

Romans 7:1-12

From the book "Take Hold" by Ariel, and D'vorah Berkowitz

"Or don't you know, brothers (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man for as long as he lives? For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband lives, she is joined to another man, she would be called an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you would be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring forth fruit to death. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! However, I wouldn't have known sin, except through the law. For I wouldn't have known coveting, unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding occasion through the mitzvah, produced in me all kinds of coveting. For apart from the law, sin is dead. I was alive apart from the law once, but when the mitzvah came, sin revived, and I died. The mitzvah, which was for life, this I found to be for death; for sin, finding occasion through the mitzvah, deceived me, and through it killed me. Therefore the law indeed is holy, and the mitzvah holy, and righteous, and good."

At first glance this seems like a very devastating passage for those believers who desire to live by the Torah. After all, does it not say, "you were also made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah?"

Indeed, this is a tricky passage. Keeping in mind two things will help to open this passage for us in a more accurate way. First, as always, notice the context. These verses fall in the larger context of Romans 5-8. In this section of Romans, the rabbi from Tarsus is discussing some of the practical effects of being justified by grace through faith. As we stated in the previous verse, one of these effects is that a believer in Yeshua now has a completely different relationship to sin that he had before. He has died to sin and sin is no longer his master.

Second, verses 10-12 provide us with an insight into what Sha'ul really thought of the Torah. As we can readily see from those verses, the Torah was not the problem. Sin was the real culprit in man. Let us see how this unfolds from the passage. In 7:1-2, it becomes clear that before we trusted in Messiah, our problem was not the

Torah, but sin! Sin is that which wrecked havoc with our lives. One of the miracles of the new birth (passage is pointing out) is that a believer does not relate to sin the same way any longer. Consequently, Sha'ul says in verse 11, "for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment deceived me, and through it killed me." Sin, not Torah was the problem.

Hence, when the Messiah comes into our lives we are released from our bondage to sin and any legalistic relationship we may have previously had with God's teaching. That is what Sha'ul (Paul) means in verse 4 when he says that we are made to die to the law. Before, we related to the Torah in a legalistic way. The only thing the Torah could do for us in those circumstances was to condemn us by revealing our sin to us. That relationship to both the Torah and sin had to change.

Thank God that in Messiah it did change! As far as sin is concerned, it was circumcised from us and relegated to our flesh (7:17, Colossians 2:11-13). As far as the Torah is concerned, once our relationship to sin was changed through our becoming a new creation, the real value of the Torah for the believer began to come to light. Accordingly, Sha'ul (Paul) says several very positive things about the Torah in verses 10-12.

God's intention that the Torah would be real life for His people can now become fulfilled. It was our own sin that caused the life of the Torah to become death in us. Now in Messiah, God's real intention for the Torah can be fulfilled in us.

God's Torah is holy. There is nothing about it that needs to be avoided. It is not evil. It is not unhealthy for God's people. In fact the scriptures themselves clearly declare, "These words are not just idle words for you, they are your life" (Deuteronomy 32:47). It is a covenant and a set of instructions making clear to God's people how to live out their new creation lives in the righteousness of God.

God's Torah is good. The Greek word translated "good" is *agathēi*. It stresses both external and moral goodness, and usefulness and perfection. It can also be rendered "useful". In other words, far from the Torah being a detriment to the believer's life, it is useful and helpful to follow for our spiritual, moral, and ethical well-being.

The Torah is righteous. It is the teaching about God's righteousness. Moreover, being intrinsically righteous, it was meant only for those whom God has made righteous by His grace. It is not a vehicle to attain righteousness; rather it is a book of instruction revealing what God's righteousness looks like and how to live out the righteousness which we now have become in Messiah.