

Ask the Rabbi

Submitted Question #4:

The assignment you gave the class was to exegete the Greek word *hoopo'* in Romans 6:14-15 (translated "under" in the "New King James Version"), and to offer an explanation of what the verses mean. The NKJ translation is as follows:

"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!"

My explanation is this: In this verse, *hoopo'* indicates a position, and the position has changed in the New Covenant. Instead of the law being the process by which our sins were forgiven, it is now our foundation. The teachings in the *Tanach* are still valid and good for instruction and teaching. Of course, the laws regarding animal sacrifices are not possible now, but even those sacrifices have a lesson in them, because God wants to be the most significant part of each of our lives.

Am I correct?

The Rabbi's Response:

What you have written is close to the way I see it, but not exactly. Still, you have done well. Here is the way I see it.

The English word "under" as a translation of the Greek word *hoopo'* is misleading because, in modern English usage, "under" can mean both "subject to" and also "beneath." Paul did not intend to say "*.. for you are not subject to law but subject to grace.*" Grace is an eternal attribute of God, so Yeshua did not bring Grace for the first time, as God's Grace has been manifest among men ever since the "fall." After Adam's sin, not doing away with us as a species can be credited to God's enormous Grace, and giving us the Law through Moses was also grace because we deserved neither.

Romans 6:14-15 refers to the time of the Mosaic Covenant when the operative hierarchy of God and man was:

- God (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit residing in Heaven)
- God's *Torah* (God's eternal righteous order)
- God's *Grace* (one of God's many attributes)
- The Mosaic Law (God's *Torah* given to man as statutes, ordinances, & judgments)
- Man

Notice that during the Mosaic Covenant, man was directly beneath (*hoopo'*) God's written Law in the hierarchy, in the sense that the "Law" completely defined God's will for our lives. When the New Covenant came by way of Yeshua, God's Grace came closer to us relative to His written Law. The way God accomplished it was to (1) send the Holy Spirit to earth to indwell man, and (2) raise our position one notch up in the hierarchy, so that the hierarchy then became:

- God (Father & Son in Heaven)
- God's *Torah* (God's eternal righteous order)
- God (the Holy Spirit now on earth indwelling men)
- God's Grace (one of God's many attributes)
- Man
- The Mosaic Law (God's *Torah* given to man as statutes, ordinances, & judgments)

Note that, under the New Covenant, God's statutory law has been repositioned to be beneath man. This is because it has now become a tool for men to use in discerning God's will with the help of the Holy Spirit. The result is that we are now directly beneath God's Grace in the hierarchy, so I might paraphrase Romans 6:14-15 this way:

"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are no longer underneath the literal application of the Mosaic Law but, by God giving you the New Covenant, you have been raised higher and are now directly beneath God's Grace – sandwiched between His Grace and Law. What then? Shall we sin because we are no longer underneath the Law but have been brought closer to God and are now directly under the covering of His Grace? Certainly not!"

I complement you on your excellent understanding of the Greek word *hoopo'* and its application in Romans 6.