

Torah Teachings

Biblical Definitions: “Stumbling Block”

Source: “*Messiah – Volume 1 – Understanding His Life and Teachings In Hebraic Context*” by Avi Ben Mordechai

NOTE: I have added my comments in square brackets as such [].

STUMBLING BLOCK

In Christian circles the term “stumbling block” is generally very obscure. It is usually defined as something you do or say that causes another Christian not to walk boldly in his newfound freedom in Christ. Other definitions also include things that are said or done to offend another person. A stumbling block or offense can have broad or narrow meanings depending on what culture and situation you happen to be in at the time.

In Hebraic circles, the term “stumbling block” is very specific. It is usually defined as something you do or say that causes a fellow Israelite to violate a positive commandment of G-d or to transgress a negative commandment of G-d. For example, if I, an Israelite, advise a fellow Israelite that he or she can work on the Sabbath, or work on the first or last day of a festival like *Chag HaMatzot* (Unleavened Bread), I have put a stumbling block in that person’s path, causing him to transgress a negative commandment of G-d.¹ On the other hand, if I do not encourage a brother to wear *tzitziot* (tassels) on a four-cornered garment then I have put a stumbling block in his path causing him to violate a positive commandment because G-d said, “*they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations.*”²

Again, if I gossip to someone about another (in Hebrew, *Lashon Hara* [Evil Tongue]) I have put a stumbling block in the path of the person hearing my gossip, potentially giving him cause to violate a negative commandment in *Vayikrah* (Leviticus) 19:16, “*You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people.*” Conversely, if I fail to teach my children the commandments of G-d, then I violate a positive commandment, “*and you shall teach them diligently to your sons...*” putting a stumbling block into their path so that they may depart from the Words of G-d.

There are hundreds of written commandments from G-d and hundreds more valid oral rulings from the rabbis that I can easily disregard or teach incorrectly in some way thus causing an offense to a fellow believer in Messiah. It is this idea that defines the *B’rit Chadashah* term “stumbling block.” From our biblical dictionary, *Tanakh*, we get these supporting passages:

*Those who **love Thy law** (Torah) have great peace, and nothing causes them to **stumble**. I hope for Thy salvation, O Lord, **and do Thy commandments.** (Mizmor [Psalm] 119:165-166) [Emphasis mine]*

¹ *Vayikrah* (Leviticus) 23:6-8.

² *Bamidbar* (Numbers) 15:38.

*For My people have forgotten Me, they burn incense to worthless gods and they have **stumbled from their ways, from the ancient paths**, to walk in bypaths, not on a highway.... (Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 18:15) [Emphasis mine]*

*“But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; **you have caused many to stumble by the instruction** (Torah); you have corrupted **the covenant of Levi**,” says the Lord of hosts. “So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the instruction (Torah).” (Malachi 2:8-9) [Emphasis mine]*

*Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the **ways of the Lord are right**, and the righteous will walk in them, but **transgressors will stumble in them**. (Hoshea 14:9) [Emphasis mine]*

*Son of man, these men have set up their **idols in their hearts**, and have put right before their faces the **stumbling block** of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? (Yechezki'el 14:3) [Emphasis mine]*

The Word of G-d gives us clear definitions of what it means to stumble or to cause another to stumble. In this light we are able to fully understand the intent of Y'shua's [Yeshua's/Jesus'] words as HaMashiach [The Messiah], who set the commandments of G-d on a firm foundation:

*But He turned and said to Peter, “get behind Me, Satan! **You are a stumbling block to Me**; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.” (Mattityahu [Matthew] 16:23) [Emphasis mine]*

*Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; **but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!** (Mattityahu [Matthew] 18:7) [Emphasis mine]*

*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, **and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks**, and **those who commit lawlessness**.... (Mattitayhu [Matthew] 13:41) [Emphasis mine]*

In Mattitayhu [Matthew] 13:41, stumbling blocks and lawlessness are defined together. The term “lawlessness,” which sometimes appears as “iniquity,” is from the Greek word *anomos* (*an'-om-os*), Strong's number 459. Its first definition from the *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* is:

- Destitute of the Mosaic law.

If one lives away from the Mosaic Law and/or teaches others to live away from the Mosaic Law then one is lawless by sheer biblical definition and is also responsible for causing stumbling blocks. Supporting this idea in the day of judgment, G-d says the following in Revelation 2:14:

*But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, **who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before***

the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

Two stumbling blocks are mentioned above in bold type, and also appear as part of an expanded list for all Gentiles to beware of in Acts 15:20 and 29. Also in the Word of G-d, are found terms like “straight path” and “crooked path.” If one is walking on a straight path that means he is obeying the Torah both inwardly and outwardly. On the other hand, if one is on a crooked path then he is not walking according to the commandments of HaShem [The Name]. Here are some passages to help paint this picture in brighter, clearer colors:

*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will **make your paths straight.** (Mishle [Proverbs] 3:6) [Emphasis mine]*

*With weeping they shall come, and by supplication I will lead them; **I will make them walk by streams of waters on a straight path in which they shall not stumble** for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born. (Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 31:9) [Emphasis mine]*

*But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, **will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?**” (Acts 13:9 -10) [Emphasis mine]*

*Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, **and make straight paths for your feet,** so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:12-13) [Emphasis mine]*

[Also see all of Mishle (Proverbs) Chapter 2.]

In Summary

- A stumbling block is something said or done or the lack of something said or done that causes another to fail in his responsibility to keep the words of the Mosaic Torah.
- Failure to walk in and/or teach about obedience to HaShem’s [The Name’s] Mosaic Torah is equivalent to stumbling or causing another to stumble.

I hope this sheds some light upon the Biblical definition of “Stumbling Block” compared to what man has defined “Stumbling Block” to be. It makes a big difference when we use the Bible as our dictionary. Especially the Old Covenant/Testament since the New Covenant/Testament did not exist at the time Yeshua/Jesus was here.

Shalom,

One Crying In The Wilderness

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