

Introduction to *Galatians*: “new covenant” part 1

Hallel Fellowship (hallel.info)

Jeff (jeff@hallel.info)

July 3, 2010

All passages from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

How should we read Paul’s words in *Galatians*?

- **Strict constructionist:** What did Paul literally write?
 - **Benefit:** Stick to what is written.
 - **Problem:** We may not know what was meant by what is written based on preconceptions or understanding different from the time or setting of the writing.
 - **Communication** involves sender, code, message, medium and receiver.
 - **Sender:** Paul
 - **Code:** Greek text of *Galatians*, including any “shortcodes” such as repeated phrases “works of [the] law,” “freewoman,” “bondwoman” and “under [the] law.”
 - In software development, shortcodes can truncate a string of commands into a short code statement.
 - However, the shortcode works best when the intent, i.e. the longer set of instructions, is understood by both the programmer and the software.
 - **Message:** It depends on what information the receiver takes to decoding the message, reading it in English today or hearing it in Greek in a first-century synagogue.
 - **Medium:** Parchment or papyrus, many fragmented with age and having “generations” of manuscripts.
 - **Receiver**
 - Galatian congregations, originally.
 - How did the congregations understand the message in Greek?
 - How did conditions in first-century synagogues scattered among the nations affect the understanding of the letter?
 - Us, today.
 - How do we understand the message today, based on the translations we read?
 - How do we reconcile any difference between the way we understand it and the way the original receivers did in the original language?
- **Originalist:** What did Paul mean by what he wrote?
 - **Benefit:** It would explain the meaning of the puzzling statements.
 - **Problem:** It requires knowing what Paul knew, when he knew it and his opinions about his knowledge.
 - **Conclusions**, based on the assumption that Paul:
 - Viewed the Law as “loss” (e.g. the common view of Phil. 3:2–12): The “Law of Moses,” except for eternal “moral” elements such as the 10 Commandments, has been replaced by the “Law of Christ,” which abrogated the first law because it was defective and didn’t work.
 - Viewed the Law as part of the “gospel”: The “Law of Moses” are the words of God given to Moses for a people He promised to Abraham He would call out of the world to himself, and by doing so bless the world. The “Law of Christ,” based on Yeshua’s own words in Matt. 5:17–19, was a reiteration and restoration of the Law of Moses to the “original intent” of God’s words. Yeshua is the the mercy of God fully revealed in the work of the Messiah. Paul as a faithful servant of the Messiah was trying to strip away any path to God that wasn’t fully rooted in Yeshua’s being *the* Lamb of the Law.
- **Progressive or liberal:** Paul used language and illustrations about bondage and freedom amid references to the Law by name and practices proscribed in it, such as circumcision, as well as barriers to non-Jewish new believers in Galatia. What human rights are being infringed by some barrier, and what is that barrier?
 - **Benefit:** The question gets to the heart of a thread of teachings throughout the Apostolic Writings: God’s breaking down barriers between Himself and the world
 - **Problem:** It requires a sound logic about the connection between God’s goal and the actual barriers to that goal.
 - **Conclusion**, based on the assumption that Paul:
 - Viewed the Law as bondage to the freedom of believers in God through Messiah: The “old covenant” was the Law of Moses, and it was for ancient Israel. The “new covenant” was the Law of Christ and is better-suited to reach the world because it doesn’t require new believers to learn and follow the Law of Moses beyond its fundamental “moral” teachings.
 - Viewed the religious beliefs about God’s plan for salvation as the barrier: Building upon Messiah

Yeshua's anger against spiritual leaders who were creating barriers between God and the people (e.g., Matt 21:12–13; cf. Isa. 56:7; Jer 7:11), apostle Paul in his letters against those who were advocating Yeshua-plus-interpreted-Torah justification before God. In other words, these folks wanted new believers in Yeshua to be converted to a sect of Judaism to be right before God, based on the idea of some sages that only full Israelites would be in the Kingdom of God in the resurrection.

What is the “New covenant”?

- **Jer. 31:31–34¹**
 - Expresses promise of a “new covenant” with the House of Israel and the House of Ya’akov.
 - Advocates equality among believers in being able to “know the LORD” (v. 34).
- **Ezek. 36:25–27²**
 - Cleansing from “filthiness” and idols.
 - This cleansing was anticipated in the first century:³
 - Akiva (c. A.D. 50–135) is quoted in the Mishnah, in a discussion of the right attitude toward sin and forgiveness at Yom haKippurim:

“Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? It is your Father who is in heaven, as it says, “And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean” (Ez. 36:25). And it says, “O Lord, the hope of Israel” (Jer. 17:13) — Just as the immersion pool cleans the unclean, so the Holy One, blessed be He, clean Israel.” (b. *Yoma* 8:9 G–I)
 - *hope* in Jer. 17:13 is translated from מִקְוֵה *mikveh* (Strong’s H4723a), which literally means “a collection.” A purification *mikveh*, then, is a collection of water. The connection with water fits with the description of the LORD in the same verse as “the fountain of living water.”
 - In the Dead Sea Scrolls “Manual of Discipline” or “Community Rule”:

“The spirit encourages ... glorious purity combined with visceral hatred of impurity in its every guise” (1QS 4.5).⁴
 - Giving a “new heart” and a “new spirit within.”
 - Replacing a “heart of stone” with a “heart of flesh.”
 - Heart = mind.
 - Just before Israel entered the Land, God promised after the exiles forced upon the people because of their disobedience He would perform heart surgery on the people to be able to follow His instruction (Deut. 29:22 – 30:6):

“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” (Deut. 30:6)
 - Commentators have noted that God’s promise in Ezekiel involves a much more radical change of heart than trimming off a portion to dedicate the existing heart, i.e. way of thinking of the people.⁵
 - Replacing our spirit with “my Spirit.”
 - Spirit = deepest emotions.
- **Rom. 11:25–27 (context: vv. 25–36)**

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,” [Isa. 59:20–21] “WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS” [Isa. 27:9].” (Rom. 11:25–27)

 - The context Romans 11 is Paul’s exasperation over the widespread Jewish rejection of Yeshua as Messiah.
 - The theme of vv. 25–36 is a “mystery” (v. 25), the God’s unfolding plan throughout history for the salvation of the world through a people named Israel.
 - Salvation of “all Israel” (v. 26) involves the “fullness of the nations” coming into Israel (v. 25).
 - πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν *pleroma ton ethnon* “fullness of the nations” relates to filling to the full, rather than completing some specific number.⁶
 - In Rom. 11:12 the “failure” (ἥττημα *hettema* G2275, “to defeat, succumb, decrease”) of Jews because of their unbelief in Yeshua as the Messiah is contrasted with their “fulfillment”

1 See “Acts of the Apostles recap notes,” Jeff Quackenbush, May 22, 2010, www.hallel.info.

2 See *Ibid.*

3 J.K. McKee. “What is the New Covenant?” TNNOnline.net, 2008. p. 7.

4 McKee, p. 7, quoting Michael Wise, Martin Abreg Jr. and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 130.

5 McKee, p. 8, quoting Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), p. 196.

6 McKee, p. 11

(πλήρωμα *pleroma*), i.e. “victory” or “rise,” when “jealousy” for God’s work among the nations through faith in Yeshua and God’s Spirit coaxes a return to God’s plan.

- Some have connected *pleroma ton ethnon* to the מְלֵאֲהֻּגוֹיִם *m’lo-hagoim* “multitude of nations” of Ya’akov’s prophetic blessing for his grandson Ephraim⁷:
“he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” (Gen. 48:19)
 - מְלֵא means “to be full” and also is used to mean “to be complete.”⁸
 - The Septuagint translation renders the phrase as πλήθος ἐθνῶν *plethos ethnon*. *Plethos* is how “the nations” is rendered in Acts 15:12, which is part of the Jerusalem Council discussion of how non-Jews would be integrated into the Commonwealth of Israel.
- Non-Jewish believers must value the original calling of the blood lineage of Israel (vv. 28–29).
 - At Sinai, God called Israel as “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:5–6).
 - He later admonished Israel to be “a light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6).
 - The implication is that God’s “mystery” was being accomplished at that time largely by non-Jews.⁹
 - The apostle Peter noted that the priesthood and light-bearer roles of Israel were to be performed by all believers in Israel.
“But you are A CHOSEN RACE [Isa. 43:20f; Deut. 10:15], A royal PRIESTHOOD [Isa. 61:6; 66:21], A HOLY NATION [Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6], A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION [Ex. 19:5; Deut. 4:20; 14:2], so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE [Hos. 1:10], but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD [Hos. 2:23]; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.” (1st Pet. 2:9–10)
 - However, Paul warns that non-Jews should not think God has formed a “new Israel,” because His gifts to and calling of Israel are “irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).
 - Paul’s lesson here should be a warning for “replacement theology.”
- The quotations in Rom. 11:26–27 come from the Septuagint Greek translation of the TaNaK (Torah, Prophets and Writings, i.e. the Hebrew Scriptures) and are different from the standard Hebrew Masoretic Text.
 - “and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (Isa. 59:20 NASB)
 - The rendering in the MT is וְלִשְׁבֵי פֶשַׁע בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלִשְׁבֵי פֶשַׁע בְּיַעֲקֹב *v’leshbey pesah b’ya’aqob*, literally “and to turning-back-ones of iniquity in Yakob.”
 - This matches Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated to the first or second centuries B.C.: “to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (Isa 59:20 *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*¹⁰)
 - “and he will turn impiety away from Iakob” (Isa. 59:20 *New English Translation of the Septuagint*¹¹)
 - Adam Clarke noted that instead of the rendering in the MT, translations in other Semitic languages follow the Septuagint understanding.¹²
 - The Syriac translation of the TaNaK uses וְהָשִׁיב *v’heshib* “and He will turn back.”
 - The Chaldean translation, with the same meaning, is וְהָשִׁיב *ulehashib*.
 - The *Peshitta* Aramaic translation of Rom. 11:26 has מְנַחֵם עוֹלָא מִן יַעֲקֹב וְנִפְקֵחַ מִן יַעֲקֹב *v’nafekh ’alo meyn ya’aqub* “and He will turn away iniquity from Ya’akub.”
 - The *Peshitta* uses a different verb from the one in the MT Isaiah — הָפַךְ *hafakh* (Strong’s H2015), “to turn, overturn,” instead of the MT’s שָׁב *shuv* (H7725), “to turn back.” The *Peshitta* agrees with the Septuagint, Syriac and Chaldean translations.
 - The messages of the LORD’s call for His people to turn back and promising to turn them back are throughout Isaiah and the other prophetic writings.
- **Heb. 8:7–13**
 - This passage has the longest direct quotation — Jer. 31:31–34 LXX — from the TaNaK in the Apostolic Scriptures.¹³

7 *Ibid.*

8 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2000). Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB) (Scribe, Daina Beach, Fla.).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).

11 Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds. *A New English Translation Of The Septuagint* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

12 Adam Clarke. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Public domain, 1810–1826.

13 McKee, p. 15.

- Quotations from the TaNaKh are used throughout the Apostolic Scriptures to show that what the prophets foretold was being brought to reality in their times.
- The Letter to the Hebrews was written to first-century believers in the years likely before the Temple in Yerushalayim was destroyed in A.D. 70. In the decade or so before that, the increasing revolts by Jewish groups foreshadowed the Roman crackdown, as historian Flavius Josephus detailed in his writings.
 - The themes of the letter are:
 - Yeshua’s death and resurrection brought a shift in the priesthood (Heb. 7:1 – 8:6), from Levitical to Mechizedekian.
 - Heb. 9:1 – 10:18 with reverence details many aspects of the priesthood, tabernacle and its operation.
 - The rhetorical style of the letter uses “how much more” to show that while the Earthly version was patterned after God’s design, the atonement — restored connection with God — brought through it was temporary because of the human nature of the Levitical priesthood. Yeshua provided permanent atonement.
 - Would Yeshua’s permanent atonement be enough when the temple in Yerushalayim was destroyed?
 - For believers both Jew and non-Jew whose whole religious orientation in the Land and elsewhere was toward the temple for the calendar and appointed times, particularly the three pilgrimage festivals.
- English translations often have “first covenant” in Heb. 8:7, with some versions noting by italics that “covenant” is not in the Greek phrase *Εἰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ἐκεῖνη ἦν ἀμεμπτος ei gar e prote ekeine en amemptos* “if indeed the first had been faultless.”
 - Many commentators assume it relates to *διαθήκης diathekes* (G1242 “covenant”) from v. 6.
 - However, *πρώτη prote* (“first”) in v. 7 is feminine and must agree grammatically with one of the feminine nouns in the discussion¹⁴:
 - *skene* “tabernacle”
 - *diatheke* “covenant”
 - *leitourgia* “ministry”
 - *hierosune* “priesthood”
 - Yet, the “main point” of the discussion is stated in v. 1: Yeshua is the high priest, ministering from the throne of God by His earthly life of perfect obedience to God’s instructions and offering of His life as God’s Anointed One to take the punishment of death due mankind for living outside God’s rules for the universe.
 - God had found fault with the earthly, sinful priesthood (Heb. 7:27; 8:4), so the first priesthood was what needed to be replaced, not the Law that enacted that priesthood.
- There are translation issues in Heb. 8:13, “He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”
 - *pepalaioken* in an active verb, meaning “to declare old,” rather than passive “to become old.”¹⁵
 - Considering that:
 - Messiah Yeshua said in Matt. 5:17–19 that “heaven and Earth” would pass away before the slightest part of the Torah would pass away.
 - The topic of Hebrews 8 is a better priesthood.
 - The existing priesthood was largely corrupt.
 - Human priests were prone to be sinful and had to atone for their own sins before the people’s.
 - The temple in Yerushalayim was about to be destroyed along with the city.
 - God had destroyed the tabernacle and temple, creating an “abomination of desolation,” several times before (e.g., Shiloh and Yerushalayim under Babylon and Seleucid Greece) because of corruption of the priesthood and leadership.
 - Therefore, this passage seems to be communicating that the first priesthood was “declared old” and “ready to disappear,” started first with the greater glory (Haggai 2:9) departing (Luke 13:35; cp. Matt 23:38; cf. Hag 1:4, 9) and then the temple itself being torn down by Rome.
- The teaching on the new covenant in Jer. 31:31–34 is reiterated in truncated form in Heb. 10:14–18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21