

## Galatians – Yeshua's (Jesus') Message to Shaul (Paul)

By Moshe Schwab

### Introduction – Prologue

The letters of Shaul (Paul) are misunderstood because he is addressing Jewish biblical issues. I will talk about these issues often in order to fully explain how Shaul (Paul) is to be understood. We cannot understand the Bible properly without its proper context or we will form faulty conclusions.

Imagine thinking that the Old Testament laws from the Torah are still to be practiced. Then read scriptures where Shaul (Paul) says that the law has not been done away. "Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah;" Romans 3:31 CJB. And Yeshua says the same, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter in the Torah to become void;" Luke 16:17 CJB. "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets;" Matthew 5:17 CJB.

Now, don't try to explain these scriptures away like so many people do. Just accept it as is like some of you are told to do. Suddenly we realize that there are apparent contradictions in the Bible that need to be examined further. That's where a Jewish biblical context comes in. Do we want truth or error? Do we care if our beliefs are based on mistaken biblical teaching? Matthew 25:46 CJB says, "They will go off to eternal punishment, but those who have done what God wants will go to eternal life." Understanding what the Bible is really saying is very important.

Kefa says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV. If we are to be careful how we interpret the scriptures because they are from God, we'd better be careful how we understand them. It is a matter of eternal ramifications (it's important).

I entitled this Yeshua's (Jesus's) message to Shaul (Paul) because Yeshua gave Shaul a message to go to the Gentiles. The word Goyim means Gentiles. The risen Yeshua tells Shaul when Shaul is on his way to Damascus, "I will deliver you from the people and from the Goyim. I am sending you to open their eyes; so that they will turn from darkness to light, from the power of the Adversary to God, and thus receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who have been separated for holiness by putting their trust in me;" Acts 26:17-18 CJB. Ananias said to Shaul that he would be a witness to all men when Shaul is in Damascus. And then, Yeshua again tells Shaul to go to the Gentiles while he is in Jerusalem. Shaul (Paul) says that Yeshua told him, "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles;'" Acts 22:21 NKJV. It is apparent that Shaul made it his mission in life to obey Yeshua.

He encountered some opposition from those of the Jewish school of Shammai who mis-interpreted the Torah (the Torah is the first 5 books of the Bible) to mean that Gentiles were not allowed to become Jewish<sup>1</sup> and also from those who were following misapplied laws of the Torah. (The school of Hillel did a better job with this issue although not with its lots of extra laws). That's where the letter of Galatians comes in. Shaul stood against these misapplied laws and extra laws. We have to understand the Jewish biblical arguments that Shaul is making. Some take Shaul's words out of their Jewish biblical context and make up their own beliefs instead of understanding Galatians how it was originally intended. This could cause some big problems for them when they meet Yeshua at the time of the resurrection.

This work is intended to help us to understand what Galatians is really about. I have to repeat myself a lot to make my points. So, please be patient. This work also serves as a warning to those who are making

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<sup>1</sup> Shammai is said to have chased Gentiles away with stick instead of helping them to follow God's commandments.

grievous mistakes with their spiritual lives. I believe this work will help correct many of the misunderstandings that results from reading Galatians without its proper context. Please don't judge my intentions the wrong way. It is meant to help you. Also, give me some latitude. Examine your heart and take some time to see if what I am sharing with you is true.

### **Background of Galatians**

Shaul (Paul) writes a letter to the Galatians over some Jewish matters. Galatia became a province of the Roman Empire time around 64 BC. It is just north of where Shaul grew up. The general population was considered to be mostly barbaric warriors with three main tribes.<sup>2</sup> Shaul came from a Jewish community in Tarsus in the province of Cilicia. Tarsus was close to the Mediterranean Sea in what is now southeast Turkey. Shaul was educated in Jerusalem under the grandson of the Great Hillel and Shaul was one of the chief Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and was a Pharisee (P'rushim).

In the passage below, the Jewish leaders of his time didn't question whether Shaul (Paul) was a Jewish leader, but instead argued about the resurrection.

Acts 23:6-8 NKJV:

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged! And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection —and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

Shaul eventually visits a number of synagogues in Jewish communities to the north and to the west of the region he grew up in after he believed in the Jewish Messiah to tell them about the coming of the Jewish Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). They are typically referred to as Paul's missionary journeys. Shaul writes Galatians to the Jewish believers (in the Messiah) of Galatia to correct, for the most part, the problem with Torah breakers (Those who misapplied the Torah and added or subtracted from God's commandments; the Torah says that is wrong; see Deuteronomy 4:2.) The Torah breakers had qualms or reservations and stipulations about Gentiles becoming part of the Jewish family of believers in the true God. Also, some didn't believe that Gentiles could become part of the Jewish community. The Torah is the first 5 books of the Bible.

It is apparent that when Shaul corrects Kefa (Peter) for being influenced by the Torah breakers in Galatians chapter 2, he must have had to face issues like this before. He has a teaching ready to share with them. He probably had developed this teaching early on in his evangelistic work with the Gentiles. We should surmise that the Galatians were no doubt familiar with Shaul's arguments and likely familiar with the story about Kefa being influenced by the Torah breakers. We will understand this more as we go along.

In order to understand Galatians, we need to understand the Jewish biblical context and the Jewish issues (Jesus, whose actual name is Yeshua, was Jewish and so were all the early believers in Yeshua.). The Galatians probably knew what Shaul was talking about. We have to find out what the Jewish issues were and from that we can piece together an understanding of Galatians. Just like in any letter, there is a beginning, some main points, and the closing.

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<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, eds, Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, Downersgrove, Illinois; Leicester, England, Intervarsity Press, 1993, pp. 323-324.

## Understanding Galatians Properly

Scholars make a consensus about what the Bible is saying based on what they read in the New Testament manuscripts and try to properly translate the text that is put together from the manuscripts. Often, the translation does not explain to us what the Jewish issues were within the context. The problem with that is the people of the Bible were immersed within a Jewish or Israelite culture. In ancient times, there was a struggle on how the Bible was to be followed and what the scriptures meant (and extra laws were added both to apply to new situations and to make sure they followed the law).

That's why we say that the Bible contains Jewish arguments and Jewish cultural concepts about these interpretations of the law. These issues make the Bible a thoroughly Jewish book that needs to be understood in that context or we will come up with nonsense. We will then come up with our own personal ideas of what the Bible is saying and not come up with the original intent of the scriptures. We have an Eastern and Jewish/Israelite Bible. Imagine the immense misunderstandings that can develop from reading the Bible outside of its context. That's where theology comes in.

We have to understand that theology is a philosophy or made up belief system about what the Bible is saying. Sometimes, people start out with some preconceived idea about what the Bible is saying and then make it fit their preconceived ideas. My experience has been that Bible teachers misapply what Shaul is saying in one area of the Bible and apply that same wrong understanding to other scriptures until their philosophy of the Bible is complete and overwrites the true understanding.

That's one of the reasons we have so many religions. There seems to be endless interpretations that can be made by taking what Shaul is saying out of its proper Jewish biblical context. Shaul had a specific intended meaning, but since Bible teachers are not properly grounded in a true understanding of Shaul's writings and Galatians, they form wrong conclusions.

Once we begin to understand a Jewish cultural understanding of the Bible, it is only then that we can have a proper understanding of what was being said. **It is not a difficult thing to do.** We simply have to replace the wrong understanding with the correct understanding (with the way it was originally intended to be understood). When we take the Bible out of its culture we come up with a modern and false theology, a philosophy of what the Bible is saying. For example, if people understood what Jewish immersion was (we call it baptism), then we wouldn't have all these different baptism ceremonies that we have now.

I studied about ¾ of the New Testament portion verse by verse in the Greek. I did this because I was teaching books of the New Testament portion and I also did this for my work on my doctorate in religious studies. I found out that they did a pretty good job with the word for word translation (some Bibles are not a word for word translations, but are interpretations of the text<sup>3</sup>). By studying each verse, I tried to get the best sense of the meaning of each verse.

However, I never truly got back to the original intended meaning of what was written by studying the Greek. You can study the Greek text forever and not formulate the correct meaning. I found out that in order to get back to what was originally intended by the original writers of the Bible, **we need to**

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the older Bible translations were word for word translations like the New King James Version (NKJV). Newer translations like the Message, the New International Version (NIV), or the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) reinterpret what is written. Depending how well they do with understanding what's written, we have an accurate Bible translation. The Message is the worst translation of the Bible and the Complete Jewish Bible is the best translation of the Bible. The Complete Jewish Bible tries to understand the Jewish biblical context and translates from the text with this in mind (which leads us to form some better conclusions).

**understand the Jewish cultural understanding and what the Jewish issues were at that time (the context) or we will be teaching false doctrine.** We need this study on Galatians and should follow along with this study of Galatians until we properly understand what is written. Remember, we can come up with anything when taken out of context; we don't want man-made doctrine.

Just as the Holy Spirit was intended to help us to live better, so was the giving of the Torah. The Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) is intended to help us; the giving of the Torah is an act of God's favor (grace). It says in Deuteronomy 4:5-7 CJB, "Look, I have taught you laws and rulings, just as ADONAI my God ordered me, so that you can behave accordingly in the land where you are going in order to take possession of it. Therefore, observe them; and follow them; for then all peoples will see you as having wisdom and understanding. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, '**This great nation is surely a wise and understanding people.**'" When we interpret the Bible wrong we don't have the true wisdom of God's word.

Not only is following God's commandments a blessing, but God will reward us someday for doing what is right. Good works and deeds in Jewish thought is to keep the Torah because the Torah teaches us to do good. There was no New Testament portion at the time Shaul (Paul) wrote Romans. Romans 2:6-7 CJB says, "For he will pay back each one according to his deeds. To those who seek glory, honor and immortality by perseverance in doing good, he will pay back eternal life." We are to actually do what is right and not just think we are right.<sup>4</sup> Shaul (Paul) also says, "For it is not merely the hearers of Torah whom God considers righteous; rather, it is the doers of what Torah says who will be made righteous in God's sight;" Romans 2:13 CJB. This work on Galatians should help us to better live right.

### **Some Pertinent Issues**

Lastly, before we begin our study on Galatians, let's look at a couple of pertinent issues regarding understanding the Bible. Why should we do this? Because we've been taught to explain things away that the Bible says and have been given alternate meanings of what is written. We need to give these issues some thought because after all, we want truth. If we want to understand the Bible correctly, then we don't want to be susceptible to false theologies.

Kefa (Peter) said about some who were teaching error and fellowshiping with believers in the Messiah, "Their punishment, decreed long ago, is not idle; their destruction is not asleep! For God did not spare the angels who sinned; on the contrary, he put them in gloomy dungeons lower than Sh'ol to be held for judgment. And he did not spare the ancient world; on the contrary, he preserved Noach, a herald of righteousness;" 2 Peter 2:3-5 CJB. Kefa says false teachers will be punished. Righteousness actually means to do what is right and not just think we are right.

Kefa also writes about living the way God wants us to live. He says that some distort the scriptures. 2 Peter 3:13-16 CJB

But we, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home. Therefore, dear friends, as you look for these things, do everything you can to be found by him without spot or defect and at peace. And think of our Lord's patience as deliverance, just as our dear brother Sha'ul also wrote you, following the wisdom God gave him. Indeed, he speaks about these things in all his letters. They contain some things that are hard to

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<sup>4</sup> Some people say we are made righteous (righteous means to live right) without actually doing what is right. This doesn't make any sense; they are making a contradictory statement. The Bible says it is wrong to do what is right in our own eyes. In the Torah it says, "You will not do things the way we do them here today, where everyone does whatever in his own opinion seems right;" Deuteronomy 12:8 CJB.

understand, things which the uninstructed and unstable distort, to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Consider this; there was no New Testament portion at the time so Kefa (Peter) has to be talking about the Old Testament scriptures. He says that some are distorting Shaul's (Paul) writings. That's why we need this work on Galatians. That's why we need an accurate understanding of what Shaul is writing in its correct context. You can take anything out of context and make anything up that you want. As I previously mentioned, that is what appears to be happening by taking Shaul's letters out of their Jewish biblical context. I don't think we want man-made doctrines. We want to know and obey God, not man. It says in Acts 5:29 CJB, "Kefa and the other emissaries answered, 'We must obey God, not men.'"

Here are just a few more thoughts. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be called "least" in the kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew 5:19 CJB Yeshua says, "So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot (commandments) and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven." The commandments that Yeshua had to talking about were the commands in the Torah. There was no New Testament portion at that time. Some say Galatians says the Old Testament scriptures are done away with. They subscribe to the nonsense theology that says you don't have to do what is right to be right before God. As you can see, their theology makes no sense and they have to contrive their theology by taking scriptures out of their Jewish biblical context.

These following verses are very disturbing. Some think that powerful works justify them (or how much they give ...). Yeshua says that keeping the law is important. Perhaps you never considered that no one in Yeshua's time would have accepted a messiah who didn't teach doing what is right (righteousness). The Greek Torah<sup>5</sup> uses the word "nomia" for the Torah. The Greek text says in Matthew 7:23, "Get away from me" those who "anomia," those who don't keep the Torah. The word "anomia" is translated as the word "lawlessness," those who don't keep the Torah. Yeshua says in Matthew 7:22-23 CJB, "In that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'" Those that say the Old Testament scriptures are done away with will be the least in the kingdom of heaven – if they make it at all.

There are many sources that can help us to understand the Bible better. There are figures of speech in the Bible, idioms, customs, and arguments over how the Torah is applied. Also, there is archeology and there are many more sources for understanding the Bible correctly. These are all relevant in our study of the scriptures and Galatians.

For example, here is something from the Hebrew manuscripts of the New Testament manuscripts that can help us to understand the Bible better. It helps us to understand the Jewish biblical context. The Greek manuscripts of the New Testament portion tell us to obey the Rabbis and their myriads of laws. The translation of the Greek text in Matthew 23:1-3 CJB says: "Then Yeshua addressed the crowds and his talmidim: 'The Torah-teachers and the P'rushim,' he said, 'sit in the seat of Moshe. So whatever they tell you, take care to do it.'" Of course, main stream Christianity explains it away (with philosophy) by saying the point is that we should obey God, the Pharisees weren't doing what they were supposed to do. We can read these theologies of the Bible and never truly know what the Bible is saying. That's what's happened with Galatians; a whole false system of theology has been developed.

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek Torah was translated into Greek from the Hebrew in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by 70 rabbis. It is called the Septuagint.

These scriptures in Matthew 23 are actually talking about something called Moses' seat. Archeologists have found seats called Moses' seat.<sup>6</sup> That's where the ancient Rabbis sat and the Greek text tells us to listen to the Rabbis. But, it says in the manuscripts of the Hebrew Matthew that the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, listen to Moses (listen to him). Yeshua actually taught that we should be listening to Moses, namely the Torah. Those who say the Old Testament is done away with contradict Yeshua (Jesus) don't they. Who are we going to believe? Those who form philosophies about the Bible or those who have worked hard to come up with the correct context. Then there are those who use these scriptures in Matthew to say that we should be doing everything the Rabbis tell us to do including the extra laws that the Torah says we are not to keep. Yeshua told us to listen to Moses who said not to add or subtract from the Torah.

Like I said, we can make up anything we want by taking scriptures out of context and that's what people do with Colossians chapter 2. They take scriptures out of context and make up what they want to believe. Shaul (Paul) says, "Watch out, so that no one will take you captive by means of philosophy and empty deceit, following human tradition which accords with the elemental spirits of the world but does not accord with the Messiah;" Colossians 2:8 CJB. Watch out for philosophies and man-made traditions; they are false teachings. That's what happens when we form incorrect meanings for what the Bible is saying without a Jewish biblical context. That's what happens when we take Galatians out of its true context.

Shaul is dealing with a number of issues in Colossians chapter 2 involved with man-made rules involving foods, Jewish holidays (Colossians 2:16), and worshipping angels (Colossians 2:17). Colossians 2:22 CJB says, "Such prohibitions are concerned with things meant to perish by being used [not by being avoided!], and they are based on man-made rules and teachings."

It has nothing to do with not observing the Torah, (the first 5 books of the Bible) as some say. He is not saying that the Sabbath and God's feasts are not to be observed. He is not saying the foods God tells us not to eat no longer apply. Why would that change? If God said that those foods are not good for man to eat back then, they are still not good for us. After all, He is God and we are not. In Colossians chapter 2, Shaul is talking about watching out for the man-made rules involving foods, the Sabbath, and the Jewish festivals, the extra rules. We will see that Shaul is addressing problems with the extra man-made rules in Galatians as well. He is not telling us to not keep God's laws.

After some take these verses in Colossians out of context, they apply them to Galatians and say that Shaul (Paul) is saying the Torah is abolished. That's not what Shaul said in Romans. Romans 3:31 CJB says, "Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah." Aren't we supposed to believe what the Bible says? Kefa says about Shaul's writings, "Things which the uninstructed and unstable distort, to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures;" 2 Peter 3:16 CJB. People distort Shaul's writings and form their own man-made doctrines and they have formed man-made doctrines about his letter to the Galatians.

For example, some people say that the curse Shaul is talking about in Galatians 1:9 is about people who don't believe what their denomination teaches. They may believe that those who aren't from their denomination are cursed. Some think Shaul is talking about someone who does any extra ritual as being cursed ..., but the Bible tells us who is cursed. Deuteronomy 27:26 CJB says, "A curse on anyone who does not confirm the words of this Torah by putting them into practice." So, what was being changed in regards to the Torah (law) back in the first century that was causing Shaul to refer to

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<sup>6</sup> There are many helps to understanding the context including archeology.

this verse? We will find that they were adding extra laws to the Torah that were keeping the Gentiles from becoming believers in the Messiah Yeshua **by a wrong interpretation of the Torah.**

Also, Galatians is not a rant by Shaul against the extra misapplied laws as some say it is. It contains a **number of points** about the **Gentiles** being allowed to become believers and about the problems concerning the **extra misapplied laws.** It also contains **important** teachings about the misapplied laws. It is in no way saying that the Torah (the law) has been done away with. It is an important book of the Bible when understood correctly. I suggest reading this work and memorizing the key points so you can explain what Shaul is really saying.

2 Peter 3:16 talks about those who were uninstructed. What does the uninstructed refer to in 2 Peter 3:16? It probably means those uninstructed in the Torah. Again, **there was no New Testament portion at the time.** Think, what is the context? The Torah is good and produces good works the Bible says. Deuteronomy 4:6-7 CJB says about following the Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible), "Therefore, observe them; and follow them; for then all peoples will see you as having wisdom and understanding." I've heard of people coming to the United States and saying that our nation is messed up. It is probably because we don't follow God the way we are supposed to.

Perhaps one of many scriptures that has caught my attention is in the book of Revelation 2:10 CJB where Yeshua says, "Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Adversary is going to have some of you thrown in prison, in order to put you to the test; and you will face an ordeal for ten days. Remain faithful, even to the point of death; and I will give you life as your crown." If we are **not** made right by what we do then why is it so important to be faithful to the point of death? Yeshua sure got my attention.

Also, Yeshua said, "He who wins the victory will, like them, be dressed in white clothing; and I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life;" Revelation 3:5 CJB. Theology says we won't be blotted out of the book of life; Yeshua said it is possible. I don't think we want to tempt God. Yeshua said, "Do not put ADONAI your God to the test;" Luke 4:13 CJB. Of course, Yeshua's reference was the Old Testament portion. It says in Deuteronomy 6:16 CJB, "Do not put ADONAI your God to the test." Those verses in Revelation were to New Testament believers. Think before you trust people with your eternal life who take the scriptures out of its Jewish biblical context and make up their own theology.

There are many scriptures in the New Testament portion that have to be ignored in order to piece wrong man-made theologies together. It is my hope that more and more we can come to a better understanding of the Bible and the book of Galatians and can be closer to a good God that wants what is best for us and our world. Yeshua identifies Himself as a good shepherd in the book of John (Yochanan) and says. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... No one takes it away from me; on the contrary, I lay it down of my own free will ... My sheep listen to my voice, I recognize them, they follow me, and I give them eternal life." John 10:11, 18, 27 CJB. Will we listen to Yeshua or to man-made philosophies and Bible teaching taken out of their true context? It is our choice. Let's now begin our study on the book of Galatians.

## Summary – Outline

### Background of Letter to Galatians

- Shaul (Paul) writes about Jewish matters.
- Shaul grew up just south of Galatia.
- He was educated in Jerusalem and became one of the chief Jewish leaders there.

- He visits synagogues after he believes in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua (Jesus).
- Some Jews were misapplying the Torah about Gentiles who believed in the Jewish Messiah.
- Since they misapplied the Torah, they were actually Torah breakers.
- Shaul had probably encountered these Torah breakers early on when reaching out to the Gentiles with the message about the messiah.
- Shaul had probably previously communicated with the Galatians about the issues concerning the believing Gentiles (who were no longer idolaters).

### **Understanding Galatians Properly**

- Translations do not tell us what the Jewish biblical issues were.
- The New Testament letters are about Jewish issues involving the Torah and its application.
- Theology is a belief system – it needs a true context to be valid.
- When the Jewish biblical context is not considered it creates numerous interpretations.
- Only a Jewish biblical context will give us the original intended meaning.
- We only have the true meaning within a correct context.
- New Testament believers often misunderstand the Torah.
- God is pleased with those who actually do what is right and not just think they are right.

### **Some Pertinent Issues**

- We want truth and we want to understand the Bible correctly.
- Kefa (Peter) said that those who teach false doctrines will be punished.
- Some distort the scriptures and Shaul's (Paul's) teachings.
- There was no New Testament at the time so the scriptures they referred to was the Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) and the other Old Testament portion scriptures.
- Yeshua (Jesus) said that those who teach others not to obey God's commandments will be least in the kingdom of heaven.
- Yeshua will pronounce judgment on those who did powerful works, but didn't keep God's commandments.
- There are many resources that can help us to understand the Jewish issues in the Bible. For example, the Hebrew manuscripts of the New Testament portion and archeology.
- People can make up whatever they want by taking the scriptures out of context.
- Man-made rules were a problem during the time of Yeshua
- Shaul is misunderstood by people who take his writings out of their Jewish biblical context.
- Shaul said the Torah was not done away with – "Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah;" Romans 3:31 CJB.
- The Bible says the laws in the Torah are a positive witness to the nations.
- Yeshua says in Revelation 2:10 to remain faithful "to the point of death."
- People pick and choose and overlook scriptures and form wrong theologies.
- Yeshua says He is the good shepherd who lays down His life. Will we listen to Him or to man-made teachings that take the Bible out of its context?