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Torah: Genesis 12:1-17:27
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:27-41:16
Ketuvim Shlichim: Romans 3:19-5:6

Messianic Judaism 11

Shabbat shalom, Mishpacha! There's an old joke about an old-timer who, when asked which version of the Bible he read, replied, "The King James version. If it was good enough for Peter and Paul, it's good enough for me." That's the perception many people have, since it has been around since 1611. And it's a pretty good version, as accurate as many others, if you ignore the scribal additions that have come to look like part of the original words. However, across all Bibles, the original writings don't differ because they are the same for each; the differences come from how translators render them. That's been a problem for hundreds of years, each new Bible version claiming to be the best translation. Jerome published the Vulgate, a Latin translation of the complete Bible, including Apocrypha, in 405 CE. The first Western Bible was the Gutenberg Bible, printed in Germany with movable type in 1455. It was also in Latin and copied from the Vulgate.

But the problem of understanding didn't only come from what the Bible said. Belief formed over the centuries based on how people interpreted the Bible. Some time after Yeshua's original disciples died, Gentile followers of Jesus became increasingly antisemitic, accusing the Jews of killing Jesus. During this time, Antinomianism, the belief that Christians are freed by grace from the obligation to obey moral laws, arose primarily from radical misinterpretations of the Apostle Paul's teachings on grace along with the rise of Gnosticism. The early leaders' comments survive in several early books and writings, including Jerome's. He was an enigma, working closely with Jews to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin, yet harboring a dislike for Jews. Despite drawing on Jewish scholarship, Jerome engaged in aggressive verbal and written attacks against Jews. He also believed in supersessionism—the theological view that the Church had superseded Israel as God's chosen people. These ideas have persisted through the centuries and remain a major influence in Christianity today.

We are Messianic followers of Yeshua because we reject the radical misinterpretation of *Sha'ul*'s teachings on grace. We are not Antinomian but Pronomian, believing that, alongside grace, the *Torah* remains an important part of our faith life. We are Jews and Gentiles who love the Jewish people, ADONAI's chosen, who have stumbled for a time but, through G-d's love and His grace, will ultimately come to know Yeshua as their Messiah and king, as *Sha'ul* describes in Romans 11 (Romans 11:25-27). Since *Sha'ul* is the major writer on the connection between trust in Yeshua and the principles of the *Torah*, at least by volume, we must seek to understand him as well as we can. He was used more often than any other of Yeshua's disciples, at least as far as we know from Scripture. He wrote over 28% of the words

in the *Ketuvim Shlichim* and 48% of its 27 books. Understanding *Sha'ul* is critical because it shapes how a person understands ADONAI's message throughout the whole Bible. Antinomian theology maintains that Christians are entirely freed from the obligation to obey moral, religious, or civil laws because they are saved by grace and faith alone. As Pronomian Messianic Believers, we affirm that we are saved by grace and faith alone, but we also believe we should obey the laws that can be observed without the Temple and the Aaronic Priesthood. Obeying the *Torah* has nothing to do with earning salvation; rather, it is a disciple's natural response to ADONAI's love, grace, and already-accomplished redemption. Obedience isn't the root of our salvation; it is the fruit of His love, our loving response to Him. Our obedience to the *Torah* has nothing to do with salvation. We understand that we are saved only by faith and ADONAI's grace. But to understand that ADONAI's laws have not passed away, we must understand *Sha'ul*. He speaks more about the *Torah*, particularly its theological and practical applications, than any other of Yeshua's disciples. But there's no question he is difficult to understand. *Shimon Kefa* wrote: *15 Bear in mind that the patience of our Lord means salvation—just as our dearly loved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom given to him. 16 He speaks about these matters in all of his letters. Some things in them are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist (as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures)—to their own destruction*. (2 Peter 3:15-16 TLV).

To introduce *Sha'ul*'s beliefs, we look at his encounter with the people of Philippi during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:9-40). On his first *Shabbat* in Philippi, he met a woman named Lydia, shared the message of Yeshua with her, and she and her family were immersed. She invited *Sha'ul* and *Sila* (Silas) to stay at her house. A congregation eventually formed in that city, but only after *Sha'ul* left. He didn't know the congregation's people because he had never visited them. Writing to them years later, he offered this resume about himself: *5 .. "circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; from the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting Messiah's community; as for Torah righteousness, found blameless*." (Philippians 3:5-6 TLV). These things are what he described as "his resume of things in the flesh," after he had first given his spiritual resume, his testimony of faith in Yeshua: *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 3:3 TLV). If *Sha'ul* had known Marty Goetz's song "A Jew Born Anew," it would have been his testimony, and he could have sung, "Yes, through and through, I'm a Jew born anew." Both his resumes, in the flesh and in spirit, are important. He had faith in Yeshua and worshipped in the Spirit, but he also used his physical attributes to worship and serve ADONAI.

By stating that he was circumcised on the eighth day, he identified himself as a descendant of Abraham, with whom ADONAI made the Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14). His *b'rit milah*, his circumcision, brought him into Abraham's covenant. He was given the Hebrew name *Sha'ul* and also received a name in the vernacular of his birthplace. Born in Tarsus in the Roman Empire, his secular name was the Greek *Saulos,* and the Latin *Paulus*, which he shortened to Paul. He also identified himself as a member of the Nation of Israel, as it says in Greek: *Isra'el*, the name ADONAI gave to Isaac's son Jacob. He narrowed his identity further, saying he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the only tribe that remained allied with the Tribe of Judah when the kingdom divided after Solomon's son Rehoboam became king. He also said that he was "a Hebrew of Hebrews," referring to his pure-blooded Jewish lineage and his adherence to traditional Hebrew customs, language, and culture without assimilating into Gentile culture. Regarding the *Torah*, he was a Pharisee, meaning he viewed it as the Pharisees did. They believed

ADONAI expected obedience to the Torah, and *Sha'ul* was zealous for it. Years later, as a prisoner before King Agrippa, he said: *5 They* **(the Jewish People)** *have known about me for a long time—if they were willing to testify—that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee*. (Acts 26:5 TLV). He lived as a Pharisee, even though he believed in Yeshua. A point most often missed when studying him is that "he didn't believe that *Torah* righteousness, obeying the *Torah*, could save you," and neither did the non-Messianic Pharisees of his time. While the other Pharisees didn't believe in Yeshua, they also didn't believe that you could be saved by keeping the *Torah*. Their salvation came from being part of the Nation of Israel, which received atonement year by year through the sacrifices of *Yom Kippur*. To the Romans, *Sha'ul* wrote: *20 For no human, on the basis of Torah observance, will be set right in His sight—* (Romans 3:20a TLV). To the Galatians, he said: *16 Yet we know that a person is set right not by deeds based on Torah, but rather through putting trust in Messiah Yeshua* (Galatians 2:16a TLV). Non-Messianic Pharisees, the group from which *Sha'ul* came, believed atonement came from being part of Israel, ADONAI's chosen nation, and *Sha'ul* held that belief until he trusted in Yeshua. The Pharisees also believed that Gentiles who converted to Judaism and became Jewish proselytes were saved in the same way and would participate in the resurrection. They emphasized the *Torah* and the traditions but never taught that observing them would atone for you. Other Pharisaic beliefs included the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels, which the Sadducees, the priestly sect, did not believe. *Sha'ul* believed in angels and the resurrection of the dead. His zeal for the *Torah* was evident in his fervent persecution of the Messianic community, which he believed threatened Israel's covenant purity, promoted a blasphemous Messiah, and led the Jewish people astray. Believing one can be morally right, or "righteous," by following the *Torah*'s teachings and laws without faith in Yeshua is fruitless, because keeping the *Torah* cannot secure salvation. For Yeshua's Messianic followers, obeying the *Torah* is not for salvation but an act of obedience, love, and cultural identity, a logical and grateful response to God's grace.

Regarding *Torah* righteousness, *Sha'ul* said he was blameless (Philippians 3:6). This doesn't mean he didn't sin. He taught that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of G-d" (Romans 3:23). *Sha'ul* sinned, but he was blameless because he trusted in Yeshua, obeyed the *Torah*, and repented regularly. The same applies to us, Yeshua's followers today. If we seek to follow the *Torah* applicable to us today, repent regularly, and ask forgiveness for our sins, we are blameless in *Torah* righteousness, just as *Sha'ul* was. But that requires a first step. A person must first have trusted in Yeshua by faith through G-d's grace.

Sha'ul's spiritual resume in verse 3 was that he followed Yeshua and worshipped in the Spirit. His physical resume identified him as an Israelite who upheld the *Torah*. This was his conclusion: *9 ... and be found in Him not having my righteousness derived from Torah, but one that is through trusting in Messiah—the righteousness from God based on trust*. (Philippians 3:9 TLV). Some erroneously teach that the Jews of Yeshua's day, especially the Pharisees, believed that keeping the *Torah* could make one righteous. That was never the case, and nothing could be further from the truth. As we have said, the Pharisees believed that "a place in the world to come" and atonement came from being part of ADONAI's Nation of Israel. *Sha'ul* made it clear that he obeyed the *Torah*, but that obedience gives "no initial righteousness in keeping it." The key word here is "initial," referring to "spirit righteousness." This "initial" righteousness comes only through trusting in Yeshua. *Torah* righteousness, as we described it, does not mean righteousness comes from keeping the *Torah*; rather, after trusting in Yeshua, one remains righteous through obedience and repentance. We reaffirm that our initial righteousness comes only from trusting in Yeshua.

Sha'ul told the Philippians he was an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, but later, speaking to the men of Jerusalem, he said: *39 "I am a Jewish man from Tarsus in Cilicia*" (Acts 21:39b TLV). Why did he tell the men in Jerusalem something different, a detail he left out of his letter to the congregation in Philippi? He did it because he had been accused of bringing Gentiles into the Temple, something he didn't do. But because they believed he had, the crowd wanted to kill him, and he emphasized his Jewishness so they would know he was one of them. The Greek word the TLV translates as "Jewish" in Acts 21 is *Ioudaios* (ee-oo-dah'-yos), meaning "Jewish, a Jew, or Judea." Although *Sha'ul* was from the Tribe of Benjamin, he was also a Jew, a term used for those in the southern kingdom of Judah (Judea). The Hebrew equivalent is *Yehudah*, derived from the name of the Tribe of Judah. An individual was a *Yehudi*, meaning "praiser of *Yah*," a short form of ADONAI's Hebrew name, יהוה. In this sense, all southern Israelites of that era were *Yehudi*s, Jews, just as all Jews are today. *Sha'ul* was a Jew, but from the Tribe of Benjamin.

An important question is whether *Sha'ul* can be transformed into a Christian to endorse Christian views. Some describe him this way, but our answer is emphatically not! *Sha'ul* was never a Christian, and claiming he was misinterprets his writings. Did he worship on Sunday? No, he never violated the seventh-day Sabbath, and he scrupulously followed the *Torah*. When *Sha'ul* said, "I am a Jew," he was declaring who he was theologically. That's what his encounter with the crowd in Jerusalem was all about. The rumor that he had brought Gentiles into the Temple began because he had been seen earlier in Jerusalem with a Gentile friend. His statement "I am a Jew" was to counter this and also the earlier accusation that "he was teaching the Jews living in Gentile lands not to follow *Torah*, not to circumcise their boys, and not to follow the customs. When *Sha'ul* came to Jerusalem for the last time and met with *Ya'acov* and the elders, they told him: *21 They have been told about you—that you teach all the Jewish people among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or to walk according to the customs* (Acts 21:21 TLV). To forsake Moses meant disobeying the *Torah*. The customs were in addition to the *Torah*, but *Ya'acov* and the elders who made this statement approved them. *Sha'ul* did none of these things. This verse, Acts 21:21, upholds the Jerusalem elders' and *Sha'ul*'s belief that the *Torah* remains important after trusting in Yeshua by faith. Each of them, including *Ya'acov* and the other disciples and elders present, had trusted in Yeshua and continued to obey the *Torah*. *Sha'ul* did not tell the Jews in Gentile lands to "forsake Moses" or to stop following *Torah.* Because of this accusation, the elders recommended that *Sha'ul* pay for the sacrifices of three men so they could take a Nazirite vow in the Temple. He accepted their recommendation to show that he had not forsaken Moses but continued to follow the *Torah*. They were in the process of completing a seven-day purification when he was taken into custody, supposedly for bringing Gentiles into the Temple, as they believed. But it was not true. He was there so that his approval of the Nazirite vow would assure the Jews of Jerusalem that he had not forsaken the *Torah* or its customs, including those surrounding the *Torah*'s commands regarding the vow's completion. He told the crowd in Jerusalem, "I am a Jew." In saying that, he essentially told them, "I have not done these things. I follow the *Torah*. I encourage *b'rit milah* for Jewish boys and observe the customs." We don't fully know what these customs were, but we believe this isn't a reference to the Oral *Torah*, which Yeshua rejected in part. The Oral *Torah* (*Torah shebe'al peh*; *Torah* of the mouth), followed by Rabbinic Judaism, traces its roots to unwritten legal and interpretive traditions passed down through elders and sages. As we continue our studies, we will see that *Sha'ul* also rejected the *Oral Torah*, at least the parts that are referenced. If *Sha'ul* said and wrote these things, how can people believe Paul taught against the *Torah*? He was not a Christian by today's understanding because he clearly taught about the *Torah*. Yeshua Himself followed the written *Torah* (*Torah shebikh'tav*; the *Torah* which is written),

teaching that it remained in effect until heaven and earth passed away (Matthew 5:17-19), ADONAI's definition of the Judaism of His day, and continued to be in effect under the New Covenant. Did Yeshua choose *Sha'ul* to be the Apostle to the Gentiles because he was so zealous for the *Torah*? I believe He did, wanting *Sha'ul* to teach what He Himself had taught about the *Torah*, as we see clearly in *Sha'ul's* letter to the Roman congregation.

The only truth we can verify is found in canonized Scripture, Genesis to Revelation, and not in any other writings. Scripture's truth can be distorted, but our goal is to understand the Bible correctly. We don't have all truth; no one does, but our goal is to find it. No other source can verify truth, whether it's the *Talmud*, the Apocrypha, the Book of Enoch, the Book of Jasher, any apocryphal gospel, or any human tradition. These writings may contain some truth, but not Biblical truth we can follow. As Messianic followers of Yeshua, we can uphold only the truth found in ADONAI's authorized Scriptures.

S*ola Scriptura* is a Christian theological position that originated in the Protestant Reformation. The Latin words mean "by Scripture alone" and refer to the source of Christian doctrine and practice. *Sola* means "alone." Five doctrinal *Solas* emerged from the Protestant Reformation. They are: (1) that Christians are saved by grace alone, (2) through faith alone, (3) in Christ alone, (4) as revealed by Scripture alone, and (5) to the glory of God alone. We completely agree with the theology of all five *Solas*. The following words are from *Beit Shalom*'s Statement of Belief: "Faith or trust in Yeshua as Messiah brings righteousness with G-d based solely on grace through faith." I emphasize the phrase "solely on grace." In this statement, our Messianic belief is in agreement with *Solas* 1, 2, and 3: "saved by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ alone. Regarding Sola 4, "as revealed by Scripture alone," our Statement of Belief states: "The Holy Scriptures as originally written are divinely inspired and without error. Consisting of the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible, which consists of the *Torah*, the Prophets, and the Writings) and the *Ketuvim Notzrim* (the Writings of the followers of the Branch), the Scriptures are our final authority in all matters of faith and practice." We do not just state this; we believe it, do our best to follow it, and accept as truth only what the Bible can verify.

We observe some Jewish traditions in our services and spiritual walk, but we observe only those traditions grounded in Scripture as binding. For example, we recite the *Shema*, a long-held Jewish tradition, as a statement of faith on each *Shabbat*. But the *Shema* itself quotes Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:9-18. Yeshua referenced the *Shema* when He spoke about the greatest commandment and the second that is like it in Matthew 22, Luke 10, and Mark 12. Another beautiful tradition we observe each week is lighting the Sabbath candles and having the Sabbath meal. The *Torah* doesn't command this, and we don't have to do it, but "we get to do it." We don't violate any laws of Scripture by not lighting candles on Friday night, but we love welcoming the Sabbath and regularly observe this tradition. We can learn from the *Talmud* and other ancient Jewish writings, but neither is our authority. Only the holy Scriptures are. Today, many Jesus followers say "*Sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone," yet do not practice it.

When Paul is viewed as a Christian, his words are often twisted to support an antinomian view of the Scriptures. Antinomian derives from the Greek words *anti*, meaning against, and *nomos*, meaning law. The usual Christian definition of it is: "one who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace, the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary for salvation." But *Sha'ul* was not a Christian. He was a Messianic Jew who followed the *Torah* and was definitely not an antinomian. He

never worshipped on Sunday or ate non-kosher food. We seek the truth. The truth is that the Bible itself is not antinomian. Yes, Paul believed that faith alone was necessary for salvation, but he did not believe that the "Moral Law," the *Tora*h, was useless. And neither do we. Our Statement of Belief continues: "Faith in Yeshua and faithfulness to G-d's *Torah* commandments are not mutually exclusive. Both are expected as our reasonable faith and practice as new creations in the Messiah. As such, we observe and celebrate the Biblical *Shabbat* (the seventh day of the week), Holy Days, and Feasts of ADONAI, which He gave to Israel, fulfilled in and through Messiah Yeshua. Our goal is Biblical Messianic Judaism, the faith of Yeshua's first-century followers. Yes, we believe salvation comes by faith through grace alone, but we also believe faithfulness to ADONAI's *Torah* is required after salvation. We don't prescribe *Torah* for Christians, believing Yeshua gave them authority to interpret Scripture as they see it, just as He has given us authority. In Matthew 16, He gave *Shimon Kefa* the "keys to the kingdom of Heaven," along with its underlying principles of binding and loosing. Jewish practices from a generation before Yeshua, binding and loosing enabled Yeshua's followers to interpret Scripture. But there is a "catch-22" to this process. This assumes that the one interpreting Scripture has trusted in Yeshua, meaning that as a believer, he will eventually have to stand before Yeshua's Bema Seat and answer His questions about what he did or did not do in his life. *Sha'ul* wrote: *12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known* (1 Corinthians 13:12 TLV). We all see through a glass dimly in this life, and we do not claim to understand everything perfectly. But it is our goal.

When *Sha'ul* wrote the congregation at Philippi, he said: "*as for zeal, persecuting Messiah's community; as for Torah righteousness, found blameless*." He carried that same zeal through everything he did, especially regarding the *Torah*. We must not misunderstand his term "*Torah* righteousness." The Greek term *Dikaiosynēn* (dik-ah-yos-see'-nen) *ten en nomos*, "righteousness which is in the Law," does not mean that we become righteous by observing the *Torah*. But it does mean that after trusting in Yeshua by faith, we must faithfully obey ADONAI's laws, which we can keep today. *Sha'ul* began his religious life as a Pharisee and testified before Governor Felix in Caesarea about the Torah, as both a Pharisee and a follower of Yeshua. He said: *8 ..., "I have committed no offense against the Torah of the Jewish people, or against the Temple, or against Caesar*." (Acts 25:8b TLV). *Sha'ul* believed obeying the *Torah* applied to followers of Yeshua. And so did Yeshua's brother *Ya'acov* and the Messianic Jews of Judea. Speaking to *Sha'ul*: *20 ... They said, "You see, brother, how many myriads* **(tens of thousands)** *there are among the Jewish people who have believed—and they are all zealous for the Torah* (Acts 21:20b TLV) (took place in about 50 CE). It amazes me that tens of thousands of Yeshua's followers lived in Judea about twenty years after He died on the cross, and they were all zealous to follow the *Torah*. And so should we be. We will continue to explain these truths as they apply to us as Messianic Jews and Gentiles in the Modern Messianic Jewish Movement as we begin our study of *Sha'ul*'s letter to the Romans next *Shabbat*. *Shabbat shalom*!