Being involved in the Messianic Jewish movement and being deeply involved with the Jewish community and its concerns often prompts one to take new perspectives on old questions, to question established doctrine, and to reconcile passages of Scripture that most are unaware are in conflict. While this paper has been written “for the Jew first,” it in many ways was written for my Gentile Christian brethren—a term I use with no sense of irony, for indeed, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:28-29).

Unfortunately, that quote (and Rom. 10:12 and Col. 3:11) are all too often taken in such a way as to functionally say, “There is no more Jew . . . in Christ Jesus.” It is my hope that this paper will remove at least one of the objections to Jews who know their Messiah to remaining Jewish in life and practice.

The journey that led to this paper, however, did not begin with a desire to justify Messianic Judaism to mainline Christianity, nor to address Paul’s writings. It began with wanting to know the origin of a single prophecy in the Tanakh (OT), specifically, why Isaiah (11:10-12) says that in the day that the nations inquire of the Messiah, “the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people . . . from the four corners of the earth.” I was at the time testing a rabbinic adage that every prophecy in the Bible could be found in the Torah, and was curious to see if I could locate this conception of two exiles in the Pentateuch. I ultimately discovered that not only was the answer to that question an unqualified “yes,” but that it provided answers to some seemingly unrelated issues in Pauline theology that have long troubled scholars as well.

The New Perspective on Paul

More than any other book of the New Testament, Galatians poses a challenge to those, both Jew and Gentile, who take great joy in keeping the feasts and other distinctly “Jewish” commandments of the Torah. For centuries, Paul’s teaching in this book has been used to attack those maintaining any Jewish practice at all in the Church, usually as being a “legalistic” attempt to “earn” one’s salvation (the Protestant law vs. grace paradigm).
Messianic responses to Galatians have been varied. One early work-around, expressed by David Stern in his *Jewish New Testament*, takes the references to “under the law” and “works of the law” to refer to the rabbinic interpretations and additions to the pure Torah, “the system that perverts the Torah into legalism.” This interpretation proved unsatisfactory for a number of exegetical reason. For example: “The genitive, nomou, is not possessive, for the works do not belong to the law. It is not subjective genitive, for the law does not produce works. nor is it an objective genitive, because the works do not lead to the law. . . Furthermore, in Judaism the pious work is not thought of as one’s own work. It is really the work of God.”

E.P. Sanders has demonstrated that the old view that second temple Judaism, and by extension rabbinic Judaism, was a religion which depended on accruing enough “merit” by one’s own actions for a place in the world-to-come is simply untrue, introducing the term *covenantal nomism* to express the idea that Judaism teaches that election to the covenant is by God’s grace, while one was expected to live in obedience to the law to “maintain” one’s covenant status. Ergo, “legalism,” in the sense of an attempt to obtain God’s favor by keeping the law’s commandments, could not be in view.

Building on Sanders’ work, James Dunn has argued that Paul, when speaking of “the law,” being “under the law,” and keeping “the works of the law” is not arguing against legalism *per se*:

Paul intended his readers to think of particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws. . . From the broader context, provided for us by Greco-Roman literature of the period, we know that just these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively Jewish . . . [which] functioned as identity markers, they served to identify their practitioners as Jewish in the eyes of the wider public, they were the particular rites which marked out the Jews as that particular people.

N.T. Wright agrees: “[James Dunn’s] proposal about the meaning of ‘works of the law’ in Paul – that they are not the moral works through which one gains merit but the works through which the Jew is defined over against the pagan – I regard as exactly right. It has proved itself again and again in the detailed exegesis; attempts to deny it have in my view failed.”

Dunn correctly identifies that we should limit Paul’s criticism of “the law” to those commandments that distinctively marked out the Jewish people. He also recognizes that Paul’s view of the Torah as a whole was both more nuanced and more positive than most Christian commentators have recognized and that the “eschatological gift of the Spirit” was intended to bring about obedience to the law. In short, the major issue that Paul contended with was that salvation was by the way of *being Jewish*. D. Thomas Lancaster, representing the viewpoint of Messianic Judaism, has largely agreed with Dunn’s thesis, though not without some modification.

**Narrowing Down the “Works of the Law”**

Unfortunately, Dunn goes beyond the Scriptural evidence in arguing that not only where the Jewish distinctives of circumcision, the food laws, and the Sabbath not binding upon the Gentiles (a position
that has gained wide acceptance in the mainline Messianic Jewish organizations) to arguing that therefore Paul abandoned such practices himself and even forbade other Jewish believers to continue in them. As he puts it, “the advent of Christ had introduced the time of fulfillment” of the promise to Abraham that the whole world would be blessed through him; therefore, his logic goes, the commandments which had become “too closely identified as Jewish observances, covenant righteousness as national righteousness” were no longer to be maintained.\textsuperscript{10} He likewise argues that Peter’s vision (Acts 10:11-16, 11:5-10) delivered the “lesson . . . that henceforth he must . . . change his own eating habits” in addition to embracing the Gentiles as brothers.\textsuperscript{11}

These arguments fail in terms of basic logic, let alone Scriptural warrant. Can a vegetarian Christian not share the same table as one who eats meat? (Rom. 14:2-4, 1Co. 8) How much more could those who did not eat pork share table-fellowship with those who did! Paul himself took on a restrictive Nazrite vow while on his journey and assisted others in completing their own vows (Acts 18:18, 21:20-27). He clearly did not see such a Jewish “particular” as being contrary to the Gospel, even though it put him under a greater obligation to avoid ritual impurity than even the normal Jew. Moreover, the Jerusalem council did indeed impose some food laws upon the Gentiles, such as not eating blood or meat from strangled animals (Acts 15:20, 29). None of these fit the idea that Paul thought that Jews were released from being “Jewish” by the Gospel (cf. Gal. 5:3, 1Co. 7:18).

There are also some basic problems with some of the assumptions behind the common list of commandments that pertain to “the works of the Law.” Circumcision is certainly the heart of the issue, as made clear from the context of all of the appearances of the phrase, “works of the law” (Rom. 3:20, 3:28, 9:32; Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, and 10). But what of the food laws and the Sabbaths, which Dunn correctly points out were the main cultural elements that marked out the Jews in the Roman world?

On the food laws, the Torah itself teaches that the dietary laws, with the exception of the command against consuming blood (Gen. 9:4, Acts 15:29), are not required of Gentiles (cf. Gen. 9:3, Deu. 14:21).\textsuperscript{12} It does not forbid Jews from eating with Gentiles, though a certain amount of attention would need to be paid to cross-contamination of dishes and utensils (Lev. 11:32-35). The laws which made it impossible to associate with Gentiles developed in the wake of the Maccabean revolt, and at least some did not develop until just before Yeshua’s ministry.\textsuperscript{13} We might argue that Paul advocated dropping many of these later restrictions, but it does not follow that he therefore thought that Jews must eat pork as some kind of perverse test of faith.

The position that the Sabbaths and feasts are “Jewish distinctives” not intended for the nations is even more problematic: The prophets state that in the world-to-come “all flesh” would worship on the Sabbaths and new moons (Isa. 66:23) and that at least Sukkot would be compulsory on the nations (Zec. 14:16-19). Paul himself enjoined the Corinthians, “For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast . . . ” (1Co. 5:7-8), and while it has done so under different traditions and on a date on the Roman calendar, the Church at large has continued to celebrate
“Pascha.” Likewise, while eschewing the Biblical Sabbath in favor of Sunday, the Church at large has continued to keep a day of rest every seven days.

Messianic Judaism today provides the greatest argument against Dunn’s view in this matter just by way of practical example: While there is some debate in the Messianic community about the extent to which the Sabbath is binding on Gentile believers, it is generally accepted that Gentile disciples of Yeshua the Messiah are welcome to keep Sabbath, the feasts, and kosher with their Jewish brethren if they feel so called. In our synagogues, Jew and Gentile eat at the same table. In many of them, arrangements are made so that those who keep a stricter level of kashrut can do so without unduly burdening those who do not. While it is true that certain aspects of rabbinic kashrut must be relaxed for such fellowship, the Biblical injunctions themselves at no time divide the Body.

How then could keeping the food laws, the Sabbath and the Feasts be harmful to a Gentile disciple’s relationship with the Messiah? Paul clearly sees all who are “of the works of the Law” as being “under a curse” (Gal. 3:10). Yet, if we remove the Sabbaths and feasts from consideration as possible stumbling blocks for the Gentiles and set aside the issue of the Biblical dietary and purity laws as inconsequential, that leaves only the issue of circumcision, which Paul refers to repeatedly throughout his letter (Gal. 2:3; 2:7-9, 12; 5:2-3, 6, 11; 6:12-13, 15). Why was this such a key issue? After all, even Paul circumcised the half-Jewish Timothy, who was already grown and a disciple of the Messiah at the time (Acts 16:3, cf. 1Co. 7:18). Why then did he warn so strenuously against Gentiles being circumcised, ala, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you” (Gal. 5:2)?

To answer this, we need to let Paul define his own terms for us.

“Law” as the Covenant

Unlike “works of law,” which we are forced to interpret by context and inference, Paul carefully defines the term “under law” for us in Galatians 4:21-31. According to Paul, “under law” means being under a specific covenant “from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery,” which “corresponds to the present Jerusalem.” This covenant is in contrast with another associated with “the Jerusalem above [which] is free . . . our mother” which produces “like Isaac . . . children of promise.” Obviously, Paul means the latter covenant to be the New Covenant (1Co. 11:25, 2Co. 3:6).

This interpretation fits well with Tyson’s, who notes,

Basically, he [Paul] uses the phrase, erga nomou, not to express the deeds of men accomplished in response to law but to describe the conditions out of which deeds may be accomplished. Thus, for Paul, erga momou may be translated, 'nomistic service.' It designates the 'religious system which is set for man.' The question of fulfilling or not fulfilling the law plays no real part in Paul's letters. He can repudiate the system, not on account of human responsibility, but because he believes that God has repudiated it.
That is, “Paul is not attacking a general kind of works-righteousness but a specific mode of existence”—not an existence with a specific set of commandments or “existence as a Jew” (as Tyson erroneously assumes), but a “mode of existence” under a specific covenant.

Like the author of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 8:8-13), the Apostle to the Gentiles in Galatians draws a sharp contrast between the new and old covenants. Also like Hebrews, the Galatian argument is not that the old, Sinaic covenant has already been abolished: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). Rather, it is that it has been superseded by a superior covenant, and going from the New Covenant to the old is a giant step backwards. But more than that, Galatians presents being “under law”—that is, under the Sinaic covenant—as not simply being a step backwards to something obsolete, but as an action that brings the person who does it under a curse.

Deuteronomy, as many scholars have noted, is written in the form of an ancient Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty—in other words, the contract between a king and his people, or a greater king and a subject king in his empire. The Hittite treaty, unlike the later Assyrian form, contains both blessings for faithfulness to the covenant and curses for disobedience (27:9-28:68). It is that last section that most concerns our exploration of Galatians.

Deuteronomy (the “Second Law”) was written as a formal re-establishment of the Sinaic covenant with the second generation of Israel following a period of exile due to Israel’s sins. This covenant is called “law” in Paul’s letters because unlike the unilateral covenant of the promise given to Abraham, to maintain the covenant Israel was required to keep the Holy One’s laws. In return, the Creator himself would be the special God of Israel, even dwelling in the midst of the nation (Exo. 19:5-8, 24:1-25:9). In contrast, the other nations had been given over to the worship of idols in the form of created things—animals, birds, fish, trees, the sun, moon, stars, and planets (Deu. 4:15-19, cf. Rom. 1:20-23). These idols represented demonic beings (Deu. 32:17, 1Co. 10:20) and even powerful spiritual “princes,” “archons,” “powers and principalities,” and “archangels” (lit. “prince angels” or “ruling angels”) who rule over individual nations (Deu. 32:8 [DSS, LXX], Psa. 82, Dan. 10:13, 20-21, Eph. 6:12). Israel was set apart by its unique and direct covenant with the Most High, who in return for Israel’s obedience to the covenant, would dwell in her midst (Deu. 12:11), first in the tabernacle and later in Solomon’s temple.

Sadly, Israel did not keep the covenant, but instead turned to worship the gods of the nations. The first two times that Israel turned in disobedience—with the worship of the molten calf and the refusal to enter the land to face and destroy the Anakim (Num. 13)—the covenant was simply broken,
Galatians, Judaizing, and the Curse of the Law, p. 6

requiring intercession and replacement. However, anticipating that the covenant would be broken again, Hashem pronounced that breaking the Deuteronomic, Sinaic covenant would result not in ultimate rejection, but instead in a terrible punishment that would fall upon the whole nation.

The Key Issue: The Curse of the Law

This brings us to Paul’s use of the phrase, “the curse of the law.” Paul refers to the curse twice in Galatians (Gal. 3:10 and 13; cit. Deu. 27:26 and 21:13). The real nature of that “curse of the law” has been almost universally misunderstood. Christians, particularly of a Protestant background, typically believe that the curse of the law is something that comes upon all men who try to win God’s favor by their deeds instead of by his grace. Dunn correctly understands that “the curse of the law is not simply the condemnation which falls on any transgression and on all who fall short of the law’s requirements.” He argues instead,

The curse which was removed therefore by Christ’s death was the curse which had previously prevented the blessing from reaching the Gentiles, the curse of a wrong understanding of the law. It was a curse which fell primarily on the Jew (3.10; 4.5), but Gentiles were affected by it so long as that misunderstanding of the covenant and the law remained dominant.

As we will see, Dunn’s argument is unconvincing. The New Perspective is focused primarily on the law’s (at least as interpreted in late Second Temple Judaism) social function in separating Jew from Gentile. As a result, Dunn overlooks the prophetic aspect of Paul’s allusion. While he acknowledges that Paul alludes to Deuteronomy 27:26, he fails to explain that allusion in the greater context of Deuteronomy 27-30.

The curse is a specific set of punishments, set forth in Deuteronomy 27:15-26 and 28:15-68—the very passage that Paul directly cites in Galatians 3:10—that the Sinaic covenant (“law”) pronounced as a punishment for Israel—not simply the individuals, but the nation as a whole—violating the terms of that covenant. The description in chapter 28 is long, depressing, and tedious. This may be why so many commentators gloss over it, conflating all of the punishments together into a kind of amorphous mass which numbs the ears with its seeming repetitions. However, a more careful reading reveals that the curse actually gives a very specific timeline marked by five very distinct events:

1. God would curse Israel in her own land (vv. 20-35).
2. God would cause a single, specific nation to carry Israel and her king into exile (vv. 36-37).
3. Israel would be in the land (implying a return) but not prosper (vv. 38-48).
4. Another nation would swoop down on the land like an eagle, and besiege its cities (vv. 49-62).
5. Israel would suffer a second exile, this time throughout the whole world and in which (unlike the Babylonian exile) the Jew would find no place to rest and no safety (vv. 63-68).

The fact that the curse required two distinct exiles is entirely overlooked by most readers, but the text demands it. When we look at the characteristics of the two exiles and the history of the Babylonian captivity, we find that it is impossible to regard them as anything other than irreconcilably separate events.

This specific prophecy that Israel would be exiled to a singular nation (Deu. 28:36) was fulfilled in 586 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, laid siege the third and final time to Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the siege, he “put out the eyes of [King] Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon” (2Ki. 25:7) along with all but the meanest remnant of the rest of the kingdom (vv. 11-12). Israel’s punishment when she fell away into the worship of other gods was to lose her exalted position as the holy people of the Eternal Creator. Instead, she would become enslaved not only to the nations, but to those spiritual powers as well (Deu. 28:36)! As we will see, this aspect of Israel’s punishment is alluded to in Galatians.

After this, Moses gives us a description of Israel living in the Land, but not prospering, when “the alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will down lower and lower” (v. 43) until Israel is besieged again “in all your towns” (vv. 49-52). After this second siege, the curse speaks of the second exile, this one of quite different character from the first:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Exile (vv. 36-37)</th>
<th>Second Exile (vv. 64-66)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The LORD will bring you, and your king whom you shall set over you, to a nation that you have not known, you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone. You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all the peoples where the LORD shall lead you away.</td>
<td>The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, which you have not known, you nor your fathers, even wood and stone. Among these nations you shall find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot: but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and pining of soul; and your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you shall fear night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Galatians, Judaizing, and the Curse of the Law, p. 8

Isaiah, as I noted at the beginning, recognized that the covenant spoke of two distinct exiles (Isa. 11:10-12). While the final clause of Deuteronomy 28 states “there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot” and “[you] shall have no assurance of your life,” the Babylonian exile provided a period of stability for the Jews taken into captivity (Jer. 29:5-7). It was in Babylon that many of the books we think of as a unified work today—the Tanakh to the Jews, the Old Testament to the Christians—were collected and edited, establishing the beginnings of a canon. There was little to no persecution of the Jews; in fact, the chains of captivity rested so lightly that only a relative handful ever sought to return to the Land. Finally, the first exile specifically states that Israel’s king would be taken into captivity as well, so this must refer to the Babylonian exile, not to the later galut.

It is impossible to reconcile the security of the Babylonian captivity with the perpetual wandering described in verses 63-66: This second exile would have no such peace, nor any sure place for the Jew to call his own, nor any true or lasting safety provided by the kings who would rule over the Jews. This is precisely the Galut that has played out for the last two thousand years of Jewish history, with the Jews being allowed to settle in a nation for a time, but then being driven out at the whim of some future ruler (often one who was deeply in debt to them). All this culminated in the Holocaust, when indeed the Jew’s life hung in doubt before him; and he feared night and day, and had no assurance of his life.

All of these punishments are given as a single, unified curse. Deuteronomy 30:1 reads, “And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse . . . (Heb. haq‘alah). When Paul speaks of “the curse of the law” in Galatians 3:13, he is not calling the Torah a curse (cf. Rom. 7:12-13) nor referring to the curse of trying to “earn” God’s favor by works, but rather referring to the same singular and specific set of punishments as “the curse” in Deuteronomy 30:1. He also quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10, again referring to a singular curse. In all cases, the singular and specific nature of the curse is underscored by the text.

Since the curse is a unified whole that, once initiated, had to completely play out and since the curse includes the Babylonian captivity as well as the exile that followed the Messiah’s coming, we find ourselves finally putting to rest one of the longest-standing and most virulent of misunderstandings of Scripture: the popular conception that the Jews were cursed for rejecting Jesus as their savior.

Yeshua’s Rejection: Cause vs. Effect

Israel had been laboring under the curse for at least seven hundred years before Yeshua was born. According to 2 Kings 21:10-15 and Jeremiah 15:4, it was pronounced during the reign of the wicked king Manasseh, who filled Jerusalem with idolatry and blood from one end to the other. What this means is that, contrary to common Christian interpretation, the Jewish people were not cursed because they rejected Yeshua. On the contrary, the Jews had already been under the punishment of the law for over seven hundred years before Yeshua came. In fact, the rejection of Yeshua by all but a minority of Jews was the result of the curse, not the cause of it!
Isaiah 6:9-10 is one of the most often quoted passages from the Tanakh in the New Testament:

And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Yeshua quotes this prophecy in explaining why he had to teach spiritual matters to the masses only in parables (Mat. 13:14f, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, cf. 9:45), while John (12:40) and Luke (Acts 28:26f) invoke it to explain why so few Jews came to believe in him. Isaiah was given this prophecy at the beginning of his ministry, a ministry which tradition holds came to an end when his own uncle, King Manasseh, had him put to death by sawing him in half with a wooden saw (cf. Heb. 11:37). Isaiah was prophetically warned that his words would not be heeded in his lifetime, but when God finally determined the Sinaic covenant to be truly and irrevocably broken on Israel’s end—“my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband” (Jer. 31:32)—God’s warning to Isaiah became part and parcel of the curse.

“The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), and the curse specified two separate exiles. The first exile had already taken place, and the Apostles knew by Yeshua’s word that the second was soon to come. Had the whole nation believed in Yeshua, all Israel together would have died to the Sinaic covenant and been reborn to the New (cf. Rom. 7:1-4)—and the prophecy of Moses would have been broken.  

Trying to Glue Together the Fragments

Though those in Israel with ears to hear knew that the covenant had been broken, they never ceased in trying to put the pieces back together. The first to attempt to do so was Josiah. Even after being told by the prophetess Hulda that he could only delay the outpouring of God’s punishment on Judah, not abate it (2Ki. 22:14-20), Josiah attempted to renew the covenant (23:2-3, 25-26). Josiah was the last good king, and the last free king, to sit on the throne of Judah. While Jeremiah prophesied that there would indeed be a new covenant to replace the broken one, it was not to come about in his day, nor for many centuries after. The curse had begun its course, and could not be stopped until every line of it had been fulfilled. Israel would go into exile.

When the exiles were released from Babylon by the Cyrus the Persian, only about 50,000 saw fit to return to the Land. Under the leadership of Zerubabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah, they rebuilt the temple. The Holy One sent a few prophets during this rebuilding like Haggai, Malachi, and Zechariah to encourage the work to continue, but the result was small and pitiful compared to the beauty of Solomon’s temple (Ezr. 3:12, Hag. 2:3). More importantly, all of the spiritual and supernatural graces that made Solomon’s temple and the tabernacle before it true dwelling places for the Presence of the Almighty were gone. While a remnant of the exiles had returned, the covenant had not been restored.
When Nehemiah arrived to see to the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls and the restoration of the city, he led the people in a prayer of repentance and in the signing of a covenantal document, a contract as it were, stipulating the duties of the people to support the new temple (Neh. 8-10). Doubtless, he hoped that this new covenant would be the one Jeremiah had prophesied. But again, the curse had not run its course, and the sincere repentance of the small minority in Jerusalem could not turn it back.

Many of the sects of Judaism continued in the attempt to bring the people back into a state of holiness in the hopes that Hashem would forgive Israel and return the Divine Presence to the temple. Some, like the Essenes, calling themselves the Sons of the Light, withdrew into their own communities and focused solely on raising the level of purity and holiness of their members to the highest level possible so as to be ready to follow the coming Messiah when he arrived. (Ironically, that very Messiah criticized their withdrawal from society; Luke 16:8.) Others, like the Pharisees, attempted to lead the nation into repentance by their example. They built “fences” around the Torah in the form of their traditions, many of which continue in Judaism to this day, in the hope that if they built the fences high enough and far enough away from the actual point of sin, Israel could achieve a righteousness sufficient to restore the broken relationship with the Holy One. They were frustrated by the very human failings both within and without their fellowships.31 The NT takes particular note of the failure from substituting ritual for true faith and faithfulness in the heart, and the failure to hearken to the voice of the Prophet Moses had promised (Deu. 18:18) and the King that they had wished for and looked for all their lives.

So how then should we understand the New Testament in light of understanding the nature of the curse of the Law? Does this affect our understanding of Paul’s writings, particularly his seeming rejection of the Law as the means of salvation? Indeed, it does.

The Curse of the Wrong Covenant

In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul defines his phrase “under [the] law” to refer to operating under the covenant of Sinai. When Paul points out that “the present Jerusalem . . . is in slavery with her children,” he isn’t speaking metaphorically, as was formerly thought, “To laws and customs . . . under hard and oppressive rites,”32 “the slavish doctrine and worship into which it had degenerated.”33 He means the phrase very literally: Jerusalem was enslaved in succession to the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and now the Romans. Israel had been taken from the Land once to Babylon (Deu. 28:36), and from both the words of the Torah and Yeshua’s own prophecy, Paul knew that Israel would be exiled again very soon (Deu. 38:64, Luke 21:20-24).

And this broken covenant which had resulted in the punishment and exile of the nation was the very covenant that the Gentiles were being goaded into joining.

For one born Jewish, like Paul, Peter, and John, circumcision on the eighth day is a mark of their peoplehood. It seals them from birth into the covenant promises of their father Abraham (Gen. 17) as well as into the nation they had been born into (Lev. 12:3, cf. Exo. 12:48), created by the Sinaiic
covenant. Being born Jews, they joined not only into the promise and blessings of Abraham, but in the punishment of the people as a whole. This was wholly appropriate and right, and was why Paul did not hesitate to circumcise Timothy, who was after all born of a Jewish mother. Recognizing that because of their nation’s sin the covenant of law had been broken, but because of God’s grace, the Messiah had come to inaugurate a new covenant, they passed from the Sinaic covenant to the New Covenant in a wholly natural step forward. Though the Sh’khinah, the Divine Presence, had departed the temple in the midst of Israel because of Israel’s sins, the redeeming blood of the Messiah had enabled them to become living temples, both individually and collectively, for the Holy Spirit (1Co. 3:16, 6:19) as a foretaste of the return of the Divine Presence that was in Yeshua to Israel—and through Israel, to the whole world. Though they were born into a nation that was under punishment, by taking the step forward into accepting Yeshua’s New Covenant, they were the forerunners and first-fruits of that nation’s redemption. Like their Master, they would willingly join their people in their oppression—and more than that, suffer the persecution of their own people—but not because they were under the punishment of the broken covenant any longer. Rather, they were sharing in the sufferings of the Messiah, as befitted members of his body (Acts 5:41, Php. 3:10, et. al.).

To a Messianic Jew, therefore, there is no problem with observing the commandments Paul refers to as “the works of law.” Paul, Jacob (James) and the elders denied that Paul was teaching Jews that they should no longer circumcise their sons or keep the traditions of their people (Acts 21:21-26). What then of the Gentiles? They had not been born into Abraham’s promise, nor into the nation created at Sinai. They had, in their natural selves, no connection to either Israel’s promise (Eph. 2:12) nor to the curse that came from failing in that promise. Their first and only connection to the Eternal Creator was through the New Covenant of his Son Yeshua. For such as these to accept circumcision—and through it, adoption into the majority of the Jewish people who did not accept Yeshua—would be a giant step backwards. They would be forsaking a living covenant for one that was broken and which could never result in the restoration of Israel’s original position as the firstborn son (Exo. 4:22) of the Father.

Why would they do such a thing? It is clear from Galatians that the Gentile disciples were being “shut out” of fellowship (2:12, 4:17) by those trying to draw them into accepting circumcision, and with it, Jewish identity (2:16). The motive of the Judaizers was not simply an honest misunderstanding of God’s Word, but a desire to avoid persecution for the name of Yeshua (6:12). From the Sara and Hagar illustration of the two covenants, it is clear that the Judaizers’ approach was along the line of, “Oh, you believe in our Messiah? That’s nice. But to really be part
of the covenant, you have to be circumcised as a Jew. Otherwise, your only place is as a Gentile servant, like Hagar . . .”

It was bad enough that by becoming a Jew by circumcision, the now former-Gentile was frustrating the plan of God that “all the nations [shall be] called by my name” (Amos 9:12, Acts 15:17)—a necessary prerequisite to Israel’s ultimate restoration (Rom. 11:25). It was bad enough that by proselytizing, the Gentiles were robbing themselves of the opportunity of being the “not-a-people” who would “make [Israel] jealous” (Deu. 32:21, Rom. 11:14). What was worse was that by accepting the old, Sinaic covenant via circumcision, the Gentiles were in effect saying that their covenant with the Holy One through his Messiah was no true covenant at all, that they needed something “more.” They demonstrated a complete lack of faith in Yeshua and/or a complete lack of faithfulness to him. Small wonder then that Paul called it no real gospel at all and called down Divine wrath on those who taught it (Gal. 1:6-9)!

**The Explanatory Power of “Law as Covenant” Theology**

Understanding exactly what Paul means by “the curse of the law,” “under the law,” and “works of the law” not only provides a rationale for Paul’s attacks on circumcision of only the Gentile converts, it has broad explanatory power in a number of other interpretive issues. To take a few examples briefly:

**Enslaved to the Stoicheia**

Paul writes that both the Jews and the Gentile Galatians were once enslaved to the *stoicheia* of the world (Gal. 4:3, 9). He further clarifies that these *stoicheia* are “those that by nature are not gods” (v. 8). In Colossians, he adds that the *stoicheia* are connected to “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits (*stoicheia*) of the world” (2:8) to whom the Colossians had “died” in Messiah (v. 20). In that same verse, he makes it clear that the “regulations” of the *stoicheia* are the regulations of “the world,” not the regulations of God.

Walters writes, “The Greek word is simply ‘elements’, which can denote (1) the first principles of education (Heb. 5:12), (2) the physical elements of the world (2 Pet 3:10), (3) the heavenly bodies and luminaries, which were deified by the pagans (cf. Deut 4:19), or (4) the spirits that control the cosmic elements and were likewise worshiped by the pagans (cf. Wis 13:2).” Heiser clarifies that the term includes “astral deities (astrological myths)” and “spiritual beings in general,” but argues Paul uses the term to refer to “angels, principalities and powers, false gods” when speaking to his Gentile audience, but “to the law and religious teaching with a Jewish audience in view.” But his view is not convincing in its inconsistency. As G. G. Findlay argues, “The rudiments’ of Gal. 4:9 cannot, without exegetical violence, be detached from ‘the rudiments of the world’ of Gal. 4:3 . . . To suppose that just at this point, in making its application, he turns aside without notice or explanation to an entirely different matter, is to stultify his reasoning.” Yet Findlay’s solution, to consistently interpret the *stoicheia* as referring to the laws and rites of Judaism, is likewise unconvincing: Paul is
clear that the *stoicheia* were *of the world* (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20), not of God, but elsewhere states that the law “is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14) and “holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (v. 12), calling it “the law of God” (7:22, 8:7). There could not be more of a contrast between the law and these “elements of the world”! Likewise, Dunn’s view that Paul was merely likening continued service to the Jewish distinctives of the law, particularly its festivals, to bondage to the elemental spirits is unconvincing in light of Paul’s own continued fidelity to those very aspects of the law. As a result, interpreters are at a seeming impasse.

Understanding the curse of the law and its specific punishments gives us a third option: Israel, as we noted before, was meant to have only the Eternal Creator himself as their god (Deu. 6:4), where the rest of the nations were placed under the “sons of God” (Deu. 32:8, cf. 4:19) which Paul terms the *stoicheia*. In this proper position, Dunn is quite correct that the Torah itself was to serve as Israel’s “guardian angel” and *pedagogos* (Gal. 3:25). However, he misses the importance of Israel’s rebellion against the law: The curse twice specifies that if Israel fail to heed its *pedagogos*, it would be forced to serve other nations and *their gods* (Deu. 28:36, 64). Israel was meant to be God’s son, even his firstborn (Exo. 4:22), but because of her sins had become a slave to the same spiritual powers as ruled the nations.

Here we have to make a careful distinction: Both Jew and Gentile had been “enslaved” to the *stoicheia*, but the law had been a *pedagogos*, a guardian servant to the Jews. Unfortunately, the usual translation of Galatians 3:23 that the Jews were “kept captive under the law” makes the law out as a jailor rather than a guardian. As Dunn points out, *ephrouroumetha* should instead be taken in the sense of a wall which “watched over, guarded (the city)” (cf. Php. 4:3, 1Pt. 1:5). However, he again fails to take into account the phrase “under the law,” by which Paul means to be under the Sinaic covenant, not to keep a certain set of “Jewish” commandments. The real sense of Galatians 3-4, then, is that the law in *its covenant function* served as a wall to guard the Jewish people until the promised Messiah came. However, part of that covenant function was to dispense punishments when the nation disobeyed the covenant stipulations, the commandments. And part of that punishment imposed by the *pedagogos* was to subject the nation to enslavement to “the *stoicheia* of the world.”

Understood in this light, we can now interpret *stoicheia* consistently while retaining Paul’s positive view of the law and its function in relationship to Israel.

**Faith(fullness) vs. Law**

Paul’s hard contrast between faith and the law in Galatians 3:10-14 is, to say the least, problematic when considered in the context of his life. However, understood within the context of the law as a covenant complete with punishments for the nation quickly dispels the problems.

First, we have to ask what Paul means by "faith"? In Galatians 3:6, Paul cites Genesis 15:4, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness," while in verse 11, he quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith." Actually, that's a mistranslation: The original Hebrew means, "The righteous shall live by his faithfulness (emunato)." The Greek term translated...
"faith," *pistis*, actually means *both* "trust in" and "faithfulness and loyalty to" or "dependability."\(^{41}\)

In 1st Century culture, it referred to the proper response of a recipient of grace (*charis*) from a benefactor in a semi-formal client/patron relationship—not simply belief or trust, but an ongoing loyalty.\(^{43}\)

By putting those two meanings together, Paul tells us that true believing "faith" cannot be separated from true loyalty to the object of that faith.

In this context, we can unpack Paul’s statement in Galatians: “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (v. 11, cit. Hab. 2:4). As he pointed out in the previous verse, the curse of the law had been initiated because Israel had not abided by all the words of the law. Therefore, no one could be justified before God by way of the very covenant under which the nation was being punished; only true faith and faithfulness to the God of Israel could result in justification (acquittal in the heavenly court), as stated by Habbakuk shortly after the curse went into effect.

With the coming of the promised Messiah, that faith and faithfulness must necessarily be directed to Yeshua. “But the law is not of faith” (v. 12) in the sense that clinging to the law as the covenant did not display trust in and faithfulness towards the God of Israel and Israel’s true and anointed King. “Rather” (or “nevertheless”) Paul writes, “the one who does them shall live by them,” citing Leviticus 18:5—that is, “one should live his life in accordance with God’s laws and commandments and that he should obey them all his life or while he is alive.”\(^{44}\)

Paul is not against continuing to keep the Torah’s commandments as a way of life for the Jewish believers—far from it! Rather, his protest is against anyone, Jew or Gentile, trusting in “covenantal nomism” rather than trusting in the King.

Does this mean that Christians are compelled to keep the whole Torah, including the “Jewish” commandments? Not at all. As we have already seen, there are commandments that were specific to the Jewish people, as well as commandments specific to living in the Promised Land and/or engaging in the temple service. Paul clearly states that there are obligations on the circumcised (whether natural-born Jew or proselyte) beyond what is required of the Gentile convert (Gal. 5:3, 1Co. 7:18, cf. Acts 21:20-26). Only by recognizing that being “under the [covenant of] law” and keeping the commandments and traditions that define the Jewish way of life are not one and the same can we reverse eighteen centuries of the Church’s persecution of its own Jewish members once and for all.

**Dying to the Law**

In Galatians 2:19, Paul writes, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.” As Lancaster points out, “For most of Christendom, this saying holds little to no difficulty; the meaning is self-evident. . . Formerly he tried to live to Torah, for the Torah, and by keeping the Torah in order to earn salvation, but ultimately . . . became a Christian, quit trying to keep the Torah, and learned to simply live to God by grace . . .”\(^{45}\)

While that is true for most pastors and laypeople, Christian scholarship is more divided. We have already seen that scholars like Dunn and Sanders acknowledge that Judaism has never taught “earning” salvation by works. In an alternative take, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* argues from the lack of the definite article in the Greek (“For through law to law I died . . .”) that “νόμῳ denotes law in the abstract, so that this clause comprehends emancipation from
all control of external law.”

Witherington, on the other hand, notes that some scholars take Paul’s statement as being purely autobiographical, that Paul’s zeal for the law led him to persecute the Church, which led in turn to his Damascus Road experience, though he himself takes the “classical” view that Lancaster describes.

However, when we realize that Paul’s concern in Galatians in chiefly the law in its covenantal function, his meaning becomes clear: Paul saw himself to have died to the older covenant. In Romans 7:1-3, he very tellingly uses the example of a woman in a marriage covenant to her husband to illustrate the concept of death annulling one’s responsibilities to the terms (the “law”) of a covenant. Judaism has long understood that death released one from obligation to the commandments (b.Shab. 30a, 151b; b.Nid. 61b). However, the obligation to keep the Torah is a distinctly Jewish one, and is tied to the covenant. Thus, in Jewish thought, a release from the commandments would be a release from the covenant obligations, just as in Paul’s marriage example.

As in the case of the stoicheia, we see that both Jew and Gentile needs the release of “being crucified with the Messiah” (Gal. 2:20). For the Jew to be released from the punishment clauses of the Torah required being released from the Sinaic covenant. However, “even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified” (Gal. 3:15). How then could Jews like Paul and Peter and Jacob (James) be released from the Sinaic covenant and the punishments that it entailed? Only by being “buried therefore with him by ritual immersion into death, in order that, just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Likewise, the nations had long been sold into covenants with fallen spiritual archons, who became their gods, and a Gentile seeking redemption had to “die” to those ancient covenants of his own nation and be raised with Christ in order to live to the true God.

Only this “law as covenant” theology adequately explains the need to be “born again” for both Jew and Gentile (John 3) without either demonizing God’s commandments in the Torah or destroying the deliberate parallel that Paul painstakingly builds between the salvation experience of the Jew and that of the Gentile.

God’s Faithfulness in the Midst of Punishment

Messianic Jews—not to mention traditional Jews!—may be uncomfortable with the “curse” terminology. It sounds too close to the rallying cry of anti-Semites throughout history. However, “cursed” (Heb. aror) does not mean cast away or rejected by God. Even after Adam and Eve were cursed in Eden for their sin, the Holy One still maintained a measure of fellowship and protection for them, even communicating directly with their children, as with the conversation with Cain in Genesis chapter 4. However, they did have to suffer the results of the sin: Expulsion from the perfection of Eden, being forced to work hard for their food, and greatly increased pain in childbirth.

When I ground one of my children, the punishment may last a long time and cause them a lot of grief, and because of their bad behavior and anger over the punishment our relationship may be strained for a time, but my love for them does not fade. In fact, the punishment and my willingness
to maintain it is proof of my love. So it is with God himself: “For the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Pro. 3:12, cf. Rev. 3:19) and “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (13:24). Israel’s punishment is proof of the Lord’s enduring love and commitment to his covenant nation.

This is never more evident than when we realize that the curse, the punishment, was initiated some seven centuries before the Messiah’s birth. The Babylonian exile was a bitter pill to swallow, but the Lord preserved his people through it by raising up wise leaders within the courts of the nations who could speak for Israel, like Daniel and Mordechai. During those seven centuries, enemies rose up to destroy the Jews, but the God of Jacob protected his people. The Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah and Purim to commemorate this protection. Hashem continued to send prophets to comfort his people for nearly three centuries after the curse began. And of course, the ultimate expression of Hashem’s love and fidelity, Yeshua the Messiah, was born in the midst of the curse.

Hashem’s faithfulness did not end with Yeshua’s coming. Though the second temple was destroyed and the Jewish people scattered and persecuted across the Roman Empire, and later by both Christendom and Islam, still the Jew endures. And not just endured, but as Mark Twain marveled some fifty years before Israel’s resurrection, “His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him.”

Indeed, the punishment itself has acted as a preservative for the Jews, preventing them from ever settling down and assimilating into the local population: “And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot” (Deu. 28:65). The ghettos, which closed the Jews off from the world, also served to close the world off from the Jews.

The End of the Curse

No father punishes his son forever. The story of Israel does not end with the curse, but with renewal. More than that, the curse of the law does not simply continue unabated until all Israel comes to believe in Yeshua, despite the expectations of many Christians. Rather, the end of the curse is decreed within the context of the Sinaic covenant itself, which states that a specific order of events must occur (Deu. 30:1-10): (1) Everything described in both the blessing and the curse (including two distinct exiles) must take place, then (2) Israel would repent and turn again to the Lord, then (3) the Lord would return Israel to the Land and (4) make Israel prosperous and numerous. After that, (5) the Lord would circumcise the hearts of the whole people and (6) would put the curses that fell on Israel on their “foes and enemies who persecuted” the Jews. Finally, (7) the Lord would prosper Israel even more, blessing them in all things.

And here is where we will hit head-on what will doubtlessly be the greatest point of controversy: Since Israel has been gathered to the Land “the second time” (Isa. 11:11), does this not imply that we
are at least at step 3 or 4, and that the punishments of the Lord have run their course and Israel is no longer laboring under the curse?

The counter-argument is, of course, that Israel has not returned to the Lord with all their “heart and soul according to all that [he] commands [them] today” (v. 2) because the Jews have never repented of the rejection of Jesus Christ. However, we have already demonstrated that the curse was in effect several centuries before the coming of Yeshua. Rather, the conditions that would bring about the curse are laid out in Deuteronomy 27:15-26: Idolatry, dishonoring parents, robbery and injustice to one’s neighbor or the weak, sexual immorality, and rejection of the Torah. And while there are certainly individual Jews who violate one or more of the conditions above, the Jewish community as a whole has long repudiated all of the specific crimes that would invoke the curse. 49

And Israel is back in the Land. This fact cannot be denied, only explained away. Yet why would we want to? Why explain away the greatest and most visible miracle in two thousand years, and the proof of everything written by the prophets?

It is no coincidence that Messianic Judaism has only become prominent since the restoration of Jerusalem to Israel in 1967. Zechariah chapter 8 specifically states that only when the Jewish people again dwell in peace in the midst of Jerusalem would “the inhabitants of many cities . . . go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD, to see the LORD of hosts . . . in Jerusalem” (vv. 20-21) and, “ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”’ (v. 23). Only in a time when the curse had run its course, and the whole world can see Israel prospering despite all of the attacks on her sovereignty and even her right to exist could Gentiles come in great numbers to join with the people of Israel, whether in the Land or in the Diaspora, and say, “We want to join with you.” The prominence of Gentiles in the Messianic movement, to where many congregations have ten Gentiles for every Jew, is not a problem to be solved or a trend to be suppressed or an embarrassment to be hidden for the sake of impressing the wider Jewish community—it is the evidence that the curse has been lifted, and that the fulfillment of the promises of the Eternal One to Israel such as those found in Zechariah 8 has begun.

The Answer to the Prophecy Debate

Preterists assert that the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation were primarily or wholly prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah in 70 CE. Those in the premillennialist camp argue on various grounds that those prophecies were not fulfilled in the manner that they were written. Preterists respond that the premillennialists are simply taking the prophecies too literally and refusing to actually look at the historical evidence. The argument, much like the argument on what Paul meant by stoicheia, has continued unabated with neither side being able to claim the winning argument.

Deuteronomy 30:7 allows us to take a third option that gives due credit to the arguments and research of both sides. Let us say that preterism is largely correct in its interpretations of Revelation.
Galatians, Judaizing, and the Curse of the Law, p. 18

as referring to the historical events leading up to Jerusalem’s fall and the second temple’s destruction. Conceding that point is no threat to a futurist interpretation of these prophecies: Scripture says that all of the very same punishments that fell on Israel would fall on her enemies. In other words, even if the judgments described in Revelation were fulfilled in every detail in regards to Israel, they will be fulfilled again against the whole world!

I remember having a private conversation with Paul Copan many years ago on the subject of prophecy nearly twenty years ago. I was a young, brash, dedicated premillennial, and he very wisely chose to simply deflect my arguments by saying, “You know, Michael, I think that when the Lord comes back, we’ll find out that all three views (preterism, historicism, and futurism) will turn out to have been true.” Deuteronomy 30:7, understood in its context, is the proof-text that he was exactly right. This means that there is no longer a need for those of different camps to view themselves as being in a fight to the death, winner-takes-all. Instead, the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of each can be brought to the table, opening up new levels of discussion and insight for everyone who takes the Scriptures seriously.50

Conclusion

Understanding the law in its covenant function and the resulting curse of the law—its nature, its scope, its beginning and its end—is vital to understanding practically every aspect of the New Covenant: The Jews did not become cursed because they rejected Jesus, but rejected their king because that was part of God’s punishment of the nation. Paul did not consider those born Jews who were disciples of Yeshua to be “under the law” or “of the works of law,” because he knew them to have died to the Sinaic covenant and been reborn into the New. His concern, rather, was with Gentiles who had already been reborn into the New Covenant forsaking it in favor of one that had been broken by Israel many years ago, and which therefore could bring no blessing. His fervor against the “works of law” was not based primarily on concerns of ethnic exclusivity, but of covenantal fidelity.

This understanding of the Scripture is not actually far from that of the “Covenant Theology” developed during the Reformation; however, it lacks the anti-Torah—and by extension, the anti-Jewish—element which unfortunately pervades Christianity as a whole. There is no problem with Jews being Jews and living Torah-observant lives, nor indeed in the “ten men of the nations” taking hold of aspects of Jewish life (“the garment of a Jew”) because they see the Holy One once again turning to his people. Neither do Christians as a whole need to take on distinctively Jewish practices; in fact, it would be undesirable for them to do so on several grounds. Paul’s warning of the dangers of seeking a covenantal relationship with the Lord through conversion to Judaism or circumcision into Jewish identity remains as relevant today as it ever has been. While the evidence is that the time of God’s punishment of Israel has run its course, nevertheless the ultimate salvation of Israel will not be affected through a return to the Covenant of Moses, but rather through the New Covenant of Yeshua the Messiah.
Galatians, Judaizing, and the Curse of the Law, p. 19

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (Crossway, 2001)

2 “What the prophets were destined to prophesy in subsequent generations they received from Mt. Sinai. . . Moses gave utterance to all the words of the other prophets as well as his own, and whoever prophesied only gave utterance to the essence of Moses’s prophecy.” (Exodus Midrash Rabbta 28:6, 42:8)


4 E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (SCM, 1977) and Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People (Fortress, 1983).


7 Dunn, pp. 54, 75, 85

8 Ibid., p. 85

9 D. Thomas Lancaster, The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach (FFOZ, 2011), pp. 92, 93

10 Dunn, p. 114

11 Ibid., p. 31

12 Attempts to prove that kashrut is not binding on Gentile Christians from Mark 7 and Romans 14 are exegetically incorrect and are, in light of the Torah’s commandments on the matter, completely unnecessary. Unfortunately, these passages are too often used to attack Jewish believers.

13 For example, “Yosé b. Yoezer of Seridah and Yosé b. Yohanan of Jerusalem decreed uncleanness on the land of the gentiles and on glassware” (b.Shabbat 14b). The two rabbis Yose were the first of the zugot (pairs), ruling at the time of the Maccabees. But a page later, we read that it is the testimony of R. Yishmael b. R. Jose that “eighty years prior to the destruction of the Temple the decree was made that the lands of the peoples around the Land of Israel and utensils made out of glass were subject to uncleanness” (15a). Putting up a such a strict wall between Jew and Gentile (ala Eph. 2:14) was not only a development of the Second Temple Period, it is a relatively late development of that period. Ezra 10:11 and 14 notwithstanding. (The decree is against nakhrout, suggesting that the wives in question still continued in pagan practices.)


16 What then of the temple service, the feasts, or issues of ritual purity? Though not central to Dunn’s thesis, we still need to consider how they fit into our picture. Yeshua himself called for the temple to be “a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mat. 21:13; cf. Isa. 56:7, 1Ki. 8:41-43), and the Torah commanded that the alien be allowed to offer sacrifices under exactly the same Torah as the native-born (Num. 15:14-16). This means that the alien performing the sacrifice would be under the same obligation to become ritually purified before entering onto sacred ground as the Israelite, including the week-long purification ritual to remove the contamination of death described in Numbers 19. Since eating unclean meat made the eater unclean (Lev. 7:21) as did eating treif, an animal that had died before being properly slaughtered (Lev. 11:40, 17:15), the alien wishing to sacrifice would have to keep the laws of ritual purity and kosher at least in preparation for making his sacrifice. However, since an alien was permitted to eat treif (Deu. 14:21), it is evident that it was not expected for him to remain ritually pure at all times even in the Land, let alone in his native country. (Neither, for that matter, were Jews other than the priests expected to maintain ritual purity at all times, though they were expected to undertake purification rituals at the earliest opportunity.) Therefore, for the Gentile living outside of the Land, ritual purity would not be a concern until and unless he made a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem.

While it is possible that the obsession many first century sects of Judaism had with attempting to remain ritually pure at all times (as Sisyphean a task as that was) was part of the issue (Gal. 2:12), we will show that it was tangential to Paul’s chief concern.

17 It has become fashionable in Messianic circles to refer to the b’rit chadashah promised in Jer. 31:31-34, and the NT references to it, as “the renewed covenant.” The logic is that each covenant builds upon the previous; ergo, the new covenant builds upon the covenant of the Torah, thus providing a rationale for continuing to keep the Torah as a whole. However, this argument is both unconvincing and largely unnecessary. Unnecessary, because the lives of the Apostles and early Jewish disciples (i.e., the Nazarines) demonstrates that they saw no conflict between taking part in the New Covenant while continuing to keep the Torah (even participating in the temple’s sacrificial service; Acts 2:46, 3:1, 21:20-26, 24:17). Unconvincing, because Hebrews 8:13 clearly indicates that the Sinaic covenant “is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

18 Tyson, pp. 424f
The breaking of the covenant in the golden calf incident was symbolized by Moses breaking the tablets of the testimony of the covenant and Hashem’s refusal to go with Israel as originally planned. It was only after an extended period of intercession by Moses that the Holy One relented, created a new set of tablets, and allowed the construction of the tabernacle to proceed.

That the second “covenant of the law” was likewise broken and required restoration is proven by the lack of circumcision—the key sign of the covenant in NT theology—during the forty years of wilderness wanderings and by the giving of a new “covenant of the law” in the Hittite treaty form of the book of Deuteronomy (whose Greek name literally means “second law”).

This pattern of a broken covenant being replaced by a new covenant with essentially the same commandments (with only relatively minor additions that reflect changes in circumstances, such as the circumstance of leaving a nomadic desert life for a settled life in the Land) provides the prototypes for a New Covenant which includes and even necessitates Torah-observant Messianic Judaism. After all, the two sets of stone tablets both contained the command to keep the Sabbath; therefore, so too does the covenant written on hearts of flesh.

One cannot help but wonder if Isaiah’s martyrdom was the final straw in the breaking of the covenant, making the death of Yesha’yahu parallel to the death of Yeshua.

Of course, it was also Hashem’s plan to use the time of Israel’s punishment to affect a far greater salvation than just one nation (Rom. 11:11-12).

“In the Second Temple there wanted the fire from Heaven, the Ark with the Mercy Seat, and cherubim, Urim and Thummim, the Sh’khinah (Divine presence), the Holy Spirit, and the anointing oil.” (Tosefta Ta’anit 6:1, cf. b.Yoma 21b)

The rabbis voice their frustration with their own in passages like b.Sotah 22b

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible to Gal. 4:25

John Calvin, Commentary to Gal. 4:25


Heiser, p. 322

Ibid., p. 533

The Expositor’s Bible, Sir William Robertson Nicoll, ed. (e-Sword edition, downloaded from BibleSupport.com on May 26, 2013), to Gal. 4:8-11

Dunn, p. 52, 183, 269

However, note that after the Babylonian exile, it is the archangel Michael who is placed as the spiritual “prince” of Israel (Dan. 10:13, 21; cf. Rev. 12:7). So while the Torah indeed has a guardian function, God also provided Israel with spiritual protection capable of challenging the “princes” of the other nations.

Ibid., p. 243
Galatians, Judaizing, and the Curse of the Law, p. 21

41 William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan 2006), “Faith,” pp. 232f: “Finally, pistis can mean ‘faithfulness’ or ‘trustworthiness.’ . . . Slaves are to show good faith (show that they can be trusted) to their masters (Tit. 2:10).”


43 Ibid., pp. 115f


45 Lancaster, pp. 97, 98


49 Some will object, pointing to the secular Jew’s embrace of the homosexual rights movement for an example of embracing sexual immorality. However, even this is an example of the general abhorrence of injustice that has been burned deep into the Jewish soul, homosexuals having positioned themselves (and not entirely without reason) as victims of society’s injustice. Likewise, many Jews may paint themselves as non-devout and yet embrace the Torah’s teachings to a great extent. A 2009 poll of Israeli Jews (retrieved from http://www.idi.org.il/media/164429/guttmanavichaireport2012_engfinal.pdf on May 17, 2015) shows that only 16% categorize themselves as completely unobservant of Judaism, with 40% being somewhat observant and another 44% being very observant, with the trend over time being towards greater observance and personal faith.

50 The only view that is completely disqualified is hardline supersessionism. Unfortunately, there will be many who reject even consideration of this paper’s points on that basis alone. It is my view that the theological concerns which lead many to embrace supersessionism are in fact reactions against errors in the dispensational viewpoint, and can be addressed within a moderating view that embraces Israel today as the prophetic restoration of the nation.