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The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

Galatians 3:11-12

Leviticus 18:5 and Habakkuk 2:4

The righteous shall live by faith DIG: What does it mean that salvation by faith is also seen in the proof texts of Leviticus 18:5 and Habakkuk 2:4? How have believers typically interpreted this passage? What effect did these verses have on Martin Luther? Why did he call Galatians “my Katherine” [the name of his wife]. If upholding the 613 commandments of Moshe was never meant to be a means of salvation, what is its purpose today? What is the high standard of the Torah? What is the only way we can reach that standard?

REFLECT: How were you saved? By faith? How do you live? By faith? What does it mean to live by faith? Being saved by faith is a one-time act, but living by faith is a lifetime undertaking. How are you doing? Since the Torah is a blueprint for living, how are you following the blueprint? How does having the righteousness of Messiah transferred to your spiritual bank account change the way you see yourself?

Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 and Habakkuk 2:4 in a manner consistent with rabbinic interpretation to establish that the righteous shall live by faith.

The Judaizers strongly advocated the necessity of obeying the 613 commandments of Moshe in order to be saved. But here again, simply the sequence of events in the TaNaKh should have shown them the foolishness of that belief. Abraham not only was declared righteous a decade before he was commanded to be circumcised, but more than 500 years before **YHVH** revealed **His Torah** to Moshe at Sinai. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and countless other Jewish believers lived and died long before **the Torah** was given by **God**. Just as the Judaizers and their **Galatian** victims should have known the justification was by **faith** alone and not circumcision, they should have known that it is not by good deeds of the flesh.⁷⁵

It is clear that no one is set right [justified] before God by Torah, for “the righteous shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11CJB; Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 10:38). Habakkuk

2:4 receives prominent attention in a famous passage in the Talmud. In that passage, the sages began by stating that God gave Isra'el 613 commandments by which they could attain eternal life. If a man does them, he will live by them. But since 613 is far too many commandments and far too difficult, King David simplified it, summarizing the 613 in eleven principles expressed in Psalm 51. Eleven is still a lot. That's still too much. So Isaiah simplified it even further, summarizing it in six principles in Isaiah 33:15-16. But six is still a lot to remember. So Micah simplified it to three, when he said: He has told you, humanity, what is good and what ADONAI is seeking from you: Only to (1) practice justice, (2) to love mercy, and (3) to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). But even these three can be imposing, so Isaiah again simplified it, summarizing the entire Torah in two principles: preserve justice, and do righteousness (Isaiah 56:1). That's concise enough, but the Talmud goes on to say, "Then came Habakkuk, and reduced and simplified the whole Torah into one principle, saying: The righteous will live by faith (Makkoth [Stripes] 24a).

By the word live in Habakkuk 2:4, the Talmud means *the olam haba*, and describes a time after the world is perfected under the rulership of Messiah. This term also refers to the afterlife, where the soul passes after death. It can be contrasted with *olam ha-zeh*, meaning *this world* (Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30 and 20:35; Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 6:5; Revelation 20-21). Consequently, the sages and rabbis also used this Habakkuk text as a Messianic passage. The righteous who live by faith are those who have faith in the coming Messiah. This is the passage from which Maimonides, a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential **Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, derived his twelfth article of the Jewish faith: **I believe with a complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, though His [coming may be delayed], nevertheless, I will wait for Him every day.**" For the vision is yet for an appointed time. It hastens to the end and will not fail. If it should be slow in coming, wait for it. For it will surely come - it will not be delayed . . . but the righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:3-4).⁷⁶**

Christian interpreters typically understand this passage to demonstrate the difference between Christianity and Judaism, the difference between a Christian and a Jew, the difference between faith and deeds of the flesh. When **Paul** flatly states: **Torah is not based on faith, he** seems to contrast "those who live by **the Torah**," against "those who live by **faith**." A Jew, therefore, is not a person of faith if he is **Torah** observant, for **the Torah is not based on faith**. As a logical conclusion of this thinking, if you want to have **faith**, the one thing you cannot do is be **Torah** observant.

When Messianic Gentiles tell their friends or relatives in the mainstream Church that they have decided to attend a Messianic synagogue, to observe Shabbat, or eat kosher, their friends and family members often react with alarm and concern. Any perceived observance of **the Torah** causes them to worry because **Torah is not based on faith**. Throughout Christian history, Christians castigated Jewish believers who were **Torah** observant in some fashion (for example, kept the Sabbath on the seventh day or refused to eat unclean meats). The Church considered such Jews insincere converts, backsliders, and not of true **faith**. The Church often made abandonment of **Torah** the litmus test for Jewish believers, a test by which they had to prove the authenticity of their commitment to **Christ** and Christianity. It was as if they were saying, "Now that you are a Christian, you are free from the law. Have a ham sandwich!" When **Paul** said that **Torah is not based on faith**, historical Christianity understood it to mean that **Torah** observance and **faith** are incompatible.

The Christian Church has maintained this standard even for Jewish believers in **Yeshua**. When a Jewish person becomes a believer, he quickly learns that he must no longer practice Judaism or keep **the Torah**. Christian confessions often considered renouncing Torah Judaism as a prerequisite to the life of faith for Jewish believers because the **Torah is not based on faith**.⁷⁷

There is no justification by means of **the Torah**. This is obvious. If no one can uphold the 613 commandments perfectly, no one can be justified by it. This is not only a doctrine found in the B'rit Chadashah, and to prove it **Paul** quotes **Habakkuk** who lived in before the cross: **Behold, the puffed up one - his soul is not right within him. But the righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4)**.

Early in his life Martin Luther was greatly troubled by **Romans 1:17**, where he read: **For in the gospel of righteousness of God is revealed - a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, "The righteous will live by faith."** When he read it, he would ask himself, "What does this mean, that there's this **righteousness** that is **by faith**, and that it is **from first to last**? What does it mean that **the righteous shall live by faith**?" The answer to his own question became the key verse in **Galatians** and later in **Romans**. And so, the lights came on for Luther. And he began to understand that what **Paul** was speaking of here was a **righteousness** that **God**, in **His** grace, was making available to those who would receive it passively, not those who would achieve it actively by good deeds, but that would receive it by **faith**, and by which a person could be reconciled to a holy and righteous **God**. And Luther said, "When I discovered that salvation was **by faith** and not deeds, I was born again of **the Spirit of God**. And the doors of paradise swung open, and I walked through." Many Church historians maintain that the foundation of the Protestant

Reformation was laid with the writing of Martin Luther's commentary on **Galatians**.

The great German reformer said, "The letter to the **Galatians** is my letter. To it I am, as it were, married. **Galatians** is my Katherine [the name of his wife]." It was out of his careful and submissive study of Scripture, especially the book of **Galatians**, that Martin Luther discovered **God's** plan of salvation by grace working through **faith**, a plan unalterably contrary to the thousand-year-old Roman Catholic teaching of salvation by deeds.⁷⁸

Even in the Dispensation of Torah, people were saved strictly on the basis of faith. Upholding the 613 commandments of Moshe was never meant to be a means of salvation; it was a blueprint for living for the Righteous of the TaNaKh who had already had their sins temporarily covered by faith that YHVH would accept their sacrifice.

Torah provided a Levitical sacrificial system that allowed people to deal with their sin. When a Jew felt the pang of sin his conscience, he would take the appropriate sacrifice to **the Tabernacle or Temple** and give it to **the Levitical priest**, who would offer it on **the bronze altar** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fa - Build an Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze**). If the person bringing the sacrifice had **faith** that his sacrifice would indeed cover his sin, then his sin was temporarily atoned for by **the blood** of the sacrifice. However, those who were trying to pile up their good deeds as a means of salvation would be lost. All salvation, no matter what Dispensation, is by **faith** in the blood of a sacrifice. In the Dispensation of Grace, that sacrifice was **the blood of the Lamb, Yeshua Messiah**.⁷⁹

Legalism, or trying to work your way to heaven, is the exact opposite of **faith**. **Verse 11** assumes this, **however, verse 12** proves it. **Torah is not based on faith, but on [a misuse of] the text that says "Anyone who does these things** by merely going through the motions (see the commentary on **Jeremiah, to see link click Cc - False Religion is Worthless**) **will attain life through them"** (3:12 CJB). Legalists say, "No need to **trust God**, just obey the rules!"

One of **Paul's** proof texts is taken from **the Torah: So you are to keep My statutes and My ordinances. The one who does them will live by them. I an ADONAI (Leviticus 18:5). The sages taught that the words the one who does them will live by them means "people may attain the resurrection from the dead and eternal life if they do them."** **James** would later say: **Faith without works is dead (James 2:26b)**. **Paul** stayed in line with the mainstream of Jewish interpretation by explaining **Leviticus 18:5** as saying that, "if a person keeps the commandments, he or she will attain eternal life by them.

Yeshua Himself quoted the same passage to the same effect (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan** for greater detail).

Now a certain Torah-teacher stood up to entrap Yeshua, saying, “Teacher, what should I do to gain eternal life?” Then Yeshua said to him: **What has been written in the Torah? How would you read it?** And he replied, “You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind . . . and your neighbor as yourself.” Yeshua said to him: **You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live (Luke 10:25-28).** So, Paul is not pitting **faith** against **Torah** observance. He is saying **faith** and **faithfulness** are two sides of the same coin: **faith** and obedience. **Paul is not saying that keeping God’s commandments is the opposite of faith, he is saying that keeping God’s commandments is the evidence of faith.**⁸⁰

But legalism - that is, legalistic obedience to the commands of **the Torah** - is disobedience to **the Torah**. One could be obeying every single mitzvah (except, of course, the mitzvah of **faith**), but if these things are being done without the sincere **trust** in the **God** who sent **His Son Yeshua** to be the payment for sin, then all of the outward “obedience” is **hateful** to **ADONAI (Isaiah 1:14a)**.⁸¹ Those who think they can work their way to heaven do not receive the blessings of **faith**, but receive **a curse**. Because **without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)**.

The Torah itself marks the danger of trying to live up to its standard, which is perfection. Pointing to the same truth in the Sermon on the Mount, **Yeshua** destroyed the very foundation of legalism in the Judaism of **His** day. Because **YHVH’s** standard is perfection. He said: **Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48)**. And **Messiah** had already made it clear that **Ha’Shem’s** standard of perfection is inner virtue and perfection, not simply outwardly respectable behavior. To those who had piously said they had never committed murder, He said: **Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca’ shall be subject to the [Great Sanhedrin]; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be subject to fiery Gehenna (Matthew 5: 22)**. And to those who claimed they had never committed adultery, He said: **But I tell you that everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28)**.

Whether reading **Leviticus** or **Habakkuk**, the message is the same: perfection allows no exceptions, no failure, no matter how small. Failure to obey just **one** of the 613 commandments of **the Torah**, is to break **them all**. **For whoever keeps the whole Torah,**

but stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all (James 2:10). No wonder **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** inspired **Paul** to write that **no human, on the basis of Torah observance, will be set right [justified] in His sight (Romans 3:20a).**

A ship that is moored to a dock by a chain is only as secure as the weakest link in that chain. If a severe storm comes and causes even one link to break, the entire ship breaks away. So it is for those who try to come to **God** by their own perfection. They will be lost and forever wrecked.⁸²

*Is there a weak link to the chain that anchors the ship of **your soul**? If your chain's links include works/obedience-then that link is weak and will break. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship - created in Messiah Yeshua for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so we might walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10).** Is your chain secure in the work of **Messiah Yeshua**? Is so then you are securely anchored. **We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of order of Melchizedek."** (Hebrews 6:19-20_{NIV}). Let us half firmly to our faith in **Yeshua**, which is a secure chain that no power, nor storm of life can break. **Therefore, since we have a great Cohen Gadol who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua Ben-Elohim, let us hold firmly to our confessed allegiance. (Hebrew 4:14).***