

Galatians 3:24-25

Are Messianic Youth Properly Trained in the Torah and All the Scriptures?

by J.K. McKee posted 14 July, 2008 www.tnnonline.net

GALATIANS 3:24-25 – ENGLISH

Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (NASU).

so that the law became our child-conductor – to Christ, that by faith we may be declared righteous, and the faith having come, no more under a child-conductor are we (YLT).

So then, the Law/Torah pedagogue our became to/toward Messiah, in order that out of faith we might be justified. Came but the faith no longer under pedagogue we are (author's literal translation)

So then, the Torah became our pedagogue [to lead us] toward Messiah, in order that we might be justified out of faith. But [with] the faith having come, we are no longer under a pedagogue (author's translation).

GALATIANS 3:24-25 – GREEK

hōste ho nomos paidagōgos hēmōn gegonen eis Christon, hina ek pisteōs dikaiōthōmen elthousēs de tēs pisteōs ouketi hupo paidagōgon esmen.

ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν· ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν.

Galatians 3:24-25 are some difficult verses for today's Messianic Believers to contemplate.¹ Many commentators are in rightful agreement that "tutor" is not the best rendering of the Greek word *paidagōgos* (παιδαγωγός), as there is something specifically to be understood from this term in antiquity. In Galatians 3:24, we actually see Paul using a classical Greek term to express a Jewish concept.² *BDAG* indicates, "Orig. 'boy-leader', the man, usu.[ally] a slave...whose duty it was to conduct a boy or youth...to and from school and to superintend his conduct gener.; he was not a 'teacher'...When the young man became of age, the π[αιδαγωγός] was no longer needed."³ In a classical sense, the *paidagōgos* was a protector who was to guard young boys on their way to school until they reached a certain age. This "disciplinarian" (NRSV) or "guardian" (ESV) would try to instill in the boys a basic sense of who a responsible citizen was until the boys were old enough to take care of themselves. As Plato would describe it, "Our sharp-eyed and efficient supervisor of the education of the young must redirect their natural development along the right lines, by always setting them on the paths of goodness as embodied in the legal code" (*Laws* 7.809).⁴

Having to explain that the Torah is to function as a *paidagōgos* that was "to bring us to Christ" (NKJV) is a strong indication on Paul's part that his audience is still relatively new in their faith. Paul must appropriate elements from the Galatians' own dominant culture to make a very Jewish point. Paul later will indicate that the role of the Torah is to reveal the sin in a person

¹ Sections of this article have been adapted from the editor's commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*, second edition (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2007).

² The term "pedagogue" does appear as a borrowed term in some Jewish literature (Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 [Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990], pp 146-148).

³ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 748.

⁴ Plato: *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 253.

(Romans 7:7-9; 1 Corinthians 15:56), meaning that sin can only be revealed if a person has been taught sufficiently from the Torah's commandments and knows instinctively that change needs to take place.

Many will argue from Galatians 3:24-25 that the Torah is now unimportant for Believers in Yeshua today. But is the Torah as a whole no longer necessary? When the Messiah was revealed, did the Torah *cease* to be God's Word? Or, when Yeshua arrives on the scene (particularly in the life of an individual) does the Torah take on a new function? Ben Witherington III sadly does conclude, "Paul's metaphor here suggests that the pedagogue was for *Jews* before the time of Christ, and now that Christ has come no one *needs* or is *required* to submit to it."⁵ He only argues that the Torah was to serve in revealing to Jews the Messiah to come. Yet, the perfect verb *gegonen* (γέγονεν) indicates that the training of the *paidagōgos* continues to have an effect. It has every bit as much of an effect as the fulfilled prophecies that speak of the Messiah's arrival. When Matthew's Gospel asserts, "Now all this took place [*gegonen*] to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (Matthew 1:22), are we expected to throw away and ignore the prophecies now that they have been fulfilled via the Incarnation of Yeshua? Or are we to understand them in a new light?

Paul states the function of the Torah as a *paidagōgos*, a pedagogue that is to train one in the basic essentials for living. But did the Torah have only a temporary role for God's corporate people? Such a view is not supported by understanding the background of Paul's letter. Note that the Torah did indeed play a role in the Galatians' own salvation experience. Paul's visit to Southern Galatia in Acts chs. 13-14 reveals that he certainly taught about Yeshua from the Torah and Prophets! Why would Paul have done this if he thought that the Torah only played a temporary role in God's plan of salvation history, and a role that would have only been limited to Israel? What part of God's Law going forth from Zion to the nations have some interpreters missed (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2)?

If we understand Paul's admonition as referring to individuals, is the Torah to play this role for a certain season in one's life? Witherington asserts that "the pedagogue [of the Law] is replaced in the life of the Christian by other things, namely: (1) the example of Christ; (2) the 'Law' or principle of Christ; and (3) the Holy Spirit."⁶ None of us should disagree that these qualities are important. But how can we truly understand these things *as the Messiah Himself and the Apostles would have understood them without understanding* the message of the Torah and Tanach? How can we be everything that Yeshua was without adhering to a Torah ethic? Simply stating that one must follow the example of Christ and the Holy Spirit is too vague without given proper boundaries. John Wesley describes the close relationship between belief in Yeshua and the role of the Torah in his sermon "Properties of the Law":

"I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ: seeing I now want it as much, to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him...Indeed each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me 'above gold or precious stones;' seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfill in its season."⁷

Is Paul's vantage point in Galatians 3:24 that the Torah functions only as the Jews' disciplinarian (something that he has been "freed from"), or the disciplinarian of the individual prior to receiving the gospel and being transformed? If Paul is speaking to his "brethren" (Galatians 3:15) in Yeshua in Galatia, then surely the Torah has played a role *for all of them*—both Jewish and non-Jewish—"so that we [plural] might be justified by faith." The Torah served as a *paidagōgos* for all of them in their salvation experience. The Torah played a role in them understanding their sin

⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 267.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷ N. Burwash, ed., *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes* (Salem, OH: Schmuel Publishing, 1988), 350.

nature and how they failed to live up to its high and holy standard. More importantly, **the Torah showed them their need for a Redeemer.**

In Galatians 3:25 Paul can say, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor,” *hupo paidagōgon* (ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν). Does this mean that the principles that the Torah was to instill in us should be cast aside? Or, when one comes to faith in Messiah has the Torah’s function *as a pedagogue* ended? Are the ethics and morality of the Torah no longer important?

I would argue that Paul’s Rabbinical training and him comparing the Torah to a “disciplinarian” (NRSV) is comparable to what happens to Jewish boys prior to *bar mitzvah* (מִצְוָה בַּר). 4 Maccabees 1:17 attests that there is “education in the law, by which we learn divine matters reverently and human affairs to our advantage.” The Torah as pedagogue is to train young people in the basic principles of right and wrong, instilling in them the proper ethos that God wants them to have. When the young person reaches an age of adolescence, he then has to take responsibility for his own actions.

From this perspective, God’s commandments are rigorously instilled in an individual so that by the time a young person goes through his *bar mitzvah* he can be considered a man. *Bar Mitzvah* means a “son of the commandments.” At the age of 12-13, one who goes through his *bar mitzvah* recognizes that he is accountable for knowing what the God of Israel considers sin and does not consider sin. He is accountable for the penalties of sin and is fully aware of his sin nature.

The practice of preparing a youth for *bar mitzvah* is to instill in the boy or girl the understanding that he or she is accountable for living up to the Torah’s standards. The Torah up to this point serves as the person’s “tutor” or “schoolmaster” (KJV), and hopefully when the youth gets up to the bema to read from the Torah scroll and be *bar mitzvahed*, the person has an understanding that what he or she is doing is very serious in the eyes of the God of Israel. This is how the Torah is to serve as a pedagogue.

Paul is alluding to the fact that individuals are to be shown their sin from the Torah, and that prior to coming to faith in Yeshua the Torah preserved us spiritually in the sense that it showed us what was right and what was wrong. Note that Paul does believe that even without the Torah proper, pagans still have a witness of its morality via their human conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Eventually, each person would come to the point where he realizes that as a human being he cannot fully attain to God’s high and holy standard, and a Redeemer is needed. The Torah reveals sin and thus points us to Messiah Yeshua. This is why Paul can write, “For the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts” (CJB). **Yeshua is to be the ultimate aim or *telos* (τέλος) of the Torah.**

But once a person has arrived at the *telos*, faith and redemption in Messiah Yeshua, what is to be done with the pedagogue, the Torah? Considering that born again Believers are not “under a tutor,” is the Torah no longer important? Some would argue so. However, the essence of the New Covenant is that “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33). No longer must the Torah function as a disciplinarian or guardian, because the Torah’s principles are written onto the heart of the redeemed person. Tim Hegg concurs,

“[I]n the metaphor Paul uses, when one has arrived at the teacher, one does not therefore despise the *pedagogue* who lead him there! If anything, one is more appreciative of the custodian because he has performed his duties faithfully. In the same way, when a sinner comes to realize that he is unable to remedy himself of his guilt, and when the Torah leads the sinner to Yeshua, the only remedy for sin, he is forever grateful for the role of the Torah in leading to Yeshua. Far from considering the Torah to have been worthless, he recognizes the strategic role it has played.”⁸

Indeed, one must recognize that in the Torah God’s people are called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). God’s people are called to be a missional community active in the world, making a difference. Any good Christian theologian agrees with this. Having

⁸ Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), 130.

the Torah's principles imbued into the human person empowered by God's Spirit *makes the Torah even more important* following salvation—not less important.

What might this view of Galatians 3:24-25 mean for today's emerging Messianic movement?

Are Messianic youth properly being trained up?

When we consider Paul's description of the Torah as serving as a pedagogue, some difficult questions are asked of us as Believers considering whether or not we were actually trained in the basics of the Torah. If Paul intends the Torah to serve as a pedagogue for all, or at least most, who come to faith in Yeshua, what is this to say about Christians—and also Messianics—today? Are any of us properly trained in the Torah? What role does the Torah play in showing us our depravity as sinners, and our inherent need for a Divine Savior?

One of the most confusing passages in the Bible for many today is Yeshua's words, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*" (Mark 10:15; cf. Matthew 19:14). Many in the contemporary Church have concluded that what Yeshua is saying here is that the best time to receive salvation is when one is a small child. The problem with this is that a small child cannot understand his or her sin nature *as demonstrated by Scripture*. A small child might have some kind of rudimentary understanding of right and wrong, and a small child might understand some of God's love—but a small child *cannot* comprehend his or her sin nature, knowing that condemned sinners are worthy of eternal punishment.

The purpose of the Torah as pedagogue is to train individuals in what the God of Israel considers acceptable and unacceptable behavior, clearly laying forth the penalties of disobedience to Him. The Rabbinical dictum based on Deuteronomy 1:39 argues that it takes about twelve years for a child to be prepared for adulthood, knowing the principles of right and wrong, and the responsibilities that one is to undertake as a member of the Jewish community. During the years between birth and *bar/bat mitzvah*, Jewish children are trained in the commandments of the Torah and principles of the Tanach, to prepare them to be accountable. Often this is accompanied with some kind of Hebrew study, with the youth also becoming familiar with Jewish history and tradition.

Interestingly enough, many Protestant denominations follow a similar, yet less rigorous process with confirmation. Youth preparing to enter their teens go through confirmation classes by learning the basic stories and principles of the Bible, Christian history, the traditions of the denomination, and their role as young people in the contemporary Church. Confirmation classes are often held separately from Sunday School, even though they take on a similar format.

I can remember in 1993 going through confirmation classes in the United Methodist Church, where I went to take several weeks of classes independent of Sunday School, and our pastor took about a dozen or so male youth on a day-long houseboat cruise on the Ohio River. We read Scripture passages, we prayed, and we discussed issues that were pertinent to us as young people. One of the prominent issues that we discussed, especially as many of us were just entering puberty, was human sexuality. The issue had actually been forced because we had all stopped at a truck stop on the way to the marina, and several of us had noticed a condom dispenser in the men's room. Some did not know what this was, and our pastor was very gracious to discuss the issue. While none of us were Messianic, we certainly did focus on God's commandments and moral expectations of us that afternoon.

How many of us were trained in the truths of the Torah—even if they were just the Ten Commandments from a limited Christian understanding—that we were sinners in the eyes of God and needed His salvation? How many of us had the Torah guarding us while we were young, so that in the future when we reached a point of maturity, we no longer had to be reminded of the basic truths of what was sin and not sin? Did we ever have the Torah function as a pedagogue for us *in any capacity*?

James Montgomery Boice makes the surprising observation, "the experience of passing from law to promise needs to be repeated in everyone who comes to faith in Christ Jesus, for the

law condemns in order that faith might make alive.”⁹ Boice is correct; *all sinners* must be shown their sin from their violation of God’s Law. But how often does this actually happen in the Christian Church today? In a Christian Church that has largely sluffed away the Torah, are new converts to Christ actually shown their sin from the Torah, told that they need to confess and repent of this sin, and once redeemed disciplined in a life of holiness? While we cannot speak in broad terms, the problems that the contemporary Church faces today are a direct result of the fact that **this largely does not happen**. The majority of people who profess faith in Yeshua did not have the Torah serve as their pedagogue.

It is not that difficult to enter into a Messianic congregation or fellowship today and discover that a great deal of teaching emphasis is placed on the Torah. The weekly Torah cycle often dominates a *Shabbat* teaching. It is certainly good for Messianic congregations to focus on Scriptures that too many of our Christian brethren ignore. We need to know the essential stories and foundational decrees that compose our faith, and ultimately our belief in Yeshua. We need to know what the God of Israel considers proper and improper behavior, and have a firm theological foundation that begins with Genesis. But what is actually discussed from the weekly *parashah*, and how the material is delivered is a much more complicated issue. Does the Torah actually guide us as a standard of holiness?

It has been my observation over the past ten years (1997-2007) that the Messianic community as a whole **largely does not understand** the proper role that the Torah is to play as pedagogue. The Torah as pedagogue is to train people on the way to salvation in what God considers to be righteous and unrighteous. The Torah following salvation is by no means to be discarded, but can then serve as the “ethos statement” of one’s life, as consistent study of the Torah as God’s Word is to then enable a person to fulfill His Divine mission. Prior to salvation, the Torah serves as a person’s pedagogue, and after salvation it serves as a person’s assignment book from the Holy One.

This is largely what we do not see in many Messianic congregations. For too many of our Messianic brethren, Torah observance is used to “prove” to others that they are “better” than our Christian brethren. Torah observance is not adopted as a proper way of holy living, but to indeed demonstrate “superior sanctity.” Torah teachers who adopt this approach often do not teach from the Torah’s instruction as a pedagogue would, challenging Messianic Believers with whether or not they have truly lived up to God’s high standard. Instead, too much of the “Torah teaching” we are submitted to is largely disengaged from the ethical and moral demands of the text, and the weekly *parashah* is largely used as a springboard for teachers to “rant” on either the ills of Christianity or society—rather than used as a place for providing solutions. And worse enough, the solution to the world’s problems, **Yeshua the Messiah**, is often not provided. Notably, in the twelve years (since 1995) I have been in the Messianic movement, pertinent issues like sexuality (which the Torah certainly talks about) have **never been discussed** at any of the youth *or* adult meetings I have been a part of.

The impact that this has on Messianic youth is going to be quite severe if things do not begin to change. Are Messianic youth being properly trained in the Torah? Certainly, there are many good traditions from the Jewish practice of *bar/bat mitzvah* that should be integrated into our congregations. I think it is a good thing for a young boy or girl to learn some Hebrew to read his or her *parashah*, and that young people should be honored by the adults as they enter into their “adulthood” and begin to take positions of responsibility in the assembly. But preparing for *bar/bat mitzvah* should be more than just learning some Hebrew and having a party. We should integrate the elements of the Christian confirmation, where the ethical and moral issues that directly concern today’s teens should be discussed. Yet, how can we address those issues with youth if we do not even address them with adults?

Many Messianic congregations do not have a large number of youth (at least today) to warrant *bar/bat mitzvah* classes. At most, such youth prior to *bar/bat mitzvah* might have a few

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians,” in Frank E. Gaebel, ed. et. al, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 10:467-468.

consultations with their rabbi, pastor, or congregational leader. This means it is incumbent upon such a leader to make sure that the youth are trained *from the bema/pulpit* in the proper principles of life during the weekly *Shabbat* service. Furthermore, to limit the youth or anyone to exclusively the Torah, and not to provide teachings from the Prophets or Apostolic Scriptures, is also a severe mistake. Messianic youth preparing for *bar/bat mitzvah* need to know the commandments of the Torah, the stories of the Bible, and the essentials of the gospel. If they have truly not had a born again experience by this point in time, the *bar/bat mitzvah* process should be so serious **that a true conversion should follow shortly thereafter.**

Questions are being asked today not only about how we properly teach from the Torah (not avoiding some of its controversial issues), but also how we are to have more well-rounded teachings from all parts of the Bible. Too many Messianic assemblies *exclusively* analyze the Torah. Sadly, they may be just as theologically neutered as those in the Christian Church who just focus on the “New Testament.” Likewise, people attending a congregation where not only the same *parashah* is addressed every year, but the teaching every year is on the exact same *points* of the *parashah*, can become dis-empowered from fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives. The Torah can become stale, dis-enlivened, and also boring. This need not take place with a Bible as big as we have. People need to know about the results of disobedience to God, as seen all throughout the histories and Prophets of the Tanach, and **most importantly** the life and ministry of Yeshua the Messiah who came to bring us all salvation.

We need to have leaders and teachers with discernment, who can appropriate themes and broad principles from the Torah, connecting them to other parts of the Bible when they stand before the congregation to speak. Youth, as well as adults, are listening and looking for an appropriate model to emulate. Some congregations desperately need to consider the example seen in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:15-16)—one of the Galatian congregations—where short teachings from the Torah and the Prophets were given. A similar format needs to be adapted whereby a small 15-20 minute Torah teaching could be offered, later followed by an actual 30-45 minute sermon that might take a broad theme seen in the weekly *parashah*, or address other pertinent issues facing the local assembly and/or community.¹⁰

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁰ A further examination of Galatians 3:24-25, along with some further exegetical details and engagement with commentators’ opinions, is provided in the before mentioned *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*, second edition.