



Parasha Chukat

July 5, 2025

Torah: Numbers 19:1-22:1.

Haftarah: Judges 11:1-33.

See message notes beitshalom.us for parasha-specific messages

Ketuvim Sh'lichim: Galatians 1-6.

Specific to today's message

Disciples of Yeshua 34

Shabbat Shalom Mishpacha! In a previous message, we examined a portion of Galatians Chapter 3, specifically relating to Abraham as the father of both Jews and Gentiles and Yeshua's fulfillment of the curse of hanging on a tree. Today, we will discuss another topic from this letter and examine what seems to be its main focus: the Galatians' turning away from *Besurat HaGeulah HaMashiach*, the Good News of Messiah they initially accepted. *Sha'ul's* relationship with the men of the Congregation at Galatia began well enough, but had become strained when they turned away from what he taught them. We are not told if they ever responded to his urgent plea to "to turn back to the truth," and to free themselves from what he called "a yoke of slavery" (5:1). From our perspective as followers of Yeshua, *Sha'ul's* letters are truth, but during his time, not everyone he ministered to agreed with him. He faced challenges and accusations from others, including the congregation at Corinth, which was deeply divided. Those issues seem to have been resolved, but what happened with the Galatians may not have been.

What was the issue in Galatia? The problem *Sha'ul* faced was not something new and had been ongoing for some time, as he indicated in the opening remarks of his letter. *6 I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from the One who called you by the grace of Messiah, to a different "good news"— 7 not that there is another, but only some who are confusing you and want to distort the Good News of Messiah.* (Galatians 1:6-7 TLV). He identified the problem as a distortion of "the Good News." The problem arose when the Galatians turned to the message of a group we encountered in the Book of Acts. Its opening verse reveals the source of the original problem: *1 Now some men coming down from Judea were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses (the requirements of Exodus 12), you cannot be saved.* (Acts 15:1 TLV). It seems that some other Jews with the same views had gone to the Galatian group with which *Sha'ul* had a relationship. The "different Good News" *Sha'ul* referred to was not turning away from Yeshua, but something else.

The origin of the "different Good News" was caused by this group's disagreement with the ruling made by the elders and emissaries at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). It was a group of Messianic Jews who had slipped in, whom we will call "the Circumcision Group," that believed circumcision was necessary for Gentiles. *5 But some belonging to the party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.* (Acts 15:5 TLV). Those Jews trusted in Yeshua, but they also believed that new Gentile followers of Yeshua should be held to the same standards as Jews. The Council of Jerusalem ruled against them. *Ya'akov*, the *nasi*, the

leader of the Jerusalem congregation, said: *19 Therefore, I judge not to trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God—* (Acts 15:19 TLV). “Not to trouble” them meant not to require them to undergo “*B’rit Milah*,” the Covenant of Circumcision. The council ruled that Gentile males should not be circumcised. However, they also encouraged new Gentile believers to attend synagogue on *Shabbat* and study the *Torah*, but they did not command them to observe it. (Acts 15:21).

Sha’ul encountered the Circumcision Group in Antioch (Galatians 2:12) before the Jerusalem meeting (48-50 CE), and now, some members of this group had gone to Galatia (around 50 CE). Years later, Jews with similar beliefs caused trouble in Philippi. (around 60 CE). Regarding them, *Sha’ul* wrote: *2 “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship by the Ruach Elohim and glory in Messiah Yeshua and have not depended on the flesh—..* (Philippians 3:2-3 TLV). *Sha’ul* refers to the circumcision of Gentile males as mutilation, a reflection of his very strong views against it. In Philippi, Messianic Jews of this faction continued to disobey the decision of the leaders of the Jerusalem Council. The issue in our message today is that some of them traveled to Galatia and shared their beliefs with the men there after *Sha’ul* had proclaimed the “Good News” to them. The Galatian men accepted the message of the Circumcision Group and rejected the “Good News” *Sha’ul* had preached to them. These Jews are called “Judaizers” by some Christians. They agreed on the circumcision issue but disliked that they were telling the Galatians to obey the Law, which they oppose for Gentiles. We agree with the Circumcision Group’s teaching of obedience to the *Torah*, something they were undoubtedly doing. As we have shown in our study of *Sha’ul*’s other letters, that is what he taught: that Gentiles should obey the *Torah*. In closing his letter to the Romans, he wrote: *18 For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Messiah accomplished through me, to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God.* (Romans 15:18-19a TLV). Obedience to what? Obedience to the *Torah*. Obedience by word and deed means to speak obedience and to act in obedience. This demonstrates that Gentiles were to obey the *Torah* just as the Messianic Jews did.

However, *Sha’ul* was not questioning obedience to the *Torah*, but the turning of the Galatians to circumcision. But it wasn’t just physical circumcision. “Circumcision” was a code word referring to the belief system taught by the Pharisees regarding inclusion into Israel, that is, how one became a proselyte to Judaism. Those in the Circumcision Group had trusted in Yeshua, but they had not turned away from the Pharisees’ system, a system that corrupted ADONAI’s *Torah* by adding requirements He did not command. In addition to obeying the *Torah*, which was also applicable to Yeshua’s New Covenant followers in the 1st century, the Circumcision Group also preached three other things: obedience to the Oral Torah, immersion, and circumcision. We have previously shown that Yeshua did not follow Oral Torah, and also that was what *Shimon Kefa* spoke of when he spoke up at the Jerusalem Council and said: *10 Why then do you put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples—which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?* (Acts 15:10 TLV). I believe that the Oral Torah was the “yoke,” a key part of the complete Pharisaical system, which required adherence to the written *Torah*, the Oral Torah, *tevillah* (immersion), and *B’rit Milah* (circumcision)—the prerequisites for Gentile proselytes seeking to convert to Judaism during the 1st century. When *Sha’ul* wrote “circumcision,” he was referring to their becoming proselytes to the traditional Judaism of Israel. Contrary to the rulings of the elders and emissaries at the Jerusalem Council, these Messianic Jews were teaching the Galatians that

the Pharisees' doctrine was necessary for Gentile men to make the "Good News" of Messiah Yeshua effective, which was completely opposite of what *Sha'ul* had taught them.

At the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), *Sha'ul* concurred with the elders and emissaries regarding their decision. and taught that salvation was through grace alone and circumcision was not required of Yeshua's Gentile followers. Here, we have two opposing groups: the elders and emissaries of Yeshua, and a faction of Messianic Jews we are calling the Circumcision Group. Here is a comparative list of what each taught regarding salvation:

The Circumcision Group

(These are requirements, things that one must do to achieve the end result.)

Trust in Yeshua as Messiah

Be obedient to the *Torah* of Moses

Be obedient to the Oral *Torah*

Undergo *tevillah* (Immersion into Yeshua)

Undergo *B'rit Milah* (Covenant of Circumcision)

Sha'ul and the Elders and Emissaries

(There is only one requirement here, trust in Yeshua with all your heart. The other two take place after one has become a covenant partner of The New Covenant through their faith in Yeshua.)

Trust in Yeshua as Messiah

Be obedient to the *Torah* of Moses

Undergo *tevillah* (Immersion into Yeshua)

Sha'ul felt frustrated and wrote harsh words to the Galatians. *1 O foolish Galatians, who cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Yeshua the Messiah was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I want to find out just one thing from you: did you receive the Ruach by deeds based on Torah, or by hearing based on trust?* (Galatians 3:1-2 TLV). We need to understand the phrase "Deeds based on *Torah*." Was *Sha'ul* saying that obeying the *Torah* was not required? No, that was not it at all. "Deeds" refers to required acts. He continued: *10 For all who rely on the deeds of Torah are under a curse—for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not keep doing everything written in the scroll of the Torah."* (Galatians 3:10 TLV). This was a reference to Deuteronomy 27:26, one of the curses pronounced on Mount Ebal when Israel entered the Land of Canaan, at the same time when the blessings were also pronounced on Mount Gerizim. The Blessings and Curses were a part of the consequences of either following or not following the *Torah* given at Mount Sinai. The people of Israel were required to obey to remain in covenant with ADONAI. *Sha'ul* continued: *11 It is clear that no one is set right before God by Torah, for "the righteous shall live by Emunah (faith)."* (Galatians 3:11 TLV). *Sha'ul* wrote that obeying laws cannot make someone right with ADONAI. He declared to the Galatians (3:11) and to the Romans (1:17) that "the righteous shall live by faith." Under the New Covenant, salvation comes solely through faith—faith that Yeshua died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, thereby removing ADONAI's bill of charges against us, our sins, as *Sha'ul* demonstrated in Colossians 2:14. Obedience to the *Torah* as a route to salvation is foreign to the New Covenant and the Good News of Messiah. *Sha'ul* continued: *12*

However, *Torah* (**obeying the Torah to achieve salvation**) is not based on trust and faithfulness; on the contrary, “the one who does these things shall live by them.” (Galatians 3:12 TLV). The one who tries to live by keeping the *Torah* for salvation is under the curse of the *Torah* (Galatians 3:10). ADONAI Himself established this curse as part of His covenant with Israel. While individuals could also be cursed, there was also a collective curse on Israel, which was fulfilled many times through famine, hardships, war, and being scattered among the nations. But it was the personal curse that Yeshua took for each of us. Dying on the cross, being hung on a tree, He became cursed for us, as the *Torah* says in Deuteronomy. (21:22-23). *Sha’ul* referred to these verses when he wrote: *13 Messiah liberated us from Torah’s curse, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”)—* (Galatians 3:13 TLV). By dying to establish the New Covenant, Yeshua bore the curse of the *Torah* of the First Covenant in His body for us. And when *Sha’ul* said, “However, *Torah* is not based on trust and faithfulness” (3:12), I believe he used “*Torah*” as a code for 1st-century Pharisaical Judaism, with all its requirements for membership. He has affirmed many times that obeying the actual *Torah* is what we as followers of Yeshua are called to do (Romans 3:30-31).

To explain “*Torah*” as a code name for the Pharisaic system, *Sha’ul* provided two *midrashim* to demonstrate how this was a false understanding. In the first one, he explained that it is like an underage heir who is under guardianship until they reach the age of majority. *3 So also, when we were underage, we were subservient to the basic principles of the world.* (Galatians 4:3 TLV). The Greek reads: *stoicheion* (stoy-khi'-on) *tou* (toe) *kosmos* (kos'-mos), translated by *Strong’s Online Concordance* as “basic principles of the world,” precisely what the Tree of Life Version uses. He wrote “we,” referring to the legalistic perversion of Judaism that all Israel had been under before the New Covenant. *9 But now you have come to know God—or rather you have come to be known by God. So how can you turn back again to those weak and worthless principles? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?* (Galatians 4:9 TLV). *Sha’ul* uses the word “*stoicheion*” again, the same term he used in verse 3 to describe the legalistic distortion of Judaism—his former system—to refer to “the weak and worthless principles of the world.” I believe he repeated the same word because he continued referring to the legalistic distortion of Judaism, the system that the Galatians were now following. Some suggest that “the weak and worthless principles of the world” refers to the Galatians’ former worship of false gods through their Greek and Roman cultic systems. That is a possibility, but since *Sha’ul*’s primary focus throughout every chapter of Galatians has been on what the Circumcision Group was teaching them, it is unlikely that this was a reference to their former worship system. That they may have been vacillating between the message of the perverters and their former pagan religion is a possibility, but the text does not give sufficient information in that regard. However, since *Sha’ul* used the same word, *stoicheion*, in both verse 3 and verse 9, he was likely referring to the legalistic perversion of the *Torah* in both cases.

Next, he wrote: *10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain!* (Galatians 4:10-11 TLV). Observe is in the present tense in this verse, indicating something they were currently doing, and it appears to be related to “the weak and worthless principles of the world.” In my opinion, the best explanation of “days, months, seasons, and years” is that they refer to the distortion of the Judaism of Yeshua presented by the Circumcision Group. As observant Messianic Jews, *Sha’ul* and Yeshua’s other followers observed special days and new moons, just like the Pharisees. However, the Pharisees and those of the Circumcision Group altered the

Scriptural and legitimate observance of the *Moedim*, the festival days, and *Rosh Chodesh*, the new moon, by adding Oral Torah requirements to them and making other additions to ADONAI's *Torah* commands. They convinced the Galatians that, to be part of Israel and a part of the Judaism of that time, they had to follow those additional days, months, seasons, and years.

Sha'ul's second midrash is about two covenants. 21 Tell me, you who want to be under Torah, don't you understand the Torah? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. 23 But one—the son by the slave woman—was born naturally; while the other—the son by the free woman—was through the promise. 24 Now these things are being treated allegorically, for these are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, giving birth to slavery—this is Hagar. 25 But this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery along with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free—she is our mother. (Galatians 4:21-26 TLV). This is not a condemnation of the Covenant made at Sinai, as some believe. Ishmael was born because of Sarai's wish to have a child, and her unwillingness to wait on ADONAI. She asked Avram to give her a child through her handmaid, *Hagar* (Genesis 16:1-2). *Sha'ul* compares this to Isaac's birth from Sarah through ADONAI's promise (Genesis 16:1-2) and explains that it is an allegory (Galatians 4:24), a literary method used to illustrate a specific point. There are two levels of meaning: the surface level, which is the actual meaning of the words, and the symbolic level, which is the hidden, more profound meaning. The covenant from Mount Sinai refers to the legalistic perversion of the *Torah*, which brings slavery, and is represented by Hagar. This is used metaphorically to express the "human effort" taught by the Circumcision Group and is not a negative comment on the Covenant made at Sinai. *Sha'ul* also compares Mount Sinai to the earthly Jerusalem, which is again a reference to human effort rather than what ADONAI desires. Hagar's children, those who distort the *Torah* into legalism, are in bondage, enslaved to their own decisions and physical efforts to try and connect with ADONAI. Mount Sinai represents the legalistic distortion of the *Torah*, and physical Jerusalem similarly symbolizes the same idea.

Spiritual Jerusalem, which *Sha'ul* calls Jerusalem above, is symbolized by Sarah, the free woman, and her children—those who follow ADONAI's truth—who are not in bondage but free from slavery to their desires. Sarah symbolizes the promise to those who, through trust and faith, approach ADONAI through Messiah Yeshua. Sarah's children are those who are in a proper relationship with Yeshua. We are the free children of the free woman, and not slaves who are trying to maintain a relationship with ADONAI through a system of works. *Sha'ul's midrash* teaches us that following an earthly system, in this case, the Pharisaic system, to obtain righteousness is folly. The only way is through trusting faith in Yeshua as Messiah.

Sha'ul continues: *1 For freedom, Messiah set us free—so stand firm, and do not be burdened by a yoke of slavery again. 2 Listen—I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Messiah will be of no benefit to you. 3 Again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised, that he is obligated to keep the whole Torah.* (Galatians 5:1-3 TLV). Freedom in Messiah is freedom from the slavery of sin. "Let yourselves be circumcised" refers to becoming Jewish proselytes, a system of works that requires following all the laws set by the Pharisees. Yeshua had said: *34 "Amen, amen I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* *36 "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!* (John 8:34b; 36 TLV). *Sha'ul* advised the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom from sin they received through trusting in Yeshua. But if they followed the teachings of the Circumcision Group, they would lose

their salvation and be required to observe the entire *Torah*. By accepting the teachings of the Circumcision Group, they fell from the grace of Yeshua's salvation, and the only possible way for them to attain righteousness is by keeping the entire *Torah*, which is impossible for humans. *Sha'ul* wrote: *4 You who are trying to be justified by Torah have been cut off from Messiah; you have fallen away from grace.* (Galatians 5:4 TLV). In saying this, *Sha'ul* argued that an individual can attain salvation and then lose it. The Galatians who initially accepted the Good News of the Messiah and then abandoned it in favor of the legalistic approach of converting to Judaism lost their salvation.

Sha'ul concludes his letter with this: *14 But may I never boast—except in the cross of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. Through Him the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything—but only a new creation.* (Galatians 6:14-15 TLV). This means that *B'rit Milah*, the Covenant of Circumcision between ADONAI and Jewish males, has nothing to do with righteousness. It is a sacred covenant that He established, but it is unrelated to faith, and He did not make it with Gentiles. However, by trusting in Yeshua, an act of faith, anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, can become a righteous and renewed creation.

We can sum up *Sha'ul's* message to the Galatians as follows: Beware of those Messianic Jews who are trying to make you convert to Judaism. They are only doing it to avoid persecution by the Pharisees, who oppose the salvation of Yeshua. (6:12). Circumcision is unrelated to righteousness before ADONAI, whereas trusting in Yeshua allows a person to become righteous. What matters most is becoming a new creation through faith in Yeshua as Messiah. (6:15). *Sha'ul's* message to the Galatians and to us is: No person can be justified before ADONAI by obeying any list of rules or teachings. Attempting to achieve righteousness before ADONAI through rules is legalism, and it bears no fruit. While we cannot be justified by law-keeping, that doesn't mean we aren't to keep the Law. After we are saved, we must do our best to be obedient to all that Yeshua, our Master, has called us to do. And once we have been saved, He calls us to follow His *Torah*, His teaching, and instruction (Matthew 5:17-18). But righteousness before ADONAI can only be achieved through trusting in Yeshua by faith, made possible by G-d's grace, and nothing else is required *Shabbat shalom!*