



# PASSION FOR TRUTH

WHERE NEW LIFE BEGINS

## Decoding Romans Chapter 5

### A Second Adam?

by Jim Staley

## Introduction

What does it mean to have peace with God? What is the true meaning of *shalom* in its original Hebrew context? Did Paul believe in **original sin**—that people are born into sin? What role does the Law of God play in sin? These are just a few of the critical questions that arise when examining Romans 5. In this article, we will explore these themes in-depth as part of our ongoing study of the Book of Romans.



We are walking through **the Book of Romans**, verse by verse, uncovering the true intent of its author. Our approach takes us beyond Protestantism and Catholic traditions, straight to the first-century Jewish roots of the text. Understanding Paul's Jewish background is crucial in properly interpreting his writings. As a highly trained rabbi under Gamaliel, Paul's perspective was deeply rooted in first-century Jewish thought, the Talmud, and the Oral Law.

## Justification by Faith and the Meaning of Shalom

Romans 5 is a continuation of the arguments in chapters 1-4. Paul begins with a conclusion:

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*"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)*

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Whenever we see the word *therefore*, we should ask, “What is it there for?” Paul is concluding his discussion from chapter 4, where he explains that Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision.

## The Meaning of *Shalom*

To fully grasp the depth of this verse, we must understand the Jewish concept of *shalom*. Unlike the English notion of peace as merely the absence of conflict, *shalom* encompasses wholeness, harmony, prosperity, well-being, restoration, and divine blessing. When Paul declares that we have peace with God, he is not simply stating that God is no longer angry with us. Instead, he is saying that we have been fully restored into harmony with God, experiencing the fullness of His divine favor.

## The Process of Spiritual Growth: Tribulation to Hope

Paul continues:

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*"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4)*

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How can we possibly *glory* in tribulations? The key lies in the Hebrew word *kavod*, meaning “to give weight to.” Paul is not suggesting that we should celebrate suffering for suffering’s sake. Instead, he teaches that trials hold deep meaning and purpose in spiritual development:

1. **Tribulation produces perseverance (patience).**
2. **Perseverance develops character.**
3. **Character results in hope.**

Hope is not the starting point—it is the outcome of enduring trials with patience. God uses difficult circumstances to refine our character and deepen our trust in Him.

## Understanding Romans 5:6-8 in a Jewish Context

Paul further states:

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*"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His*

*own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*  
(Romans 5:6-8)

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To appreciate the radical nature of this statement, we must look at first-century Jewish thought. Ancient Jewish literature, such as the book of *Sirach* (Ecclesiasticus), taught that one should help the devout but *not* aid sinners (Sirach 12:4-7). This prevailing mindset made Jesus' sacrificial death for sinners a revolutionary concept.

Paul is emphasizing that Christ did not die for the righteous alone—He died for sinners. This directly challenged Jewish traditional thought and underscored the boundless grace of God.

### The Ultimate Goal: Reconciliation

Paul concludes this section by emphasizing reconciliation:

"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:9)

Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Just as Christ sought reconciliation over proving Himself right, we too must prioritize restoration in our relationships. In conflicts, our goal should not be to win arguments but to mend relationships, mirroring Christ's sacrificial love.



### Faith and Obedience: A Hebrew Perspective

Faith in Hebrew thought is not merely intellectual agreement—it requires action. True faith manifests in obedience. As James 2:17 states, “Faith without works is dead.” Paul’s discussion of justification by faith assumes that genuine faith results in repentance and righteous living.

***Romans 5 reveals profound theological truths:***

- ***Shalom*** is more than peace; it is total restoration with God.
- Trials serve a divine purpose, shaping character and leading to hope.
- Christ’s death for sinners was a radical departure from Jewish expectations.
- True faith is lived out in action, not merely in belief.

As we continue our journey through Romans, let us embrace the full weight of Paul's message and apply these timeless truths to our lives.

## The Challenge of Understanding Paul

Have you ever encountered someone so intellectually profound that their words seem to go over your head? This is exactly what Peter refers to when he acknowledges that some of Paul's teachings are difficult to grasp. One such perplexing statement from Paul has led to widespread debate, particularly regarding the doctrine of original sin.

## Theological Interpretations and Misconceptions

Paul's words have been interpreted in **multiple** ways, often leading to confusion. One of the key questions is whether Paul is suggesting that all humans are born sinners, condemned from birth. Does this mean that if a baby dies, it is automatically damned? Is there an age of accountability? These questions arise from a single verse and have given rise to various doctrinal perspectives.

Another common interpretation is that without the law, there is no sin. This perspective suggests that adhering to the law actually makes one a sinner, leading some to argue that the law itself is the problem. Such a viewpoint logically concludes that eliminating the law would eliminate sin, which is a deeply flawed argument. Paul himself addresses this misunderstanding, stating emphatically in Romans 6:1, *"Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? God forbid!"*

## First-Century Jewish Understanding of Sin

To fully comprehend Paul's argument, it is essential to recognize that first-century Judaism did not subscribe to the concept of original sin. They believed that each person was their own Adam, responsible for overcoming sin through their own choices and actions. While this belief rightly emphasizes human agency, it fails to acknowledge the inherited sinful nature described in Scripture.

The Bible consistently calls believers to righteousness: *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48) and *"Be holy, because I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:16). This affirms that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome sin. However, Paul clarifies that sin has been present since Adam, affecting all humanity.

## Examining Romans 5:13-14

Paul states in Romans 5:13-14:

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*"Until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of Adam's transgression."*

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Some have misunderstood this passage to mean that sin did not exist before the law. However, Paul is not arguing that sin was nonexistent or unaccounted for. Historical examples such as Cain, the people of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Tower of Babel all faced divine judgment long before the Mosaic Law was given. Clearly, sin was recognized and condemned even before the written law.

Paul's point is that while the Torah was not yet codified, God's moral law still existed, and people were judged accordingly. The idea that sin is only imputed when a written law exists is a misinterpretation. God's moral expectations have always been present, even before they were formally documented.

## The Role of the Law and Grace

Paul's Jewish audience largely believed that sin only applied to Gentiles and that righteousness was tied to adherence to the Torah. However, Paul argues that *all* are guilty before God, regardless of whether they have the written law. He emphasizes that sin has been present since Adam and that its consequences—death and separation from God—apply universally.

Paul then introduces the concept of the *Second Adam*: Christ. Just as Adam's disobedience brought sin and death to all, Christ's obedience brings righteousness and justification:

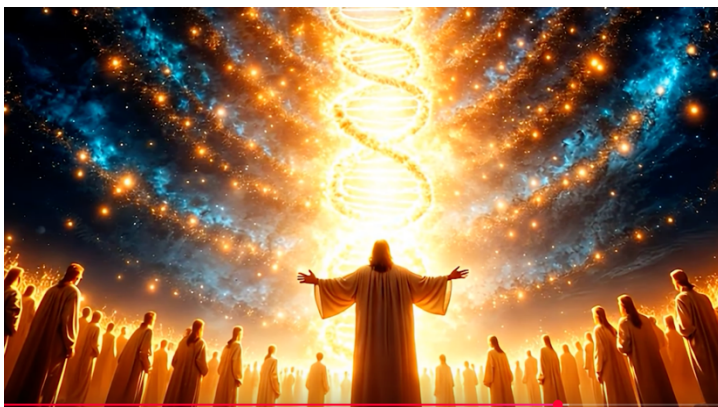
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*"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)*

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This comparison illustrates the transformative power of Christ's sacrifice. Humanity inherited a sinful nature from Adam, but through faith in Christ, we receive His righteousness.

## Understanding the Blood of Christ



A deeper understanding of first-century Jewish theology helps illuminate Paul's teaching. Jewish believers often saw righteousness as tied to Torah observance. They failed to recognize their inherent need for a Savior. Paul dismantles this belief, asserting that righteousness does not come through works but through Christ's perfect obedience.

Christ, as the Second Adam, was born without the "death gene" of Adam's sin. His divine nature meant that His blood remained untainted by sin. When believers accept Christ, they experience a

spiritual "blood transfusion," replacing the inherited sinfulness with Christ's righteousness. This is why Paul emphasizes the necessity of faith in Christ's redemptive work.

## Clarifying the Purpose of the Law

Paul's statement in Romans 5:20—"*Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound*"—is often misinterpreted as a negative view of the law. Some argue that the law itself causes sin, leading them to dismiss the Torah entirely. However, Paul is not condemning the law; rather, he is highlighting its purpose: to reveal sin clearly.

Consider a parent giving a child a list of rules before leaving for work. If the child disobeys, is it the parent's fault for setting rules? Of course not! The rules merely expose the child's inclination to disobedience. Similarly, the law makes sin evident, leaving no excuse for ignorance.

Paul concludes by emphasizing that while sin abounds, grace abounds even more. The law does not create sin—it exposes it. This revelation leads us to recognize our need for grace and salvation through Christ.

## Conclusion

Paul's teachings in Romans 5 and 6 address fundamental misconceptions about sin, the law, and grace. He challenges the Jewish belief that righteousness comes through Torah observance and corrects the misunderstanding that eliminating the law removes sin. Instead, he presents a powerful argument for justification through faith in Christ, the Second Adam, whose righteous life and sacrificial death provide the *ultimate redemption*.

Understanding Paul's message requires recognizing the historical and theological context of his audience. By doing so, we grasp the profound truth that salvation is not achieved through works but through the grace of Christ, whose perfect blood cleanses us from sin. This is the heart of the gospel—redemption through faith in Jesus Christ, who offers us eternal life.

*Watch the full teaching here:*



<https://youtu.be/xdSSS86bFFM>

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