

# Under The Fig Tree



## WEEK 11

### Introduction

Let us pause and reflect a little. We have reached the half-way point in the last of the five books of Torah. These books have been foundational to all Bible teaching since they were first written. They are not books of theoretical ideas, but are the result of God's dealings with real people. As such they are relevant to every human being, showing us what we are like, teaching us the ways of God and about His plan to draw together His covenant family. We have considered how to read these books, layer upon layer, and seek God for how to apply the teaching in our own lives in light of Messiah.

There are mistakes to avoid. We must always remember that Israel was chosen first. Despite failure, they are not forgotten. There is an ongoing purpose in God's eternal covenant plan for the physical descendants of Abraham, who come to Him through faith. The object of Abraham's faith was fully and finally revealed in the Son of God, Yeshua HaMashiach and there is no other way to the Father. This is clearly understood through the Gospel message. Israel, during the time of Moses and later in the Promised Land, was being prepared for this. First the Israelites were shown their need and they were to learn about themselves through how they responded to God's laws. Study of the biblical history of Israel shows us all how we would have been in their place. The Torah shows us what all mankind is like.

God's laws are perfect throughout all generations, but sinful flesh is too weak to achieve the perfect goal of the Torah of God, without further help. That help came through the New Covenant in Yeshua's Blood. Now, by faith, we are free to learn to walk with Him. This is no longer through human striving but by letting God's Holy Spirit change us and lead us. The New Covenant takes what was written into the Torah and puts it on our hearts. This is true for both Jew and Gentile who live by faith in Yeshua. The laws of God come to our hearts as deep-rooted spiritual principles. Moses was shown examples of outward manifestations from these laws, which the Holy Spirit now makes inner reality.

The study of Moses, therefore, has great value. Through study of the Torah, we come to love the laws of God as did the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 119. We love God, however, more than the written law. It is He who is at the heart of His own laws. It is He who saves us from the sinfulness of our human nature, and puts His Spirit into our hearts to give us new life.

The best experience of Israel was when they were able to live in the protection of God through obedience to His laws. This was when they were blessed. These blessings bear witness to what we now experience directly - each one of us who is born again through the Holy Spirit.

The laws are still relevant to our nations and the basis on which every country should administer justice. They bring a protective fence while the Lord God is reaching out to save us through the power of His Spirit. We must be careful to hold this perspective in the balance of our studies. The law reveals sin

because natural men and women rebel against what God has made known. Therefore, the laws of God are the basis on which the Gospel must be preached.

There is another point, however: all law needs to be interpreted. Leaders were appointed throughout Israel's history to interpret Torah. By the time that Yeshua came to earth, various rabbinical schools had been formed. They taught according to traditional interpretations of the law for their sect. People were told to live by the laws of Moses, according to various interpretations. The laws were interpreted, therefore, by men who could not live by them any more than the rest of us. Thus the laws were not interpreted as heart principles and so brought bondage. Indeed, it was impossible for even the devoutest Bible teacher to take the essence from the Torah and bring it to heart level. Only Yeshua could give His Spirit to us so that the laws would be interpreted in an uplifting and freeing way. All rabbis, except Yeshua, were bound to fail. Thus the Law of Moses, when it is referred to in the New Testament, refers to the laws as interpreted by the rabbinical schools. This brings a two-fold problem. There is both the weakness of any human being to obey the Laws of God perfectly and the weakness of human beings to teach one another accurately.

As we will read in the Prophets and the Psalms, there were times when wonderful inspiration came from God highlighting the true meaning of Torah. Paul, for example, quotes from Habakkuk in Galatians 3:11 – *The just shall live by his faith*. God was brooding over His Word all through the days of Israel and flashes of inspiration were given to His people, especially through the Prophets, concerning the balanced meaning of Torah. We, like Paul, must learn to be skillful in discerning the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the entire Bible, so that we can piece it all together and understand what God's overall purpose was from the time of Adam and Eve. Paul could do this and so wrote to assemblies of Yeshua's disciples, such as those in Galatia, often correcting errors.

Paul's letter to the believers in Galatia is very important in this context, so we will pause in our study of Deuteronomy and read the letter this week. If we read it carefully at this point it will help us to cultivate a balanced perspective when we complete the Book of Deuteronomy and read other parts of the Bible. Paul knew the beauty of Torah and of God's laws, but he understood that there was a danger of new disciples of Yeshua losing the gift of God's Spirit. Already some of them were being beguiled into following the rabbinic schools of his day in literal observance of the laws given by Moses, according to their interpretation. The Laws of God lose their life if not imparted by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same today. God appoints Bible teachers as a ministry of the Holy Spirit, but any other interpretation of the Laws of God, than what is written on our hearts by His Spirit is, by comparison, lifeless.

Moses led Israel to the Promised Land to point us to principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. Through Israel's example, foundations are set so that He might lead us into the Kingdom through Yeshua, not as slaves to earthly requirements but as His children, born of His Spirit. This is central to Paul's exhortation to the Galatians, and also to us.

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## Day 1

Galatians Chapter 1. Paul was called directly by Yeshua to be an Apostle. Before this he had studied in the most prestigious rabbinic schools of the day under the highly respected Gamaliel. Thus he was in a

perfect position to judge rabbinic interpretation of the Torah (known as rabbinic Judaism). He was able to contrast it with the infinitely more meaningful fulfillment of Torah through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The rabbis were powerful and persuasive because they were zealous for the Laws of God and did their utmost to interpret them. The human mind can be easily persuaded that this is sufficient, so new disciples of Yeshua in Galatia, having received the Spirit of God and begun a path of discipleship, could still be beguiled by lesser interpretations of Torah.

This can be true today, as it was then. God is still working His purposes out in the Nation of Israel and it is wonderful to see the Jewish people back in their Land, and to be eye-witnesses to the miracle of their survival. It is wonderful to study how this nation has kept family traditions and Torah-based lifestyles. It is so fascinating that, in a time when branches of the Christian Church have become weak and worldly, we, too, can be beguiled by rabbinic interpretations of Torah. Just as in Paul's day, there are those who are earnest for the law among the Jews of our day. The Galatians had been visited by earnest representatives of the rabbinical schools who were not yet enlightened to the greater teaching of God. They claimed that there was no salvation outside of entering the Jewish community through circumcision according to Jewish tradition, and through obedience to their interpretation of Torah. Paul pleaded with them not to depart from what they had been shown through the life of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel message centres on the sacrifice of Yeshua. This replaces the sacrifices of the Temple, which prepared the way for Him. Sin is not to be dealt with by human endeavour but through the forgiveness of the Father through faith in Yeshua, and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, who brings new life and a new way of walking with God.

For your prayerful studies today, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to value the Torah of God through His work in you. See if you understand the balance of this, so that we read Torah as useful, but not depending on human interpretation alone. Consider your own response to the Holy Spirit and how you read the Bible for inspiration.

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## Day 2

Chapter 2. Thank God for Paul. He was so enlightened for his ministry to the Gentiles that he even stood against the great Apostle Peter when he discerned error. Even Peter had shown weakness under the pressure of the rabbis, and Barnabas had to be corrected too. This is how powerful the pull of the flesh is, causing us to believe that God is pleased with ritual observance of the Torah as a means of salvation to eternal life. This had separated the Jews from all other nations. This was not the Lord's aim any more. For a period in history He showed Israel that they needed help to live in the spirit of the laws. This was so that we all might learn. The flesh is weak, however, and prefers ritual to direct dependence on God, in spite of the fact that He offers us a walk with Him, better than Israel in the wilderness years. The time of clearer interpretation of Torah came with the sacrifice of Yeshua. This heralded the breaking forth of the Kingdom of God into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Yet, there were times when even Peter and Barnabas weakened in their understanding. Paul stood firm. The grace of God brought us to a new place in Yeshua in fulfillment of the Law itself. The Holy Spirit does not cause us to sin – He does not cause us to break the Laws of God, but to grow into them as willing learners. We will find ourselves living the life of the Spirit, not according to fleshly understanding but through spiritual manifestations of God's character built in us.

Continue to consider prayerfully what Paul is saying. Remember that not even Moses could enter the Promised Land. He broke God's laws when He became impatient and struck the rock twice. He sinned and God dealt with it on the edge of the Jordan by prohibiting him entry into Canaan. This does not mean that Moses lost his place in the coming Kingdom, only that God showed us that no-one, not even Moses, enters the Kingdom of Heaven on their own merits. Moses and many others, listed in Hebrews 11, are examples of the faith that God wants us to have. Nevertheless, they could not enter the eternal Kingdom unless they, like us, are reborn into the life of God's Spirit. This is the importance of what Paul taught to the Galatians.

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## Day 3

Chapter 3. The authentic children of Abraham are those who live by faith. We are drawn from among the physical descendants of the Children of Israel and from those who are called to salvation from all nations. This does not mean that the Christian Church replaces Israel as if Israel's failure put an end to them. Faith in Yeshua is the end purpose (true objective) of the Torah for all who will believe. The structure of God's Covenant family is still based on the Israel of God, Jew and Gentile together, both identifiable, in the covenant family. The teaching of Paul is relevant to all who come to Yeshua, past present and future. Those who are counted in the Israel of God from the time of Adam to the return of the Lord, at the end of the age, are those who live by faith and are brought to new life in God's Spirit. Enoch is counted, so are Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, and countless numbers whose faith and walk with God was to be fully realized in Yeshua. He is the centre of our faith. He always was at the centre, and those called to the Kingdom are being prepared through God's Spirit.

Continue to meditate on Paul's letter to the Galatians and let the Holy Spirit show you the balance of what God has done in all history for our benefit in the end times. You may find that your ideas modify from some things you have been told. You may discover that your own Christian experience has been made lifeless through the teaching of modern-day rabbinic schools, whether Christian or Jewish, where ritual rather than life is taught. You may find that you have not considered Torah in balance and not learned how to appreciate what God has taught us through Israel and through the pages of the Bible. We may misunderstand the freedom that we are given in Yeshua. We are not to be in bondage to any school of theology that does not bear witness to the life of the Spirit. We are not to be denied the freedom that comes from faith and personal relationship with God. We are not to live our lives controlled by others, however convincing their arguments may be in their interpretation of the Scriptures. Neither are we to use our liberty as a licence for sin. The law still judges us if we fall into sin and is a useful mirror to our inner character. Freedom in Yeshua still leads us to a disciplined and holy life.

One mistake comes from a misunderstanding of verse 13. Israel was given the entire law and agreed to live by every teaching, thinking that this would be possible. The Covenant at Sinai led to blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience. Through their suffering we learn what they did not know, until they tried and failed. They could not live up to their covenant commitment. If they broke one law then they had broken covenant and so eventually their sins would mount up and the curse of the law would come upon them. Paul teaches us that Yeshua became that curse, as the only way for us to be free of the curse. If we lose faith and try to do what Israel could not do, by trying to achieve righteousness through ritual observance of the law (works), putting ourselves under the Covenant at Sinai, then we too will fail. We would put ourselves under the curse for disobedience again. The curse of the law was taken by Yeshua, so that we all could inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. The law itself was not the curse, but the curse was part of the Covenant at Sinai. Therefore, when Yeshua took away the curse of the Law He did not take away the Law itself! The Covenant in His blood as foreseen by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31) is the fulfillment of the Covenant with Abraham through a new and better way.

All nations should make their laws in line with the Laws of God. They bring the protection that Paul highlights in verse 23, until each person comes to faith. Laws reveal sin and the need of Yeshua's help, so they are as relevant as ever. For the believer, who finds faith and is able to walk out his faith (*Halakhah* in Hebrew) in fellowship with God, he is now under the direct protection of God. We know from Chapter 2, where Peter and Barnabas began to lose sight of this walk, that this is not as easy as we might like, but it is still the supreme goal and Paul is unambiguous.

Let the Holy Spirit show you how well you are doing. Paul was confident to hand believers over to the care of the Holy Spirit, and we can be confident in this too.

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## Day 4

Chapter 4. Paul was skilled at interpreting Scripture. He could draw on his understanding of the different ways Scripture can be used to teach us. He used the lives of Hagar, Ishmael, Sarah and Isaac to illustrate the way the Covenant was brought out of bondage into freedom through Yeshua. We need to learn to be skillful, too. The Bible is full of imagery, pointing to Yeshua. Paul was critical of those Galatians who had come to rely on ritual observance of what he calls weak and beggarly elements of the law. It is possible that he referred to the way some of them made the Sabbath Day and the Feasts of the Lord into dry rituals. They teach us about the plan of Salvation, fulfilled through the Cross, the giving of the Holy Spirit and foreshadowing His return. We must not lose sight of this through dry observance and ritual. Freedom with discipline and without licence to sin is a great goal. Paul settled for no less than this freedom in his teaching. We must all review the balance of our life of faith, over and over, as we reflect prayerfully on this teaching.

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## Day 5

Chapter 5. Walk in the Spirit is the central call to the Galatians. Recall that Paul was addressing the problem that had arisen. New believers had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and then run into the teaching of some Jewish sects who did not understand new life in Yeshua. These new believers in Galatia had become fascinated by this lifeless teaching, and were being persuaded that salvation was through ritual observance taught by these sects. The Galatians were in danger of turning away from the walk in the Spirit that they had begun so well. Paul warned them to stand fast and let the Holy Spirit bring life to the Torah – the teaching of God. Circumcision was the mark that distinguished Israel from the rest of the world, but when Yeshua brought fulfillment to Torah it was to be reinterpreted as cleansing of the heart by the Spirit. Therefore, if Gentiles took on the external rite of circumcision in the flesh as a means of fulfilling the Torah then the implication was that they were converting to become a member of a Jewish sect, trying to obey the entire law as a means of salvation, independent of the Spirit of God. Paul warned them that this would not work. Physical circumcision is God's external mark on the physical descendants of Abraham and is still used today as God works out His purposes among these specially called people but, of itself, it avails nothing spiritually. For Gentiles it is what the Holy Spirit will do in circumcising our hearts that counts.

Paul was not against the Laws of God, only that they were limited in changing unregenerate hearts and minds. At the same time he had the utmost confidence in the life of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will write the Laws of God into our spirits in a spiritual way so that we will not break any of the deeper and meaningful principles of God's Laws. Paul emphasized that the fruits of our lives would prove this to be so. If we are unregenerate human beings then we would not be able to resist the sins of the flesh which are according to the list in verses 19 to 21. The fruit of the Spirit is evidenced by the spiritual overflow of the character of God that becomes part of our own character – verses 22 and 23. Paul exhorts us to be confident in what God's Holy Spirit will do in us – that which we cannot do for ourselves.

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## Day 6

Chapter 6. Paul begins this section of his letter by referring to the ministry that we have to one another. Not only are we to live by the Spirit of God individually, but our ministry to one another is also spiritual. If we consider this carefully we will realize that it opens up an enormous topic. The teachers of the Law, by Yeshua's day, had become controlling in their ways. They interpreted the Torah as a set of dos and don'ts to be obeyed by human endeavour (in the flesh). Yeshua rebuked these people, and so did Paul, for putting the people under bondage. Instead, ministry to one another is spiritual and for the purpose of building one another up, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father and the Son. We learn, in other letters Paul wrote, about the range of ministries and gifts of the Holy Spirit by which believers are to be built up as a body. We will come to this in due course. There is enough in Galatians to *begin* the process of balancing out our lives and our ministries in the light of all that the Bible says.

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## Day 7

### A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Because of its importance, we have concentrated this week on just one book of the Bible. Spend today prayerfully considering this again today. Next week we will return to Deuteronomy. It will be useful to have these balanced perspectives as we continue to study the history of God's dealings with ancient Israel throughout the entire Bible.

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