

Under the Law

How can today's Messianic movement widely advocate that the Law of Moses is still valid, when the Bible is clear that Christians are not "under the Law"?

Any person who believes in the final authority of the Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, will have to take the admonition **"for you are not under law but under grace"** (Romans 6:4, NASU) very seriously. For anyone who believes in the continued validity of the Torah or Law of Moses in the post-resurrection era, to disregard something like this—or somehow claim that the Apostle Paul is "wrong"—would indicate that he or she does not hold to a very high view of the *whole* Scriptural canon.

There are various challenges present when approaching the issue of what "under the Law" should be viewed as meaning, that too many of your average Bible readers are simply not aware of. Much of this has to do with the fact that being "under the law" in too much of contemporary, modern speech, has become synonymous with "according to the law," whether such law is Biblical or secular. When "under the Law" terminology is witnessed in the Scriptures, it is automatically assumed to mean "according to the law" or "being obedient to the law." But, does it really mean this? And, few are aware that in various mainline English translations, like the New American Standard or Revised Standard Version, that there are a variance of Greek clauses rendered as "under [the] law."

Our ultimate appeal as Bible readers and examiners, as it pertains to what "under the Law" really means, has to be made to the source text that sits behind our English translations. It would not only be too convenient, but even a bit haphazard, for any of us to simply type in a few search criteria via some Bible software program for "under law," and then conclude that the results include *just* the places where the Greek clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) appears. The only places where "under [the] law" legitimately appears in the Bible are: **Romans 6:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 9:20** (four times); **Galatians 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18**. Where an English version may employ "under [the] law," and something else actually appears in the source text, we need to carefully determine if something like "in the law," "by the law," or "according to the law" is used instead.

While for many Bible readers, being "under the Law" means being obedient to the Torah or Law of Moses, few laypersons are actually aware of the fact that there are actually three main interpretations of "under the Law" accessible to interpreters. Douglas J. Moo, who himself believes that obedience to the Torah was only a part of the pre-resurrection era, is quite fair in summarizing the three main options of what "under the Law" could mean:

"We do not presume that 'under the law' must connote the same idea in each of its occurrences, although the stereotypical flavor of the phrase may point in this direction. Three general meanings of the phrase are popular: (1) under the condemnation pronounced by the law; (2) under a legalistic perversion of the law; and (3) under the law as a regime or power in a general sense."¹

Within a great deal of today's broad Messianic movement (in no small part due to the influence of David H. Stern's Complete Jewish Bible), "under the Law" meaning some kind of legalistic perversion of the Torah, has been a common view one will encounter. Ultimately, though, Bible readers have to recognize that the redeemed in Yeshua **not** being "under the Law," has to serve as an appropriate counterpart to them being "under grace."

It is the viewpoint of Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics, that "under the Law" **being subjected to the condemnation pronounced by the Torah**, is actually the best way to view the clause *hupo nomon* in all of the locations where it appears within the Pauline letters. For, it is quite obvious that those who have received Yeshua and His salvation into their lives are redeemed from the high penalties of the Torah (cf. Colossians 2:14), yet the Messiah Himself bid His followers to follow Moses' Teaching (Matthew 5:17-19). Being "under the Law," then, is a

¹ 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), 361.

status in which unsaved persons will find themselves—not saved persons who know Yeshua as their personal Savior. Being “under the Law” regards a condition of condemnation and punishment if not rectified, not the steadfast requirement that God’s people obey His commandments and live in holiness.

The author has written two articles on this topic: “**What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?**” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*) and “**What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?—A Further Study**” (appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*). Both of these should inform you a great deal about the meaning of *hupo nomon* in the Greek Scriptures, and how “under the Law” meaning obedient to God’s Torah is a poor conclusion. (The second article goes into much more detail than the first, and is engaged with a wider array of scholastic perspectives.)