Zephaniah 3:8 is that, according to Charles Feinberg, it is the only verse in the Old Testament that contains all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The chapter then progresses forward into the wonderful, peaceful reign of Christ over all nations—that is, over all those who are left after the cataclysmic wars of the end time. Verse 9 describes God providing a "pure language" for the peoples of the earth, much better suited for praising and serving God. Today's languages are filled with pagan references and other ungodly elements. That won't be so in the language of the future. The tone of the book from this point on is quite positive, as conditions that will exist on earth under the rule of the Kingdom of God are described. Verse 15 prophesies, "The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst."

Feinberg states that the "appointed assembly" of verse 18 refers to the "feasts of the Lord" (p. 235). This parallels Zechariah 14:16, which tells us that the Feast of Tabernacles will be observed at that time. The chapter ends with the wonderful truth that, though God will bring national punishment on the Israelites, He will still regather those who are left to at last be the model nation Israel was intended to be (verses 19-20). They will then be, as verse 12 shows, the meek and humble people of God.

Galatians 1

Paul's letter to the assemblies in Galatia. What is it about? Paul opens with this comment: "I marvel that you are so readily turning away from Him who called you in the favor of Messiah, to a different 'Good News,' v.6. So this is the subject of the letter.

He points out that some, who have come to the assembly or are part of the assembly, are perverting the Good News of Messiah.

Some men have come to them now, with a "different path" unto righteousness rather than what Paul has taught them: Salvation through Faith. He stresses the point to them, that this message of Good News and salvation through Messiah is not a teaching of man, but Elohim. These people who are coming to them now preaching a different message and calling it the good news, bring their message from men.

v. 12 “For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but through a revelations of Yeshua Messiah.” In the next couple of verses Paul purposefully presents the contrast of who he was prior to this revelation, in the religion and tradition of his fathers of Judaism and of the Pharisees. Also, Paul stresses how when he received the revelation of Yeshua Messiah and the Good News he did not immediately go and consult men or councils of men... but instead went to the desert (Mt Sinai in Arabia) for three years. Upon his return to Damascus and then Jerusalem, he sought out Peter – a true disciple and witness of Yeshua from the beginning to learn from him. He also points out that as he began his ministry for the Good News throughout, he was only known by those people as “the one who used to persecute us, now teaches us of Messiah” and how they marveled and Praised Elohim for the transformation. He presents all these things to provide “proof” of a “true” transformation of spirit and deed within him. He petitions them of this such that they know, he is not a deceiver.

Galations 2

He has been preaching and teaching this same message to all the peoples, the Gentiles throughout Asia Minor of the Good News, salvation through faith and after fourteen years appeared again in Jerusalem to also report to the Apostles what he was teaching and preaching to the gentiles to make sure he was doing rightly and in agreement with them. He makes a point to the fact that his Aramean friend Titus was not even compelled to be circumcised, v 3. Why would he mention circumcision here? For the same reason of the letter that was mentioned in chapter 1: there were men coming to them preaching and teaching “another Gospel and another “way” unto salvation.”

He professes that even in Jerusalem in the private meeting with the Apostles concerning his teachings to the Gentiles, some of these same types of men sneaked in to hear all that was said between them. Paul stood his ground with them also and would not yield concerning the matters of which they incessantly desire to demand of the new converts. And when the meeting was done, the men left in agreement, with approval and handshakes all around: that Paul and Barnabas would go to the uncircumcised preaching the Good News and Peter, John, and James would continue in preaching the Good News to the circumcised and that each man had the approval of being in the will of Elohim in this manner.

Again, Paul is testifying of his position of who he is... and then who these men are who are now coming to the assemblies behind him and attempting to persuade them of another path, another way, and another Good News.

Basically here, Paul is speaking about peer pressure in simple terms. There is a clique of religious elites who desire to impose upon the new converts and believers... their same old traditions and ways in order to enslave all these new people coming to belief. This way was not based upon the Power of Messiah’s resurrection, but based upon old man-made traditions, chains of does and don’ts, rules and regulations – and they were telling the new converts that they must abide by all these man made rules in order to be saved and part of the assembly.

Paul tells the story of even how James, Peter, and Barnabas fell to the peer pressure and fell into hypocrisy concerning these matters. Where they once were eating and communing with the Gentiles fine in faith, but when the Pharisees from Jerusalem came they began behaving differently and as they used to when the Gentiles were seen as ‘unclean’

Peter, James, and John were eating and drinking amongst gentile converts while among them even though they of course were still Judean but when the Judeans came to visit, they began not only behaving again as Judeans according to their religious traditions but also began requiring the gentiles to behave as Judeans. Paul points out how hypocritical this is, and how it brings the work of Messiah to nothing.

For if the Judeans had all they needed for deliverance unto eternal life in the Torah, then what need of Yeshua Messiah at all? And why then preach and teach a “Good News” if all is as it ever was previously? He makes the analogy of rebuilding the same house that was just torn down. Evidently also, according to this letter and its contents, the Galatian assemblies were believing them and doing according to the wishes of the traditional Pharisees.

Galatians 3

“Oh senseless Galatians! Who has put you under a spell, not to obey the truth – before whose eyes Yeshua Messiah was clearly portrayed among you as impaled?” v.1.

Then Paul asks them the most meaningful question: Did you come to faith by hearing the Good News of Messiah preached? Or did you come to faith through the Torah? And through whom and which way did you receive the Spirit, the Set apart Spirit of Elohim?

Abraham believed Elohim and it was reckoned unto him as righteousness. Paul writes to them concerning being under a curse in relation to depending upon the Torah for righteousness and for salvation. Why? Is the Torah itself a curse? No! But if you are depending upon your keeping of the Torah for salvation and to be declared right... this is a curse because even in the Torah itself it is written in Deut. 27:26 “cursed is he who does not establish the Words of this Torah.” But no man is made righteous by Torah before Elohim is evident, for it is written, “the righteous will live by faith.” Habakkuk 2:4.

Whoever will do the things written in the Torah shall live and have life in it. There is also a curse for not doing, or failing to do those things that are written in the Torah. There are blessings and there are curses and the choice for these are each persons to make. But salvation is obtained through belief in Messiah... eternal life.

Sharing some insight from www.hebroots.org concerning the Letter to the Galatians and the terminology used by Paul:

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND THE “Works of the Law”

http://www.triumphpro.com/dead_sea Scrolls_works_of_the_law.htm

Millions of people have wondered what the expression, “works of the law” means as used by the apostle Paul. What are they?

Are “works of law” the Ten Commandments? Are they the “Law of Moses”? Or something else? Paul said “a man is not justified by the works of the law,” and that “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal.2:16). What did he mean? What is the Christian’s relationship to “works of the law”?

William F Dankenbring

In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul makes it plain that a true Christian is not “justified” by “works of the law,” or made righteous in God’s sight by them. Paul declared, “He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the WORKS OF THE LAW, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal.3:5).

Paul went on, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the CURSE: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal.3:10). What are these “works of the law”?

In his translation, Ferrar Fenton refers to them as “rituals of the law.” Most Christians, Protestants and others, think they refer to the “deeds” of the law of Moses — the entire Law of God given to Israel at Mount Sinai — including the Ten Commandments, statutes, judgments, and Temple rituals and ceremonies of the Law. But is this assumption true?

The title of an obscure Dead Sea Scroll is MMT, which stands for Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah. This phrase was originally translated “Some of the Precepts of the Torah,” by Dead Sea Scholars Strugnell and Qimron. However, the word miqsat does not just mean “some.” The same word is used in Genesis 47:2 where Joseph presents five of his brothers before Pharaoh — where the word could be translated as most important, select, or choice brothers.

More importantly, however, is the rest of the phrase — ma-ase ha-Torah. Strugnell and Qimron translated this as “precepts of Torah.” However, the most common GREEK word for ma-ase is ergon — which in the New Testament is usually translated “works.” The Hebrew word Torah is usually translated as nomos, which in the New Testament is generally translated “law.” Thus the expression ma-ase ha-Torah then simply means “works of the law.” This would be a very excellent translation. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament leaves no

doubt — it translated the Hebrew expression *ma-ase ha-Torah* by the Greek *ergon nomou*. This Greek expression is commonly translated in the New Testament as “works of the law.” This expression is found in Romans 3:20,28, and Galatians 2:16, and 3:2,5, and 10.

Interestingly, when the British Bible Society translated the New Testament into modern Hebrew in 1976, when the text of the MMT Dead Sea Scroll was known only to a few scholars, they translated the Greek *ergon nomou* (works of the law) as *ma-ase ha-Torah*.

Says Martin Abegg, author of an article entitled “Paul, ‘Works of the Law’ and MMT,” in the November-December 1994 *Biblical Archaeological Review*,

“In short, *ma-ase ha-torah* is equivalent to what we know in English from Paul’s letters as ‘works of the law.’ This Dead Sea scroll and Paul use the very same phrase. The connection is emphasized by the fact that this phrase appears nowhere in rabbinic literature of the first and second centuries A.D. — only in Paul and in MMT. “The works of the law that the Qumran text refers to are obviously typified by the 20 or so religious precepts (*halakkah*) detailed in the body of the text. For the first time we can really understand what Paul is writing about. Here is a document detailing works of the law” (p.53, *BAR*, 11-12/94 issue). Finally, then we can put to rest the question, just what are the “works of the law” that Paul wrote about! Finally, an argument which has raged for centuries, and still rages today, can be settled by clear evidence from the first century!

Let’s take a look at this mysterious document MMT, and see what it is all about.
THE DEAD SEA SCROLL MMT

The MMT scroll records the remains of nearly two dozen legal issues. Perhaps another dozen issues perished. The scroll calls attention to the subject of boundaries between what was to be considered pure and impure. The phrase *rohorat haquodesh*, “purity of the holy,” sums up the contents of the scroll and its purpose. Says Abegg, this means, “Do not allow the holy to be profaned by what is impure.” The issues discussed, says Abegg, were: “The issues include bringing Gentile corn into the Temple, the presentation of Gentile offerings, and the cooking of sacrificial meat in unfit (impure) vessels. Other rulings concern cleansing of lepers, admitting the blind and the deaf into the Temple; and permitting intermarriage with Ammonite and Moabite converts, long forbidden to enter the congregation of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3).

Other issues involve the transmission of impurity by a flow of water (*musaq*), the intermixture of wool and linen (*sha-atnez*) and perhaps the climax of the discussion: the intermarriage of priests with the common people.

“Most of the rulings espoused by the author of MMT are based directly upon Biblical law (for example, the prohibition against plowing with unlike animals in Deuteronomy 22:10). A few others are interpretations or amplifications of Mosaic prescriptions (for example, bans on Gentile offerings and dogs in the Temple). The list clearly reflects a conservative reaction against a relaxation of Torah precepts” (*ibid.*, p.53-54).

Notice! These “rulings” or “works of the law” included “INTERPRETATIONS OR AMPLIFICATIONS OF MOSAIC PRESCRIPTIONS.”

The Qumran sect spurned the “rabbinic extensions called Talmud, which effectively built a fence around the Torah, successive layers of which have become codified in the rabbinic works of the Mishnah and the two Talmuds. The Qumranites were the ‘Bible only’ group of their day” (page 54).

Notice again! The “RABBINIC EXTENSIONS” reflected in the Talmud, that corpus of Jewish religious and rabbinic literature accumulated over the centuries, known as the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, was spurned by the writers of the MMT Dead Sea Scroll. They developed their own interpretations, expansions, and *halakkah*. But both came under the over-all description of “works of the law” — and included various rabbinic interpretations, amplifications, and extensions of the Law of Moses to Jewish life during the first century. The expression *miqsat ma-ase ha-torah* — “pertinent works of the law” — nowhere appears in rabbinic literature. However, clearly the Qumranites, like the apostle Paul, were against these rabbinic “works of the law,” though from a different point of view. They were espousing their own version of the “works of the law.” Paul, very clearly, condemns in no uncertain terms these “works of the law” in both Romans and Galatians!

Writes Abegg:

“Looking at Galatians and Romans in the light of MMT, it seems clear that Paul, using the same terminology, is rebutting the theology of documents such as MMT. I do not mean to suggest that Paul knew of MMT or of the zealous members of the Qumran community, but simply that Paul was reacting to the kind of theology espoused by MMT, perhaps even by some Christian converts who were committed to the kind of thinking reflecting in MMT.”

What does this all mean? Clearly, even in Paul’s day, the Jewish scribes and Pharisees were building “fences” around the law of God, and making it into a burden — a “yoke of bondage” (Gal.5:1). Paul warned of “false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into BONDAGE” (Gal.2:4). He warned the Galatians that we are not justified before God by “works of law” (Gal.2:16).

Paul was upset, disturbed, about the reports he had received concerning them. He wrote, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal.3:1). He asked them, “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal.3:2-3).

Paul urged the Galatians not to become entangled in the “works of the law” — the deeds and decisions and rulings of rabbinic Judaism or its offshoots. He wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the LIBERTY wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal.5:1).

Writes Martin Abegg in Biblical Archaeology Review:

“Some scholars have suggested that Paul misunderstood the Jewish teaching of his day or, at the very least, that he created a straw man to bolster his own teaching regarding faith versus law. In the past, this view was supported by the fact that the phrase ‘works of the law’ nowhere appears in the foundational books of rabbinic Judaism. MMT, however, provides the ‘smoking gun’ for which students have been searching for generations, not from the pages of rabbinic literature, but from the sectarian teachings of Qumran. MMT demonstrates that Paul was not jousting with windmills, but was indeed squared off in a dramatic duel — not with mainstream Judaism but with a sectarian theology — that ultimately defined Christianity. If I have understood rightly, the importance of MMT for New Testament research is nothing short of revolutionary” (ibid., p.55).

Clearly, in Romans and Galatians Paul taught against “legalism” and the teaching that one could be saved and achieve salvation through the Law of Moses — which was the Jewish teaching of the time. Rabbinic Judaism still teaches today that obedience to the LAW is the way to salvation — that the Torah is the key to eternal life. Yet they reject the Messiah, and the atoning work of the Messiah, as of no consequence and unnecessary for salvation.

They have seriously missed the boat. Paul makes that issue crystal clear in Romans and Galatians. Clearly, there can be no salvation, and no eternal life, apart from Jesus Christ our Lord! And in following Christ, we should not become burdened by or under the bondage of “the works of the law” of rabbinic halakkah and traditions, rulings, precepts, and extensions of the Torah, as it is in the Scriptures.

On the other hand, we also need to be careful not to come under the “bondage” to the “oral law” or “halakkah” of various Christian-professing churches, who create their own rules, regulations, prescriptions, and dogmas — traditions of “men” which Jesus clearly rejected — which violate the written Word and Law of God. It is interesting that those churches which seem to object the strongest against the Jewish “oral law” themselves create their own “oral law,” although they do not call it that.

Historically, even the Sadducees, who rejected the “oral law” preserved by the Pharisees, found it necessary to create their own “halakkah” and “oral tradition,” in order to expound the Scriptures. However, any “tradition” or “church custom” which contradicts the Word of God — Torah, or divine Revelation of the Scriptures — must itself be rejected and avoided.

The bottom line, therefore, is that Christ Himself has the last word — He is the “second Moses,” the Prophet like unto Moses, who had FINAL AUTHORITY to “interpret” the Mosaic Law — and provide a new “halakkah” of true

interpretation and obedience (see Matthew 5-7). He came to “fill full” the Law, and make it complete (Matt.5:17-19).

To really understand God’s Law, therefore, and its application to Christians, and the New Covenant, we need to search the Scriptures, and the words of Christ. We need to avoid all the “works of the law,” or man-made religious taboos and constraints, which men have added from time to time, for one reason or another, to the Scriptures, leading into a yoke of heavy-handed?authoritarian bondage and spiritual slavery.

The “works of the law” that Christ and Paul condemned were the human additions to God’s Law which made it a system of bondage and misery. Neither of them were condemning the keeping of God’s commandments or referring to obedience to God’s Law as “works of the law” — not at all!

Let’s thank God for this precious truth and revelation — and for the beauty of His Torah Law and Revelation!