

Study Companion

Did Paul Teach Against Torah?

Works of the Law, Under the Law, the Curse, Circumcision - and the Apostle Everyone Thinks They Know

A printable companion for testing Paul in context: Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Greek vocabulary, Second Temple background, and the New Covenant.

Use this packet with your Bible open. Read the paragraph before the proof text. Record what Paul actually says before choosing an interpretation. Keep the hard passages on the table.

THE STUDY RULE

Never let one sentence from Paul cancel another sentence from Paul.

Don't take my word for it - Open your Bible.

OPENYOURBIBLE.ORG

BEFORE YOU STUDY

Start With Your Current Paul

Do not edit your starting position yet. Record it honestly, then return after the study.

When Paul says “law,” what do you normally assume he means?

What passage makes you think Paul was either for or against Torah?

What do you think “not under law” means?

What do you think “works of the law” means?

What do you believe changed because of Yeshua and the New Covenant?

READING DISCIPLINE

For every difficult Pauline statement ask: Which law? What problem? Who is being addressed? Jew or Gentile? Justification or obedience? Covenant status or moral conduct? Condemnation or instruction?

The Rumor About Paul

READ: Acts 21:17-26; Acts 24:10-16; Acts 25:7-8

Acts gives us our exact question. Paul is accused of teaching diaspora Jews to forsake Moses, stop circumcising their children, and stop walking according to ancestral customs. James and the elders propose a public demonstration so people will know the report is false.

What exactly is the rumor in Acts 21:21?

What does James say the public action will demonstrate about Paul in Acts 21:24?

What does Paul affirm about the Torah and Prophets in Acts 24:14?

What offense does Paul deny in Acts 25:8?

EVIDENCE CHECK

Acts does not prove every detail of Paul's Torah theology. But it does require us to distinguish Paul's actual teaching from the accusation that he simply taught Jews to abandon Moses.

Paul's Positive Torah Statements

READ: Romans 3:31; Romans 7:7-14; Romans 8:3-4; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 1 Timothy 1:8

PASSAGE	OBSERVATION
Romans 3:31	Faith does not nullify the law; it establishes/upholds it.
Romans 7:12	The law is holy; the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.
Romans 7:14	The law is spiritual.
Romans 8:4	The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in Spirit-walkers.
Romans 13:8-10	Love fulfills commandments Paul explicitly quotes from Torah.
1 Cor. 7:19	Keeping God's commandments is what matters.
1 Tim. 1:8	The law is good if used lawfully.

What interpretation of Paul must account for all of these statements?

GREEK WORD STUDY

Nomos: “Law” Is Not a One-Word Shortcut

νόμος — nomos

Paul can use nomos for Mosaic Torah, Scripture, a legal norm, or a governing principle. Romans itself speaks of the law of God, law of sin, law of the mind, and law of the Spirit of life. Context must identify the referent.

COMPARE: Romans 3:31; Romans 7:22-23; Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 9:20-21

In Romans 3:31, what “law” is Paul discussing?

In Romans 7:23, is “law of sin” identical to Mosaic Torah?

In Romans 8:2, what two “laws” are contrasted?

In 1 Corinthians 9:21, does Paul describe himself as outside God’s law?

WORD-STUDY RULE

A Strong’s number or dictionary gloss does not decide the argument. Lexicons give range. Sentence, paragraph, letter, and historical setting determine meaning.

WORKS OF THE LAW

Erga Nomou and Ma'ase ha-Torah

ἔργα νόμου — erga nomou

מעשי התורה — ma'ase ha-Torah

READ: Galatians 2:1-21; Romans 3:19-31

Traditional Protestant readings often hear “works of the law” broadly as law-keeping treated as a basis of justification. New Perspective readings often emphasize Torah practices functioning within Jewish covenant identity and Jew-Gentile disputes. 4QMMT shows that “works of Torah” language existed in Second Temple Jewish halakhic discourse. It is evidence for historical vocabulary, not a magic decoder ring.

What events immediately surround “works of the law” in Galatians 2?

What role do circumcision and Jew-Gentile table fellowship play?

What does Paul say cannot be achieved by works of law?

What does the 4QMMT parallel help establish - and what does it NOT prove?

KEEP BOTH QUESTIONS

Is Paul rejecting obedience to Yehovah? Or is he rejecting Torah works as the basis of justification and/or the gate through which Gentiles must enter Jewish covenant identity? Test the entire chapter.

CIRCUMCISION

Titus vs. Timothy

COMPARE: Galatians 2:3-5; Acts 16:1-5; Galatians 5:1-6; 1 Corinthians 7:17-20

TITUS

Greek Gentile. Not compelled to be circumcised during a gospel dispute over Gentile status and compulsion.

TIMOTHY

Jewish mother, Greek father. Paul circumcises him in connection with mission among Jewish communities.

Why does Paul refuse circumcision for Titus?

Why does Paul circumcise Timothy?

What does Galatians 5:4 say is the issue when circumcision is tied to justification?

How does 1 Corinthians 7:19 complicate the claim "Paul opposed circumcision because commandments no longer matter"?

CONTEXT MATTERS

Paul's circumcision decisions force us to ask why, for whom, and what the act is being made to mean.

UNDER THE LAW

Romans 6-8: Under Law, Under Grace, Under Sin

READ: Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-14; Romans 8:1-8

What question opens Romans 6?

Immediately after “not under law but under grace,” what does Paul ask in Romans 6:15?

What conclusion does Paul explicitly reject?

In Romans 7, what does Paul say about Torah itself?

In Romans 8, what was weakened - Torah, or human flesh?

What does the Spirit produce according to Romans 8:4?

INTERPRETIVE BOUNDARY

Whatever “not under law” means, Paul himself says it does not mean permission to sin. His negative statements about one relationship to law must coexist with his positive statements about Torah itself.

GALATIANS 3

The Curse of the Law

READ: Galatians 3:1-14; Deuteronomy 27:26; Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Does Paul say “the law is a curse,” or does he speak of “the curse of the law”?

According to Deuteronomy 27:26, who comes under covenant curse?

What does Messiah redeem us from in Galatians 3:13?

Why does Paul immediately connect this with Abraham’s blessing reaching the Gentiles?

DO NOT COLLAPSE THE CATEGORIES

Torah, transgression, covenant curse, condemnation, and Messiah’s redemptive work are related - but they are not interchangeable nouns.

MY CURRENT READING

Paidagōgos and Telos

παιδαγωγός — paidagōgos

Ancient household guardian/custodian during a child's minority - not simply a modern classroom teacher.

READ: Galatians 3:15-29

What temporary/custodial role does Paul assign to the paidagōgos?

What changes when maturity / faith in Messiah arrives?

τέλος — telos

Can carry the sense of end, goal, outcome, or culmination depending on context.

READ: Romans 9:30-10:13

What is Paul's larger argument about righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:13?

Does telos automatically mean "abolition," or must context decide?

Which reading of Romans 10:4 best explains Paul without contradicting Romans 3:31 and Romans 7:12?

Ephesians 2: What Was Abolished?

READ: Ephesians 2:11-22

Paul uses strong language about “the law of commandments in decrees/ordinances” and about abolishing/rendering inoperative. The immediate argument is Jew-Gentile alienation, hostility, and the creation of one new humanity in Messiah.

What were Gentiles formerly alienated from?

What brings those who were far off near?

What is Messiah creating from Jew and Gentile?

What is being killed according to the paragraph?

TEST BOTH READINGS

Reading A: Mosaic law as covenant boundary is rendered inoperative. What supports this?

Reading B: divisive/condemning legal barrier is abolished without abolishing Yehovah's moral instruction. What supports this?

NO SHORTCUT

A Torah-continuity reading must respect the strong abolition language. A Torah-abolition reading must still explain Paul's continuing appeal to God's commandments and Torah ethics.

What Was Nailed to the Cross?

χειρόγραφον — cheirographon

A handwritten record, bond, or certificate of indebtedness; Paul does not use *nomos* as the noun for what is nailed to the cross.

READ: Colossians 2:8-23

What does Paul say was canceled / removed / nailed to the cross in verse 14?

How is a record of debt related to transgression without being identical to Torah itself?

What subjects appear in verses 16-23 besides biblical food and sacred times?

What role do asceticism, human commands, and “do not handle/taste/touch” play in the chapter?

CATEGORY CHECK

Forgiveness of legal debt is not automatically the same claim as abolition of the standard that exposed the debt. Keep the nouns distinct.

Second Corinthians 3 With Romans 7

COMPARE: 2 Corinthians 3; Romans 7:7-14

What severe phrases does Paul use for the old-covenant ministry in 2 Corinthians 3?

Does Paul say that ministry had no glory?

How does he describe the commandment itself in Romans 7?

Who/what does Romans 7 identify as producing death through the good commandment?

How can “ministry of death/condemnation” and “holy, righteous, good, spiritual” both be true?

USE OUR NEW COVENANT STUDY

Torah as Yehovah's instruction and the Sinai covenantal ministry are related but not identical categories. Messiah brings genuine covenant transition without requiring Paul to call Yehovah's commandment evil.

Make Paul Explain Paul

Do not fill only the column you prefer. Every interpretation must account for all four boxes.

PAUL'S POSITIVE TORAH STATEMENTS Rom. 3:31; 7:12,14; 8:4; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 7:19; 1 Tim. 1:8 What do these establish? _____ _____ _____ CONTEXT OF THE HARD TEXTS Justification? Circumcision? Jew/Gentile? Condemnation? Old covenant? Human rules? Write the context before the conclusion: _____ _____ _____	NEGATIVE-SOUNDING STATEMENTS Works of law; not under law; released from law; curse; paidagōgos; telos; Eph. 2; 2 Cor. 3 List the hardest texts: _____ _____ _____ WHAT STILL REQUIRES INTERPRETATION Gal. 3-4; Rom. 7; Rom. 10:4; Eph. 2; 2 Cor. 3 What questions remain? _____ _____ _____
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TEST THE CLAIMS

Do the Slogans Survive Context?

CLAIM	TEST TEXT	SURVIVES?
"Paul taught Torah is sinful."	Romans 7:7-14	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Faith abolished the law."	Romans 3:31	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Not under law means sin no longer matters."	Romans 6:14-15	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Paul said Torah itself is a curse."	Galatians 3 + Deut. 27:26	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Paul opposed circumcision."	Gal. 2; Acts 16; 1 Cor. 7:19	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Torah was our schoolteacher and Yeshua fired the teacher."	Gal. 3 + paidagōgos	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Christ is the end of the law, so Torah ended."	Romans 9:30-10:13 + telos	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"The law was nailed to the cross."	Col. 2:14 + cheirographon	Yes / No / Needs qualification
"Paul taught Jews to abandon Moses."	Acts 21; 24; 25	Yes / No / Needs qualification

Which slogan changed the most for you after reading its context?

MY CONCLUSION

What Was Paul Actually Opposing?

Use Scripture references, not just labels. Several answers may be true in different passages.

Torah itself?

Evidence: _____

Torah used as a basis for earning justification?

Evidence: _____

Boasting in covenant status?

Evidence: _____

Requiring Gentiles to become Jews for covenant inclusion?

Evidence: _____

Circumcision imposed as a justification requirement?

Evidence: _____

Sin/flesh exploiting a good commandment?

Evidence: _____

The condemning function of the old covenant?

Evidence: _____

Human ascetic regulations?

Evidence: _____

Jew-Gentile hostility?

Evidence: _____

MY ANSWER: DID PAUL TEACH AGAINST TORAH?

AFTER THE STUDY

A Safer Paul-and-Torah Checklist

- ☐ Which passage am I reading - and what is the whole paragraph about?
- ☐ What does nomos refer to here?
- ☐ Is Paul addressing Jew, Gentile, or a mixed assembly?
- ☐ Is the issue justification, obedience, covenant membership, condemnation, or human regulation?
- ☐ If circumcision appears, what is it being made to mean?
- ☐ Am I assuming “works of law” means all obedience without showing it from context?
- ☐ Am I changing “curse of the law” into “law is a curse”?
- ☐ Am I treating telos as “abolition” before reading Romans 9-10?
- ☐ Am I calling cheirographon “Torah” when Paul used a different noun?
- ☐ Does my reading explain Romans 3:31, Romans 7:12-14, and 1 Corinthians 7:19?
- ☐ Does my Torah-continuity reading also respect genuine New Covenant change?
- ☐ Does the proposed Paul contradict Paul? If yes, keep turning pages.

ONE SENTENCE I WANT TO REMEMBER

FINAL GUARDRAIL

Paul is not Torah as Savior, Torah as boasting, or Torah used to exclude believing Gentiles. But neither is Paul grace as lawlessness. Keep Messiah, the New Covenant, Spirit-led righteousness, and Paul's own positive Torah statements on the same page.

NOTES

Keep Turning Pages

Use this page for cross-references, Greek/Hebrew notes, questions for further study, or passages you want to revisit.

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