

# The Purpose of the Torah

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*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse- <sup>27</sup> the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; <sup>28</sup> the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known (Deut 11:26-27).*

The Hebrew word *torah* means, “instruction;” with the definite article (*Ha Torah*), its usual meaning is, “the instruction” or “the law.” In Judaism the *torah* is made up of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, commonly referred to as the Pentateuch or “the five books.” This collection is also referred to as the Sinai Covenant, the Law of Moses, and, by Christians, the Old Covenant. The covenant aspect of these writings comes from the Deut 11:26-27 passage cited above. After delivering Israel from Egyptian enslavement, God entered into an agreement with him or her similar to an agreement anyone enters into in a contingency contract. “If you agree to keep the terms of this agreement, **then** I will reward you with blessings.” The negative of the contract is that, “If you do not keep the terms of this agreement, **then** you will pay a penalty for breaking the contract.” The terms of the contract consisted of a collection of moral and ritual codes, found throughout Exodus through Deuteronomy, variously called statutes, judgments, and commandments – all codes of conduct.

The question of many social historians is, “Why all these codes?” Why did God give these people so many rules to follow in order to receive his blessings? One must understand that the law was to give moral instruction to a people who had been delivered

from a 400-year slave culture, a culture ruled by a survival mentality. The Sinai Covenant consisted of laws, codes, statutes, judgments, and commandments – rules. These were for the purpose of developing in these people a sense of right and wrong, which is essential to the development of moral character. This is the Apostle Paul’s understanding of the purpose of the law, as stated in his letter to Galatians.

## **The Law Was Our Tutor**

*Therefore the law was our tutor (paidagogos) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (paidagogos), (Gal 3:24-25).*

The critical word here is “tutor,” from the Greek *paidagogos*. William Barclay, one of my favorite biblical scholars, has a wonderful discussion of this term in his book, *New Testament Words*, pp 206-09. I have done my own work on this word but Barclay’s presentation cannot be easily improved upon. Some translations render this Greek term as “schoolmaster,” while others have “tutor.” Both are acceptable translations, if we keep in mind what a schoolmaster or tutor was in the first century Mediterranean world. In this culture a boy was under the care of his mother until age 7, after that the *paidagogos* took over the management of the boy until he was 18. The family having the ability to provide an in-house servant who served as a *paidagogos* to the children was the exception, but this was the nature of education in this part of the world, during this period. The *paidagogos* was responsible for the “development” of the male children. This included his social instruction as well as his philosophical and moral instruction. Barclay describes his duties as follows,

His duty was to accompany the boy to school each day and to see that he got there safely; to carry the boy’s books and his lyre; to watch his conduct in school; to see to his conduct in the street; to train the boy in morals, in manners and in deportment. He must see that the boy walked modestly with downcast head in the street; he must see that he gave place to

older people and was becomingly silent in their presence; he must teach him to be well-mannered at table and to wear his clothes with grace. He must teach him all the Greek meant by *eukosmia*, good manners, good deportment, and pleasantness of life. K. J. Freeman says of the *paidagogos* that he is was a mixture of nurse, footman, chaperon and tutor. *New Testament Words*, pp 206-07

Barclay quotes Clement of Alexandria, in a writing called, *The Paedagogus*, defining the *paidagogos* as one whose objective or purpose was to bring up the child in areas of the, “practical, not theoretical, his aim is thus to improve the soul, and to train it up to a virtuous, not to an intellectual life.” (page 207). Barclay’s concluding paragraph of this article is very useful to our purposes here in this study.

In any event the *paidagogos* existed for no other reason than to make his charge independent of his care. Xenophon in his work on Sparta (3.1) writes, “Whenever they emerge from childhood to youth, they cease from *paidagogoi*, they cease from teachers. No one governs them any more, but they let them go as masters of themselves.” When Paul spoke of the law as our *paidagogos* to bring us to Christ, in the very phrase he affirmed that the law was an inadequate, unsatisfactory thing, doomed to come to an end. It was another way of saying that Christ is the end of the law (page 2-9).

The purpose of the law as a *paidagogos* was to school or tutor the people of Israel in matters of human behavior. Their tutorage was from a childhood stage to adulthood, after that man was ready for a stage of moral behavior wherein he was expected to behave as he did because of this development in moral character, rather than a behavior rooted in codes of conduct and concern for undesirable consequences for undesirable behavior.

## The Tutorial Stage of Israel's Behavioral Development

The law was a body of statutes, judgments, and commandments designed to instill in man as sense of acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant--the Ten Commandments (in the Hebrew text, "the ten *dabarim*" - the ten words), (Ex 34:27-28).*

This law consisted of blessings and curses:

*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse- <sup>27</sup>the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; <sup>28</sup> the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known (Deut 11:26-27).*

*If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit ... (Lev 26:3).*

*'But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it... (Lev 26:14-17).*

The purpose of these statutes, judgments, and commandments was to develop them into a nation of people of moral character, a holy nation.

*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (Ex 19:5-6).*

*Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:7-8).*

The intent of this covenant of codes: statutes, judgments, and commandment, was to instill in them a sense of mortal right and wrong - character development - and to teach them the difficulty and limitations of living by a system of code ethics.

## **The Need for a New Covenant**

*For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord (Heb 8:7-9).*

There is a tremendous significance to the metaphorical imagery used by God in his promise to give a new covenant in the place of the Sinai Covenant. In this new covenant the standard of moral behavior was to be within man himself, not on tablets of stone.

*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother,*

*saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more (Heb 8: 10-12).*

This promise can be found in Jeremiah 31:31-34,

*The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD."I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD, 'because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

## **The Nature of the New Covenant**

God's promise here is clearly to create a new covenant people (i.e., a people created anew in Christ), whose moral behavior is a reflection of their moral character, as a people whose lives have been transformed by their conversion to Christ. Once this new covenant became a reality by the death and resurrection of Christ, the old covenant became obsolete.

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Gal 4:4-5).*

*By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete (fulfilled - mwl); and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." Or, as the KJV reads, In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb 8: 13).*

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the*

*realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:1-4).*

*Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts (2 Cor 3: 7-11).*

*He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6).*

Those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah will have the veil taken away and will fully understand the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in Jesus of Nazareth.

*Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3: 12- 4:1).*

Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant and it is a covenant established by his blood.

*For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:15).*

*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament (covenant is a better translation-MWLIII) in my blood, which is shed for you,' (Luke 22:19-20).*

Where the old covenant was with Israel, the new covenant is for the whole of mankind.

*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one (Jews and gentiles) and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:11-14).*

## **A Study of Moral Development**

What we have presented here is a study of moral development. This has been an area of major research in this and the last century. In this research the development of one's moral behavior from childhood to adulthood has been presented in stages. At the stage of childhood, moral learning involves rules and their enforcement in order to instill in the child a sense of right and wrong in terms of moral behavior. As one grows to maturity, he moves from the motives of fear of consequences and desire for reward as the causes

of his behavior to a stage of moral development wherein his moral character is the controlling force behind his moral decisions. One goes from a stage wherein he has learned acceptable behavior through his exposure to the consequences of his responses to rules to a stage of development where his behavior is more controlled by a developed moral character than by a strict adherence to rules.

This is, essentially, what we see as the purpose of the law for the people Israel. The Law represented legislated moral and ritual behavior (a system of code ethics). Man's response to the Law was "lawkeeping." The Law defined and interpreted human behavior as good or bad and condemned all bad behavior. This is what law is all about. Its primary function is to control our behavior and then condemn us when our behavior gets out of control. The Law, then, doesn't make us holy or good, it only condemns us when we fail to conform to the moral/ethical and ritual codes contained in the Law.

## **Conclusion**

The message of the New Testament is that God has given us another and better means of attaining holiness and goodness. Rather than being conformed to a set of codes, which is the means of attaining righteousness/holiness under the law, we are to be transformed by a relationship we enter into through belief. The Jews viewed their Scriptures not as a body of revelation given to provide man with insight into the nature of God but, rather, they saw the Scriptures as a body of law given to provide man with codes (statutes, judgments, and commandments) to control his behavior.

God's revelation of himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth was to reveal who he was to man, to the end that man would know who he was to be to as a being created in the image of God. Here is where the revelation that serves as the basis of Judaism (*Ha Torah*) is different from the revelation that informs the faith of Christianity. In the religion of Judaism, God is seen as having revealed his word on stones and in parchment scrolls, in the religion of Christianity, God is seen as having revealed himself in human flesh - in the historical person we know as Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1-2, 14; 16-18; 14:6-10).

Jesus was the very expression of God's holiness and goodness and is for us a paradigm or exemplar of who we are to be if we are to achieve holiness and goodness. Rather than being conformed to the dictates of law, we are to be transformed into the image of the one who was God with us: "He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation." (Col 1:15.)

*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, **who is the image of God**. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4:4-6.)*

It is in the face of Jesus that we see God, and it is there that we see ourselves as we are supposed to be a beings created in the image of God, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

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