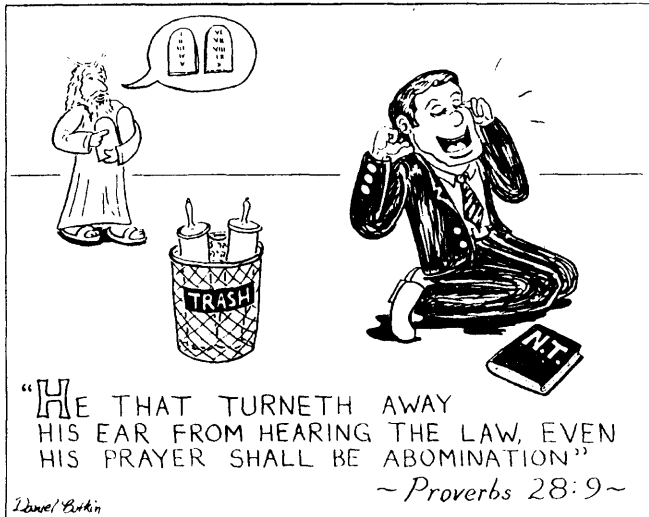


# TORAH: MISHPATIM, EDOT, CHUKIM

Daniel Botkin



Torah, usually translated into English as "Law," is a subject of vital importance for those who would worship the God of the Bible, as the above-quoted verse from Proverbs so strongly points out. Unfortunately, most Christians have only a superficial understanding of what Torah is, and a lack of appreciation for this God-given gift.

David Stern, in his book *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, refers to the study and understanding of Torah as "Christian theology's greatest deficiency." To demonstrate his point, Stern compares the amounts of pages various Jewish and Christian writers give to the subject of God's Law in their books of systematic theology. The three Jewish commentators Stern checked devoted 15%, 20%, and 22% of their pages to explaining the meaning of Torah, while the Christian commentators devoted only 3%, one half %, and one fourth% of their space to the subject.

Stern admits that these figures provide only "a rough measure," but my own twenty-plus years of study and experience tells me that Stern is quite accurate in his conclusion when he writes "One is forced to the conclusion that the topic interests Jews and not Christians."<sup>1</sup>

I happen to be a Christian who does have an interest in the topic. I do not consider myself an expert on the Torah, but I have given the subject a considerable amount of study, prayer, and thought over the years. The purpose of this article is to give readers a general understanding of the basic elements of Torah, and thereby help in a small way to remedy "Christian theology's greatest deficiency."

When trying to understand a broad subject like Torah, it often helps to first break the subject down into its major components. Fortunately, the Bible does this for us very clearly in Deut.4:44f: "And this is the Law (Torah) which Moses set before the children of Israel. These are the testimonies (edot) and the statutes (chukim) and the judgments (mishpatim) which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt."

From this we can see that the commandments of the Torah fall into three major categories: edot, chukim, and mishpatim.

The commandments referred to as mishpatim are the moral, ethical commandments we call "judgments." These laws require no explanation or justification — the need for laws against murder, rape, robbery, etc. is self-evident to anyone with good "judgment." The Septuagint uses the Greek word *krimata* in Deut.4:45, a word that carries with it the idea of condemnation and punishment. Disobeying the mishpatim usually results in some form of condemnation and punishment, whether by a human court or by Divine retribution.

The edot are feast days and other rituals that testify to some important spiritual truth. Edot can be translated "testimonies" or "witnesses," as the Septuagint demonstrates by using the Greek word *marturia*. Readers of the KJV can see the word used in its singular form in Joshua 22:34: "And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: for it shall be a witness between us that the Lord is God." The edot are important because they remind us of God's presence, God's faithfulness, God's holiness, and the privileges and duties we have as His children. Obeying the edot strengthens and reinforces the spiritual realities which they represent.

The reasons for the edot are always stated; the reasons for the mishpatim are always obvious. The reasons for the commandments known as chukim, however, are neither stated nor obvious. Chukim are commandments such as "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and a donkey together" or "Thou shalt not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together" (Deut.22:10f).

Why these acts are forbidden is not stated; the commandments are simply given with no explanation. God, for reasons known only to Himself, decided to require men to follow certain regulations. This is evident in the Septuagint's translation of chukim as *dikaomata* ("decision, requirement, regulation"). The chukim are commandments that are "prescribed" or "appointed" for reasons known only to the Lord.

Some people speculate about why the Lord gave certain chukim. For example, many believe that the dietary laws were given for reasons of health, and this may very well be true. However, when the Bible does not state the reason for a commandment (as it does for the edot) and the reason is not obvious (as it is for the mishpatim), we must accept such laws as chukim.

Most decent people accept the mishpatim as good laws that ought to be obeyed by everyone. Most religious Jews and Christians see the importance of the edot for believers (although the only edot practiced by many Christians are baptism and the Lord's Supper). But both Jews and Christians stumble over the chukim. Aryeh Kaplan, a Jewish writer, admits that even for Jews, the chukim are "the most difficult to keep." Kaplan gives a good explanation of why this is so:

"If we do not understand the reason for some-

thing, it is tempting to find excuses not to do it. When we try to explain our religion to non-Jews, the laws that do not have an obvious reason are the most difficult to justify. If a person is unsure of himself or is wavering in his Judaism, these laws will be the first to be abandoned."<sup>2</sup>

The terms "non-Christians/Christianity" can be substituted for "non-Jews/Judaism" to make the above paragraph relevant to Christians.

How often have we heard people respond to the chukim, or even to the edot, with remarks like "Why would God care about this?" or "Why doesn't He want us to do that?" or "This doesn't seem important to me. Surely the Lord doesn't care about it!"

Christians often dismiss the chukim by saying, "Only the moral laws are important now. Now that we have the Holy Spirit, we don't need to do those other things anymore." Ironically, the Bible says that one reason for the giving of the Holy Spirit is to enable God's people to keep the chukim as well as the mishpatim:

"And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes (chukim), and you shall keep My judgments (mishpatim), and do them" (Ezk.36:27).

And again it is written:

"And I will put a new spirit within them...that they may walk in My statutes (chukim) and keep My ordinances (mishpatim), and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God" (Ezk.11:19f).

Pentecostals often speak of having the Holy Spirit "with evidence of speaking in other tongues." Maybe it's time to talk about having the Holy Spirit "with evidence of walking in the chukim."

For centuries Christian theologians have used Christianity's rejection of the chukim and edot to justify the Church's changing of the Biblical seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday observance. The need for a regular day for rest and worship was viewed by Christians as a mishpat. The part of the commandment that specifies the seventh day as the Sabbath, however, was viewed as a "ceremonial law" which could be abandoned or altered.

Chrysostom, from whose pen flowed both sweet praises to God and bitter anti-Semitism against the Jews, said that the Sabbath commandment teaches that "among the days of the week one must be singled out and wholly devoted to the service of spiritual things."<sup>3</sup> It is no longer "the seventh day," but any day of the week. According to Chrysostom, then, man can single out a day for rest and worship other than the day written on the tablets with the finger of God.

In the 13th Century, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa theologiae*, wrote that "the precept of the Sabbath observance is moral...in so far as it commands man to give some time to the things of God...but it is a ceremonial precept...as to the fixing of the time."<sup>4</sup>

For Aquinas, the laws of God that he believed could be discovered by human reason are moral and binding; the laws that require Divine revelation are not. Hebraically speaking, we could say that Aquinas accepted the mishpatim but rejected the edot and chukim. The moral laws, Aquinas said, are grounded on "natural law," i.e., they can be discovered by natural human reason without any Divine revelation.

The flaw in Aquinas' theology lies in the fact that human nature is fallen and sinful, and "the

natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor.2:14). The Torah does not have its origin in natural human reason; it comes by Divine revelation.

The influence of Aquinas' unscriptural elevation of natural law above the chukim and edot can be seen in the theology of later Christians. Luther rejected the seventh-day Sabbath because "it is not supported by the natural law."<sup>5</sup> Melancthon insisted on a day to replace the seventh-day Sabbath because it is "moral and natural" to have a fixed day for worship.<sup>6</sup> The Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) dismisses the seventh-day Sabbath because it is not "a principle of the natural law," but accepts the other nine of the Ten Commandments because the Nine Commandments "belong to the natural law, and are perpetual and unalterable...because they agree with the law of nature."<sup>7</sup>

By whose authority do we use "natural law" to determine whether or not a command in the Bible should be obeyed? Do we obey the commandments because they "make sense" to the natural man without the aid of Divine revelation? Or do we obey them because they were commanded by our Heavenly Father, who happens to be the Supreme Ruler of the universe? Both Christians and Jews should hearken to Kaplan's comments about the chukim:

"The fact that a commandment does not have an obvious reason makes its observance all the more an act of faith. It indicates that we are ready and willing to obey God's commandments, even when we cannot justify them with logic. It shows that we are placing God above our own intellect...We do not observe the commandments because logic demands it, but simply because they were given by God. The required basis is the relationship between the commandments and their Giver. This is higher than any human wisdom."<sup>8</sup>

Yes, some of God's commandments seem foolish, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Cor.1:25). Let us manifest the wisdom of God to the world by our obedience to the mishpatim, the edot, and the chukim, and show the world that we believe our Heavenly Father knew what He was doing when He gave the Torah.

1 David H.Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988), 125f.

2 Aryeh Kaplan, *Waters of Eden* (New York: National Conference of Synagogue Youth/Orthodox Union, 1982), 8.

3 Chrysostom, *Homilia* 10, 7 In *Genesim*, PG 53, 89.

4 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II, Q.122, 4.

5 Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther's Works, 1958, 40:93.

6 Melancthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, *Loci Communes* 1555, Clyde L.Manschreck, ed.and trans., 1965, 96f.

7 Catechism of the Council of Trent, J.Donovan, trans., 1908, 342.

8 Kaplan, 8f.

# "HONEY, I SHRUNK THE SCRIPTURES"

Daniel Botkin

In 1990 a Christian friend, knowing that my view of Paul's writings was different from that of most other Bible believers, referred me to an article in *Christianity Today*. The title of the article was "The Misunderstood Apostle," and the subheading declared that "A revolution in New Testament studies has challenged traditional understandings of Paul's critique of Judaism."

According to the writer of the article, this "revolution" began in 1977 with the publication of E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, a work the scholarly world now considers "a landmark in Pauline studies."<sup>1</sup> This lengthy volume was followed by a shorter book by the same author, entitled *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* in 1983.

Two other theologians' works were mentioned in the *Christianity Today* article, but neither received as much space or praise as Sanders did. Since E.P. Sanders seemed to be Christianity's top expert on Paul, I decided I should read what he had to say. I thought perhaps he would have a more correct way than I did to explain Paul's seemingly contradictory statements about the Law (viz., "The Law is good" versus "The Law is bad").

I obtained *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* and waded through hundreds of pages, taking notes along the way. I gleaned some knowledge from this book, but the real eye-opener for me was Sanders' shorter book, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. I totally disagree with the author's solution for reconciling Paul's positive and negative statements about the Law, but the book opened my eyes to some things.

First, I learned from Sanders' introduction that theologians have long struggled with Paul's theology of the Law. According to Sanders, the subject "has been discussed by numerous scholars in great detail" and "all the scholarly labor that has been spent on it has resulted in no consensus."<sup>2</sup> Sanders writes that "one should be able, by using the normal tools of exegesis, to determine precisely what he [Paul] thought...Yet the search for what he 'really meant' goes on."<sup>3</sup> It was refreshing for me to discover that theologians have long realized that what Paul taught about the Law is not as clear-cut or simplistic as most Christians think it is.

Another significant fact I learned from Sanders' book was that many Christian theologians, far more educated and experienced than I, have come to the same basic conclusion about Paul's theology of the Law as I have. I have explained the seeming contradiction between Paul's praising and practicing of the Law on the one hand, and his apparent condemning of it on the other hand, by saying that he condemned only man's misuse and perverting of the Law. Obeying the Law for the purpose of establishing one's own righteousness is to be condemned; obeying the Law as a result of having been made righteous by faith in the Messiah is to be expected and praised.

Sanders quotes various scholars whose explanations

show that they have arrived at the same basic conclusion:

Hans Hubner explains Romans 10:4 ("Christ is the end of the Law") by saying that "Christ is the end of the *fleshly misuse* of the law."<sup>4</sup> (Italics mine.)

Rudolf Bultmann writes, "Christ is the end of the Law so far as it claimed to be the way to salvation or was understood by man as the means to establishing 'his own righteousness,' *for so far as it contains God's demand, it retains its validity*."<sup>5</sup> (Italics Bultmann's.)

Ernst Kasemann states it this way: "The obedience of faith abrogates the law as a mediator of salvation, sees through the perversion of understanding it as a principle of achievement, and in eschatological retrospect restores to the divine gift [i.e., the Law] the character of the original will of God."<sup>6</sup>

Herman Ridderbos says that works of the Law are good "where meritoriousness is not in question."<sup>7</sup>

In J.A.T. Robinson's view, "the law is constantly regarded from two viewpoints, as the will of God and as a way to salvation."<sup>8</sup>

Heikki Raisanen tells us that "the common explanation [is] that Paul rejects the law as a way of salvation but retains it as an expression of God's will."<sup>9</sup>

Sanders says that "this general view [the view of the above-quoted theologians] is very common."<sup>10</sup> He further states, "Many have seen the 'end of the law'...as meaning that one dies to the law as *a system of salvation*. It is only *that* aspect of the law which has come to an end since Christ."<sup>11</sup> (Italics mine.)

I find it both comforting and disturbing that "many" theologians have seen that Paul taught that it is only man's perverted misuse of the Law which the Christian is to shun, and not the Law itself. It is reassuring to know that my theological conclusion is the same as that arrived at by theologians with far more knowledge of the Scriptures, their historical background, and the Greek language than I possess.

What disturbs me, however, is the practical implication of this theological conclusion. If, indeed, the Law is good "where meritoriousness is not in question" (Ridderbos) and if it "contains God's demand" (Bultmann) and tells us "the will of God" (Robinson), and if faith in the Messiah restores to the Law "the character of the original will of God" (Kasemann) so the Law is now "an expression of God's will" (Raisanen), then it is important to carry all this to its logical conclusion, namely, that believers in the Messiah should still be following the commandments of the Law, including the Sabbath, holy days, dietary laws, and other miscellaneous commandments that are ignored by the vast majority of Christians. If the commandments of the Law still retain validity as an expression of God's will for those justified by faith, then the only option for a New Covenant believer who wants to do the will of God is to begin putting these neglected commandments into practice.

When I hear the vast majority of Christendom

conveniently label the neglected commandments "Jewish," "obsolete," or "nullified," I cannot help but wonder how many of the "many" theologians who have seen that the Law is still a valid expression of God's will ("where meritoriousness is not in question") have acted upon it. If the theologians would teach their seminary students that even the neglected commandments are important, and if the seminary graduates taught it from the pulpit, Christian worship would certainly undergo some radical changes.

The only alternative to the above scenario is to come up with some other explanation of Paul's theology of the Law. This is exactly what E.P. Sanders does in *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. Although I totally disagree with Sanders' alternative explanation, I must say to his credit that he, at least, appears to have thought through to the aforementioned practical implications of the other theological position, unlike the theologians themselves.

Sanders agrees that Paul expected Christians to keep the Law. But Sanders qualifies this statement by saying that Paul imposed a "reduced law" for New Covenant believers (103). The law Paul prescribed for Christian behavior, Sanders says, is the written Torah, but a Torah from which Paul deleted circumcision, Sabbath, holy days, and food laws (101f). Sanders admits that "Paul offered no theoretical basis for this de facto reduction of the law," (101), and he "offered no rationale for his de facto limitations" (103). "We can say that he meant a *reduced* law," Sanders writes, "...only because we can observe the ways in which he reduced it" (103).

Sanders is very aware of the fact (and even points it out) that the elements of Torah which he believes Paul "deleted" were the very elements of Judaism "which drew criticism and ridicule from pagan authors" (102). Sanders writes, "I do not wish to propose that Paul consciously deleted from the law which Christians are to keep the elements which were most offensive to pagan society on purely practical grounds, so that pagans would find it relatively easy to convert" (102).

According to Sanders, Paul's reduction of the Torah was the natural and necessary outcome of Paul's putting into practice his two convictions: 1) Jew and Gentile are to be saved on the same basis; 2) Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (102). I personally do not see why holding these two convictions requires the deletion of commandments which draw ridicule and scorn from pagans.

On the last page of his concluding chapter about Paul and the Law, Sanders asks a question that all thinking Christians should ask themselves: "How could a Jew of Paul's antecedents, while still viewing Scripture as Scripture, and quoting it to show God's plan and intention, say that some of its commands are optional?" (162)

Here is Sanders' answer to this question:

"Though I wince at the possible anachronism of the phrase, I think that Paul had found a canon within the canon. He did not formulate it, and I doubt that he consciously reflected on it. We perceive it in operation. It is this: those parts of the Scripture which mention faith, righteousness, Gentiles, and love are in,

as are those which accuse Israel of disobedience; parts which disagree with this interior canon, particularly the point about the Gentiles, whether explicitly or by implication, do not count." (162)

In effect, this is saying that Paul did not really believe in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, except for those parts which served his purpose. Sanders is telling us that Paul actually shrunk the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures by deleting commandments that drew scorn and ridicule from pagans. The commandments that are distasteful to pagans "do not count" because they are not "in" Paul's "interior canon."

This is the explanation offered by E.P. Sanders, the man portrayed in *Christianity Today* as Christendom's top expert on Paul's theology of the Law. I am sure that Mr. Sanders is one thousand times the scholar that I am, and I mean no disrespect to the man, but I must flatly reject his theory.

A Scripture-shrinker could never write, as Paul did, that "All Scripture is inspired and profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16), unless he were the worst kind of hypocrite. If I were to accept Sanders' theory, I would have to totally reject Paul as a hypocrite who took it upon himself to abolish God-given commandments (even the Sabbath) with the stroke of his pen, an action which even Jesus did not have the authority to do. (See Matt.5:17-19, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law," etc.)

I see no reason for Christians to reject the "general view" that "many have seen" (i.e., it is only misusing the Law as a means to establish one's own righteousness that should be rejected, and not the Law itself). Furthermore, I see no reason for Christians to not act upon the practical implications of this theological position (i.e., keep Sabbath, holy days, dietary laws, etc.). Such a decision means undergoing some radical changes, but seeking to live and worship more like the Master often results in such painful but beneficial adjustments for the disciple.

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1Daniel G. Reid, "The Misunderstood Apostle," *Christianity Today* (July 16, 1990), 25.

2E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 3.

3Ibid.

4Hans Hubner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus*, 2d.ed. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 129.

5Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol.1 (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1951-55), 341.

6Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 94.

7Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 179.

8Sanders, 91, fn. 54.

9Ibid., fn. 58.

10Ibid., fn. 54.

11Ibid., 83.

# DULL GENEALOGIES OR "FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE"

Daniel Botkin

*Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jered, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." (1 Chronicles 1:1-4).*

The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles consist of little more than lists of names. Most Bible readers think such passages are boring, and if they are honest, they will admit that they merely glance over the genealogies or ignore them altogether. Some may think me a bit strange, but every time I read through a book of the Bible, I feel an obligation to actually read any lists of names that happen to be in the text. After all, if my name were listed in the Bible, I wouldn't want people to skip that section and not read my name!

I usually receive no great blessing from reading lists of names. One time, however, when I was reading the above verses ("Adam, Seth, Enosh...Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth"), I began to weep. It is a bit embarrassing to admit that I was actually moved to tears by reading the names of thirteen men. It normally takes something more dramatic and touching than a list of names to make me cry.

Of course it was not just the names that caused me to weep; it was the Holy Spirit using the passage to bring an obvious yet profound revelation to me. I realized, by the time I got to Noah's name, that I was actually reading the beginning of my own genealogy. I was overwhelmed by the realization that these men were my ancestors. I sensed a powerful connection with these men, my fathers, and this opened the fountain of my tears. Noah's name reminded me of the Flood, and I realized that I owed my existence to Noah and to all his fathers before him. As I thought back to our forefather Adam, I experienced a feeling of loss and sadness — perhaps a small taste of the terrible sadness Adam felt when he was driven out of the Garden of Eden.

The best way to describe an emotionally moving experience of this nature is to call it "the memory of a place we have never been." Some may wonder how we can have a "memory" of a place we have never been. The Bible does not teach reincarnation, but it does teach that we were "in the loins" of our ancestors: "And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him" (Heb.7:9f).

In the same way that the yet-unborn Levi was in the loins of his great-grandfather Abraham, so we were all in the loins of our ancestor Adam. Everything necessary to bring each of us into existence was embodied in Adam and Eve. But was that a guarantee that we would eventually be born? I wonder. When I consider all the events that had to transpire in the lives

of all my ancestors to bring me into existence, I realize how much the odds were against my ever being conceived. Every link in the chain of my genealogy was necessary to produce the unique individual that is me. Any number of things could have happened in the lives of my ancestors to break one of the links in that chain — a different decision that would have resulted in a different spouse for someone, a death before conceiving the next person in the family tree.... The fact that my existence could so easily have been aborted generations ago, but wasn't, fills me with a sense of destiny and a duty to justify my existence in this present generation.

The Bible tells us that "David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay" (Acts 13:36). This is everyman's biography. We all must live in the generation where God has placed us. We cannot serve the purpose of God in some past or future generation. And until the Lord returns, we will all eventually die, be laid with our fathers, and undergo decay as David did. Until that time, we have the opportunity to serve the purpose of God in our own generation by spending our lives doing His will. A wise woman once said, "Your life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you like, but you can only spend it once." Amen. Let's spend our lives serving the purpose of God in our generation.

## POETRY CORNER

### BETWEEN ANCESTORS AND DESCENDANTS

All of my ancestors are no more.  
They used their allotted portion of time  
To live and love and laugh and die.

All my descendants are yet unborn.  
Asleep, perhaps, in some nonplace,  
They wait their turn for tents of clay.

But my generation is here and now,  
No longer unborn and not yet dead,  
Given a segment of seventy years,  
A slice of history to shape as we will.

Some of my peers see no nobler a cause  
For existence than that of brute beasts:  
To consume food from the fields of the earth,  
To generate dung on the face of the earth,  
To die and return to the bowels of the earth.

My greatest fear is that my generation  
Will leave behind this epitaph:  
"They lived and they died,  
And the world remains  
As if they had never been."

-Daniel Botkin