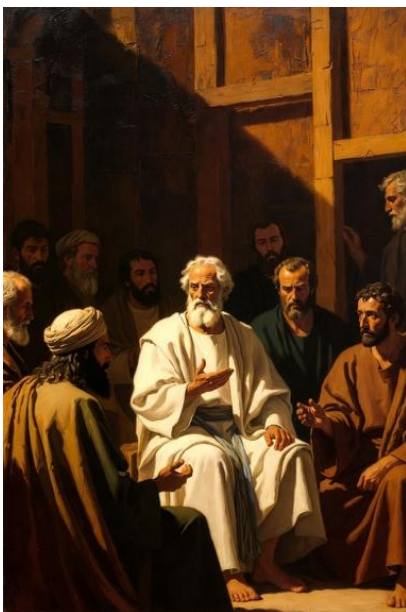


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## Background to the Letter to the Philippians

In his commentary on *Philippians*, R. Sean Emslie starts by saying: **You will receive power when the Ruach Ha’Kodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea, indeed to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)**. With these words, the mission to reach the world with the message of **Yeshua** began. Starting with **Jerusalem and Judea**, the message of **Messiah** spread among **the Jews** of the Land. The earliest Messianic Community was a movement of **Jews**. Then the Good News of **Yeshua** moved to the ends of the earth, and the doors were opened to the **Gentile** world.

The earliest followers of the Messianic **Jewish** faith understood **themselves** as a form of **Judaism**. The **Jewish** scholar Jacob Neusner (*Judaisms* 139) even described such faith as one of the **“Judaisms”** of the Second Temple era. Early on, a debate arose over **Gentiles** coming to faith in **Yeshua** and **their** relationship to **the Torah** and **Jewish** practices, especially **circumcision** for men. This issue of debate in the early Messianic Community became crucial in **Acts 15:1** when men from Judah went to Antioch to teach the **Gentile** believers: **You can’t be saved unless you undergo circumcision in the manner prescribed by Moses**.



This teaching conflicted with Paul and Barnabas' teachings to **Gentiles** and led to an important decision by the early Messianic **Jewish** leadership group, which later became known as **the Jerusalem Counsel** (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Bs - The Council at Jerusalem**). After hearing debate from both sides, **James, Yeshua's** half-brother and the leader of the Messianic Community in Jerusalem, said: **Therefore, my opinion is that we should not put obstacles in the way of the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood (Acts 15:19-20).** **James'** ruling about eliminating **obstacles** such as **circumcision** and substituting less stringent practices resulted in the council's unanimous ruling, which then sent a letter to be read to all the **Gentile** churches declaring that **they** didn't need to convert to Judaism nor undergo male circumcision before becoming full members of the Messianic Community and disciples of **Messiah**.

This ruling supported **two important truths** that can be missed by modern scholars - be they Christian or **Jewish**. **First**, the fact that the Judaizers (see the commentary on **Galatians Ag - Who are the Judaizers?**) taught that **Gentiles** had to become **Jews** before **they** could believe in **Messiah**, as the Hebrew Roots Movement today demands (see the commentary on **Galatians Ak - The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**) is not true. This ruling ended the legalistic burden of observing all 613 mitzvot for all followers of **Yeshua**, both Messianic **Jews** and **Gentiles**. If the Messianic **Jews** themselves had decided to abandon that legalistic observance, it seems pointless, and even cruel, to require **the Gentiles** to do so.

Therefore, for both Messianic **Jews** and **Gentiles**, **the Torah** reveals the heart of **God** in three ways. First, **the Torah** is still a moral guide by revealing sin (**Romans 7:7**). Secondly, we know that **all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16)**. Therefore, **the Torah** can be used as a **teaching** tool to show **ADONAI's** standard of **righteousness**, so that we can know **Him** better and love **Him** more. And thirdly, it can also be used to point others to **Yeshua**. **ADONAI** had told **Abram** that **all the peoples on the earth would be blessed through his** spiritual descendants (**Genesis 12:3b**; also see **Galatians 3:24-25** and **Mt 28:19**). Therefore, you could say **the Torah** is **God's** blueprint for living. The closer we follow **the Torah**, the smoother our life will be. This is true for unbelievers as well. If they unwittingly follow **Torah**, their lives will go much smoother. But for

those who violate the teachings of **the Torah**, your life will collapse into chaos, this is true for both believers and unbelievers.

**Secondly, the Jerusalem Council** asserted that **Gentiles** coming to **Yeshua** could, and should, come to **Him** as **Gentiles**. This is the mystery of the Gospel that through **Yeshua**, the way was open for **the Gentiles** to be grafted into **the Righteous of the TaNaKh**, but remain **Gentiles** (see the commentary on **Dani'el Dx - The Mystery of the Olive Tree**). No longer would **Gentiles** need to convert to **Judaism**. Instead, **Gentiles** could become part of **the people of God, the Jewish people**, as **Gentiles**. The only requirement was faith alone in the crucified and risen **Yeshua**. Together, **they** followed **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, and opened up the message of **ADONAI** to the whole world.<sup>6</sup>