

Galatians 4 notes

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

Galatians 4, with its discussion of freedom from being “under [the] law” and not of the Jerusalem related to the flesh, is often cited by those who argue that observing the Torah is a backward step for believers in Messiah Yeshua. However, considering what Paul already wrote in chapters 1 through 3 and the parallel discussion in Romans 5–7, his point in this chapter is that both Jews and non-Jews are in the same situation without God’s method of salvation, which isn’t God’s Law. Yet God’s goal for humanity long-term is heart-led obedience to His Law.

Recap of Galatians 1–3

- What is the “gospel” Paul is preaching and the wicked “different gospel” opposing that message? (Gal. 1:1–9)
- Is the Torah “bondage” for believers in Yeshua as God’s Messiah?
 - “But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Messiah Yeshua, in order to bring us into bondage.” (Gal. 2:4)
 - Messianic scholar J.K. McKee asks, “Did God free Ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery — only to later bring them into bondage to His Law at Mount Sinai?”¹
 - God said He took them out of slavery not into it.
 - “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Exod. 20:2–3; cf. Deut. 5:6–7)
 - Two reasons God gives in the 10 Commandments for worshipping Him only are:
 - He is the savior of Israel.
 - He saved Israel from His wrath that came down on Mitsraim (Egypt).
 - He is the creator of the heavens and the Earth (v. 8).
 - Through Abraham and Israel, all inhabitants of Earth were blessed with the arrival of God’s Anointed, Yeshua, as God’s reconciliation between God and man.
 - Because of God’s promise to “all the nations of the Earth” through Abraham and Yeshua, the nations have the invitation to join the people of God, the Commonwealth of Israel.
 - God said defined “life” as following His Law and “death” as rebelling against or disregarding it.
 - “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Yitskhak [Isaac], and Ya’akov [Jacob], to give them.” (Deut. 30:19–20)
 - “Slavery” of one’s mind and actions comes from “sin” and not from God’s Law, according to the Messiah and His apostles.
 - The Master said sinning makes one a “slave” to sin.
 - “Yeshua answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.’” (John 8:34–35)
 - Apostle Yokhanan (John) defined *sin* as disregarding law.
 - “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” (1st John 3:4)
 - Apostle Paul wrote that changing from being a “slave of sin” to a “slave of righteousness” involves a change of heart, which is a change of motivation to become obedient to God.
 - “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” (Rom. 6:17–18)
 - So God’s goal for Israel is freedom from the “chains” of sin, and sin is rebellion against or disregarding God’s Law.
 - What did Abraham have “credited to him as righteousness”?
 - Was it Abraham’s sealing the covenant with God with circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14)?
 - Sarai told Abraham to have a child with Hagar when he was 85, and Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 (Gen. 16:3, 15).
 - When Abraham was 99, God told him to circumcise his children as a seal of the covenant regarding God’s multiplying of his offspring. One who wasn’t circumcised was to be “cut off from his people” for breaking the covenant. (Gen. 17:1–14)
 - The LORD then told Abraham that God’s special blessing would come through a son born to 90-year-

¹ J.K. McKee. *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*. TNN Press (www.tnnonline.net): 2007. p. 47.

- old, past-childbearing-years Sarai, whom God renamed Sarah (Gen. 17:15–22; 18:1–15).
- Was it Abraham’s belief in God’s promise to give him many descendants from his body, though he had no natural heirs (Gen. 15:2–6; 17:15–22)?
 - Apostles Ya’akov and Paul quoted Gen. 15:6 as a foundational example of who God considers righteous (Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23).
 - Paul used the example to show God’s calculus of righteousness: faith/belief must precede any action related to that belief.
 - Ya’akov cites the example to show that faith-prompted action must follow faith for belief in God to not be “dead.”
 - In reflecting on the teaching of all Scripture on the roles of faith and obedience in the lives of the people of God, McKee observes, “In minimizing the Torah, Christians today remain largely uninformed as to the world view and ideology of Yeshua and the Apostles, and have instead, unfortunately, often created an artificial world view of their own selectivity.”²
 - As we’ve noted in the introduction to *Galatians*, one’s worldview and ideology can color one’s interpretation of Paul’s writings about the Law.
 - If one believes that the Law, or large portions of it deemed “ceremonial,” is obsolete, then that is how one will “twist” Paul’s writing.
 - One theologian interpreted Gal. 4:3 this way:

“For a Gentile Christian to submit to the Mosaic Law would be *like* going back under the elementary pagan teachings of the world, which they left behind when they became Christians...”³
 - This twisting of Paul’s points was happening in the first century, as apostle Peter noted.

“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught⁴ and unstable⁵ distort⁶, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled⁷ men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Yeshua Messiah. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2nd Pet. 3:14–18)
 - In railing against the “different gospel” in chapter 1 and his rebuking of apostle Peter and the Galatian congregations in chapters 2 and 3, apostle Paul demonstrated, particularly through the life of Abraham, that faith in Yeshua’s death and resurrection was the source of salvation for both Jews and former gentiles in Israel, the people of God.
 - Peter “stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11) — literally, “was self-condemned”⁸ — because he was going against the ruling of the Jerusalem Council that believers didn’t have to become circumcised before God would consider them righteous before Him, i.e. making them part of the people of God (Acts 15).

Galatians 4

- Is the Torah only for “immature” believers in Messiah Yeshua?
 - Is there a connection between the child heir of Gal. 4:1–3 and the “slaves of sin” in Rom. 6:16–22?

“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” (Rom. 6:20)

 - Is being a “slave of sin” a desirable situation and goal?

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law [ὑπὸ νόμον *hupo nomon*] but under grace? May it never be! 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death⁹, or of obedience resulting in righteousness¹⁰? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

² McKee, p. 49.

³ Ben Witherington III. *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*. Eerdmans: 1998. p. 282. Quoted by McKee, p. 108.

⁴ ἀμαθής *amathes* (Strong’s 261, from 3129): “unlearned” (NASB Greek Lexicon)

⁵ ἀστήρικτος *asteriktos* (Strong’s 793, from 4741): “unstable, unsettled” (*ibid.*)

⁶ στρεβλώω *streblōō* (Strong’s 4761, from 4762): “to twist” (*ibid.*)

⁷ ἄθεσμος *athesmos* (Strong’s 113, from θεσμός: “law, custom”): “lawless” (*ibid.*)

⁸ NASB note on Gal. 2:11.

⁹ ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον *hamartias eis thanaton* “sin resulting in death.” According to Thayer’s lexicon, εἰς (Strong’s 1519) is a preposition “denoting entrance into, or direction and limit: into, to, toward, for, among.” Thus, sin is an entrance into the death sentence from God’s ultimate ending the stain of sin in the universe. (Joseph H. Thayer, D.D. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.)

¹⁰ The use of εἰς in this phrase communicates that obedience is an “entrance” into righteousness before God, a “door” only God Himself can open by declaring someone righteous.

(Rom. 6:15–18)

- Sin, or disobeying the Law, results in death from the wrath of God on “that day” against unrighteousness in the world.
- Obedience to the Law results in righteousness.
 - Yet we became “slaves of righteousness” because God considered us righteous by faith in His Messiah and had mercy on us.
- Is being a “slave of sin” God’s goal for mankind?
 - Immaturity and maturity of believers is discussed in *Hebrews* 5, just after an explanation of how Yeshua can be a high priest like Melchizedek though not a descendant of Aaron.

“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant¹¹. 14 But solid food is for the mature¹², who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. 1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.” (Heb. 5:11–6:2)
 - Paul contrasted bottle-fed believers with Spirit-sipping mature believers when chastising the Corinth congregation for one-upping each other over who was their teacher.

“But a natural¹³ man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually¹⁴ appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For ‘WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?’ [Isa. 40:13, LXX] But we have the mind of Christ. 1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants [νηπίους] in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” (1st Cor. 2:14–3:4)
 - God’s promise of the new covenant was to give the houses of Israel and Yehudah His Law in their hearts (Jer. 31:31–34), giving them “a new heart and put a new spirit” (Ezek. 36:26).
 - When this happens, true knowledge of the LORD will be pervasive (Jer. 31:34).
 - When the heir takes control of his inheritance, he must now put his training into actions, to make the lessons “come alive.”
- Is observance of the Torah “bondage under the elemental things of the world” (Gal. 4:3)?
 - Paul is addressing believers who had not known God, i.e. hadn’t heard the Torah (vv. 8–9).
 - Note that Paul is including himself in this by saying, “while we were children.”
 - If Paul later wrote that God’s law is “holy” and “spiritual” (Rom. 7:12, 14) in a parallel lesson to *Galatians* about “the flesh” “selling” us into “bondage to sin,” then does he mean that Torah is the one that keeps us in bondage to the world away from God’s knowing us and our knowing Him?
 - Know and known here are translated from the Greek root verb γινω *gno*, from which we get the term *gnosticism*, used to refer to various methods pagans, Jews and Christians used to gain knowledge of the divine available to select few able to wield those tools.
 - The Pharisee and Essene sects of Judaism weaved the Greek concept of Fate into their theology.¹⁵
 - The Jewish apologist and philosopher Philo described the breastplate of the high priest as having “the three elements” — air, water and earth — as communicating messages to the priest.¹⁶
 - Jewish mysticism of the first centuries A.D. was later collected, particularly in the *Zohar*.
 - All the world — Jew and non-Jew — were subject to the “powers and principalities of the air,” and thus were under the curse of God’s wrath against those powers, as detailed in the Torah, Prophets and Writings.

11 νήπιος *nepios* (Strong’s 3516, from νη- (implying negation) and 2031, from λέγω *lego*, “to speak” (3004), i.e. not yet able to speak): “infant, figuratively a simple-minded or immature person.” (NASB Greek Lexicon)

12 τέλειος *teleios* (Strong’s 5046, from τέλος *telos* (5056), “an end”): “having reached its end, i.e. complete, by extension, perfect.” (*ibid.*)

13 ψυχικός *psuchikos* (Strong’s 5591, from ψυχή *psuche* (5590), “breath, soul”): “natural, of the soul or mind.” (*ibid.*)

14 πνευματικός *pneumatikos* (Strong’s 4153, adverb from 4152 and πνεῦμα *pneuma* (4151), “wind, spirit”): “spiritually, mystically.”

15 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.172. Quoted by McKee, pp. 109–110.

16 Philo. *Life of Moses* 2.121. Quoted by McKee, p. 110.