

## Galatians 3:12-14

**Pastor:** Galatians 3:12-14: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

**“However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM’ [Leviticus 18:5]. Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’ [Deuteronomy 21:23]—in order that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”**

**3:12** All readers of Galatians 3:12 can acknowledge how Paul says that the Torah is not of faith, and how he then quotes Leviticus 18:5 to state some kind of purpose that the Torah serves.<sup>1</sup> Various commentators on the Epistle to the Galatians have taken this as a statement that eternal life can be gained by Torah observance—and that since this is a human impossibility—faith in the perfect Messiah, who was sacrificed for human sins, is required instead.<sup>2</sup>

Many readers of Galatians 3:12a take Paul’s remark, “the Law is not of faith,” *ho de nomos ouk estin ek pisteōs* (ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως), and use it as an excuse to avoid having to heed Moses’ Teaching—even sometimes to just read and study the Pentateuch as a matter of Biblical history. Does this statement actually mean that the Torah is of no relevance for Believers today who have faith in Messiah Yeshua? This statement must be counterbalanced with what the author of Hebrews communicates, as he says “faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Likewise, it must also be counterbalanced with the fact that Paul himself further asserts, “we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14).

The Torah is not something that is inspired by mere mortals; its Author is God Himself. It is not to be dispensed with on a whim. *We are to listen to its instruction.* The Torah as something to be followed cannot generate “faith” or “trust,” as this must come from a steadfast internal confidence that a person places between himself or herself, and the Creator God. The Torah might not be “of faith” (*ek pisteōs*, ἐκ πίστεως), but it is surely an important part of “the faith” and the canon of authority that God’s people are to turn to.

And so, having just stated that “the Law is not of faith” (Galatians 3:12a), Paul proceeds to establish some kind of different point, by making reference to Leviticus 18:5:

LEVITICUS 18:5 (MT)	LEVITICUS 18:5 (LXX)	GALATIANS 3:12 (PAUL)
You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live—I am HASHEM (ATS).	So ye shall keep all my ordinances, and all my judgments, and do them; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I <i>am</i> the Lord your God (LXE).	But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them” (ESV).
<p>וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי  אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּכֶם הָאָדָם וְחַי  בָּהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה:</p> <p><i>u'sh'martem et-chuqotai v'et-mishpatay asher ya'aseh otam ha'adam v'chai b'hem ani ADONAI</i></p>	<p>καὶ φυλάξεσθε πάντα τὰ  προστάγματα μου καὶ πάντα τὰ  κρίματα μου καὶ ποιήσετε αὐτὰ ἃ  ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν  αὐτοῖς ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν</p> <p><i>kai phulaxesthe panta ta prostagmata mou kai panta ta krimata mou kai poiēsete auta ha poiēsas anthrōpos zēsetai en autois egō Kurios ho Theos humōn</i></p>	<p>ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως,  ἀλλ' ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν  αὐτοῖς</p> <p><i>ho de nomos ouk estin ek pisteōs, all' ho poiēsas auta zēsetai en autois</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, pp 162-163; Longenecker, pp 120-121.

The major difference between Paul’s quotation of Leviticus 18:5 and what appears in the MT and LXX, is that the MT has *ha’adam* (אָדָם) and the LXX has *anthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος), “human being” or “person,” and Paul simply drops *anthrōpos*, whereby the text would be rendered with “He” or “The one” (ESV). This does not change anything that significantly.

The quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12b is intended to be a contrast between the Torah not being of faith, and its statutes to be followed. But, is this intended to be something that is adversative? Among interpreters, the view of James Montgomery Boice is precisely this: “For faith excludes law, and law by its very nature excludes faith. [Paul] quotes the law itself (Lev. 18:5) to support this conclusion.”<sup>3</sup>

Messianics across the spectrum have significantly struggled with Galatians 3:12, but not so much with the assertion that “the Law is not of faith” (a). It can be pretty easily deduced that the Torah’s instruction has been given not to provide faith, but rather provide a means of holiness and proper living. Messianics have specifically struggled over the quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12b, so much so that the Complete Jewish Bible rendering of Galatians 3:12 implies an errant view of Leviticus 18:5 being present in the Jewish world of the First Century: “Furthermore, legalism is not based on trusting and being faithful, **but on [a misuse of] the text that says, ‘Anyone who does these things will attain life through them.’**” While it should definitely be disputed why *nomos* (νόμος) is rendered in the CJB here as “legalism” and not “Torah” as it is elsewhere, it should even more be questioned why David H. Stern chose to add “a misuse of” in brackets []. He believes that the problem present in Galatians is legalism,<sup>4</sup> which may be true to some extent—but does Stern stand on strong exegetical ground to paraphrase Galatians 3:12 the way that he has with “a misuse of”? Probably not.

Much, of how the quotation of Leviticus 18:5 is viewed, is going to come down to the contrasting forms of “life” in view, between Galatians 3:11-12. In Galatians 3:11 previously, it is fairly clear that eternal life via faith in God, as opposed to idols (Habakkuk 2:4, 18-19) is what is emphasized. In Galatians 3:12, though, given the wider background of Leviticus ch. 18, it can be disputed if whether the “life” being described is eternal life, **or** whether it is a high quality of life that comes by keeping God’s Instruction. The wider context of Leviticus ch. 18 would seem to strongly suggest that a high quality of life is available for those who live within the sphere of God’s Torah.

## Different Approaches to Leviticus 18:5

On its own, Leviticus 18:5 says, “**So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.**”<sup>5</sup> The two verbs of interest first include *shamar* (שָׁמַר), generally meaning to “keep, watch, preserve” (*BDB*),<sup>6</sup> “The basic idea of the root is ‘to exercise great care over’” (*TWOT*).<sup>7</sup> The second is *chayah* (חָיָה), seen in the clause *ha’adam v’chai b’hem* (הָאָדָם וְחָי בָּהֶם), a very wooden translation of it being: “a person/mortal and will live in/by them.” The verb *v’chai* (וְחָי) is a third person, Qal vav consecutive perfect, here in Leviticus 18:5 likely having a “**Consequential**” usage, meaning that it “expresses logical result, describing an action or situation resulting from a previous action or situation” (*A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*).<sup>8</sup> If people keep God’s statutes and judgments, then they will live. The theological challenge, with approaching the verb *chayah*, is how it can range from meanings relating to physical life, a prosperous life, to eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

What is intended by, “if a person does them, he shall live by them” (Leviticus 18:5, ESV)? This is where we need to be sure to read Leviticus 18:5 in view of its wider context, in which some important contextual and

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<sup>3</sup> Boice, “Galatians,” in *EXP*, 11:459; cf. Longenecker, 120.

<sup>4</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 546-547.

<sup>5</sup> “You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live—I am HASHEM” (ATS).

<sup>6</sup> *BDB*, 1036.

<sup>7</sup> John E. Hartley, “שָׁמַר,” in *TWOT*, 2:939.

<sup>8</sup> Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Elmer B. Smick, “חָיָה,” in *TWOT*, 1:279-281.

historical indicators are mentioned. This should give readers an appropriate perspective of what is being asserted by the Lord:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. **So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD**”’” (Leviticus 18:1-5).

Following this preface in Leviticus ch. 18 is largely a series of sexual instructions, prohibiting various incestuous relationships (Leviticus 18:6-18), sexual intercourse during a woman’s menstruation cycle (Leviticus 18:19), sexual relationships between a man and another woman (Leviticus 18:20), male homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22), and bestiality (Leviticus 18:23). Also seen are a prohibition on presenting one’s offspring to Molech (Leviticus 18:21), and how Israel will be cast out of the Promised Land if they perform any of these sins (Leviticus 18:24-30). The universal nature for all of those within the community to keep these instructions is emphasized (Leviticus 18:26). The essential summary is that the sexual practices observed in Egypt, and also observed in Canaan, are strictly off limits for the Ancient Israelites. Readers should notice that,

**“So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD...**For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do *so* shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:5, 29-30).

With this all in view, the wider context and issues present in Leviticus ch. 18 should not guide readers in the direction of thinking that eternal life, or everlasting communion with God, is something that can be earned by keeping the Torah’s commandments. Such a conclusion is something plainly absent from the text reviewed. It would, however, be most proper to conclude that Leviticus 18:5 says that a proper mode and quality of life, *b’hem* (בְּהֵם)—“in them” (KJV), “by them” (NIV/ESV), or “through them” (CJB/CJSB)—can be present by those who keep the Torah’s commandments. The Torah’s high sexual instructions, for example, are surely intended to generate respect for other people in the community. For the Ancient Israelites who would be faithful to observe God’s Torah, especially in regard to the immediate instructions seen in Leviticus ch. 18, they would not have been cut off or have faced capital punishment for their offenses. On the contrary, in guarding their sexual conduct, they would be contributing to a society where the value of all people was honored.

The tenor we see, from how Leviticus 18:5 is referenced elsewhere in the Tanach, would confirm that a high quality of Earthly life and conduct is in view:

“I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live...But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them...But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, *if* a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness” (Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21).

“And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen” (Nehemiah 9:29).

At the very most, what could be implied from Leviticus 18:5 is that the person, who keeps God’s commandments, would remain on a straight and narrow path (cf. Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:24), that will consummate in entering into God’s Kingdom—not that keeping commandments themselves will earn or

merit one eternal life. Those who live within the right sphere of conduct on Planet Earth, by their behavior, should demonstrate themselves as those who are members of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In theological studies, both Jewish and Christian, one will certainly find a divergence of views on the meaning of Leviticus 18:5. The debate on how Leviticus 18:5 is to be approached, generally falls into two categories: those who see this as a quality of daily life in holiness on the path of faith that God has established for His people, and those who see this verse as implying that eternal life can possibly be earned through human Torah observance.<sup>10</sup> The following chart is a summary of relatively current Jewish and Christian approaches:

LEVITICUS 18:5 IN THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION	
A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE	POSSIBLY EARN ETERNAL LIFE
<p>Verse 5 enjoins obedience to Yahweh's 'statutes' and 'judgments' with a reference to their life-giving effect—i.e. the prevention of sudden death in the framework of 'normal' earthly life.<sup>11</sup> Martin Noth, <i>liberal Christian</i></p>	<p>The simple sense of the clause <i>va-hai ba-hem</i>, "he shall live by them," is that 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. This clause has, however, stimulated other interpretations reflecting its unusual syntax and semantic nuances. Syntax allows us to understand this clause as one of result: "that man shall perform, so that [as a result] he may acquire life by them." Performance of God's laws and commandments holds forth the reward of life, whereas their violation threatens man with death. This interpretation is the basis for the traditional understanding of our verse by later commentaries [Targum Onkelos, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban], which state that observance of the commandments is rewarded by life in the world to come.<sup>12</sup> Baruch A. Levine, <i>liberal Jew</i></p>
<p>As long as the chosen people kept the prescribed statutes and ordinances, they could expect to <i>live</i> (5). The kind of life which the law brought would be one of divine blessing and material prosperity, consonant with the covenantal promises, but contingent always upon implicit obedience to the will of God.<sup>13</sup> R.K. Harrison, <i>evangelical Christian</i></p>	<p>This verse [Leviticus 18:5] may mean no more than that the pious Israelite should "live out life" in the sphere of the law. But the use of the language of "life" elsewhere in the Pentateuch to denote the reward God gives for obedience to the law (e.g., Deut. 30:15, 19) makes it more likely that "will live" in Lev. 18:5 is a reward for obedience....Leviticus 18:5 is not...a promise that the doer of the law will attain eternal life. On the other hand, one can make</p>

<sup>10</sup> For a useful approach to the various views, consult R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:597-599.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 134.

<sup>12</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 119; cf. Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 489; A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983), 716.

Levine, 119 also notes that Leviticus 18:5 has been used to support the Rabbinic principle of *Pikku'ach Nefesh*, in that certain commandments can be violated in order to preserve human life.

<sup>13</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 185.

<p>Lev. 18:5 does not teach salvation by works. It teaches that the OT believers who trusted God and obeyed him from the heart received life abundant both here and hereafter....Observance of these laws in an attitude of faith resulted in spiritual life and power for the godly Israelite...Therefore it is best to take Lev 18:5 as a command to keep all God's laws by faith and thus attain a full spiritual life.<sup>15</sup> R. Laird Harris, <i>evangelical Christian</i></p>	<p>a good case for thinking that Paul, like later Jewish writers (cf. the Onkelos and Pseudo-Jon. Targums) understood Leviticus 18:5 to be promising eternal life for the doer.<sup>14</sup> Douglas J. Moo, <i>evangelical Christian</i></p>
<p>Men and women will fare much better if they will follow God's laws. This chapter is addressed to those who claim the Lord as their God...Only those who already have this Lord as their God are commanded to walk in God's laws so that they might live (v. 5). Keeping the law will not lead to eternal life, as some have mistakenly thought that this verse teaches, but it will lead to an abundant life. The phrase "will live by them" means that life will be lived in accordance with God's laws and commandments. The subsequent history of interpretation finds both Christian and Jewish commentators attempting to have this phrase reinterpreted to say, "[A person] shall perform, so that [as a result] he or she may acquire life by keeping them." But this result, as one can see, is contrived both in its understanding of "life" and in its unusual construal of the syntax.<sup>16</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, <i>evangelical Christian</i></p>	
<p><i>And by which he shall live.</i> Ramban writes that the term <i>by which he shall live</i> refers particularly to the 'social commandments' between man and his fellow man, such as the laws governing property and debts, and those forbidding murder and robbery. Only if society adheres to this body of law can life be peaceful and stable.<sup>17</sup> ArtScroll Chumash, <i>Orthodox Jewish</i></p>	

<sup>15</sup> Harris, in *EXP*, 2:598.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 325-326.

<sup>16</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1125.

<sup>17</sup> Nossou Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 650.

<p>The call of Israel was a call to abundant life. Obedience to God’s commands would result, not in poverty, death, or destruction, but in a fullness of life denied to those who lived by their own laws instead of by God’s word. God promised to look on those who obeyed the terms of his covenant with favour (26:9) and to bestow on them the blessings of peace and prosperity. Rich and fruitful lives would be theirs.<sup>18</sup> Derek Tidball, <i>evangelical Christian</i></p>	
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Gordon J. Wenham is one whose observations on Leviticus 18:5 seem to move between Earthly and eternal views of life. He first states, “For the OT writers life means primarily physical life. But it is clear that in this and similar passages more than mere existence is being promised. What is envisaged is a happy life in which a man enjoys God’s bounty of health, children, friends, and prosperity. Keeping the law is the path to divine blessing, to a happy and fulfilled life in the present (Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14).”<sup>19</sup> He goes on and adds, however, “it is Jesus and Paul who insist that the full meaning of life is eternal life. If anyone can keep the law, he will enjoy eternal life (Matt. 19:17; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12).”<sup>20</sup> Wenham further takes this to the point of saying, “In John’s Gospel man must keep the new law—the word of Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

There are those Christian examiners who lean toward, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them” (Leviticus 18:5), as relating to the obedience of Yeshua the Messiah to the Torah—and how born again Believers are to be associated with such obedience, as they are to be found in Him. A similar view would be how people keep a Torah that is intended to naturally point to the salvation of the Messiah (cf. Romans 10:4, Grk.).<sup>22</sup> While we do surely all benefit as redeemed souls from the perfect obedience of Yeshua to the Torah, and a Believer’s keeping of God’s commandments is to always point to the salvation of Yeshua—this is probably a bit of a stretch for interpreting Leviticus 18:5.

For today’s Messianics, who can be certainly said to have a faith practice significantly informed by Judaism, it is true that there are views expressed in ancient Jewish literature, such as the Targums, which would conclude that Leviticus 18:5 teaches that eternal life is attainable via keeping the Torah’s commandments:

“And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man do he shall live by them an everlasting life. I am the Lord” (Targum Onkelos on Leviticus 18:5).<sup>23</sup>

“And you shall keep My statutes, and the order of My judgments, which if a man do he shall live in them, in the life of eternity, and his portion shall be with the just: I am the Lord” (Targum Jonathan on Leviticus 18:5).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 219.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 253.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

John E. Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus*, Vol 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 293 takes Leviticus 18:5 itself to not imply that there is any kind of promise of eternal life given to those who keep the Torah, concluding, “There is little support in the Pentateuch for such a reading of this text.” Yet, he further thinks that “the language of the OT, while in itself not expressing a specific belief, nevertheless prepares the hearer for the fuller revelation of God,” in that eternal life is promised to those who believe in the Messiah.

<sup>22</sup> This is the basic thought expressed in Walter C. Kaiser, “Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 14 No. 1 (1971).

<sup>23</sup> *BibleWorks 7.0: Targum Onkelos on the Pentateuch*.

<sup>24</sup> *BibleWorks 7.0: Targum Pseudo Jonathan on the Pentateuch*.

A lesser, although notable view, is seen in the Talmud, where a Rabbi Meir is said that a non-Jew who keeps the Torah may be regarded as though he were a high priest:

“R. Meir says, ‘Whence do we know that even an idolator, should he take up study of the Torah, is equivalent to a high priest? For it is said, “[You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments,] which, if a man do them, he shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5); priests, Levites, and Israelites are not specified, but only a man. From that formulation you learn that even an idolator, should he engage in study of the Torah, is equivalent to a high priest” (b.*Sanhedrin* 59a).<sup>25</sup>

There are ancient Jewish opinions that regarded Leviticus 18:5 as teaching that eternal life could be attained via keeping God’s commandments. This was an opinion surely present within the First Century Jewish world of Yeshua and the Apostles, but whether they actually agreed with it or endorsed it can probably be disputed.

A more modern Jewish approach to Leviticus 18:5, which can be appreciable, is how Richard Elliot Friedman renders the clause *ha’adam v’chai b’hem* as, “he’ll live through them.”<sup>26</sup> In his estimation, “This way of picturing the laws, as a path to *life*, begins here. It returns as the climax of the Torah in Deuteronomy. The path to the Tree of Life is blocked at the Torah’s beginning, and the way to recover it is emphasized at the Torah’s end. The laws are not presented as a burden but as a blessing.”<sup>27</sup> He goes on to chastise those “who have characterized the law as a weight that no human can possibly bear, as a curse from which one needs to be saved.”<sup>28</sup> Yet, Friedman’s view is probably a bit too conditioned by a Jewish theology which sees the Torah as the means of obtaining what was lost in Eden, rather than directing people to a coming Messiah who is to save God’s people (cf. Genesis 3:15).

From the actual text of Leviticus 18:5, we see that “life” is promised to those who keep God’s commandments. Readers are definitely on good footing to conclude that Leviticus 18:5 regards a **high quality of life lived on Earth**, one that is intended to be blessed and prosperous from the Lord. To conclude that eternal life can somehow be merited from keeping commandments, though, has to be eisegeted into the text, even though there are interpreters in history who have incorrectly held to it.

However, for those who have acknowledged Yeshua (Jesus) as Savior—to act as though daily life has no connection to future Heavenly life—would be most inappropriate. For those who obey God’s commandments in Messiah are surely to be regarded as men and women of the age to come living in the present evil age. They are to bear in their activities of daily life, the blessings to be fully consummated in future Heavenly life. Leviticus 18:5 does not promise eternal life via someone keeping God’s commandments, but Leviticus 18:5 can provide assurance that those who keep God’s commandments will be firmly planted within the sphere of His Kingdom. God’s commandments **do not provide the way of salvation from sins and eternal punishment**, but they do provide the way of sanctification and holiness. As Tidball properly describes,

“Some might wish to object to God’s right to say how his people should live, but it should really come as no surprise that the God who made us knows better than we ourselves know how we should function in his world. It should not surprise us that obeying the maker’s instructions is likely to bring the best out of us and lead us to live life to the full.”<sup>29</sup>

Leviticus 18:5, as just noted, is a section of the Torah where appropriate sexual conduct was commanded of the Ancient Israelites as they prepared to enter into the Promised Land. **These were surely things that the non-Jewish Believers in Galatia similarly had to follow**, as would be confirmed in the later Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21), **being non-negotiable for their inclusion within the *ekklēsia***.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 375.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus*, 219.

Commonly “the Law is not of faith” (Galatians 3:12a), is viewed as being adversative, or in considerable opposition, to the following remark: “on the contrary, ‘HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM’” (Galatians 3:12b). With Leviticus 18:5 pertaining to a high quality of life for those who conduct themselves within the sphere of God’s commandments, it would seem best for us to view the clause *all’ ho poiēsas auta zēsetai en autois* (ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς), with the conjunctive *all’ ho...* as marking “a transition to someth. new...[or] **other matter for additional consideration**” (BDAG),<sup>30</sup> being better translated with “yet, ‘HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE IN THEM.’” So, while Paul may recognize that the Torah is incapable of generating faith (Galatians 3:12a), if the presence of Leviticus 18:5 (Galatians 3:12b) is not viewed as adversative—he by all means upholds the relevance of the Torah as a means of proper human conduct, most especially its sexual code. No word in Galatians, or anywhere in the Pauline corpus, can be seen speaking against the sexual ethics of the Torah!

When the conjunction *alla* (ἀλλά) is taken not as adversative, but rather as “forming a transition to someth. new,” such as another “**matter for additional consideration**” (BDAG),<sup>31</sup> then the rendering “**And, the Torah is not of faith; yet, HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE IN THEM**” (PME) can be better understood. God’s Torah not providing faith, and practicing the commandments of God’s Torah, are not at total odds with one another. The purpose of God’s Torah is not to provide faith, but its purpose is to provide a sanctified way of living on Planet Earth.

James D.G. Dunn fairly observes on Galatians 3:12, concurrent with this, how “The law...was the means of regulating life within the covenant, not the basis of the covenant itself...It needs to be stressed that this is essentially a *positive* view of the role of the law.” He further states, “the thought of the unfulfillability of the law [is not] anywhere in sight here...[I]t is highly pertinent to note that in context Lev. xviii.2-5 emphasizes the distinctiveness of Israel’s way of life from that of the surrounding nations.”<sup>32</sup> Galatians 3:12 should be read as communicating that while the Torah is not of faith, it is *yet* intended to bring the right way of living to those who keep its commandments.

The proper role of the Torah as a matter of spiritual sanctification can actually be seen within Paul’s writing to the Galatians. Paul has previously asked them, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Galatians 3:2), and “So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Galatians 3:5). In both verses, the Influencers’ human-derived “works of law” are contrasted with *akoēs pisteōs* (ἀκοῆς πίστεως), “the hearing of faith” (KJV/NKJV). This “hearing of faith” should be immediately connected to the *Shema*’s imperative to hear and obey the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-7), something which begins with love for Him and a discipleship within His covenant community.

Among Messianic interpreters, Tim Hegg has some useful thoughts on Galatians 3:12 for us to all weigh and consider:

“Apart from faith, the Torah functions only to condemn—it can never bring life...In fact, genuine obedience to Torah (obedience which includes right motives as well as right actions) flows from faith. Thus, the Influencers had the sequence backward: Torah does not produce faith, rather, faith produces obedience to Torah....Paul’s emphasis, therefore, in quoting Leviticus 18:5 is to show that obedience flows out of covenant membership, and not *vice versa*. One does not obey in order to gain covenant membership, but rather, one’s obedience is proof of covenant membership already possessed.”<sup>33</sup>

The need to read Leviticus 18:5, appearing within Galatians 3:11-13, from its original context of blessing for those who live within the community of God—which one enters via faith in Him and now His Messiah—is imperative. The Torah is not intended to justify, nor is it intended to provide faith (Galatians

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 45.

This same entry also states, concerning the conjunction *alla*, that “when whole clauses are compared, *ἀλλά* can indicate a transition to someth. different or contrasted: **the other side of a matter or issue, but, yet**” (Ibid.).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, pp 175, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Hegg, *Galatians*, 107.

3:11; Habakkuk 2:4). Yeshua the Messiah was sacrificed to provide atonement for human beings' Torah violation (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23). The Torah is, however, intended to provide a means of sanctification and holy living (Galatians 3:12; Leviticus 18:5).

In Galatians 3:11-12, Paul certainly did remind the Galatians that it was not enough to just keep the Torah. Faith requires that one's confidence be placed in a God that he or she cannot see, as redemption is accomplished via a person's belief in the atoning work of Yeshua. The Torah on its own is not sufficient to bring one into a covenant relationship with God. Yet, the Torah does contain principles that one should live by. Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18:5, while often used as a proof text against following the Torah, should actually be taken as evidence that it is the sphere of conduct in which God's people should find themselves. And, the very principles, elucidated in Leviticus ch. 18, are some of the very principles that the new, non-Jewish Believers had to follow in order to enter into the corporate Body of Messiah (Acts 15:20, 29).

At first (Galatians 3:11) Paul is concerned about the Galatians just "following Torah" from the vantage point that it is all that is necessary for justification. Secondly, he notes that the Torah is not "of faith" (Galatians 3:12a) in that it cannot bring a person the firm trust that one is to have in God, *which often involves having experience with Him* via relationship. Third, Paul yet notes that the one who practices the Torah's commandments will live by them (Galatians 3:12b), quoting from Leviticus 18. These specific commandments end with the admonition, "Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 18:30), and we **do not** find Paul endorsing the (sexual) lifestyle of the Egyptians, Canaanites, or the Galatians' Greek and Roman neighbors.

**3:13** Some in Paul's Galatian audience may not have understood that faith in the God of Israel—especially with the entryway into His people now definitively being Messiah Yeshua—would naturally lead to obedience, perhaps even one emulating Him (Galatians 6:2). The Influencers caused many to be confused (Galatians 3:1) regarding the proper place of the Torah within the life of a redeemed person, and likely what the Messiah had done for them. Having just emphasized obedience in Galatians 3:12b, specifically as it relates to the sexual commands of Scripture, Paul continues in Galatians 3:13 reminding the Galatians, "The Messiah redeemed us from the curse pronounced in the *Torah* by becoming cursed on our behalf" (CJB/CJSB). The "curse of the Law," *tēs kataras tou nomou* (τῆς κατάρως τοῦ νόμου), has been lifted for those who are in Him. This curse definitively composes the penalties that are to be enacted against those who violate the Torah's commandments (cf. Colossians 2:14). In the case of the Galatians, if any of them had been involved in prohibited sexual activities, and any other major capital offenses, Yeshua surely took the penalty onto Himself that they doubtlessly had deserved.

F.F. Bruce is absolutely correct when asserting, "The solution set forth here...probably came to [Paul] sooner rather than later: Christ had endured the curse on his people's behalf (by being 'hanged on a tree') in order to redeem them from the curse pronounced on those who failed to keep the law."<sup>34</sup> One of the major sins that would especially bring a curse upon someone is murder, as indicated by Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 21:23: "his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."

Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 21:23 and his reference to "tree" (Grk. *xulon*, ξύλον) might have reminded some of the Galatians (at least those in Pisidian Antioch) of his previous preaching to them: "And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb" (Acts 13:29, RSV). Perhaps thoughts of Paul's original visit to them could now begin to resurface, as they remembered the *real* purpose that Yeshua came into their lives. Yeshua came into their lives to redeem them from the consequences that they incurred for violating God's immutable statutes, so that they could now live empowered to fulfill God's mission and be a blessing to others. Paul specifies the blessing of

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 166.

Abraham as “the promise of the Spirit through faith.” After a person had faith in God and was empowered by His Spirit, *only then* could proper obedience truly follow.

Certainly, if Yeshua had been executed to atone for high sins such as murder, than other less serious, non-capital sins would also be covered by His death. Via this death, the penalties that all of us were to incur because of our violation of the Torah’s commandments are now remitted! But now that the curse is lifted, what does this mean regarding the status of the Torah?

Paul specifically says that the curse of the Torah pronounced upon sinners has been removed, for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. Notice that Paul **does not say** that Yeshua has removed the Torah from being a standard of proper living for God’s community, and that the standard of sin contained in the Torah has gone away. Nor does Paul say that keeping the Torah—obeying God—will actually bring a curse. Yet, one will find a few readers today who (poorly) conclude these sorts of things.

It should be immediately dismissed that *tēs kataras tou nomou*, or “the curse of the Law,” is somehow akin to “the curse of *having to keep* the Law.” This is an extremely errant, populist view, that one can encounter among Christians today, but one which I have never seen explicitly expressed as such among the mainline Galatians commentaries that I have in my library!<sup>35</sup> Paul makes it clear that the curse was incurred by disobedience to the Torah. The term *kátara* (κατάρα) is explained by *TDNT* to “[apply] to everybody, not just to the Jew or Jewish Christian. To be a sinner is to stand under God’s wrath and condemnation. Release comes because Jesus became a curse on our behalf.”<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, Paul confirms that not only is disobedience to God’s Instruction a universal human problem (cf. Romans 2:14; 3:19), but that “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The curse incurred from disobedience has been permanently solved because of the Messiah’s execution.

The “curse of the Law” **can by no means be the Torah**, as that would actually make Biblical prohibitions like those against murder and stealing in the Ten Commandments—universally agreed to in all religions and societies (and even among atheists) as principles to be followed—to actually be curses upon the human race. The “curse of the Law” principally regards the capital penalty that is pronounced upon sinners, which will ultimately result in eternal punishment for those who are unrepentant. Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) was incarnated as a human being, crucified for the sins of fallen men and women, precisely so that the penalties of the Torah could be lifted from those who express faith in Him (Galatians 4:4-5).

The fact that the “curse of the Law” is something that has been incurred from disobedience to the Torah, and is something that had to be *definitively dealt with* on the tree or execution-stake, is appropriately recognized by theologians who actually think that the Law has been abolished in the post-resurrection era. Among these, Ben Witherington III is one who rightly concludes, “Christ on the cross endured the curse of the Law, indeed the curse of God that falls on Lawbreakers, his execution being the carrying out of the curse.”<sup>37</sup>

Yeshua the Messiah is the final atonement for human sin, and in His death He has abolished the curse of condemnation pronounced upon all Torah-breakers. But even if His final sacrifice has nullified this curse, *for those who believe in Him*, this does not all of a sudden make the Torah unimportant and irrelevant for His followers. At the very most, as Bruce states, Paul’s “argument would have been all of a piece with his swift and radical reappraisal of the place of the law in God’s ways with mankind.”<sup>38</sup> Until the good Apostle was met by the Living Yeshua on the Damascus road, much of who he was as a Jew was focused exclusively on Torah-keeping (Galatians 1:13-14). Following the dramatic salvation encounter He had with the Messiah,

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<sup>35</sup> There are various Galatians interpreters who think that “the curse of the Law” is something that only the Jewish people experienced, such a curse not being a condition for all humanity. This curse might also involve some kind of bondage or slavery to the Torah, but not that keeping the Torah is akin to a kind of “curse.”

<sup>36</sup> F. Büschel, “*kátara*,” in *TDNT*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Witherington, *Galatians*, 239.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 166.

Paul would have to recognize the Torah’s main role in identifying sin and condemning sinners, shutting them up as jailed criminals needing to be freed (Galatians 3:22ff). **Those who have experienced redemption in Yeshua are to no longer have the Torah’s curse hanging over them!**

The Apostles would have needed to seriously reevaluate the status of the Torah for born again Believers, as Yeshua’s death, burial, and resurrection did certainly change some significant spiritual dynamics. On the one hand, Yeshua the Messiah Himself said that He came to fulfill, and not abolish the Torah, and that the Torah would remain in force until the closing up of this universe (Matthew 5:17-19). *This would mean that the Torah is validated by Him as relevant instruction for all His followers.* On the other hand, though, with a permanent atonement offered for human sins, one can see an emphasis in Hebrews 7:12 on a “change of law” occurring in relation to the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices.

The main changes, which have occurred in the post-resurrection era, concern the relationship that God’s people have to the Torah relating to the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices (Hebrews 7:18), which were clearly brought in to regulate sin (Galatians 3:19). Such a priesthood has been set aside (at least until the Millennium given the tenor of Ezekiel chs. 40-44) with the final sacrifice of Yeshua now offered (Hebrews 10:12, 14), and the Torah’s capital penalties have been absorbed by His atoning work (Colossians 2:14). Changes which have **not occurred** concern how God’s people are to live and conduct themselves as His upright representatives in greater society, as Deuteronomy 26:18 admonishes, “The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments.”

**3:14** A major reason for Yeshua being sacrificed, as Paul accurately explains, was “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14, ESV). Galatians 3:14 includes two important usages of the preposition *hina* (i[na], meaning “in order that...so that” (NASU).<sup>39</sup> The sacrifice of Yeshua has brought the blessing of Abraham to the nations, and as Paul will later explain, one who has the faith of Abraham is of his “descendants” (Galatians 3:29).

One of the immediate challenges, which need not be overlooked, is how the blessing of Abraham coming *ta ethnē* (τὰ ἔθνη), via the atoning work of Yeshua, is something that *includes* the Jewish people every bit as much of the nations of Planet Earth at large. Being sacrificed, so that the curse of the Torah could be remitted (Galatians 3:13), was equally a Jewish problem as it was for all people who need redemption. An average English Bible version has a tendency of skewing things a bit by rendering *ta ethnē* as “the Gentiles,” whereas if a more neutral rendering such as “the nations” is included—“in order that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the [nations]” (Galatians 3:13a)—one can better reckon with the Paul’s following remark, “so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13b).<sup>40</sup> Paul, a Jewish Believer, is surely among the “we” who would receive the Holy Spirit via faith in Yeshua.

The “we” are the redeemed from among all the nations of the world, *including* the redeemed from among the Jewish people. When the Abrahamic promise decrees, “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3), this surely includes the immediate physical descendants of Abraham, as much as it includes others.

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<sup>39</sup> Grk. *hina eis ta ethnē hē eulogia tou Abraam genētai en Christō Iēsou, hina tēn epangelian tou pneumatōs labōmen dia tēs pisteōs* (ὕνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὕνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως).

<sup>40</sup> The 2011 Kingdom New Testament by N.T. Wright actually offers a rendering of Galatians 3:14 along these lines: “This was so that the blessing of Abraham could flow through to the nations in King Jesus—and so that we might receive the promise of the spirit, through faith.”